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**Substance and Sense: Objects of Power in the Life, Writings, and Legacy of the
Tibetan Ritual Master Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan**

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Substance and Sense:

Objects of Power in the Life, Writings, and Legacy of the Tibetan Ritual Master

Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan

A dissertation presented

by

James Duncan Gentry

to

The Committee on the Study of Religion

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of
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Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a reflection upon objects of power and their roles in the lives of people through the lens of a single case example: power objects as they appear throughout the narrative, philosophical, and ritual writings of the Tibetan Buddhist ritual specialist Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624) and his milieu. This study explores their discourse on power objects specifically for what it reveals about how human interactions with certain kinds of objects encourage the flow of power and charisma between them, and what the implications of these person-object transitions were for issues of identity, agency, and authority on the personal, institutional, and state registers in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tibet.

My investigation of Sog bzlog pa's discourse on power objects shows how the genres of narrative, philosophy, and liturgy are related around such objects, each presenting them from a slightly different perspective. I illustrate how narratives depict power objects as central to the identity of Sog bzlog pa and his circle, mediating relations that are in turn social, political, religious, aesthetic, and economic in tone, and contributing to the authority of the persons involved. This flow of power between persons and objects, I demonstrate further, is connected to tensions over the sources of transformational power as rooted in either objects, or in the people instrumental in their

ritual treatment or use. I show how this tension between objective and subjective power plays out in Sog bzlog pa's philosophical speculations about power objects and in his rituals featuring them. I also trace the persistence of this discourse after Sog bzlog pa's death in the seventeenth-century state-building activities of Tibet and Sikkim, and in the present day identity of Sikkim's Buddhist population. Power objects emerge as hybrid subject-object mediators, which variously embody, channel, and direct the flow of power and authority between persons, objects, communities, institutions, and the state, as they flow across boundaries and bind these in their tracks. Finally, I illustrate how this discourse of power objects both complicates and extends contemporary theoretical reflections on the relationships between objects, actions, persons, and meanings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	1
PART I: Objects in Narrative.....	39
Chapter One: In the Vicinity of Things—Substance, Violence, and Power In the Milieu of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624).....	40
I. The Shifting Tides of Clerical Influence and Authority: Religion, Politics, and Materiality in the Time of Sog bzlog pa.....	46
II. Sog bzlog pa’s Influences and Milieu: Violent Rites, Brahmin Flesh, and other Object-oriented Bonds.....	66
Chapter Two: Prowess and Persona in the Wielding of Things—Exorcisms, Objects, and Insights in the Life and Literary Career of a Mongol-repelling Scholar-adept.....	105
I. The Spiritual and Material Life of an Exorcist Yogi.....	105
II. A Literature of Precedent, Protection, and Perfection: The Writings of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan.....	150
III. Rhetoric of an Exorcist: The Construction of Sog bzlog pa’s Public Identity.....	169
PART II: Objects in Theory and Practice.....	201
Chapter Three: Controversies Over Things—Drawing, Blurring, and Crossing the Boundaries.....	202
I. Visionary Glimpses.....	217
II. Powerful Speech.....	249
III. Amulet Practice.....	273
IV. Brahmin Flesh and other “Liberating” Edibles.....	299
Chapter Four: Things in Action and the Actions of Things— A Dynamic Ontology of Ritual Objects.....	333
I. Incorporation, Contact, and Ingestion in Pill Practices.....	339
II. Artifacts of Violence, Substances of Danger.....	383

III.	Vision, Exegesis, and Touch in the Use of Initiation Substances and Introduction Props.....	415
PART III:	Aftereffects.....	440
Chapter Five:	Continuities and Contentions Over Things—The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and the Material Links of Political Authority.....	441
I.	The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and His Milieu in the Writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama.....	447
II.	The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and his Milieu Among Tibet’s Old School Lineages.....	476
III.	The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and his Milieu in the “Hidden Land” of Sikkim.....	484
Final Considerations.....		506
	<i>Bibliography</i>	526

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INTRODUCTION

This study is a reflection upon objects of power, the roles they play in the ritual actions of persons, and the ramifications of these roles in other domains of human activity. Its aim is to explore how human interactions with certain kinds of objects encourage the flow of power and charisma between personal and objective elements, and what the effects of these transitions are for understandings of identity, agency, and authority. In addressing this issue I adopt a historical perspective focused upon a single compelling case example. The discussion centers upon power objects used or produced in contexts of ritual action according to the literary works of the Tibetan ritual specialist Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624) and his milieu. This study seeks to understand through the lens of this figure's diverse writings the basic contours of his object-power discourse.¹ In so doing, this thesis attempts to explicate what this discourse reveals about how sensory and material objects deemed to be particularly powerful operate within Sog bzlog pa's ritual world, how these objects and their discourse of power relate to one another and to broader domains of human action, language, and cognition, and what these relationships between objects and persons illustrate about power, agency, and identity formation – on the levels of person, community, and state – in Tibetan Buddhist cultural spheres.

This project took as its starting point a literary debate about the roles of sensory objects and material media in Buddhist practice and doctrine that transpired in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Tibet. Sog bzlog pa was a major participant in

¹ I adapt the term “object-power discourse” from Jane Bennett’s concept “thing-power,” which she develops in her recent publication *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010). Bennett uses the term thing-power to highlight the excess and vitality of the material world, beyond its characterization as mere inert stuff, which becomes active only when subjected to the interventions of human endeavor. I employ the term “object-power discourse” in a slightly similar vein to describe Sog bzlog pa’s literary discourse about “object-power,” that is, sensory and material objects that exhibit their own generative potencies to act upon and influence other persons, places, things, and states of affairs.

that debate. The opinions Sog bzlog pa voices and criticizes therein reveal rarely expressed theoretical understandings about the efficacy of certain visionary experiences, sonic annunciations, amulets, pills, and relics to act upon persons and other sentient life, delivering them from negative practical circumstances, negative future rebirths, or even the entire round of cyclic existence, *samsāra*. As a contemporary student of Tibetan Buddhism, I was both surprised and perplexed to encounter a sustained doctrinal argument concerning the efficacy of a range of objects, which might more likely be relegated to the realm of popular folk religion and superstition, and deemed unworthy of the rigors of erudite philosophical speculation. This startling discovery drew my attention to the centrality of power objects in Sog bzlog pa's life and writings and prompted me to consider how he variously treats these kinds of objects throughout the other genres of his literary oeuvre.

At first I visited Sog bzlog pa's narrative writings – his histories, biographies, and autobiography – and noticed that these present the same powerful objects, but emphasize instead how they become enmeshed within networks that variously involve social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious elements and inflections. These works also expand the range of powerful objects to include those that feature in rituals intended to kill or repel encroaching armies, violent individuals, harmful spirits, or natural disasters. The efficacy of objects and their rites emerges throughout these narratives as a matter of conscious reflection, but from the alternate perspective of the complex linkages these form in the lives of people, rather than in the minds of theorists.

Despite such differences, it soon became clear that Sog bzlog pa's apologetic and narrative treatments of power objects both center upon controversies surrounding the sources, locations, and movements of efficacious power. Sog bzlog pa and his

interlocutors appeared to be grappling with and arguing over to what extent, on the one hand, the efficacy of objects is rooted in the power of the persons who construct, prepare, wield, or encounter them; and to what extent, on the other hand, efficacy resides in the materials, or other potent properties of objects themselves. At first glance, I noticed primarily how Sog bzlog pa valorized the sphere of materiality and objective power in his polemical wrangles with an opponent who argued instead for the primacy of the cognitive, symbolic dimension of efficacy over the power of objects in and of themselves. However, upon closer scrutiny, and especially in view of his narrative texts, I started to see that Sog bzlog pa's considerations are not at all a unilateral defense of objective power. Instead, they express the diverse ways in which personal action, cultivation, habit, and intentionality can work in conjunction with physical contact and sensory experience of powerful objects, and with the persons, locations, and institutions instrumental in their production, use, and distribution to shape sensibilities and enact transformations in world and person alike. The importance for Sog bzlog pa of rituals as specialized sites for such person-object interactions led me to speculate that underlying the studied equivocations of his reflections on the efficacy of power objects is a ritual sensibility, or ethos. By this I mean a dispositional tendency to create and operate within a specialized space where the boundaries between the materiality of the object-world and the immateriality of the subject-world are blurred to enable a controlled fluidity of power between human and non-human domains.

With this hypothesis in mind, I turned next to the ritual texts that Sog bzlog pa authored and performed. My aim was to determine the diverse ways in which ritual actors interact with objects in the process of their formation into things capable of impacting persons and states of affairs. This called for me to trace the trajectories of

materials that feature centrally in Sog bzlog pa's ritual texts, with an eye toward the principles of efficacy involved and the "boundary play" that these principles permit or inhibit. This line of inquiry, strongly suggested by the subject matter of the Tibetan texts themselves, eventually put me into conversation with strains of recent theoretical thought, which are reconsidering how objects and ritual actions can do what they do, in and of themselves, beyond their presumed communication of underlying beliefs. I subsequently discovered that much like Sog bzlog pa, albeit with very different aims in mind, contemporary thinkers are also engaged in debates over what, precisely, is at play when we encounter what Bruno Latour terms "human/non-human hybrids," or "quasi-subjects" and "quasi-objects:" items formed from combinations of objective materials and subjective meanings, which often act like, or are treated as though they possess the agentive properties that we would usually reserve for persons.²

Tracing the characteristics of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse has thus led me to reflect on what a focused sensitivity to sensory and material objects across diverse genres of writing can offer the study of Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhism, and religion more generally. My approach relates to a broader movement in the study of religion, culture, and society that has sought to counteract prevailing assumptions that sharply oppose religious meanings to the material world of things, and "privilege spirit above matter, belief above ritual, content above form, mind above body, and inward contemplation above 'mere' outward action."³ This recent "material turn" in the study of religion, three to four decades now in the running, is connected to a further series of "turns" currently

² Latour's treatment of person-object relations and its implications for agency and action will be discussed below in this introduction.

³ Birgit Meyer and Dick Houtman, "Introduction: Material Religion—How Things Matter," in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, eds. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer, 1-23 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 1.

being taken in the study of human societies. Despite their specific emphases, approaches variously labeled the “sensory turn,”⁴ the “ontological turn,”⁵ the “post-human turn,”⁶ “new materialism,”⁷ and even the “quiet revolution”⁸ are all premised upon a current of thought that seeks to counteract the priority that previous scholarship has afforded the immaterial world of ideas, subjectivities, and discourses to explore what a shift in focus from human beings to sensory and material objects can newly contribute to our understanding of humans and the world. As these new currents of thought wend their way into the study of religion, they hold the possibility of doing for objectivity and materiality what the language and meaning centered approaches of the “linguistic turn” and the “cultural turn” did for subjectivity and discourse.⁹

The material turn’s shift in perspectives from personal subjectivity to objects and actions has already had a number of implications for the study of religion. Not only has it impacted the choice of subject matter involved, fostering greater interest in the religious body, ritual practice, cult objects, and material sacra, among other topics traditionally

⁴ Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1993) and David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2003).

⁵ Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell, “Introduction: thinking through things,” in *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*, eds. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-31.

⁶ Jane Bennett (2010).

⁷ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-43.

⁸ Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007).

⁹ Examples of this turn in the study of religion are too numerous to cite. It is evinced most conspicuously perhaps by the recent appearance of the journal, *Material Religion: the journal of objects, art and belief* (Oxford: Berg, 2005-present). One particularly recent study that gives strong voice to this new direction is Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

neglected in the study of religion. This change of focus has also signaled a major paradigm shift in the way such topics are approached. In the study of religious objects, for instance, scholars are increasingly turning away from the assumption that objects operate solely as instruments of human action, or as symbols that represent and communicate values for the humans that use them. Emphasis is shifting instead to the diverse ways in which objects can act in and of their own accord, embodying and enacting meanings that contribute in substantial ways to the formation and dynamism of humans and their interactions.¹⁰ In the domain of ritual studies, this turn of thought has expressed itself primarily in a set of approaches that seeks to understand how ritual action is a specialized mode of framing activity, which achieves its effects through the reiterative, formal features of ritual acts themselves, and resolutely not through their presumed communication of underlying values or beliefs.¹¹ In general terms, these theoretical currents in ritual and object studies signal a sharp divergence from models which propose that objects and actions necessarily symbolize, signify, or represent the underlying beliefs, values, or meanings of their human counterparts. These approaches place greater emphasis instead upon the diverse ways in which rituals and objects,

¹⁰ There are several strains of this recent wave of thing-theory. Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell (2007) argue for an anthropological approach to the cross-cultural study of things, which construes them as *being*, rather than *signifying* meanings. This approach advocates the study of another culture's valued things as sites of alternate worlds, or ontologies, and not alternate viewpoints upon a shared reality. Alternatively, the "new materialisms" of Bennett (2010) and Coole and Frost (2010) promote a reappraisal of the agentive properties of things as part of a normative political project, or a "post-human" ethical response to the excesses and crises brought on by our traditional human-centric approaches and values.

¹¹ The paradigmatic example of this type of approach to ritual has become the work of Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). More recently this approach to ritual as framing activity has found another expression in the study of Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simonson, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). This study de-emphasizes Bell's focus on power and rejects her insistence upon maintaining the division between religious and secular spheres to argue that a ritual orientation to action extends beyond the confines of ritual settings to inform other domains of human activity.

through their very enactment and materiality, contribute to the constitutions of the subjectivities and agencies of their performers, creators, and consumers.

At issue in this contemporary direction of thought is how we construe the relationships between actions and objects, on the one hand, and discourses and meanings on the other. In reassessing the links between actions, objects, and meanings, the general goal of this recent wave of reflection has been to shed critical new light upon presuppositions concerning the relationships between nature and culture, mind and body, materiality and meaning, and a host of other dyads, which, it is claimed, continue to haunt the study of the valued objects and actions of other societies and time periods.¹² The existence of this strain of thought was a striking discovery indeed given that the relationships between objects, actions, and meanings is a central point of controversy and tension throughout Sog bzlog pa's writings as well. This affinity between the concerns of a sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Tibetan religious specialist and a particular

¹² The difficulties posed by the cross-cultural study of things are summarized well by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (*Cosmological perspectivism in Amazonia and elsewhere*. Masterclass Series 1. Manchester: HAU Network of Ethnographic Theory, 2012: 151-153). Viveiros de Castro argues that the narrowing of the ontological field into "unextended thought and extended matter" brought on by the "Cartesian rupture with medieval scholastics" ended up relegating the ontological conundrums of alternate worlds of matter to the epistemological domain of thought. Ontological divergences, or alternate "worlds," then became cast as epistemological problems of disparate perceptions, representations, or "worldviews" upon a single, unified, material reality. This assumption in turn led to the "one nature, many cultures" thesis that has often been taken for granted in the recent study of human societies. And this thesis implies also a "one thing, many concepts" view with respect to the functionality of objects cross-culturally, thus leading researchers to treat things as though they express, represent, or symbolize social relations or cultural meanings that are otherwise extrinsic to the objects themselves.

One major problem with this set of approaches, as I see it, is not that they are necessarily wrong per se, but that the bifurcation of thing from meaning entailed in the "one nature, many cultures" thesis simply does not apply universally across time and space, and therefore often proves inadequate to the task of coming to terms with objects cross-culturally and cross-temporally. Moreover, when left unquestioned, the "one nature, many cultures" thesis, rooted as it is in the assumption that science has the most authoritative vantage point on nature, silently privileges its ontology and relegates all other ontologies to the contingent domain of the plurality of thoughts and representations. Viveiros de Castro echoes Latour (1993) and Sahlins (1996) to speculate that this "naturalistic monism" and its reigning position within the dualisms of our day might even be rooted in the more basic distinction between a transcendent, singular, and omnipotent God and his immanent, myriad, and limited creatures (2012: 151).

constellation of contemporary theorists came to present rich potentials to me for cross-cultural and cross-temporal dialogue and critique.

The present study of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse variously challenges, draws from, and adds new dimensions to how this group of contemporary academic ritual and object theorists tends to parse human experience at present. To be clear, this current of contemporary reflection is internally quite diverse in terms of the specific assumptions and aims of its practitioners. The features of Sog bzlog pa's world of powerful objects present challenges to strands within this body of thought that propose fixed and categorical relationships between objects, actions, and meanings. As a case in point, an approach that interprets ritual actions and objects solely in terms of what they do, rather than what they may say, mean, or represent, risks prefiguring a field of inquiry whose contours might be an ongoing point of negotiation for those most intimately involved in their performance and use. For instance, Sog bzlog pa's diverse literary passages about objects and their related ritual treatments often bear witness precisely to conscious reflections concerning the dividing lines between technical/instrumental and expressive-symbolic types of action, between what an object or act achieves in and of itself, and what it may or may not mean or signify beyond itself. Yet, the very distinction between the disciplinary effects of ritual actions and their presumed underlying meanings is one whose genesis the contemporary theorist Talal Asad would rather locate in the pre-Enlightenment west.¹³ A focused investigation into Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse shows how he, a sixteenth- to seventeenth-century Tibetan ritual specialist, also weighs in on that and other distinctions when it comes to the efficacy of his own practices

¹³ Talal Asad, "Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 55-82.

and objects. His equivocations on this issue provide a particularly rich illustration for how alternate approaches to ritual action can perhaps be understood as modalities of being in the world, which take various expressions at different times and places, even for a single individual, rather than paradigms that typify incommensurable “modern” and “traditional,” or “western” and “non-western” epistemologies.

In this way, Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse provides critical perspectives on the tendency to sideline meanings in favor of objects and actions, or vice versa. Sog bzlog pa’s writings on powerful objects illustrate that in his world, objects, persons, and other presumably bound entities emerge as identities precisely through their mutual interpenetration, and never in isolation. His object-power discourse models an approach in which the dynamic interplay between human and non-human items and elements is formative of the persons, objects, places, and institutions that take on the character of discrete identities operative within his world. What is more, in Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse, the field of human and non-human elements and the relationships between them includes a staggering range of material and immaterial forces, inflections, and bonds, the likes of which has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention.

When taking these features into account, the object-power discourse present in Sog bzlog pa’s writings resonates better with other strands of contemporary object and action theory that position themselves as critical responses to the tendency of the material turn to simply replace an emphasis upon the subject with an emphasis upon the object, without seeking instead to determine the relationships between them. This more recent critical reflex is based upon the observation that at root, the shift in much contemporary theory from meanings and discourses to objects and actions rests implicitly upon an understanding of human discourse as either a superficial epiphenomenon of the dynamic

material world of things and actions, or as fundamentally constitutive of the material world's perceptible features and forms. In the study of material culture, these tendencies manifest as an emphasis upon either the "object" powers of objects, or the "person-like" powers of objects.¹⁴ The former tendency is typical of new materialists like Jane Bennett, who argue for a post-human appreciation of the generative potencies of matter above and beyond the domain of human endeavor, reversing the previous emphasis upon subjects to foreground objects and materiality instead.¹⁵ The latter tendency is typically associated with the "linguistic turn," to which the "material turn" often represents itself as a critical counterpoint.¹⁶ This ironic valorization of human subjectivity in material cultural studies is most visible when enlisting models of human language and lifecycle – the semiotic and biographical approaches, respectively, with which objects are treated in a number of influential recent studies.¹⁷

¹⁴ Christopher Pinney, "Things Happen: Or, From Which Moment Does That Object Come?," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller, 256-272 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 257.

¹⁵ This is the central thrust of Bennett's (2010) *Vital Matter*.

¹⁶ Christopher Pinney (2005: 260) calls such tendencies "an enduring manifestation of the 'linguistic turn,' the humanities-wide preoccupation with the arbitrary and conventionalized nature of social meaning." He charges its legacy in material culture studies with reducing objects to the social lives of humans, or to "webs of culture," which have "erased any engagement with materiality or visuality except on linguistic grounds."

¹⁷ One example of the linguistic approach is Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), which makes extensive use of Peirce's notion of index. Gell uses this concept to explore the abduction of agency from persons to things in social interactions that occur in the vicinity of art objects, largely from the vantage point of human intentionality and creativity. Thus, his theory of artifacts is not so much about how art objects serve as agents, but the conditions under which people can reasonably perceive objects as agent-like. Another example of the linguistic model is E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1984), which enlists Peircean semiotics more broadly to analyze the relationships between substance and person in Tamil cultural contexts. Pinney singles out *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (ed. Arjun Appadurai, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) as a particularly salient example of the biographical model. Another example of the biographical model is Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Story of People's Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

Foregrounding the roles that objects play in the lives of persons should ideally begin by questioning the hallowed assumption that human subjectivity precedes action and objects, finding expression in performative ritual forms through which subjects work upon inert matter in the creation or use of ritual artifacts and objects.¹⁸ A willingness to acknowledge the roles of objects in the formation of subjects has dramatic implications for this more common understanding of agency. Rather than follow the tendency to locate agency solely within the interiority of a discrete, human subjectivity, which acts by volition upon distinct outer objects, the newest theoretical twists and turns, initiated by Bruno Latour, among others, propose that agency be construed as distributed across chains of human/non-human, subject/object assemblages.¹⁹ Thus, while the paradigm

¹⁸ Daniel Miller, "Materiality: An Introduction," in *Materiality*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 1-50. Borrowing from Hegel, Marx, and Bourdieu, Daniel Miller (2005, 8) uses the term "objectification" to describe the dialectical process of subject-object formation. For Miller (2005, 10), "whether we are dealing with mundane artifacts such as clothes or statues, or with more complex images and institutions such as dreams or law, there is nothing without objectification."

Elaborating upon this concept, Miller states (2005, 8):

We cannot comprehend anything, including ourselves, except as a form, a body, a category, even a dream. As such forms develop in their sophistication we are able to see more complex possibilities for ourselves in them. As we create law, we understand ourselves as people with rights and limitations. As we create art we may see ourselves as a genius, or as unsophisticated. We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us. This world confronts us as material culture and continues to evolve through us... In objectification all we have is a process in time by which the very act of creating form creates consciousness or capacity such as skill and thereby transforms both form and the self-consciousness of that which has consciousness, or the capacity of that which now has skill.

In sum, prior to the appearance of what seem like autonomous subjects acting upon autonomous objects is the process of objectification, in which the creation of forms gives shape to the agents – human and otherwise – which produce them. In other words, through the very acts of creating particular objects, performances, and institutions, agents instantiate themselves as subjects endowed with the requisite consciousness and capacities to do so. The teacher, juggler, ritual master, or carpenter does not precede the acts of teaching, juggling, performing ritual, or working with wood. Rather, she becomes these through their doing.

¹⁹ Implicit in this approach is also a critique of phenomenology as proposing an understanding of subject-object relations that tends to assimilate objects and materiality to human subjectivity. For instance, in remarks seemingly intended for the phenomenological model of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Bruno Latour (*Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 9) states:

Phenomenology deals only with the world-for-a-human-consciousness. It will teach us a lot about how we never distance ourselves from what we see, how we never gaze at a distant spectacle, how we are always immersed in the world's rich and lived texture, but, alas, this knowledge will be of

shift of the material turn, when taken seriously, presumes that objects play a significant role in the creation of subjects and in the actions that emergent subjects take credit for,²⁰ this perspective need not lead to an equally misleading overemphasis on objects and materiality. Instead of replacing a narrow emphasis upon subjects with an equally myopic emphasis upon objects, the most promising version, in my view, of the shift to objects calls for heightened sensitivity to the dynamic relationships that pertain between objects and subjects, things and their meanings.

Much of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse also centers upon such relationships. In general terms, the perspective shared by Sog bzlog pa's discourse and the most promising strain of contemporary object theory has it that thing and person, subject and object, agent and patient are only ever provisional markers, never fully realized, of a situation that is in actuality far more fluid, contingent, and hybrid than tends to be acknowledged. When attending closely to this dimension of Sog bzlog pa's world of powerful objects, fresh avenues of inquiry open, which provoke insights into how features of his world extend into unexpected directions. Following the many links that constitute these sets of relations allows us to question how religious objects and ritual actions play into the dynamics of human agency, the formation of personal and

no use in accounting for how things really are, since we will never be able to escape from the narrow focus of human intentionality. Instead of exploring the ways we can shift from standpoint to standpoint, we will always be fixed in the human one. We will hear much talk about the real, fleshy, pre-reflexive lived world, but this will not be enough to cover the noise of the second ring of prison doors slamming even more tightly behind us. For all its claims to overcoming the distance between subject and object—as if this distinction were something that could be overcome! as if it had not been devised so as *not* to be overcome!—phenomenology leaves us with the most dramatic split in this whole sad story: a world of science left entirely to itself, entirely cold, absolutely inhuman; and a rich lived world of intentional stances entirely limited to humans, absolutely divorced from what things are in and for themselves.

²⁰ As a distant forerunner to the “material turn,” socio-psychological analyses of the varied roles of objects in the formation of self identity is also the subject matter of Mikaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

communal sensibilities and identities, and the construction of institutional and political authority, to name but a few effects. The present study of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse is devoted in large part to an exploration of these newly opened vistas.

To shed light upon these formative interactions between subjective and objective elements, and discern how their emergent heterogeneous assemblages come to constitute larger actors and identities requires that we level the field of agency. This means, in essence, opening the range of possible agents to the widest spectrum of items that can potentially exert influence upon one another. The admission of objects within a field of agency previously reserved only for humans is a viewpoint most cogently expressed in the work of Bruno Latour and the actor-network-theory (ANT) that he helped develop. In order to extend agency to the domain of the non-human, Latour broadened the concept of agent by applying the term "actant," which he defines as any source of action whatsoever.²¹ More precisely, an "actant," by Latour's account, can be any human or non-human factor whose presence "alters a course of some other agent's action," such that in its absence, the series of events would unfold differently.²² Simply put, the notion of "actant" enables us to move beyond a position that privileges human intentionality as the final site and source of meaningful action in the world.²³

²¹ Latour (2010, 54n) states that his and actor-network-theory's use of the term "actant" derives from the earlier coinage of A.J. Greimas (*Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. Daniele McDowell, Ronald Schleifer and Alan Velie, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983 [1966]), who used the term to refer to structural elements of narratives in the study of literature. For a comparative analysis of the theoretical reflections of Latour and Greimas, see Roar Høstaker, "Latour – Semiotics and Science Studies," *Science Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005): 5-25.

²² Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

²³ Jane Bennett (2010) makes extensive use of Latour's notion of "actant" precisely to achieve this shift in emphasis from humans to things.

An actant, moreover, is always something whose “competence is deduced from performance,” based on what it *does*, rather than what it may *represent*, or *mean* beforehand or after.²⁴ This entails an expansion of what counts as action beyond mere mechanistic causality. For Latour, “between full causality and sheer inexistence... things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on.”²⁵ Included is anything and everything that contributes through its presence toward the fulfillment of a particular trajectory of action. The concept of actant thus produces a radical shift in perspective. Instead of assuming the centrality of human interest in social action, and the centrality of causality in the workings of things, the concept of actant dislocates actions and impetuses among the heterogeneous interplay of human and non-human elements, whatever these may be in any given situation. Objects, according to such a view, are therefore no longer simply inert vehicles for the meanings that they represent and communicate; objects emerge as meaningful in their own right, which act and are acted upon in concert with other actants, both human and non-human.²⁶ “To act” becomes a much more complex proposition,

²⁴ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 237.

²⁵ Latour (2005), 72.

²⁶ For Latour, the introduction of non-humans into the dynamics of human agency stems from his consistent effort to expose and counteract the processes of “purification,” which he sees as inaugural in the creation of the concept of a singular, material, non-human “nature” and its opposition to multiple, relative, human “societies” and “cultures.” Through his studies in the history of science, Latour has determined that in creating their respective objects of study – their nature, society, and culture – practitioners of the natural and human sciences have been complicit in efforts to purge their respective fields of their oppositional others. These efforts of purification are rooted in the assumption that science, or the study of “nature” should be objectively concerned with determining predictable laws and unchanging principles, and should thus be free of the capriciousness that characterizes human behaviors and institutions; whereas social science and humanities ought to concern itself with questions of “society” and “culture,” without reducing the human to the mechanistic causalities of nature. Thus, in carving out their respective disciplinary boundaries, claims Latour, scholars and scientists have been signally motivated to cleanse from these domains any trace of hybrid human/non-human entities that might call the distinctive attributes, or “purity” of their fields into question. For Latour, on the other hand, the world is in fact composed of such

admitting of chains, or networks of mediators – human and non-human – which contribute in tandem to any particular course of action or event.

A key implication of this approach is that despite his generous treatment of objects as actants, Latour resists the urge to neglect discourse in the interest of things. Latour is particularly insistent that his concern with objects does not privilege “‘objective’ matter in opposition to ‘subjective’ language, symbols, values, or feelings.” He calls instead for a readiness “to inquiry about the agency of all sorts of objects,” even “intellectual technologies” such as “documents, writings, charts, files, paper clips, maps, organizational devices,” with the following proviso in mind:

As soon as some freedom of movement is granted back to non-humans, the range of agents able to participate in the course of action extends prodigiously and is no longer restricted to the ‘middle size dry goods’ of analytical philosophers.²⁷

The agency of non-humans distributes, by Latour’s account, to all quarters. His notion of actant allows us to recognize more fully how discursive and material elements can interact in the constitution of actions, identities, events, and meanings. Thus, rather than reduce the constructions of human meaning to material epiphenomena, the complex heterogeneity of action opened up by Latour and his actor-network-theory entails the inclusion of all “actants,” even those linguistic and cognitive forms that might seem to “mean,” “symbolize,” or “represent” as part of the way they “act.” This perspective invites comparison with the Peircean semiotic approach to the study of society and culture, which has shown that language and discourse are physical and cognitive,

human/non-human hybrids and the ongoing work of purification speaks to the challenges that this more complex and fluid reality poses for the self-imposed guardians of disciplinary and conceptual boundaries. Although this line of reasoning constitutes the central thesis of much of Latour’s work, it is perhaps most cogently argued in *We have Never Been Modern* (trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁷ Latour (2005), 75-76.

personal and public, performative and propositional, and so much else besides.²⁸ As such, language and discourse reaps effects on users and audiences across a range of discursive and material registers.

The present study of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse contributes to the effort of Latour to treat human discourses and material objects as equal partners in trajectories of actions and effects. It explores the relationships between human discourses and material objects on two interrelated levels. First is the level of the subject matter of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse itself. Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse models a fluid and distributed sense of action and efficacy, calling for an appreciation of the complexities of person-object relations beyond too simple dichotomies between conscious, intentional humans and inert passive things, or between material and sensory objects and actions, and discursive meanings. The distributive nature of his ritual world challenges us to consider the ways in which actions and events are always collaborative affairs that unfold through the dynamic formation of assemblages composed of materials, artifacts, persons, sensory experiences, *and* discourses. All of this suffices to say that for Sog bzlog pa, as for Latour, language, expression, and cognition are far from negligible. They are important links in human/non-human assemblages whose powers must be acknowledged in connection with those of objects.

The second level of analysis in the present study concerns how Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse relates to the material world outside the text to impact the

²⁸ For a particularly lucid, thorough, and insightful introduction to the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce and their possible applications to the study of material culture, see Richard J. Parmentier, "The Pragmatic Semiotics of Culture," *Semiotica* Vol. 116-1 (1997): 1-113. For an ethnographic application of Peircean semiotics to the study of Tamil personhood and substance, see Daniel (1984).

dynamics of personal, communal, and institutional identity formation and authority in Tibetan Buddhist societies. The rhetorical force of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse "works" by bringing into being specific relationships between objects, actions, and meanings that did not exist before they were recorded in his writings and received by his audiences of readers.²⁹ His discourse on powerful objects and actions can thus perhaps be described as the site of a possible world, or ontology, which is brought into being and activated through its enunciation and reception. This world of his object-power discourse functions as a "semiotic ideology," through which the values and meanings that specific objects should be construed to possess are variously constructed, promoted, and contested.³⁰ And rather than view such socio-cultural constructions as immaterial abstract entities with no relation to the material world of things, they should be more properly understood as "world-making practices that vest what they construe with an intrinsic power and reality."³¹ According to such a perspective:

The world is not 'out there' or a point of reference that is represented through signification (as in the Saussurian approaches); rather, signification itself achieves its own tangible and concrete reality effects.³²

These two levels of analysis are very much interconnected throughout this study, demanding at times that we tack back and forth between them even when discussing a

²⁹ Here, I am referring to the rhetorical, "work-like" aspects of textuality, i.e., how texts interact with and impact their extra-textual contexts through shaping sensibilities, galvanizing communities of readers, and a myriad other ways. I draw this term from Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), who distinguishes the "work-like" functions of textuality from its "documentary" functions.

³⁰ Webb Keane, "Semiotics and the social analysis of material things," *Language & Communication*, 23 (2003): 419. Keane more specifically describes a "semiotic ideology" as "basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world. It determines, for instance, what people will consider the role that intentions play in signification to be, what kinds of possible agents (humans only? Animals? Spirits?) exist to which acts of signification might be imputed, whether signs are arbitrary or necessarily linked to their objects, and so forth."

³¹ Meyer and Houtman (2012), 6.

³² Ibid.

single passage or term. This is largely because, I believe, Sog bzlog pa's thinking and writing about power objects and associated ritual actions, his object-power discourse, has world-making capacities that achieve effects on audiences and environments in ways that are informed by and rooted in the relationships between the objects, actions, persons, and meanings that these writings describe. Indeed, part of what makes Sog bzlog pa's writings about objects such a rich resource to think through is precisely that they bear witness to complex theoretical and pragmatic reflections about the relationships between persons and objects. And these literary treatments of objects – which span the genres of narrative, theory, and liturgy – act upon audiences through indissoluble combinations of formal aesthetic features and propositional messages, forming and informing sensibilities and orientations to power objects and the ritual world they inhabit. In this way, Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse contributes toward imbuing objects with power, working in tandem with the ritual treatments through which those objects pass, and existing in tension with claims of the intrinsic powers of objects themselves.

The turn from persons to objects, especially when acknowledging the mutual constitution of subjects and objects and the de-centering influence of this subject-object dialectic upon identity and agency, calls for a methodology that “traces the associations,” as Latour puts it, between all the human and non-human items within any given configuration of action. This paradigm shift, when applied to Sog bzlog pa's writings, allows us to follow the trajectory of power objects as they course through diverse discursive and material terrains. The constellations of heterogeneous assemblages that surface through this exercise capture something quintessential about how power objects function within Sog bzlog pa's world. Power objects, in essence, emerge as mediators, which variously embody, channel, and direct the transition of power and authority

between persons, things, communities, institutions, and finally, the state, as they flow across porous boundaries and bind these in their trajectories. Moreover, since the ritual sphere of action is the primary arena where Sog bzlog pa's most valued objects feature, this thesis aims to discern how the power of these objects relates to their involvement with ritual action and what this nexus of powerful sensory objects and ritual actions tells us more broadly about the transitions of efficacious power across non-human/human divides. Most importantly, this thesis aims to show how such boundary crossings play into the formations of Tibetan Buddhist sensibilities, identities, and institutions. The particular features of how Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse enables efficacious power to flow between persons and things across a number of different registers will incidentally also be interrogated for how these might add new dimensions to the contemporary object theories that I draw from in this study.

* * *

The change of focus in the study of religion from doctrinal ideas, language, and subjectivity to embodied practices, materiality, and sensory objects has slowly found expression in the academic study of Buddhism in a growing number of works that seek to address the material realities of the majority of Asia's Buddhists, past and present, above and beyond the prescriptive formulas of orthodoxy and orthopraxy found in canonical Buddhist texts. The anthropological work of Stanley Tambiah was inaugural in this regard, particularly his study of Thai amulets and the flow of charisma they enable

between persons and objects.³³ Most pertinent for the present study is Tambiah's criticism of Weber's blindness to the "objectification of charisma in talismans, charms, regalia, palladia, and so forth – a phenomenon as old as religion, indeed as old as all forms of leadership."³⁴ Tambiah cites how Marcel Mauss's theory of gift exchange in *The Gift*³⁵ allows for an important shift in our understanding of the sources of charismatic leadership. According to Tambiah, Mauss's emphasis on the 'power in objects, of exchange,' leads away from Weber's focus on the charismatic leader and his attributes "to the process of the *objectification of power in objects* – of the sedimentation of charisma in gifts, valuables, and amulets," which "become focal points and vehicles of social exchanges."³⁶ Tambiah's trenchant critiques notwithstanding, his interpretation of Mauss, especially when we inflect it with Latour's leveling influence, opens the way further to view objects not simply as objectifications of human charisma, but alternatively, as sources of charismatic power and authority in their own right, which can in turn imbue the people who wield them with their power and become focal points in the creation of personal, communal, and institutional identity and authority. By thus adopting a perspective that foregrounds neither subjects, nor objects, but instead traces the flow of power and charisma between them, a more complete account of how charisma works can emerge, one which is less likely to surreptitiously insert preconceptions about the priority or nature of one or another of the actants involved.

³³ Stanley Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

³⁴ Tambiah (1984), 335.

³⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).

³⁶ Tambiah (1984), 339.

More recently, the “material turn” has led to a focus upon materiality and objects as a rubric through which to study the history and culture of Buddhist societies. Following Tambiah’s pioneering work on amulets, other “art” objects, such as relics, reliquaries, images, and books began to receive greater scholarly attention.³⁷ The monographs of John Kieschnick³⁸ and Fabio Rambelli³⁹ extended this earlier work on devotional objects to present the first sustained examinations of the complex roles of objects in the lives of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists, respectively. Both of these studies present broad, thematic considerations of how Buddhist attitudes and treatments of objects in China and Japan variously influenced material cultural and historical developments within those two countries.

The work of Dan Martin has been pivotal in bringing the changing emphases of the “material turn” to bear on the study of Tibetan Buddhism. His 1994 article on Tibetan relics, reliquaries, and pills of power opened up a whole new world of potential research topics for future scholars that has by and large still remained unexplored.⁴⁰ The present discussion of Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse, which constitutes the first

³⁷ Examples include Yael Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stupas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual and Representation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Horton Sharf and Robert Sharf, *Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); David Germano and Kevin Trainor, eds. *Embodying the Dharma: Buddhist Relic Veneration in Asia* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004).

³⁸ *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³⁹ *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ Dan Martin, “Pearls from Bones: Relics, Chortens, Tertons and the Signs of Saintly Death in Tibet,” *Numen*, Vol. 41 (1994): 273-324. See also Martin’s slightly earlier exploration of many of the same themes, “Crystals and Images from Bodies, Hearts and Tongues from Fire: Points of Relic Controversy from Tibetan History,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, eds. Shōren Ihara and Zuihō Yamaguchi, 2 vols (Narita-shi, Chiba-Ken, Japan: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992).

monograph-length study to address the role of power objects in Tibetan religion, society, and polity, follows Martin's lead. Unlike Kieschnick and Rambelli, whose works range across the literature of diverse figures and historical periods, this thesis represents a micro-study of a single, compelling case example: object-power discourse as it variously appears throughout Sog bzlog pa's narrative, philosophical, and ritual texts. It has been critically remarked that narrative, philosophy, and ritual tend to be treated separately in the study of Buddhist societies.⁴¹ This study demonstrates how each of these domains of theory and practice is related around powerful objects, and how each inflects Sog bzlog pa's concerns in slightly different ways, exhibiting object-power discourse from alternate perspectives. It illustrates that material culture has been an object of theoretical, philosophical speculation for Tibetans themselves. And it also shows how and why one particularly material-focused Tibetan writer and ritual expert extended his philosophical interest in the efficacy of power objects into a lifelong preoccupation, which variously found expression throughout his activities, writings, and posthumous legacy.

In examining the relationships between potent objects and the persons involved in their creation, use, distribution, and consumption, this study turns upon a tension endemic to Buddhist orientations toward the role of material and sensory sacra in religious life: simply put, to what extent does transformation depend on individual karma, intention, meditative cultivation, gnosis, or some other personal, subjective, or immaterial quality; and to what extent does efficacious, transformative power reside in certain special material or sensory objects, such that it can transfer to beings and impact them. While the prominent role of material objects in the histories of Buddhist societies is something

⁴¹ Todd Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), xiv and 166-168.

that scholars are now beginning to recognize, there has been relatively little attention given to how objects contribute to the formation of Buddhist persons, sensibilities, and subjectivities. With this inter-subjective/inter-objective perspective in mind, a shift in emphasis from persons to objects, or more specifically, to the relationships that form between them, has the potential to alter not only our understanding of the roles of powerful objects in Buddhist settings. It can also alter our understanding of Buddhist persons, reframing notions of karmic causality, the efficacy of Buddhist practice, and the nature of the moral cultivation of the person, to name but a few implications.⁴²

Sog bzlog pa was a ritual specialist, physician, doctrinal scholar, and visionary adept deeply invested in the creation and deployment of powerful substances and objects for a range of practical and soteriological ends. Owing perhaps to his own exceptional immersion in the material dimensions of Buddhist practice, Sog bzlog pa's writings exhibit an unprecedented awareness of the dynamic tension between subjective and objective sources of power, as well as a unique concern with establishing the orthopraxy and orthodoxy of things and sensory objects in Buddhist religious life. With Sog bzlog pa's writings as our principal guide, this dissertation seeks to trace the sources, locations, and movements of efficacious power in the vicinity of powerful material objects and sensory experiences, and how Sog bzlog pa's formulations reflect orientations to action that extend beyond the ritual sphere into other facets of human life and expression, particularly, the political domain of Tibetan Buddhist state formation during the seventeenth century.

⁴² The reframing that I have in mind is somewhat akin to how Maria Heim, "Buddhist Ethics: A Review Essay," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39.3 (2011): 571-584, re-envision the nature of Buddhist karma theory, ethics, and intentionality as fundamentally inter-subjective, relational, temporal, and context specific. To acknowledge that sensory experiences with powerful objects are as formative of personal sensibilities as are interactions with other persons potentially expands Heim's insightful analysis into new directions.

To understand the interactions between objects and persons in relation to ritual action, we must first be more specific about what, precisely, is meant by “object-oriented rites” and their “power objects,” and how these are presented in the Tibetan texts under consideration in this study. This thesis explores rites that prominently feature objects of the senses believed to have the power, or capacity to exact transformations in the state of being of persons and environments. When referring to this class of rituals I call them object-oriented, or object-centered rites. To be clear, this is not an indigenous Tibetan category, but something that I coined to differentiate this type of actions from other Tibetan rituals, which may include objects, but do not center upon the creation, invocation, distribution, or use of objects construed to possess, or accrue their own powerful, transformational properties.

The power objects that feature in Sog bzlog pa’s writings include two principal types: the sensory and material objects of visions, sounds, amulets, and pills, which are purported to “liberate” beings through sensory contact alone; and a whole range of material “enemy objects” such as effigies, oblations, thread-crosses, stone cairns, diagrams, powders, pellets, and other items which involve object-person confluences instrumental in repelling enemy armies, ending civil wars, quelling natural disasters, or otherwise controlling the dangerous volatility of the surrounding material world of humanity and nature. As a point of comparison, this study also briefly considers Sog bzlog pa’s treatment of a third category of objects: initiation substances, objects, and other material specifications, which ostensibly serve to mediate the induction of participants into specific ritual cycles and meditative experiences. Each of these three kinds of objects features in, or passes through ritual proceedings. In such settings these objects often become focal points for a dense array of human action, speech, and thought.

Each of these kinds of objects, moreover, is directly regarded and/or tacitly treated to possess its own generative potencies to “liberate,” “kill,” “induct,” or otherwise transform beings and their surroundings, respectively. Although visions are immaterial in nature and sounds operate at the margins of materiality, the visions and sounds that feature in this study are held to be particularly powerful sensory objects. As I will illustrate through the course of this study, it is precisely their presumed status as specialized objects that can liberate through sensory contact that becomes a focal point of vehement contention among Sog bzlog pa’s peers. For this and other reasons that will become clearer in the chapters ahead, I consider Sog bzlog pa’s philosophical treatment of visions and sounds that “liberate” as an integral part of his power-object discourse. That said, the present study explores from the perspective of Sog bzlog pa’s writings and ritual world the relationships between the generative potencies of these objects themselves and the human domain of which they are a part, specifically the ritual interventions thought necessary to unleash, mediate, direct, or produce their powers for specific ends.

Although there is no general Tibetan term that specifically demarcates ritual actions that feature these kinds of objects, Tibetans do have terms to describe such objects, and the power that they embody, mediate, and transmit. The most general Tibetan term for potent material sacra is *dam rdzas*, often understood as an abbreviation of the term *dam tshig gi rdzas*, which translates the Sanskrit *samaya-dravya* of Indian Buddhist scriptures. This Sanskrit compound can be rendered into English as “oath substance,” “pledge substance,” or “commitment substance.” The term appears only a few times in the translated *sūtras* and *tantras* (*bka’ ’gyur*), but gains greater frequency in the translated commentarial treatises (*bstan ’gyur*). This Indian commentarial literature generally uses it to signify the tantric sacraments of “five meats” (Tib. *sha lnga*, Skt.

pañcamāṃsa) and “five ambrosias” (Tib. *bdud rtsi lnga*, Skt. *pañcāmṛta*), which make up a standard enumeration of ten *samaya-dravya*.

The semantic range of the term *dam rdzas* appears to have expanded considerably in Tibet. In a creative adaptation upon the term/concept *samaya-dravya* from the Indian Buddhist context, it came to denote a broader range of objects and substances, inclusive of any kind of sacred material object said to possess transformational power. Moreover, although the term is defined in the *Great Tibetan-Tibetan-Chinese* dictionary as “a material object that has been transformed by mantra,”⁴³ the wider semantic range of *dam rdzas* in Tibet means that oath substances are often treated in practice as though they possess their own transformational properties, above and beyond their ritual treatment.

Despite the semantic shift of this term from its earlier, more limited usage as a translation for the Sanskrit term *samaya-dravya*, the association of such substances with oath taking captures something fundamental about how these material media function in the lives of the persons who use them. *Samaya* (*dam tshig*), “oath,” the first term in the Sanskrit compound *samaya-dravya*, most typically refers to a set of prescriptions and prohibitions bestowed orally by a tantric master to his or her circle of tantric initiates ostensibly to ensure the integrity and efficacy of a practice they have in common.⁴⁴ Initiates receive *samaya* vows in conjunction with their consumption of a drop of *samaya* water, which, in some senses, is interchangeable with the vows themselves.⁴⁵ The proper

⁴³ Krang dbyi sun, et al, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Chengdu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1993), 1248 (*dam tshig gi rdzas te sngags kyis byin gyis brlabs pa'i dngos po*).

⁴⁴ Tantric *samaya* generally include 14 main and subsidiary elements, and are most often framed as protecting from a corresponding set of 14 main and subsidiary downfalls. However, *samaya* often expands to include anything and everything that the master specifically stipulates or prohibits his or her students to do or avoid. For more on tantric *samaya*, see Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé, *The Treasury of Knowledge Book Five: Buddhist Ethics*, trans. International Translation Committee (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2003), 215-306.

observance of *samaya* by a group of initiates is often said to be sufficient to enable the actualization of the associated practice, whereas transgressions of *samaya*, even when committed by a single member of the group, is said to result in negative rebirth for the perpetrator and deleterious effects for the entire group, including their master. These different outcomes are expressed in ritual settings in terms of the *samaya* water. As the material correlate of tantric vows, the drop is said to remain in the heart, where it alternately confers bliss upon those who properly observe the vows and incinerates those who do not. Simply put, then, *samaya* constitute a set of regulatory observations, encapsulated in material form, which are instrumental in the formation of communal bonds among initiates, between them and their master, and through him and their shared practice to associated deities, buddhas, past masters, and more.

When applied to *dravya* (*rdzas*), or “substance,” *samaya* and its bond-forming capacities take on an even more markedly material and sensory dimension. Once Tibetans expanded upon the semantic range of the term, oath substance came to include everything from the traditional Indian tantric five ambrosias and five meats to edible sacra of all kinds, amulets, and even larger items, such as particularly revered statues, and other images and objects of power. Many of the kinds of substances and objects dealt with in the present study belong to the category of “Treasure substance” (*gter rdzas*), which is treated as a subclass of oath substance throughout the literary passages analyzed herein. Treasure substance refers specifically to an entire range of potent oath substances that were presumably concealed by the eighth century Indian tantric master Padmasambhava throughout the Tibetan landscape for later destined Treasure revealers to

⁴⁵ Jacob Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 60-61.

retrieve and implement anew when the time for their peak efficacy is reached. As *samaya* in material form, oath and Treasure substances possess the particular feature of binding those who encounter them via the senses to one another, to the substances themselves, and through the substances to all the masters, buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities who were once in contact with them, or had a hand in their creation, ritual treatment, distribution, and consumption. Oath substances and Treasure substances are thus by definition sensory media that bind, on a number of different registers.

An understanding of power substances and objects as sensory media that bind invites speculation about the various styles of binding enacted by them and the implications of their binding properties upon the religious sensibilities of individuals and their formation into communities. Firstly, it is the “blessings” (*byin rlabs*) and “power” (*mtshu*) that oath substances variously embody, possess, or accrue which accounts in large part for their active binding properties. “Blessings,” in this instance, is a rather poor rendering for the combination of reciprocity and transformational power conveyed by the Tibetan term *byin rlabs*, or its longer verbal form, *byin gyis brlabs pa*. Indeed, according to Dan Martin, this term more literally means, “received” (*rlabs*) “by way of” (*gyis*) “giving” (*byin*), a notion, which by my estimation connotes better the relational and dynamic sense of transformational possibilities that emerges in encounters with objects said to possess blessings.⁴⁶ Tibetan discourses tend to frame this word/concept in terms

⁴⁶ Dan Martin (1994), 274. Martin traces the Tibetan term *byin rlabs* not to the direct translation of the Sanskrit *adhiṣṭhāna*, but to the literal translation of the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit term that was first executed, by his estimation, during the seventh or eighth century importation of Buddhist traditions to Tibet. Martin’s source for this judgment is H. Inagaki, “Kūkai’s Sokushin-Jōbutsu-Gi (Principle of Attaining Buddhahood with the Present Body),” *Asia Major*, Vol. 17.2 (1972): 194. Inagaki describes how Chinese translators rendered the Sanskrit term *adhiṣṭhāna* into the two-character term 加 “add” 持 “hold,” which signals, according to the interpretation of Kūkai, both the transformational “power on the part of the Buddha and also the response to and reception of it on the part of the practitioner.” This certainly appears to connect more closely to the meaning of the Tibetan *byin rlabs*, although, to be fair, the similarity

of power, which in this instance should be understood in the broadest sense possible as “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.”⁴⁷ In a doctrinal gloss of the noun *byin rlabs*, the *Great Tibetan-Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary* defines it as “the capacity or power present within the object/meaning of Dharma that constitutes the path of a superior one.”⁴⁸ This same dictionary defines the verbal sense of *byin gyis brlabs pa* more generally as “to be transformed by radiant energy into something powerful, or to cause power to enter and emerge.”⁴⁹ Moreover, in addition to blessings being defined in terms of capacity and power, Tibetan writers also directly use the word “power” (*mthu*) alongside “blessings” as a related property that certain objects are said to possess or acquire.⁵⁰ When objects are construed as materializations, or receptacles of blessings and power, their transformational potency poises them to variously act upon persons, places, and things, forging bonds and creating other effects between them in unpredictable ways that extend beyond the properties of how standard tantric *samaya* observations are given and received. It is in this specialized sense, among others, that such objects can be understood as actants, which exercise agency, in the general Latourian sense of a capacity to act and affect a course of events.

between the Chinese and Tibetan terms could also reflect a common “meaning translation” inherited from Indian exegetes, rather than a Tibetan rendering of a Chinese translation.

⁴⁷ New Oxford American Dictionary, 2nd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ Krang dbyi sun, et al (1993), 1885. *byin rlabs/ 'phags pa'i lam chos kyi don gang yin pa la gnas pa'i nus pa'am mthu/*

⁴⁹ Krang dbyi sun, et al, (1993), 1884. *byin gyis brlabs pa/ gzi byin gyis nus ldan du sgyur ba'am/ nus pa 'jug par byed pa dang/ thon par byed pa/*

⁵⁰ The term *mthu* has the additional meaning of “black magic,” or “sorcery” (*ngan sngags*, literally, “evil mantra”), perhaps indicating a slippage between the general meaning of power as the ability to make an impact, and its more specific meaning as the ability to exercise control over others.

We will notice throughout this thesis how owing to their intrinsic or acquired power and blessings, oath substances and other objects of power exhibit the marked tendency to flow across, connect, or fuse a number of disparate elements and domains which in other contexts might be kept apart, or related quite differently. This feature is in turn connected to the related tendency for such objects to become animated, usually in reliance upon ritual treatment, and the uncontainable, or unstable nature of their properties of animation. In literary episodes that feature oath substances, their newly acquired properties of animation invariably provoke awe, fascination, and confidence among onlookers in the potency of both substances and their human wielders. These aesthetic displays of animated matter actively bind spectators to one another, to the substances concerned, and through them to the world of masters, deities, and awakened beings through which these objects materialized in this world.

Owing to the uncontainable animation of power objects, their property of binding extends beyond the explicitly religious domain of ritual practice to impact the social, political, and economic dynamics that occur in their vicinity. In light of this observation, I adopt Birgit Meyer's insightful discussion of how novel forms of media have impacted religious sensibilities and galvanized community formations in this globalized electronic age. I find that her notions of "sensational forms" and the communal "aesthetic formations" that they shape are particularly apropos. Even while these two terms were coined to account for how newly circulating electronic media form human communities in ways that extend Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined community," they are also quite felicitous for characterizing how oath substances and Treasure substances function vis-à-vis the people who interact with them. I thus frame oath substances, Treasure substances, and the other power objects that feature in this study as especially efficacious

“sensational forms,” which mobilize people into communal “aesthetic formations” through shaping individual aesthetic sensibilities into common, recognizable patterns, or collective habits (*habitus*).⁵¹ In conjunction with their displays of animation, oath substances shape sensibilities based primarily upon the sense faculty through which they are accessed, whether it be through sight, sound, taste, touch, thought, or more often, a combination thereof. Emphasis upon the sensory, aesthetic, and affective interactions with such objects thus features throughout Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse, even becoming a point of controversy in his polemical defenses of their transformational powers.

Since it is the senses that “mediate the relationship between self and society, mind and body, idea and object,”⁵² sense faculties and their associated sensory objects often form an explicit focal point in the object-oriented ritual actions of Sog bzlog pa’s world. Indeed, Sog bzlog pa’s Buddhist tantric ritual world possesses a repertoire of techniques through which it aims to instill a particularly tantric sensibility with respect to objects. To start with, Buddhist tantric ritual is premised upon the dissonances between how we variously perceive (*snang tshul*) – the epistemological dimension of sensory experience, representation, and signification; and how things really are (*gnas tshul*) – the ontological domain of reality and presence. The ostensive goal of Buddhist tantric practice is to overcome these dissonances, such that personal perception and absolute being fuse in a final coalescence of subject/object dualism (*gzung ’dzin zung ’jug*). Until the time when we actualize this non-dual gnosis, Buddhist tantric rituals present an array of techniques,

⁵¹ Birgit Meyer, “Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding,” in *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, ed. Birgit Meyer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-28.

⁵² Michael Bull, Paul Gilroy, David Howes and Douglas Kahn, “Introducing Sensory Studies,” in *The Senses and Society* Vol. 1.1 (March, 2006), 6.

with a variety of pragmatic and soteriological objectives, which play with the tensions between representation and reality, signification and presence.

This “play” with the dissonances between perceptual representation and ontological reality is also expressed in Buddhist tantric ritual in terms of the tensions we often feel between pretense and sincerity, or make believe and literality as opposing orientations to action and interaction. Sog bzlog pa’s rituals continually call for us to “imagine” (*mos*) our selves and environments as none other than the ultimate mode of reality itself. This is accomplished foremost by the deity yoga techniques of meticulously mapping the physical elements, psychophysical aggregates, sense faculties, sense objects, sense consciousnesses, and their convergence, as well as all concepts for that matter, to the pantheon of deities imagined within the configuration of a visualized *maṇḍala*. This detailed identification of divinized values with the functional constituents of one’s personality complex and sensory interactive field is intended to produce a complete shift in orientation from ordinary “I” to divine “I.” By attuning our sensory perception to the ultimate mode of being, this imaginative act brings into presence that reality, even while, as imagination, it also signals our perceptual distance from truly experiencing it as an abiding actuality. Thus, rather than “signify” some other, as yet unrealized reality, Buddhist tantric ritual works by bringing that reality into experience, thus collapsing, if only temporarily, the dissonances between one’s own particular perceptual inclinations and the singular, divine nature of being itself.

* * *

As we shall discover in this thesis, the tensions in the tantric ritual world between presence and reference, identity and difference become particularly conspicuous when it

comes to the power objects and substances that pass through ritual settings. In tantric ritual settings, objects are often treated as though they have their own intrinsic powers, above and beyond whatever else they may be said to symbolize or represent. At the same time, however, tantric ritual objects course in a densely semiotic world, where signification, reference, and innuendo are employed to achieve a variety of cognitive and material effects. The tensions between presence and reference, being and representation, which can be witnessed in the self-fashioning processes of tantric deity yoga, thus play out with particular force when rituals feature tangible sensory objects and material substances of power and blessings. Moreover, as this study of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse attempts to demonstrate, the dynamics and tensions surrounding power objects that pass through rituals extend well beyond the ritual sphere, bringing a number of far-reaching implications for the nature of religious sensibilities and communal formations in Sog bzlog pa's world. Each chapter of this study explores a particular facet of the many possible implications of interacting with powerful objects.

I begin this thesis with a consideration of the roles of powerful objects in the lives of Sog bzlog pa and his colleagues. Part I: Objects in Narrative, which includes Chapters One and Two, considers power objects as they variously appear throughout the narrative writings by and about Sog bzlog pa and his masters. Chapter One: "In the Vicinity of Things—Substance, Violence, and Power in the Milieu of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624)," introduces the figure of Sog bzlog pa and his preoccupation with powerful objects and object-oriented rites through an analysis of his broader socio-political and religious setting. This portrait of sixteenth-century Tibet sets the stage for a more focused investigation into the specific influences of Sog bzlog pa's teachers upon his development through careful readings of the narrative writings by and about three of

his closest masters: gTer ston Zhig po gling pa (1524-1583), Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa (16th c.), and Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan (1499-1587). The discussion proceeds by “tracing the associations” between persons, places, things, rituals, deities, visions, prophecies, and everything else that constellated around powerful objects and their rites, attending to the ways in which such objects and object-oriented performances mediated and were mediated by the elements with which they transacted in general during this period. This chapter thus extends beyond a historical account of how certain kinds of powerful objects and object-oriented rites formed an important aspect of Sog bzlog pa's broader socio-religious milieu. More fundamentally, it seeks to explore the myriad ways such objects and their rites can cut across and conflate categories and domains of experience and interaction that are usually kept apart, or related differently, and how, in the particular case in hand, such dynamics impacted the social, political, and economic power and influence of the figures involved.

Chapter Two: “Prowess and Persona in the Wielding of Things—Exorcisms, Objects, and Insights in the Life and Literary Career of a Mongol-repelling Scholar-adept,” is a presentation and analysis of Sog bzlog pa's religious career, writings, and persona.⁵³ Throughout this discussion, I attempt to highlight the tension that appears in

⁵³ Unless otherwise specified or clear from context, my use of the ethnonym “Mongol” throughout this thesis reflects Sog bzlog pa's own usage, rather than my own historiographical judgments. Groups with varying and often combined Mongol and Tibetan ethnic and cultural affiliation have been part of the social milieu of the Tibetan plateau since at least the thirteenth century. The boundaries between Tibetan and Mongol identity was and remains far more complex than the discourse of Sog bzlog pa, “The Mongol Repeller,” could ever convey through his totalizing use of the term Mongol (Sog). Indeed, the first chapters of this thesis demonstrate how Sog bzlog pa portrays “the Mongols” as the oppositional other against which his own persona and a wider sense of Tibetan identity, rooted in Buddhism, was being constructed. And yet, despite this totalizing use of the term Mongol (Sog), Sog bzlog pa's accounts of his and Zhig po gling pa's involvements with partially-Tibetanized Mongol groups along the northeastern frontiers of dBus and gTsang (this time designated exclusively as Hor, instead of Sog) also sometimes reflects the more fluid and complex reality on the ground. To complicate matters further, some of the texts under examination in this study at times use the terms Sog and Hor interchangeably to designate the destructive Mongol armies against which Sog bzlog pa and his associates directed their averting rituals,

narrative passages between depictions of efficacy that emphasize the special subjective qualities of powerful persons, on the one hand; and the special features of certain objects, locations, ritual procedures, or other observable, material forms, on the other hand. I close the chapter with a consideration of how this tension between subjective and objective sources of power is also inflected in Sog bzlog pa's autobiographical attempts at reconciling the conflicting elements of selfless sacrifice and personal power, which form a dramatic tension throughout his self-portrait.

Part II: Objects in Theory and Practice, which includes Chapter Three and Chapter Four, continues to explore the tensions between objective and subjective sources of power and efficacy, but from the perspective of Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections and ritual practices that center upon objects of power. The juxtaposition of theory and practice in Part II is intended to occasion reflections concerning the relationships between how power objects are variously philosophized about and implemented in action. Chapter Three: "Controversies Over Things—Drawing, Blurring, and Crossing the Boundaries," brings us face to face with Tibetan theories about a series of four objects whose central claim is to bring positive benefits – even "liberation" from *samsāra* – to whoever sees, hears, wears, or eats them. This discussion explores the literary debates in which Sog bzlog pa participated around issues concerning the efficacy and legitimacy of certain visions, sounds, amulets, and pills that his Old School tradition regards as particularly potent sensory objects. These arguments revolve principally around whether efficacious, transformative power is located primarily within these sensory objects themselves, or whether that power is really within the minds of the people that use or

while at other times Sog bzlog pa reserves the term Hor specifically for the partially-Tibetanized Mongols at the frontiers of dBus and gTsang that sponsored and benefitted from Sog bzlog pa's ritual campaign.

encounter them. Put another way, at stake was whether these potent objects directly affect sentient beings as stipulated, “liberating” them from some level or another of suffering; or whether they work on beings only indirectly by symbolizing, or signifying some underlying meaning or value.

Sog bzlog pa’s contributions to this debate represent a concerted strategic effort to formulate a theory of efficacy that can account for the power of specialized objects, both sensory and material, in bringing about transformations in world, body, and psyche. And yet, we shall also see that his theoretical reflections are not an unequivocal argument for the power of sensory objects. While defending the power of these forms, he demarcates the nature and distribution of efficacious power across sensory objects and sensate minds by carving out a role for cultivation, intentionality, and personal karma in their efficacy. The primary goal of this chapter is therefore to illustrate how Sog bzlog pa’s reflections parse out a theoretical terrain whose internal divisions implicate not only the potency of substances and sensory experiences, and their effects on beings and environments, but also the very nature of mind, body, person, gnosis, subject, object, and more.

Chapter Four: “Things in Action and the Actions of Things—A Dynamic Ontology of Ritual Objects,” extends the issues raised in chapters two and three to consider the rituals with which Sog bzlog pa was involved that feature objects that act as agents or instruments of change. In this discussion I trace the production, distribution, and consumption of a series of powerful objects that appear in Sog bzlog pa’s rituals and ritual commentaries, with the aim of discerning what, by Sog bzlog pa’s account, rituals do, what makes rituals effective, and what makes for powerful ritual objects and specialists. Addressing these questions brings to light the notions of efficacy at work in the construction and use of powerful objects as they pass through ritual treatments.

These involve a wide spectrum of efficacious principles, ranging from incorporation, ingestion, contiguity, and mimesis, to category inclusion, aesthetics, discursive knowledge, and exegesis. In keeping with my approach of exploring Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse both within his texts and as his object-power discourse effects readers and performers outside his texts, I tack back and forth between these two levels of analysis. I thus analyze in tandem how material power and human discourse interact within these ritual texts and proceedings, and how such object-oriented ritual performances potentially impact the orientations and sensibilities of ritual performers and audiences.

Part III: Aftereffects includes Chapter Five and Final Considerations. This section explores the ramifications of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse in the socio-political movements of Tibetan Buddhist state formation that transpired within a few decades of his death, how this impacted Sog bzlog pa's reception by his Old School tradition, and what the ripples of these dynamics are in the present period. Final Considerations constitutes a reflection upon the "Aftereffects" of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse for my own understanding of the relationships between objects, actions, and discourses, specifically in terms of how the features of his object-power discourse might add new dimensions to the recent wave of object-oriented theoretical reflections which I discuss in this introduction. Chapter Five: "Continuities and Contentions over Things—The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and the Material Links of Political Authority," returns to Chapter One's emphasis on the social, political, and economic associations that form in the vicinity of things. This time, however, I trace these associations as they formed around Sog bzlog pa's potent things and rites after his death in the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682), Old School historical

narratives, the founding narratives of Sikkim, and the present ritual calendar and religious identity of Sikkim's Bhutia population. I attempt to illustrate, in light of the dynamics observed in Sog bzlog pa's theoretical and ritual works, how his ritual orientation to action and the conflations and crossings that it encourages between persons and objects contains its own aspirations to power. I specifically trace how such ritually-inflected aspirations to power led to diametrically opposed posthumous receptions of Sog bzlog pa by the Fifth Dalai Lama, on the one hand, and by the founding authors of the Sikkimese state, on the other; and how, through those different receptions of his writings and rituals, Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse directly and indirectly played into two interrelated state-formation projects within three decades of his death.

Final Considerations is a summary of significant findings and a reassessment of the critical possibilities broached in the introduction in light of what we have learned through examining Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse. In particular, I critically reassess the world-making activity of writing about powerful things, and how this discourse relates to the material world of things that this discourse claims to describe, argue over, explain, and prescribe. In this vein, I revisit the concept of "ritual ethos" to analyze how opposing orientations to objects and actions are variously inflected in Sog bzlog pa's writings and what such inflections might tell us about the work-like functions of his object-power discourse.

PART I
OBJECTS IN NARRATIVE

CHAPTER ONE

IN THE VICINITY OF THINGS—SUBSTANCE, VIOLENCE, AND POWER IN THE MILIEU OF SOG BZLOG PA BLO GROS RGYAL MTSHAN (1552-1624)

Introduction

The career of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan vividly reflects a highly contentious environment. Sog bzlog pa was best known during his lifetime for his thirty-two year endeavor to rid Tibet of Mongol armies by means of wrathful, object-oriented ritual performances. His activities in this domain were based primarily on the *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies (dMag zlog nyer lnga)*, a Treasure ritual cycle revealed by his master Zhig po gling pa.⁵⁴ Another side of his career was as a scholar and writer. In this sphere, Sog bzlog pa is most renowned for his compendious responses to critics of his Old School's power objects, practices, and texts, as well as for his eloquent and apologetic biography of the eighth century Indian tantric master Padmasambhava. A third aspect of his career was as a physician. Before entering the religious vocation and throughout much of his later life Sog bzlog pa earned his living as a doctor, who administered to some of the most powerful aristocrats and clerics of gTsang and dBus. Last, but certainly not least, Sog bzlog pa was renowned as a Great Perfection master, who through in depth practice of the visionary experiences of "crossing over" (*thod rgal*)

⁵⁴ For more details on *zlog pa* and other similar types of protective "averting" rituals, see René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Demons and Oracles of Tibet* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1998), 507-537; Stephan Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 363-467; Sherry Ortner, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 91-127; Stan Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 117-139; Vincanne Adams, *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Donald Lopez, *Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sutra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 216-238; and Donald Lopez, "Exorcising Demons with a Buddhist Sutra," in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 511-526.

in the context of dark retreats encountered and communicated with deities, buddhas, and past masters.

The thread running throughout much of Sog bzlog pa's activities in the diverse domains of medicine, literary production, ritual, and vision quests is his concern with protecting borders – bodily, sectarian, territorial – against threats of external attack. Such a focus rooted Sog bzlog pa firmly in the material and pragmatic aspects of Buddhist practice. Yet, at the same time, Sog bzlog pa's erudition in the domain of apologetics, and especially his authority as a Great Perfection master, led him to attempt to make the material dimension of Buddhist practice resonate with the highest ideals of Buddhist doctrine. In this regard, among several others, Sog bzlog pa is unique. Previous Old School figures had made related attempts, but earlier defenses were largely directed toward proving the authenticity of the Old School's Word (*bka' ma*) and Treasure teachings (*gter ma*) in general. Sog bzlog pa was perhaps the first and last to focus his doctrinal acumen upon safeguarding the authenticity and efficacy of Treasure substances (*gter rdzas*), and the power of material and sensory objects in Buddhist practice more broadly.⁵⁵

The socio-political ramifications of Sog bzlog pa's career as a guardian of borders caused him to stand out as one of the most controversial figures in Tibetan religious history. Vilified as a charlatan by the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Tibetan leader even curtailed

⁵⁵ This is not to say that the materiality of Treasure teachings, i.e., their revelation from the physical elements, was never an object of scrutiny before Sog bzlog pa's time. However, other polemics, when they touch upon the issue of materiality, typically revolve around the authenticity of Treasures as physical, material excavations in general, and not upon the efficacy, per se, of Treasure objects and substances, and their frequent claim to confer "liberation" through sensory contact. For a historical overview of Treasure polemics, see Andreas Doctor, *Tibetan Treasure Literature: Revelation, Tradition, and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism* (Ithaca and Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 31-38. For a discussion of Treasure polemics in Tibet set within the broader history of Buddhist notions of canonicity and apocrypha, see Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 121-140.

the circulation of Sog bzlog pa's writings and banned the practices connected with his lineage throughout Tibet during the century following Sog bzlog pa's death.⁵⁶ Sog bzlog pa's reputation nevertheless withstood such repressive measure. Soon after the Great Fifth's death, Sog bzlog pa became a staple figure in Old School religious histories. In part because most major Old School ritual cycles had been transmitted through him, Sog bzlog pa also appears as an honored member of several religious lineages that endure to the present. Consequently, even while the legacy of Sog bzlog pa's contributions to Tibetan Buddhist religious culture has been dimmed considerably compared to his influence while he was alive, Sog bzlog pa's memory lives on among the Old School adherents who inherited his teachings or appreciate his doctrinal, ritual, or narrative acumen.

As we shall see in the discussion ahead, Sog bzlog pa's influence is perhaps felt most vividly in the figure of the charismatic master of violent object-oriented rites and potent material sacra, a paradigmatic type of religious specialist that has exercised considerable influence throughout the socio-political and religious landscape of Tibet and the rest of the Tibetan Buddhist world.

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⁵⁶ Sog bzlog pa's legacy in the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama and elsewhere will form the subject matter of Chapter Five of this study.

Rituals that feature powerful substances and sensory objects are an integral facet of Tibetan religious life.⁵⁷ This is especially so in the careers of certain kinds of Tibetan religious specialists like Sog bzlog pa whose identities are premised on prowess in the arena of ritual proceedings intended to manipulate the material world for pragmatic effect. The autobiographical and biographical literature connected with such figures is often explicit about the social, political, and economic circumstances surrounding potent practices and substances. These were felicitous associations for building public images as powerful guardians of individual communities and all of Tibet.

Chapters One and Two of this study examine the autobiographical and biographical writings of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan and his milieu with the aim of demonstrating that powerful sacra and the authority to wield it for a range of ends was a particularly defining feature of this circle's identity. In explicating the details of Sog bzlog pa's immersion in the material dimensions of religious practice, this discussion argues more fundamentally that the importance of powerful objects and object-oriented rites in the lives of Sog bzlog pa and his associates stems in large part from both the ability of such objects to flow across, connect, or fuse a number of disparate elements and domains which in other contexts might be kept apart, or related quite differently; and the related tendency for such objects to become animated, and the uncontainable, or unstable nature of their properties of animation. In this regard, Sog bzlog pa's potent substances and objects function much like other items, such as money, blood, and ghosts for instance, whose mercurial materiality and heavily-laden metaphorical character cause

⁵⁷ The centrality of potent materials in Tibetan ritual life can be quickly discerned from a casual perusal of José Cabezón's "Introduction," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. José Cabezón (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-34.

them to gather associations as they flow through and connect a range of discursive and material domains.⁵⁸

As we peruse the relevant literature, we will notice that social, political, economic, aesthetic, and religious dynamics all tend to converge in the vicinity of these kinds of objects, allowing them to serve as mediating vectors for the transference and conversion of power, influence, and wealth between persons, things, deities, locations, institutions, and more. Such power objects are often purported to possess their own generative powers. Independently, or in combination with ritual proceedings, powerful substances often become animated, acting in a variety of ways upon humans and their environments. In such circumstances, moreover, there is a marked uncontainability, or excess to their properties of animation. These objects variously act not only to liberate, repel, kill, initiate, or otherwise effect sentient beings and adverse circumstances, as is explicitly claimed of them. They also act to connect persons in economic exchange, form social and political alliances, galvanize collective action around shared problems, provoke controversies and anxieties from rival factions, and so much more.

* * *

The discussion begins in Chapter One with a sketch of the central features of Sog bzlog pa's wider environment, specifically in terms of the nexus of ritual, materiality, and power at work among Tibetan religious specialists of his day. This outline provides the broad historical conditions in and around Tibet that made possible the emergence of a

⁵⁸ Janet Carsten, "Substance and Relationality: Blood in Contexts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 19-35.

figure like Sog bzlog pa. The purpose of painting this wider context is to determine how Sog bzlog pa – physician, apologist, ritual specialist, visionary – epitomized the time in which he lived, in terms of his preoccupation with the protective dimensions of writing, ritual, and medicine; and also how he stood out, in terms of both the focused nature of his interest in the ritual and material domains of Tibetan religion and in his concern to make that domain consistent with the highest Buddhist ideals. Chapter One therefore shifts from Sog bzlog pa’s broader socio-religious setting to an examination of his more specific influences, both in terms of the models of ideal types of religious specialists circulating during his time, as well as the overlapping interests of his closest masters – Zhig po gling pa, Yongs ’dzin Ngag dbang grags pa, and Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan. The emphasis here is on how, precisely, the life stories of these masters articulate the social, political, and economic ramifications of being associated with such powerful objects and object-oriented practices.

These discussions set the stage for Chapter Two’s introduction to the religious and literary career of Sog bzlog pa himself. Through an exploration of his own collected writings and comparative analysis of third person biographies, Chapter Two narrates the pivotal events in Sog bzlog pa’s life, illustrating with particular vividness his central concern with powerful sacra and the rituals that incorporate them. Chapter Two also includes an analysis of Sog bzlog pa’s writings, focusing specifically on those that treat the material and sensory dimensions of Tibetan religious life and which, therefore, constitute the principal textual sources for this study.

It will hopefully become clear throughout this discussion how the confluence of ritual actions, sacred substances, social influence, and political power made Sog bzlog pa and his masters controversial figures both during their lifetimes and after. Chapter Two

thus closes with a foray into the rhetorical images and tropes that Sog bzlog pa enlisted in his writings to construct his public persona as a humble, self-sacrificing defender of Tibet's frontiers, who was nonetheless powerful and violent enough to contend with foreign military aggression.

Throughout this analysis of Sog bzlog pa's involvement with powerful things and their associated rituals we will begin to feel out the contours of his object-power discourse. We will begin to see in particular how the efficacious power of objects draws a prodigious range of items and entities into its orbit, thus enabling power objects to course through a diversity of discursive and material domains, in turns human and non-human. We will also have occasion to observe that there is considerable tension throughout this discourse between two opposing orientations to action and objects, and that these two contrasting approaches are fundamentally related to a friction between subjective and objective sources of power and charisma. This tension, as we shall witness, finds expression throughout Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse in a number of related oppositions and frictions. Let us turn first to Sog bzlog pa's wider socio-political context to explore the set of conditions that helped produce this figure and shape his orientation toward the world of power objects and object-oriented rites.

I. The Shifting Tides of Clerical Influence and Authority: Religion, Politics, and Materiality in the Time of Sog bzlog pa

Sog bzlog pa (b. 1552) was born into a particularly volatile time, marked by ongoing struggles between a multiplicity of rival and allied factions in dBus and gTsang over

control of land and resources.⁵⁹ Much of the fighting assumed the form of armed skirmishes between aristocratic families and their lay and clerical supporters based in the western Tibetan region of gTsang, on the one hand, and the central Tibetan region of dBus, on the other. The rivalry between gTsang and dBus was in some senses an enduring dynamic of Tibetan socio-political life rooted in much older feuds.⁶⁰ However, the absence of stable, centralized political control throughout the decades preceding this time seems to have exacerbated these traditional tensions.

Political power was by and large fragmentary during this period, signaled by an unstable confederation of minor, local centers of power constellating around larger, wealthier regional centers located in gTsang, or dBus, respectively. The influence of these regional centers waxed and waned in large part based upon the relative reach and durability of their networks of local-level alliances. Thus, with the periodic formation and fracture of the links that constituted these networks, the balance of power tilted uneasily between gTsang's and dBus's most powerful families.

Despite this constantly shifting political landscape, there were extended swathes of time during which power was concentrated in the hands of one or another of Tibet's

⁵⁹ For the most elaborate standard historical narrative of this period, see Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, *One Hundred Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet, Volume 1*, trans. Derek F. Maher (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 243-371. See also Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 17-56. I do not wish to challenge the basic features of these accounts, but only to highlight certain elements, such as the constant fighting between dBus and gTsang for control over all of Tibet, mounting clerical influence in the political arena, and correspondingly, different opportunities for clerical figures to claim and exercise temporal power.

⁶⁰ Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa skya Period of Tibetan History* (Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 65. Rome: Istituto Italiano Per il Medio ed Esremo Oriente, 1990), 59-60. Petech describes there an "age-long duel" between dBus and gTsang. See also Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet: A Study of Tshal Gung-thang*, Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie. Vol. 361 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), vol. II, 401-552. Sørensen and Guntram highlight throughout their magisterial study of the central Tibetan region of Tshal Gung thang centered upon Lhasa that its history must be contextualized in terms of the ongoing clashes between dBus and gTsang over control of what they term the Lhasa "maṅḍala-zone" and its symbols.

family dynasties. In 1435, the Rin spungs aristocracy based in Rong, gTsang overthrew the Phag mo gru dynasty of dBus.⁶¹ This effectively shifted the concentration of power from dBus to gTsang, where it would remain until 1642, when the Fifth Dalai Lama and his dGa' ldan pho brang government assumed power and once again shifted the concentration of power back to dBus after the plateau was unified under their reign. In the meantime, power struggles within gTsang's Rin spungs network of alliances reached a critical point between the 1550's and 1570's. Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje, an ambitious Rin spungs retainer, who eventually served as governor of bSam grub rtse castle in gZhi ka rtse, gTsang, gathered alliances and gradually seized control of this and other key Rin spungs strongholds.⁶² According to standard Tibetan historical narratives, this ushered in the period of gTsang pa sde srid rule. Based at bSam grub rtse castle, this would be the final gTsang polity to rule Tibet.

When Sog bzlog pa was born in 1552, gTsang's Rin spungs aristocracy was still the reigning family dynasty. Although Rin spungs hegemony was on the wane during Sog bzlog pa's youth, and would eventually be eclipsed in the ensuing decades by Zhing shag pa and his descendents, the Rin spungs family continued to exercise power locally and exert considerable influence in socio-political and religious affairs.⁶³ As a young physician from gTsang, Sog bzlog pa administered primarily to the medical needs of the Rin spungs family and its larger circle of allies, which included his master Zhig po gling

⁶¹ For a detailed account of the rise of Phag mo gru pa and the career of its first leader, Byang chub rgyal mtsan, see Luciano Petech (1990), 100-137.

⁶² Shakabpa (2010), 280-281.

⁶³ The enduring influence of the Rin spung aristocracy on the plateau, even after the rise of the gTsang pa sde srid government, will hopefully become clear throughout the course of this chapter.

pa.⁶⁴ Throughout his adult years, Sog bzlog pa's career continued to be based in gTsang. During the final decades of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century, Sog bzlog pa remained a loyal servant to the Rin spungs family. With the rise of gTsang pa sde srid power, Sog bzlog pa also fell into favor with the new leadership, receiving substantial largesse and encouragement to stage large-scale army-averting rites on behalf of the polity's ambitious rulers.

Sog bzlog pa's rituals were part of the new gTsang government's concerted efforts to expand its power to eventually encompass all of Tibet.⁶⁵ The gTsang pa ruling family's aspirations to absolute power over a unified territory appear in hindsight to have been part of a general *Zeitgeist* that was then capturing the political imagination of Tibet's aristocratic and clerical elite.⁶⁶ The dGe lugs clerical establishments around

⁶⁴ This and the other details mentioned in this general discussion concerning the lives of Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

⁶⁵ James Gentry, "Representations of Efficacy: The Ritual Expulsion of Mongol Armies in the Consolidation and Expansion of the Tsang (Gtsang) Dynasty," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. José Cabezón (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 131-164.

⁶⁶ This is powerfully evinced by the fact that between 1640 and 1650 Tibetans created three distinct Tibetan Buddhist polities – the dGa' ldan pho brang state of the Dalai Lamas, the state of Sikkim ('Bras ljongs), and the state of Bhutan ('Brug gzhung). For comparisons between these state formations, see John Ardussi, "Formation of the State of Bhutan ('Brug gzhung) in the 17th Century and its Tibetan Antecedents," in *Proceedings of the Seminar on The Relationship Between Religion and State (chos srid zung 'brel) in Traditional Tibet*, ed. Christoph Cüppers, Lumbini 4-7 March 2000. Lumbini International Research Institute, Monograph Series, vol. 4. (2004), 33-48.

Despite the particular circumstances that led to the formation of each of these three states, this concentration of state-building activity and the durability of these state structures into the present period strongly suggests a concomitant expansion of trans-local, or trans-regional Tibetan cultural identity, much like the Tibetan "proto-nationalism" discussed by George Dreyfus, "Cherished Memories, Cherished Communities," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th International Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. Fagernes 1992*, vol. 1, ed. Per Kvaerne (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 205-218. Dreyfus highlights the role of Treasure narratives, specifically those that feature the imperial-period king Srong btsan sgam po as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, as providing many of the pre-modern factors that coalesced into modern Tibetan nationalism. He points toward thirteenth-century Tibetan encounters with Mongol military interventions as a galvanizing force behind the appearance then of Treasure narratives which both expressed and contributed to this trans-regional sense of Tibetan political identity. He terms this sense of communal belonging "proto-nationalism." The period between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth century in Tibet, with the reappearance of Mongol armies in Tibet and the consequent rise in the political influence of

Lhasa and their lay aristocratic patrons were meanwhile nurturing their own aspirations to dominion over a unified Tibet.⁶⁷ Despite their common ambition, the lay gTsang government and the burgeoning dGe lugs government in dBus had quite different political configurations in mind. The gTsang pa government, as a lay dynastic family, selected its rulers based on hereditary descent.⁶⁸ The gTsang rulers' relationship with the clergy can best be summarized in terms of the classical Indian *dharmarāja* (*chos rgyal*, Dharma king) and *cakravartin* (*'khor los bsgyur pa'i rgyal po*, universal monarch) model of patron-priest relations (*mchod yon*). According to this arrangement, the gTsang house provided financial support and military protection for monasteries and hierarchs in exchange primarily for ritual service, preaching engagements, and diplomatic missions.⁶⁹ The Rin spungs house and the gTsang pa sde srid house that followed it both maintained traditional gTsang patronage of the sectarian formations of Jo nang, Sa skya, rNying ma, and most centrally, bKa' brgyud and its Karmapa incarnation series.⁷⁰

Treasure revealers, can, I believe, be characterized as an extension of this communal proto-nationalistic sentiment. The emergence in the seventeenth century of three distinct Tibetan Buddhist states, which variously attempted to reflect and reinforce certain aspects of Tibetan Buddhist communal identity, can in many senses be understood as the geo-political culmination of this process of political identity formation.

⁶⁷ Shakabpa (2010), 321-380.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 282.

⁶⁹ For an insightful discussion of the patron-priest relationship in Tibet, see David S. Ruegg, "*Mchod yon, yon mchod* and *mchod gnas/yon gnas*: On the historiography and semantics of a Tibetan religio-social and religio-political concept." In *Tibetan History and Language: Studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ernst Steinkellner (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1991), 329-351. For analysis of the early Indian Buddhist precedents for these models of righteous kingship, see Frank Reynolds, "The Two Wheels of Dhamma: a Study of Early Buddhism," in *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada tradition in India and Ceylon*, eds. Gananath Obeyesekere, Frank Reynolds, and Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, Pa.: American Academy of Religion, 1972), 6-31.

⁷⁰ The primary-source details of the gTsang pa sde srid's patron-priest relationships are scattered throughout the biographical literature of the period, especially that of the Karmapa and Jo nang hierarchs of the time.

Throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, tides were shifting away from this type of political arrangement, as religious specialists, and especially the figures of the reincarnate lama and the Treasure revealer, became more and more integral to political affairs and increasingly threatened to displace lay aristocrats as the main power brokers in Tibet.⁷¹ The literature from this period attests to frequent references to the “two-fold code of religion and polity” (*chos srid lugs gnyis*) as belonging to one or another clerical establishment, or sectarian affiliation. The application of this term to religious institutions meant among other things that the dyad of political and religious affairs were conceptually separable, but practically intertwined for Tibet’s swelling monastic establishments, and their constellation of clerics, lay supporters, administrators, and local leaders.⁷² The reincarnate lama *cum* head of state, a figure whose persona symbolically fused the political and the religious spheres, would soon emerge in the figure of the Fifth Dalai Lama as the virtual embodiment of the two-fold code. Despite the titular role of the Mongol general Gushri Khan (b. 1582) as Dharmarāja of Tibet,⁷³ and the presence of civil administrators and “regents” (*sde srid*) responsible for the

⁷¹ Franz Michael, *Rule by Incarnation: Tibetan Buddhism and Its Role in Society and State* (Boulder, Colorado: Westwood Press (1982), 36-40.

⁷² The shift I refer to here concerns the use of the term “two-fold code” to describe the combined religious and socio-political influence belonging specifically to Tibet’s sectarian formations and institutions, such as ’Bri gung, sTag lung, dGe lugs, etc. For a discussion of this term, see Saul Mullard, *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 24-27. While the term does denote, as Mullard argues, an idealized complementarity between clerical and lay domains, in terms of the rights and responsibilities each sphere enjoys vis-à-vis the other, sixteenth and seventeenth century narrative literature abounds with episodes that describe the “two-fold code” of one or another sectarian formation. This suggests at the very least that during this period socio-political influence and authority was increasingly conceptualized as being subsumed within the sectarian, religious sphere.

⁷³ Zahiruddin Ahmad, trans, *A History of Tibet by the Fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), 195. Gushri Khan was thus more commonly known among Tibetans as bsTan ’dzin chos kyi rgyal po, “Dharmarāja, Upholder of the Doctrine.”

implementation of civil and political affairs,⁷⁴ the rise of the Dalai Lama government signaled that the reincarnate lama would displace the centrality of Tibet's lay aristocratic families on the political stage, ushering in a political system that would endure until 1950: the dGe lugs-led dGa' ldan pho brang government. This is not to say that lay aristocratic families ceased to exercise political power, only that their power was increasingly interwoven with and expressed in terms of religious sectarian interests and affiliations.

During the decades leading up to the rise of the dGa' ldan pho brang, the shifting balance of power from lay to clerical domains, in light of heightened struggles between rival factions in gTsang and dBus to unify Tibet under their respective rule, conferred unprecedented power and influence upon Tibet's leading religious specialists. As Tibet's aristocratic families vied to broaden their range of influence, they formed or strengthened patron-priest relationships with the clergy, enlisting them in the service of their expansionist agendas. This opened up new opportunities for the lamas of Sog bzlog pa's era to take more active roles in the socio-political events of their time.

As part of their increased activity in the political arena, lamas were sometimes sent as missionaries and emissaries to foreign territories in order to secure allegiances and potential military assistance in their struggles against rival Tibetan factions.⁷⁵ Such

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the dGa' ldan pho brang government's regents and their shifting roles in Tibetan political affairs, see Luciano Petech, "The Dalai Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study," in *The History of Tibet: The Medieval Period*, ed. Alex McKay (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 567-583.

⁷⁵ A particularly compelling example of this practice is found in the biography of the Sixth Zhwa dmar hierarch, Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug (1584-1630), composed by Si tu pañ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, *sGrub brgyud karma kam tshang brgyud pa rin po che'i rnam par thar pa rab 'byams nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: D. Gyaltsan and Kesang Legshay, 1971), 255-299. Nearly every page of this figure's biography describes his diplomatic travels to the neighboring kingdoms of Mongolia (*sog yul*), Hor, Yunan (*'jang*), and Nepal in service to the gTsang pa sde srid rulers. The biography also describes the 6th Zhwa dmar as a kind of immigration minister, responsible for providing

missions often involved attempts to “convert” powerful Mongol neighbors to the northeast to sworn allegiance to one or another of Tibet’s religious factions. As the Third Dalai Lama and hierarch of dBus’s ’Bras spungs monastery, bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543-1588) made a particularly successful missionary expedition to Mongolia in 1577, whereupon he converted influential Khalkha and Tümed Mongol generals, led by Genghis Khan’s heir Altan Khan (1507-1582), thus paving the way for a dramatic sea change in the delicate balance of power between gTsang and dBus.⁷⁶ His reincarnation, the Fourth Dalai Lama Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589-1616), was subsequently identified among the ruling Tümed Mongol family.⁷⁷ This cemented the dGe lugs alliance with both Tümed and Khalkha Mongols, which indirectly led to the Qośot Mongol general Gushri Khan’s military overthrow of gTsang rulers in 1642, and his enthronement of the Fifth Dalai Lama as ruler of Tibet.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, at home, rival gTsang and dBus factions commissioned lamas to stage large-scale exorcism rites aimed at repelling their respective enemies and armies, and expanding their own influence and power.⁷⁹ For gTsang loyalists such as Sog bzlog pa and his milieu, these rituals were explicitly directed against Mongol armies with dGe lugs/dBus loyalties and were part of the gTsang pa sde srid’s wider, multi-pronged

foreign nationals – mostly Indian and Nepali pilgrims – with official papers authorizing travel (*lam yig*) in Tibet.

⁷⁶ The positive long-term impact on dGe lugs fortunes of bSod nams rgya mtsho’s visit with Altan Khan is mentioned by the Great Fifth himself; see Ahmad (1995), 193.

⁷⁷ Shakapba (2010), 299.

⁷⁸ Eliot Sperling, “Tibet’s Foreign Relations during the Epoch of the Fifth Dalai Lama.” In *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas*, ed. Françoise Pommaret (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 119-132.

⁷⁹ It will become clear throughout this thesis that the role of Tibetan lamas in staging exorcisms aimed at destroying foreign and domestic enemies of the gTsang pa house is a recurring theme throughout the biographical and autobiographical literature of this period.

approach to consolidating Tibet under his rule.⁸⁰ The increased importance of Tibet's clergy in this expansionist political project, which would impact all Tibetans, thrust the master of ceremonies into the public limelight and dramatically increased his influence and power on the political stage. When Sog bzlog pa, for instance, writes of his own extended involvement with these army-averting rituals, he ultimately credits his own powerful rituals for the expansion of gTsang pa sde srid power, and only minimally shares credit with the gTsang polity's other expansionist strategies.⁸¹ So defining was Sog bzlog pa's role in this public ritual campaign for his self-identity that he eventually adopted the nickname "The Mongol Repeller" (Sog bzlog pa) in the process. For figures like Sog bzlog pa, then, reputation for ritual prowess, particularly with respect to violent object-oriented rites with Tibet-wide impact, became an increasingly important leverage for positioning themselves within the political landscape newly opened to them.

This is not to say that the image of the powerful ritualist was something new on the horizon during this time. Tibetan literary images of the master of violent tantric rites are as old as Tibetan life writing itself. One of the earliest instances of the genre, the *Biography of Rwa lotsāwa rDo rje grags pa*⁸² (1016-1128/1198) written by his grandson Ye shes seng ge (born 12th c.), draws from the stock of Indian tantric imagery to construct

⁸⁰ This depiction of Tibet-Mongol relations is somewhat of a simplification of what was actually taking place during this period. Throughout the decades preceding the rise of dGa' ldan pho brang, the gTsang pa sde srid attempted to counter the growing Mongol military challenge with a range of responses. Tibetan literary sources offer copious episodes in which gTsang rulers engage in diplomatic missions with Mongols, commission violent rites against Mongol armies, and directly confront Mongol forces in armed conflicts. In addition, Tibetan literary sources attest to the formation of alliances between Tibetan clergy—of both gTsang and non-gTsang persuasion—and Mongol warlords during this period, and to the diverse nature of those alliances depending on the political loyalties or leanings of the lamas involved.

⁸¹ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 203-259.

⁸² Rwa ye shes seng+ge, *mThu stobs dbang phyug rje btsun rwa lo tsā ba'i rnam par thar pa kun khyab snyan pa'i rnga sgra* (Lhasa: Yab gzhis dge legs bde skyid rab brtan, 1905).

what is perhaps the paradigmatic instance of this type of religious specialist in Tibetan literature.⁸³ The work includes numerous episodes that showcase Rwa *lotsāwa* killing even respected religious masters through his powerful rituals. Rather than equivocate about the ethical implications of these actions, Rwa *lotsāwa*'s biographer revels in the gory details, presenting such acts as evidence of his greatness in the domain of tantric rites. Following the pattern of this and other early models, additional instances of the sub-genre followed suit. The image of the ritual sorcerer has remained a powerful trope in the socio-cultural imaginaire of Tibet up to the present.⁸⁴

The prestige that this type of religious specialist enjoyed in traditional Tibetan society, due to the widespread acceptance of such a figure's powers in the pragmatic sphere, meant in the particular context of the history of Tibetan Buddhism that the creation of this identity type had far reaching political ramifications. Such figures could, it was often believed in traditional Tibetan circles, predict and dramatically influence the course of socio-political events, quell epidemics and cure diseases, manipulate the mentalities and physical movements of individuals and whole armies, change weather patterns to ensure healthy crops and livestock, and increase wealth for patrons and the state, all through recourse to powerful rites and the powerful substances they incorporate.

It stands to reason that such figures rose to even greater political prominence when urges for Tibetan geo-political unification gaining force throughout the late

⁸³ For an extended discussion of this figure's life and times, see Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 129-141.

⁸⁴ This fact is evinced by the circulation of oral reports about Tibetans performing "army-averting" rites on the eve of the Chinese invasion of Tibet. See, for instance, Honey Oberoi, *Lives in Exile: Exploring the Inner World of Tibetan Refugees* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009, 10), in which one of Oberoi's informants reports that Tibetans performed "magdogs" (army averting rites) "to ward off the impending disaster" of the Chinese invasion.

sixteenth and early seventeenth century thrust Tibetan ritual experts onto the public stage as patriotic defenders of the burgeoning state. Quite predictably, then, there was competition during this time for the position of foremost master of violent rites with trans-regional impact. A number of figures appeared on the scene that traded in imagery drawn from the stock of tantric tropes, interweaving these with themes of contemporary relevance to create through life stories identities with competing claims to ritual prowess. As we will see when investigating his life and career below, Sog bzlog pa was one such figure. Furthermore, since it was the Treasure rites and substances of his teachers from which Sog bzlog pa drew his greatest inspiration in this domain, his identity as a powerful ritual master is premised in large part upon his involvement with this aspect of practice.

The Treasure traditions had a particularly strong purchase on the concatenation of elements that were coalescing in Tibet during Sog bzlog pa's times. The increased influence of clerical figures on the political stage, in light of a growing sense of trans-local Tibetan political identity, finds resonance in three interlaced elements of the underlying rationale of the Treasure tradition: its materiality, distributive sense of agency, and political overtones. Understanding these three features is a crucial step toward discerning the background and ramifications of Sog bzlog pa's implementation of powerful objects and object-oriented rites in Tibet during this period.

* * *

Materiality can arguably be characterized as the governing element of Tibetan Treasure traditions as a whole.⁸⁵ According to the Old School tradition, Treasure revelations (*gter ma*) were primarily concealed throughout the natural and manmade landscape of Tibet – her rocks, lakes, mountains, temples, pillars, statues – by the paradigmatic Indian tantric master Padmasambhava and his Tibetan consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal.⁸⁶ Within these physical Treasure sites (*gter kha*) were interred a combination of “Treasure teachings” (*gter chos*), or “Dharma Treasures” (*gter chos*); and “Treasure substances” (*gter rdzas*), or “Material Treasures” (*rdzas gter*). Generally speaking, when excavated by destined Treasure revealers, Treasure teachings first assume the form of “yellow scrolls” (*shog ser*) inscribed with *dākinī* script. These scrolls require “decoding” by the Treasure revealer (*gter ston*), or proprietor of the teaching (*chos bdag*), before they can be unraveled into ritual cycles and associated liturgies. Such Treasure teachings abound with violent rites that incorporate powerful objects to repel armies, natural disasters, or other undesirable material circumstances. Recall, for instance, that the violent army-

⁸⁵ Andreas Doctor (2005), 21-23. Doctor observes with reference to two of the earliest classifications of Treasures in Tibet – Nyang ral nyi ma’od zer’s *Copper Temple* and Gu ru Chos dbang’s *Great Treasure Chronicle* – that Treasures were understood largely as physical, material items, and only secondarily as teachings concealed and revealed in the mind of Treasure revealers, as later traditions would come to emphasize. Doctor remarks that the term “Mind Treasure” (*dgongs gter*) was not used until the fourteenth century, in the compositions and revelations of kLong chen pa and U rgyan gling pa. See Doctor for more details on the various categories of Treasure in Tibet. The materiality of Treasures is also emphasized in more recent Tibetan works. See, for instance, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye, *The Hundred Tertöns: A Garland of Beryl, Brief Accounts of Profound Terma and the Siddhas Who Have Revealed It*, trans. Yeshe Gyamtso (New York: KTD Publications, 2011). Section One of this text, “Earth Terma” (71-330), meaning Treasures physically excavated from the ground, occupies 260 pages, whereas Section Two, “Mind Terma” (331-377), receives only 46 pages of attention. A more recent and extremely insightful discussion of Treasures as “materializations of the past” is Holly Gailey, “Ontology of the Past and its Materialization in Tibetan Treasures,” in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, eds. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸⁶ For a detailed traditional account of the Treasure tradition, see Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet: An Exploration of the Terma Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*. Ed. Harold Talbot (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1986).

averting rites performed by Sog bzlog pa are object-oriented rites derived from Zhig po gling pa's Treasure teaching *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies*.⁸⁷ Even after yellow scrolls are decoded, moreover, they are often venerated as power objects in their own right, despite their illegibility to all but destined revealers.⁸⁸ As Dan Martin has observed, these "texts" were treated primarily not as books to be read, but as relic-like extensions of ancient sages to be inserted within reliquaries and venerated as such.⁸⁹ Treasure teachings are therefore not simply discursive messages that communicate propositional content. Rather, physicality, or materiality – before and after decoding – is a fundamental feature of their transformative power.

Treasure substances, on the other hand, may include statues, relics, clothing, ritual objects, wealth, medicine, and even whole locations, which do not require "decoding" *per se* to be put to use. These "substances," which are often presented as including the fluids, flesh, bone, hair, nails, clothes, or craftwork of Padmasambhava and other awakened buddhas and bodhisattvas from the past, are presumed to have their own intrinsic powers to impact beings and environments. Human ritual treatment, however, is typically still required to activate, or direct the power of these items. The power of these objects, once augmented and unleashed by ritual mediation, is most often expressed in terms of newly acquired properties of animation that confound the senses. Treasure substances are depicted as increasing, boiling, wafting fragrant odors, emitting lights, flying, producing

⁸⁷ Zhig po gling pa's revelation of this ritual cycle is depicted with great detail in Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Zhig gling rnam thar*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 48.3-51.3

⁸⁸ The practice of venerating "yellow scrolls" (*shog ser*) as materializations of power and blessings is evinced by their inclusion within Sog bzlog pa's "brahmin flesh pills" (*sKye bdun dkar chag*: 451.4). The practice of wearing yellow scrolls as amulets in the hair or around the neck can also be observed today among Tibetan Buddhist clerics who are in possession of such items.

⁸⁹ Dan Martin (1994), 280.

dreams and visionary encounters with deities, masters, and buddhas, and other outcomes that typically amaze, astound, and inspire audiences and participants. Ultimately, powerful Treasure substance is often believed to even bring “liberation” from adverse circumstances, negative rebirths, or *samsāra* as a whole through sensory contact alone. Since these are the very objects that Sog bzlog pa wrote about and implemented throughout his career, they will feature throughout this study.

In sum, Treasures are construed as manifestations of the awakened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities of Padmasambhava. That is to say, both Treasure teachings and substances are understood by Treasure traditions as part of the dynamic, ever-unfolding materialization of Padmasambhava’s awakened presence in Tibet, the special abode of his awakened activities. Often literally unearthed from the Tibetan landscape, the materially enmeshed nature of Treasures is crucial for understanding the role they play in Tibetan religious life, as is the distributed sense of Padmasambhava’s enduring agency that these materializations bring into presence.

In addition to Treasures themselves, the contexts and aims of Treasure teachings and substances also inflect a strong material emphasis and a distributed sense of agency. Each of the teaching and substance components of Treasure sites typically come with their own “Treasure prophecies” (*gter lung*) and “histories” (*lo rgyus*). These texts, most often cast in the voice of Padmasambhava and his ninth century imperial Tibetan milieu, tell the story of Treasures’ original revelation amidst the court of the Tibetan Emperor Khri srong lde’u btsan, their subsequent concealment within the Tibetan landscape, and the circumstances appropriate for their future revelation and implementation by the

various successive reincarnations of the original imperial Tibetan audience.⁹⁰ The logic of Treasure concealment and revelation is therefore premised on the fluidity of identities across generations and incarnations, which constellate around the fragmentary materializations of Padmasambhava’s enduring presence in the Tibetan landscape.

We can tell from this preponderance of elements that the concealment and revelation of Treasures is also governed by a high degree of context specificity. As I discuss later in this chapter in greater depth, prophecies in particular provide the loose interpretative guidelines concerning the material details – the dates, figures, locations, rites, substances, and more – most appropriate for specific Treasures to address problems of particular contemporary urgency. The alignment of these elements, termed the “arrangement of auspicious circumstances” (*rten ’brel sgrig/’grig*) is deemed crucial for a revelation event to unfold as it is prophesized. This means, among other things, that Treasure revelation is a deeply collaborative affair. In addition to the Treasure revealer himself, the revealer’s relationships with a proper “proprietor of the teaching” (*chos bdag*), an instrumental “companion” (*grog*s), and a non-human “Treasure protector” (*gter srung*) are also foretold in prophecy texts as necessary components of each revelation. And beyond the personal sphere of this confluence of sentient helpers and associates, these figures must together align all the “auspicious circumstances” of time, place, substance, and so forth, for a revelation event to occur according to the letter.

The aims of Treasure revelations also inflect an emphasis upon materiality. The range of problems that Treasure revelations and implementations are imagined to address typically includes the whole gamut of violent natural and manmade disasters that have

⁹⁰ For an English language translation of an early instance of Treasure narratives, see Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, trans. Erik Pema Kunsang (Boston: Shambhala, 1993).

periodically threatened Tibet's survival. Enemy armies, civil wars, floods, droughts, pestilences, epidemics, impoverishment, and famine are but some of the communal threats that the revelation and implementation of Treasure rites and substances are intended to neutralize or delay.⁹¹ The theme of communal threat is so prevalent throughout the Treasure prophecies that we might regard this body of literature, and Treasure traditions more broadly, as particularly Tibetan strategies for gaining some purchase over the wild unpredictability of their surrounding material world of humanity and nature. Moreover, the centrality for Treasure traditions of the collective, material well being of whole territories and populaces means that the Treasure revealer's role overlaps considerably with the domain of governance.

The prominent role in Treasure prophecies of violent object-oriented rites and substances in quelling the danger and volatility of the surrounding material world is rooted in the paradigmatic Tibetan Imperial past and its associated literary images of collaborations between royal and sacred power. As the "Second Buddha" and an emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*) of Tibet's patron bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Padmasambhava can be seen along the lines of the three successive Tibetan "Dharma Kings" of Tibet as the paradigmatic embodiments and mediators of awakened Buddha activity in Tibet. Recall that Padmasambhava is ultimately credited in the Treasure literature with subjugating Tibet's volatile spirit landscape and making it amenable for Tibet's royal court to successfully implement the institutional importation of Indian

⁹¹ The full scope of pragmatic affairs addressed through Treasure rites can be best discerned from a perusal of the liturgies in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980) collection designated "Rituals for enactment of specific kinds of activity (*bye brag las kyi tshogs rab 'byams*). This category begins in vol. 70, 275, with rituals of protection (*srung ba*), and continues through vol. 84, with rituals variously intended to pacify, enrich, seduce/overpower, and destroy.

Buddhism to Tibetan soil.⁹² A big part of how Padmasambhava did this was not only through the subjugation and “binging under oath” of Tibet’s indigenous landscape deities, but also through providing the Tibetan Imperium access to and control over Tibet’s volatile and unmanageable waterways.⁹³ It is very likely, moreover, that these spiritual and material levels of subjugation were believed by Tibetans to be very much intertwined.⁹⁴ Taken as whole, the literary images of Padmasambhava’s role in the court from Treasure histories and other earlier documents attests to a multiplicity of political resonances, all of which center upon the protective and paternalistic relationships that this Indian tantric master forged with the vital natural resources and indigenous pantheons of the land itself. In light of this material, geological emphasis of Padmasambhava’s involvement with Tibet, the tradition of his interment throughout the Tibetan landscape of Treasures – understood as living material fragments of his distributed being – emerges in part as a way to secure the safety and vitality of the territory through ensuring ongoing sensory access to his continued presence on the plateau.

In order to truly give presence to Padmasambhava’s distributed being in ever-new contexts requires the interventions of prophesized Treasure revealers.⁹⁵ The material, distributive, and political rationale of the Treasure tradition gave both impetus and

⁹² Tsogyal (1993).

⁹³ Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *dBa bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha’s Doctrine to Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 14; Jacob Dalton, “The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet: A Study of IOL Tib J 644 and Pelliot tibétain 307,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124.4 (2004), 768-770.

⁹⁴ It should be noted that the opposition between “spiritual” and “physical” invoked by Dalton (2004: 769) is more than likely misleading in this context, since Tibet’s indigenous non-human landscape entities are typically portrayed as indissolubly associated with particular geological formations and/or geographical locales.

⁹⁵ See Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Taye (2011) for an English language translation of a famous collection of Treasure revealer biographies.

opportunity for would-be Treasure revealers to weave themselves into the tradition by identifying themselves as destined reincarnations of Tibetan Imperial figures with an ordinance to rid Tibet of pending disasters.⁹⁶ So much prestige and power was at stake in being accepted or rejected as an authentic Treasure revealer that burgeoning Treasure revealers were sometimes in competition, as they and their factions struggled to position their revelations as the most timely and potent techniques available to address the latest calamities threatening Tibet. I will return to this competitive aspect of Treasure traditions shortly. For now, allow me to venture a few closing remarks about the wider context of Sog bzlog pa's life.

* * *

Given the material, political, and distributive rationale underlying the Treasure tradition, it is little wonder that its representatives were often commissioned by gTsang leadership to implement powerful substances and object-oriented rites for a range of pragmatic effects. The battle for political and sectarian hegemony that took place during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and the increased role of religious specialists in these struggles, made the Treasure revealer and his lineage as important in the political arena as they were in the religious.⁹⁷ The political potential of Treasure traditions would

⁹⁶ For an insightful analysis of this dimension of Treasure traditions, see Janet Gyatso, "The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition," *History of Religions*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Nov., 1993): 97-134. Gyatso discusses specifically the "arguments and strategies devised by Treasure proponents in making their case for the Treasure's legitimacy" (98), with a focus on the self-legitimizing function of certain documents and semiotic operations that figure in revelation events.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the political role that the sixteenth century gTer ston bsTan gnyis gling pa played in the court of Mang yul Gung thang, see Karl-Heinz Everding, "rNying ma pa Lamas at the Court of the Mang yul Gung thang – The Meeting of the gTer ston bsTan gnyis gling pa with Kun bzang nyi zla grags

develop even further under the Fifth Dalai Lama, as he fashioned the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama office from his own connections with Tibet's revered Treasure revealers. This point will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five of this thesis when discussing the legacy of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu.

Sog bzlog pa was deeply immersed in the Treasure traditions of his time. Although he himself was not officially recognized as a Treasure revealer, three of his closest masters were Treasure revealers who steeped Sog bzlog pa in the practice and underlying principles of their Treasure traditions. As we shall see below when exploring the lives of these figures, powerful Treasure substances and violent, object-oriented Treasure rites were defining aspects of their religious careers. Sog bzlog pa inherited this involvement with these two material-based facets of Treasure teachings and substances. To reiterate, Sog bzlog pa's army-averting ritual campaign was derived from a Treasure teaching of Zhig po gling pa, while much of Sog bzlog pa's apologetic and ritual literature centers upon Treasure substances. The dual role of generative Treasure substances and object-oriented rites to repel and liberate from adverse circumstances and physical limitations echoes the kinds of material mastery that were called for by Tibet's leadership and wider populace during this period of intense fighting and bloodshed. It seems that the time was indeed ripe (*dus la babs*) for the Treasure tradition to take the lead in protecting Tibet from the wild vicissitudes of the surrounding environment of humanity and nature.

Further along these lines, perceived threats to physical survival sometimes also led lamas to search for sacred "hidden lands" (*sbas yul*) on the frontiers of Tibetan

pa," in *Proceedings of the Seminar on The Relationship Between Religion and State (chos srid zung 'brel) in Traditional Tibet*, ed. Christoph Cüppers, Lumbini 4-7 March 2000. Lumbini International Research Institute, Monograph Series, vol. 4. (2004), 267-300.

cultural influence, the final resort for those desperate to flee the ravages of Mongol incursion and dGe lugs pa persecution.⁹⁸ Such hidden lands, which are understood as Treasure substances concealed by Padmasambhava for future generations of Treasure revealers to “open” when the time is right, are but an extension into geopolitical space of the material, distributive, and political rationale of the Treasure traditions in which Sog bzlog pa and his milieu were immersed. Thus, in addition to Sog bzlog pa and his milieu’s role in the performance of violent rites directed against Mongol armies, they also promoted the discovery and settlement of whole territories that might protect Tibet’s populace against the uncertainties of turbulent times.

Sog bzlog pa did not live long enough to lead his supporters to an idyllic hidden land beyond the travails of dGe lugs pa hegemony. However, nearly twenty years after Sog bzlog pa’s death, his grand disciples mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin (1592-1656) and Lha btsun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med (1597-1650) would flee Tibet and the persecutions that may have awaited them with the rise of the Great Fifth. They would try their fortunes instead in the hidden land of Sikkim (’Bras ljongs), where they sought to fashion their own Tibetan Buddhist kingdom.

All of the aforementioned details contribute to a picture of Tibetan social and political life during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which religion and politics

⁹⁸ For a detailed study of the “revelation” of hidden lands and the political implications of this practice during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Abdul-Hamid Sardar-Afkhami, *The Buddha’s Secret Gardens: End-times and Hidden-lands in Tibetan Imagination* (PhD. diss., Harvard University, 2001). See also Jann Ronis, “Bdud ’dul rdo rje (1615-1672) and Rnying ma Adaptations to the Era of the Fifth Dalai Lama,” in *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition: Tibetan in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Bryan J. Cuevas and Kurtis R. Schaeffer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 171-186. Ronis suggests with respect to the Treasure revealer bDud ’dul rdo rje’s problematic relationship with the Fifth Dalai Lama that certain lamas may have fled south to “hidden lands” not as “spiritual refugees fleeing the incursion of politics into their communities, but religious leaders who had tried to get ahead in regional centers of power and were unsuccessful” (184).

were very much intertwined and often utterly impossible to differentiate. The dominant theme of this interplay between the political and clerical spheres was, in sum, a surging interest in Tibetan geopolitical unification among rival factions in gTsang and dBus; a deep ambivalence concerning the enlistment of foreign involvement, especially Mongol military intervention, to secure the benefits of specific Tibetan religio-political factions; and a heightened role for Tibet's clergy, and especially Treasure revealers, on the burgeoning national political stage. As supporters of the gTsang leadership – both the gTsang pa sde srid government and the Rin spungs leadership that it usurped – Sog bzlog pa, Zhig po gling pa, and their milieu were major power brokers during those decades. While the dGe lugs-led factions of dBus were courting Mongol favor, Sog bzlog pa and his milieu focused much of their religious careers on counteracting this rising tide of dBus influence and the deleterious effect that their Mongol involvements would have on gTsang power and Tibetan geopolitical integrity. All of their various activities in this domain were rooted in the pragmatic dimensions of the Treasure tradition, whose material, distributive, and political rationale made Sog bzlog pa and his colleagues particularly well suited to take up the challenges that their socio-political setting presented.

II. Sog bzlog pa's Influences and Milieu: Violent Rites, Brahmin Flesh, and Other Object-oriented Bonds

a. Treasure Revealer Zhig po gling pa: Political Leader of sNang rtse and Guru of Sog bzlog pa

In order to most fully appreciate the context in which Sog bzlog pa's life unfolded it will be important to ground the general historical outline sketched above in the life stories of particular individuals with whom Sog bzlog pa was in close contact. Sog bzlog pa's biography of his master Zhig po gling pa is a most appropriate starting point. Zhig po gling pa's biography abounds with episodes that depict his multi-faceted immersion in the material dimensions of Buddhist practice. Zhig po gling pa was a Treasure revealer whose discoveries included a whole range of potent material sacra and wrathful object-oriented ritual cycles, which he implemented for a mixture of socio-political and soteriological effects. Most salient for the present discussion are the copious edible sacra and other power objects that Zhig po gling pa revealed, exchanged, and implemented during his lifetime; and the ritual cycle *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies* and other violent army-repelling and natural disaster-repelling rites, which Zhig po gling pa discovered, implemented, and conferred upon Sog bzlog pa to enact after his death. Zhig po gling pa's involvement with such physically efficacious rites and powerful Treasure substances, as well as the social, political, and economic implications of dealing with these, is a central theme of Sog bzlog pa's biography of this master. More fundamentally, since Sog bzlog pa inherited many of Zhig po gling pa's specific object-oriented rites and power objects, and shared the Treasure revealer's overall emphasis upon this material dimension of Buddhist practice, Sog bzlog pa's portrait of this master provides several insights into the formation of Sog bzlog pa's own sensibilities as a religious specialist.

* * *

In addition to his ecclesiastical role, Zhig po gling pa was the son of the ruler of sNang rtse principality in the sTod lung region of dBus province, directly west of the Ra sa 'khrul snang temple on Lhasa's western border.⁹⁹ As heir to a political office of some importance, Zhig gling was raised with every advantage that sixteenth century Tibetan life could afford. He was cared for by nannies, educated by some of the brightest ecclesiastical minds in the area, and mingled with the some of the most powerful political leaders of his time. Perhaps in part due to Zhig po gling pa's prestigious political background and office, and in part to share in that prestige himself, Sog bzlog pa's depiction of Zhig po gling pa's life is quite explicit about the socio-political ramifications of his activities as a religious specialist, specifically as these relate to his dealings with powerful material sacra and the rites that feature them.

Sog bzlog pa's descriptions of Zhig po gling pa's interactions with the most powerful clerical and political figures of his times – the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554), the Rin spungs pa ruling family, the 'Bras spungs elders, and others – offers a particularly vivid look at how potent objects and substances can bring together discrete persons and domains, enabling the conversion of power between them, and what the ramifications of these conversions were for the life and legacy of the Treasure revealer and his lineage of students. As we shall see when perusing these episodes, moreover, the power of such substances and objects is witnessed foremost through their properties of animation, which they often acquire in the course of ritual proceedings, but which also extend unpredictably beyond ritual precincts into the interpersonal dynamics between the Treasure revealer and other persons, past masters, future disciples, deities, locales, and more. Zhig po gling pa's power objects thus appear in the vicinity of a

⁹⁹ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 34.6-35.1.

variety of interactions as animated mediators that exert their generative potencies on a number of different registers.

Sog bzlog pa narrates an episode that purportedly occurred five months after Zhig po gling pa's first Treasure discovery, which offers a particularly lucid introduction to the dynamics that can occur in the vicinity of powerful objects. The objects that feature in the following passage are the Treasure substances (*gter rdzas*) that Zhig po gling pa excavated, quite literally, according to Sog bzlog pa, from the face of a cliff. By Sog bzlog pa's account, the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje sent word to Zhig po gling pa specifically to request one of the seven-times born Brahmin pills that Zhig po gling pa had allegedly discovered during that excavation.

The practice of discovering, distributing, and ingesting the flesh of deceased human beings undoubtedly appears to most contemporary readers unfamiliar with its underlying logic as an outrageously grotesque and irrational activity for anyone to be involved in, let alone Buddhists. Indeed, the seemingly cannibalistic nature of this practice deeply challenges fundamental assumptions concerning the range and limits of Buddhist practice and propriety. And yet, for all its peculiarity, the practice of ingesting Brahmin flesh and other unusual ingredients and concoctions is firmly rooted in canonical Indian Buddhist tantric scriptural traditions as these absorbed earlier medical and ritual techniques prevalent throughout India. Pills ostensibly formed from the bodily flesh of a person born for seven consecutive lives as a Brahmin are extolled in several Indian Buddhist *tantras* as an especially potent substance that confers a range of mundane and soteriological powers when eaten, especially the power of flight.¹⁰⁰ When

¹⁰⁰ The *Hevajra-tantra* and the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* are but two of the influential Indian Buddhist tantric scriptures that describe the positive effects of eating seven-times born Brahmin flesh. See Chapter Three of this study for more on the role of these two scriptures in the practice of consuming Brahmin flesh. For a

excavated as Treasure substances, Brahmin flesh is often regarded to derive specifically from human embodiments of Avalokiteśvara, who materialized as seven-times born Brahmins to benefit beings that come into contact with, or ingest them.¹⁰¹ Treasure Brahmin flesh, moreover, is typically treated in collective ritual performances called “great accomplishments” (*grub chen*). In such rites, Brahmin flesh is mixed with other substances and formed into pills in the context of ritual proceedings where the concoction becomes the focal point of choreographed series of physical, verbal, and contemplative operations associated with Avalokiteśvara. The consumption of ritually “accomplished” Brahmin flesh pills promises, according to Treasure traditions, “liberation through eating” (*myong grol*¹⁰²), one of the four, or six liberations renowned in Old School parlance.¹⁰³ Brahmin flesh and its ritual treatment will be discussed in greater details in Chapter Three and Four of this thesis. For now it suffices to remark that in the following episode, the discovery of potent, time- and context-specific Treasure Brahmin flesh

discussion of Brahmin flesh in the context of the *Cakrasamvara-tantra* and its commentarial traditions, see David Gray, “Eating the Heart of the Brahmin: Representations of Alterity and the Formation of Identity in Tantric Buddhist Discourse,” *History of Religions*, 45.1 (2005): 45-69.

¹⁰¹ Sog bzlog pa himself draws a distinction between the New Schools’ tantric Brahmin flesh and the Old School’s Treasure Brahmin flesh, a topic that I shall revisit in Chapter Two.

¹⁰² The Tibetan term *myong ba* has a semantic range that includes “to taste,” “to undergo,” “to feel,” and “to experience.” When it appears in the phrase *myong grol*, “liberation” (*grol*) [through] *myong*, the meaning of *myong ba* spans from intentional and conscious “tasting” and “experiencing” to unintentional and unconscious consumption, or “eating.” However, since this practice generally calls for complete consumption, I translate this phrase throughout as “liberation through eating,” except for when it signals the consumption of liquid, in which case I alternately employ the phrase “liberation through tasting.”

¹⁰³ The “four liberations” are literally “liberation” through seeing, hearing, wearing, and tasting. The enumeration of “six liberations” adds liberation through touching and feeling, and sometimes recollecting and touching, although there are considerable variations. For more details on these rubrics and practices see Holly Gayley, “Soteriology of the Senses in Tibetan Buddhism,” *Numen* 54, (2007): 459-499; and Joanna Tokarsha-Bakir, “Naïve Sensualism, Docta Ignorantia. Tibetan Liberation through the Senses,” in *Numen*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2000): 69-112.

rendered it a valuable commodity in social interactions between the Treasure revealer and his wider network of relations.

Then, when about five months had passed, rGyal ba'i dbang po Mi bskyod rdo rje, the one dwelling at mTshur phu, issued a formal letter to Zhig gling. In it was the following command:

Your attainment of subterranean accomplishments is absolutely wonderful. From among them, you must give me an unmistakable seven-times born Brahmin pill.

Explaining why it should be kept secret for a while, and so forth, [Zhig po gling pa] came before him, showing him a few of each type from among the choicest *samaya* substances (*dam rdzas*); and a corner of the master of Oḍiyāna's yellow, Hor-silk religious garment, upon which was applied a little of the *bodhicitta* fluids of the master of Oḍiyāna and his consort, with difficult to behold letter-garlands written at the top of each of the *ur pa* woven borders.

Through offering him exactly that, the Karmapa was extremely pleased, and praised Zhig po gling pa extensively, saying, among other things, the following:

These do not appear to be any different from Sangs rgyas gling pa's yellow scrolls from dGa' ma mo mdzod nag. Such documents are the preserve of those who have attained mastery over *ḍākinīs* and magical powers, for how would an ordinary being be capable of fabricating something like this?¹⁰⁴

As circumstance would have it, Sog bzlog pa made his literary debut in 1576 with an apologetic response to a set of criticisms allegedly composed by the Eighth Karmapa, wherein Mi bskyod rdo rje specifically targets the authenticity of the Old School Treasure substance of seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills and their claims to confer “liberation through eating” (*myong grol*). Chapter Three of this thesis is devoted in part to an analysis of that literary debate. As we will see in that discussion, Sog bzlog pa's concern with defending the authenticity and efficacy of that and other related edible substances occupied him throughout much of his literary career. Although he composed the

¹⁰⁴ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 52.6-53.3: /de nas zla ba lnga tsam song ba'i tshe/ rgyal ba'i dbang po mi bskyod rdo rje mtshor phu na bzhugs yod pas/ bka' shog nang nas/ khyod kyi sa 'og gi dngos grub thob pa de cis kyang legs pa yin/ de dag gi khrod na skye bdun 'khrul med gcig nged la skur dgod/ zhe sogs kyi bka' shog phebs pas/ dam rdzas kyi phud nas sna 'ga' re dang/ u rgyan gyi sku chos kyi grwa hor dar ser po la/ u rgyan yab yum gyi byang sems byug/ tsung da ur pa'i spun re'i thog tu ye ge phreng re bris pa mig gis bzod dka' ba de spyen lam phab nas re zhig gsang ba sogs kyi rgyu mtshan 'bul ba dang bcas zhabs drung du phebs/ de ka ltar du zhus pas shin tu mnyes nas/ dga' ma mo'i mdzod nag gi sangs rgyas gling pa'i shog ser rnam dang khyad par mi snang/ 'di lta bu'i yi ge mkha' 'gro ma dang rdzu 'phrul la dbang thob pa rnam kyi spyod yul yin/ so so'i skye bos 'di 'dra ga la byed thub/ zhe sogs bsngags pa rgya cher gnang/

biography of Zhig po gling pa in 1599, over twenty years after his famous response to the Eighth Karmapa's alleged criticisms, we can witness here that Sog bzlog pa was still making efforts to demonstrate that the bKa' brgyud hierarch, arguably the most high profile and politically influential incarnation in Tibet at the time, was not opposed to this substance. The Karmapa's comparison between the Treasure substances of Zhig po gling pa and the yellow scrolls of Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396) is especially significant in this regard, since Zhig po gling pa was construed to be a reincarnation of this authoritative past Treasure revealer.¹⁰⁵ Sog bzlog pa makes this rhetorical dimension more conspicuous when he appeals to his own empirical experience and reliable oral testimony to plead his case:

This official letter [from the Eighth Karmapa] has subsequently been seen by ordinary beings like us, who have had it in our hands. Moreover, as is universally known, it has also been shown to the great ones, such as the Kaḥ thog emanation body among others.¹⁰⁶

Sog bzlog pa strengthens this bid for authenticity by relating how Zhig po gling pa, the leader of sNang rtse, received from the Karmapa in turn the material resources necessary to stage an important funeral ceremony.

Zhig gling said that donations to him from mTshur phu were excellent: In Rin spung that year (1544) the [Rin spungs] leader Ngag dbang rnam rgyal passed away. To produce for him gold, currency, and books like when Nang so dBon po ba passed away would have locked our sNang rtse in debt and was therefore impossible to accomplish. The donations from mTshur phu fulfilled this duty.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 30.5-32.2.

¹⁰⁶ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 53.4: *bka' shog 'di ni phyag na 'dug pa bdag cag la sogs pa phal pa dag gis kyang phyis mthong zhing/ ka thog sprul pa 'i sku la sogs pa che rgu rnams kyis kyang spyen lam du phab pa yongs la grags pa ltar ro/*

¹⁰⁷ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: pp. 52.6-53.6. */der mtshor phu nas gnang sbyin shin tu bzang pas/ rin spungs su de lo sde pa ngag dbang rnam rgyal gshegs pa la/ yang nang so dbon po ba gshegs su byung ba 'i gser zong deb nang bzhin sgrub pa la/ rang re 'i snang rtse na bu lon gyi 'og tu chud nas bya thabs med/ mthur phu 'i gnang sbyin des go bcad pa yin gsung/*. For corroboration of this event see *mKhas pa 'i dga' ston*, 1318. There, dPa' bo gTsong lag 'phreng pa mentions that Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje shouldered the expenses for the ceremony.

In sum, this episode depicts the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje, whose influential incarnation line included the principal teachers of Tibet's Rin spungs pa leadership, authenticating Zhig po gling pa's newly discovered sacra, exchanging it for wealth, and in so doing, providing Zhig po gling pa with the financial resources necessary to fulfill an important familial and political obligation. Zhig po gling pa's exchange with the Eighth Karmapa of Treasure ended up securing enough material support for Zhig gling's region of sNang rtse to stage the expensive funerary rites of the recently deceased Rin spungs leader.

Nang so pBon po ba mentioned here is probably identical with Yab Nang so dBon po pa, discussed elsewhere in the text as one of Zhig po gling pa's male relatives with close Rin spungs pa ties.¹⁰⁸ In another passage, Sog bzlog pa disagrees with certain members of his own faction (*rang phyogs pa dag*), who considered this figure the stepfather (*pha yar*) of the deceased Rin spungs pa leader Ngag dbang rnam rgyal himself.¹⁰⁹ Sog bzlog pa defensively argues that this male ascendant of Zhig po gling pa in fact belonged to the bloodline of the Rin spungs pa aristocracy's prestigious sGer clan, thus carrying a family affiliation with the Rin spungs leadership that extended beyond a recent marriage alliance. In any event, all of this suffices to say that this exchange of Treasure substances for funeral provisions served to fuse, by way of mediation, the particular constellation of social, political, religious, and economic concerns that Zhig po gling pa was then facing. In this case, the consequent fulfillment of the Treasure revealer's family *cum* political obligation to the house of Rin spungs, not to mention the bonds formed in the process between he and the Eighth Karmapa, highlight just how

¹⁰⁸ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 54.4-54.5.

¹⁰⁹ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 89.1-89.6.

powerful substances and objects can serve to bind disparate entities, on a number of different registers. Moreover, when keeping in mind Sog bzlog pa's sustained efforts to rebut this Karmapa's alleged criticisms of seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills, it becomes clear just how centrally invested Sog bzlog pa was in depicting the bKa' brgyud hierarch's positive appraisal of the substance and its revealer.

Sog bzlog pa narrates yet another revealing episode that centrally implicates himself. Unlike the previous passage, which focuses upon the "liberation through eating" Treasure substance of seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills as a unit of exchange, this next episode relates this substance to the violent object-oriented Mongol-repelling rites that Sog bzlog pa would inherit from Zhig po gling pa. This episode occurred, according to Sog bzlog pa, in 1569, when scrambles to secure or sever Mongol military allegiances were well underway. On this occasion, Zhig po gling pa's powerful sacra, ritual actions, visionary signs, and political authority converge in a clear expression of anxiety over looming Mongol military threats. Specifically, Zhig po gling pa's performance of a mass seven-times born Brahmin flesh great accomplishment rite triggers a dream vision of Padmasambhava, who prescribes another ritual, which in turn invokes clairvoyance into the activities of his future Mongol-averting apprentice, Sog bzlog pa himself.

When Zhig gling began a seven-times born great accomplishment rite at the center of the pilgrimage site [of Zab bu lung]¹¹⁰ on the twenty-fifth of the second Hor month, he had a dream in which the precious master of Oḍiyāna was seated on a lotus and moon cushion atop the head of Vajravārāhī, who was together with her retinue. He issued the following command:

I the Lotus One, Avalokiteśvara, Karmapa,
And the precious subjects (*dkon mchog 'bangs*)
Appear distinct according to the mode of appearance,
But, in reality, we are inseparable in essence.

¹¹⁰ Zab bu lung is a valley associated with Padmasambhava located in Shangs, a region in gTsang, north of the Brahmaputra River from Myang. For a visual depiction, see Dudjom Rinpoche *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, trans, Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), vol. 2, map 6.

While much can be said about this intricate passage, most salient for the present discussion is that the narrative progression causally connects Zhig po gling pa's performance of a seven-times born Brahmin flesh great accomplishment rite with his premonition of Sog bzlog pa's role in repelling Mongol armies. The reference to "one of his disciples" who "would become a beneficial being meaningful to everyone he encountered," and "would help to quell border armies and conflicts between Tibetan factions" is a clear reference to Sog bzlog pa, as are the two verses beginning with "13 years from now..."¹¹⁵ This alludes to the year 1582/83, roughly when, as Sog bzlog pa describes, Zhig po gling pa would pass away and Sog bzlog pa would inherit the *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies* and instructions for their use in confronting Mongol armies. Mediating between the initial seven-times born Brahmin great accomplishment rite and Zhig po gling pa's clairvoyant epiphanies is a vision of Padmasambhava, and Zhig po

'du/ /mchog thun dngos grub thob pa yin/ /khyad par skya leb maNDal steng/ /tshogs gtor mchod pa bshams nas ni/ /bdag la gsol ba btab pa ni/ /mchog dang thun mong dngos grub kun/ /'du tshogs rnams kyi thob par 'gyur/ /ces gsung mkha' la yal bar mi/ ces pa ltar skye bdun sgrub chen dang bka' chos rnams grol nas/ hor zla gsum pa'i tshes gcig gi nyin skya leb tu phebs/ tshogs gtor rgya cher bshams pa'i tshe/ snang srid thams cad dag pa chen po rgyal ba'i dkyil 'khor du gzig/ rang gi slob mas sems can la phan thogs pa'i skyes bu 'brel tshad don ldan gcig lo skor song ba dang byon nas/ mtha' dmag dang bod kyi sde 'khrugs zhi ba la phan pa cig 'ong ba dang/ bstan pa dar rgud ji ltar 'ong ba sogs kyi ma 'ongs pa'i 'jug pa mtha' dag mngon par mkhyen pas gzig nas/ gnas chen 'di ni rdo rje sems pa'i zhing/ /gsol ba btab nas o rgyan nyid dang mjal/ a la la mos gus can tsho'i skyid pa la/ /zhes sogs nas/ 'di nas mi lo bcu gsum song ba na/ gnas 'dir zab don snying po mnyes pa'i mi/ /skyes mchog mthong thod dran reg don ldan la/ /'byon par 'dug go skal ldan las can tsho/ /a la la mos gus can tsho'i skyid pa la/ /de yis rkyen byas bod khams sems can rnams/ /bde ba'i skal pa bag tsam 'byung ngam snyam/ /de yang rgyal ba rnams kyi thugs rje dang/ /sems can bsod nams las la byung ngam snyam/ /zhes sogs kyi mgur bzhes/

¹¹⁵ Sog bzlog pa makes this connection crystal clear in the *Sog bzlog brgyis tshul kyi lo rgyus* (211.6-212.1). When narrating Zhig po gling pa's efforts to convince him to implement the Mongol repelling ritual campaign, Sog bzlog pa describes: "Go look for my collected works!" he told the chamberlain. "Within it appears a description of an elaborate pure vision I had atop sKya leb ma in Zub bu: The section from, 'This sacred place is Vajrasattva's realm,' up until 'It seems to me that because of him, an age of peace, brief though it be, will emerge for sentient beings in the realm of Tibet...' refers to you." *gzim dpon la nga'i bka' 'bum de tshol shog gsung/ de'i khrod na zab bur skya leb ma'i steng du dag snang rgya cher gzig te/ gnas chen 'di ni rdo rje sems dpa'i zhing/ /zhes pa nas/ de yi rkyen byas bod khams sems can rnams/ bde ba'i skal pa bag tsam yong ngam snyam/ /zhes shar ba'i de khyod yin/*

gling pa's performance of an oblation-focused *gaṇacakra* ritual at a specific location, as stipulated by Padmasambhava himself. The overall effect of this sequence is the intertwining of Zhig po gling pa's personal visionary experience and his ritual prowess in violent rites and powerful substances with events that would have geopolitical significance for all Tibetans. The hinge between Zhig po gling pa's private experience and its public import is none other than Sog bzlog pa himself, the disciple destined to take up the onerous task of repelling foreign armies and healing domestic conflicts.

The entire sequence is set in motion by the great accomplishment rite centered upon the seven-times born Brahmin flesh. This rite animates the already potent substance, producing Zhig po gling pa's dream vision of Padmasambhava, who exclaims his essential identity with the Karmapa, and their shared identity with the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara and the "precious subjects," meaning the populace of the eighth century Tibetan imperial court. Such a reminder of Padmasambhava's and the bKa' brgyud hierarch's shared identity as manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, appearing as it does in the context of a seven-times born Brahmin flesh accomplishment rite, seems to be a detail of particular socio-political and sectarian expedience. Not only does it assist in demonstrating the Karmapa's fundamental alliance with Padmasambhava in light of the Eighth Karmapa's alleged criticisms of the Old School and the general political influence then wielded by the Karmapa hierarchs. This detail also makes critical connections between Avalokiteśvara, the imperial court, and Avalokiteśvara's key emanations – Padmasambhava and Karmapa – all in the vicinity of seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills, their ritual accomplishment, and the prophetic charter for Sog bzlog pa to stage violent rites for the protection of the state. This preponderance of past- and future-oriented items culminates in the person of Sog bzlog pa, who in Zhig po gling pa's

concluding songs, the Treasure revealer refers to as someone “whom seeing, hearing, recalling, or touching bears fruits.” This final detail of four sensory and discursive modes of beneficial contact is a rubric often applied to describe Treasure substances as well. This overlap between powerful persons and objects suggests that the persona of Sog bzlog pa is constructed in some measure as an extension of the liberating potencies of the materials that he is predicted to wield.

In another particularly telling episode, Sog bzlog pa relates how Zhig po gling pa’s performance of a wrathful, object-oriented ritual animated the medicinal ambrosia that occupied center stage in the rite, and induced the Treasure revealer to make accurate political prognostications about the fortunes of the recently-usurped Rin spungs aristocracy. Unlike the previous two episodes, this does not directly implicate Sog bzlog pa. It does, however, provide a snapshot of the juxtaposition between violent rites, powerful substances, and future-oriented political maneuvers, which, as we will see later in this study, would come to define in large part Sog bzlog pa’s career as a religious specialist. Furthermore, this episode highlights more than the previous episodes how this particular combination of elements was crucial for religious specialists of the time in successfully confronting the volatility of the surrounding material world. The circumstances leading up to this event foreground the volatility and unpredictability of the material world, while the Treasure revealer’s activities in Rin spungs illustrate Zhig po gling pa’s impressive mastery of its wild vicissitudes.

The episode begins in 1575, when, as Sog bzlog pa reports, Zhig po gling pa received an invitation from Rin spungs to give religious instructions in the family’s natal

territory.¹¹⁶ However, strife within the house of Rin spungs interfered with the Treasure revealer's journey on this occasion, forcing 'Bri gung Zhabs drung rin po che to divert Zhig po gling pa to Rwa lung¹¹⁷ for a time in order to keep him out of harm's way.¹¹⁸ By 1576, the fighting quelled, allowing the Treasure revealer safe passage to Rin spungs. In light of these surrounding circumstances, Zhig po gling pa's activities in Rin spungs speak volumes to the confluence of forces active in the vicinity of powerful substances.

Sog bzlog pa relates Zhig gling's stay in Rin spungs as follows:

After he completed nine months of teachings (1576), Zhig gling visited Rin spungs on the way back. Having opened the face of the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa maṇḍala*, Zhig gling made medicinal ambrosia, such that the whole place from top to bottom was filled with the fragrant aroma of medicine and several amazing signs occurred. Zhig gling prophesied that within that year, even though there would be wider variations in the vicissitudes of the Rin spungs pa, they would not be displaced. Thereafter, a large military division arrived, but Rin spungs maintained power.¹¹⁹

This passage forms compelling links between the implementation of wrathful rites, powerful substances, sensory signs of ritual prowess, and the authoritative vision to give savvy political prognostications amidst turbulent times. The *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs*

¹¹⁶ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 90.2-90.3.

¹¹⁷ Rwa lung was the abbatial seat of the 'Bru pa bKa' brgyud order, whose hierarch, Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po (1543-1604), was married to the daughter of Zhig po gling pa, bDe chen rgyal mo (gTsang mkhan-chen 'jam-dbyangs dpal-ldan-rgya-mtsho, *dPal 'brug pa rin po che ngag dbang bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa rgyas pa chos kyi sprin chen po 'i dbyangs zhes bya ba las ring po 'i gleng gzhi*, Delhi: Topden Tshering, 1974: ff. 19r-20v). The Treasure revealer is consequently depicted throughout his biography as enjoying a particularly close relationship with Rwa lung on this account. Hubert Decler, "Another Newar link with Surata-bajra & Lhasa's White Crystal Cave? Zhigpo-lingpa's meditation scenario on the Five Ārya Brother Images," *Buddhist Himalaya* VolXI, 2001-2002: 2) misidentifies Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po as the father of Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, the founder and first ruler of the kingdom of Bhutan. Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po and Zhig po gling pa's daughter were rather the grandparents of the Zhabs drung. It was their son Mi pham bstan pa'i nyi ma (1567-1619) who sired the Zhabs drung.

¹¹⁸ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 90.3.

¹¹⁹ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 90.6-91.2. *chos bka' rnam s zla ba dgu la rdzogs nas/ phyir lam rin spungs su phebs/ bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa 'i dkyil 'khor zhal phye nas bdud rtsi sman sgrub mdzad/ rse zhol thams cad sman gyi dri bzangs kyi khengs shing ngo mtshar ba 'i ltas du ma byung/ lo nang der rin spungs pa chags 'jig la rgya ba yod kyang/ 'pho 'chug mi yong ba 'i lung bstan mdzad/ de rjes dmag tshan che ba sleb kyang byus zin/*

'dus pa is one of the premier Treasure ritual cycles belonging to the Old School. First revealed by the Treasure revealer Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192), the *bKa' brgyad* purports to be a fusion of all the most important wrathful deity practices of the Old School traditions.¹²⁰ The “medicinal ambrosia,” otherwise known as *amṛta*, and its ritual accomplishment share many features with the seven-times born Brahmin flesh and its ritual treatment. Chapter Four of this thesis includes a discussion of Sog bzlog pa's exposition on “medicinal ambrosia,” its composition, ritual implementation, and benefits, along with comparisons to the seven-times born Brahmin flesh. For now, it suffices to say that “medical ambrosia” is an edible compound, formed from a wide range of ingredients, which is believed to confer health, power, spiritual attainments, and other positive benefits through simply ingesting it. Much like edible Treasure substances such as the seven-times born Brahmin flesh, the successful ritual “accomplishment” of this concoction is often said to animate it, causing it to waft fragrant odors, grow in volume, overflow, boil, and on some occasions, take flight. In the same vein as seven-times born Brahmin flesh, such activations of the substance signal that it has become properly “accomplished” by the rite and is then fit to be distributed to the audience and participants for consumption. On this particular occasion, the accomplishment of the substance also signaled that Zhig po gling pa was ready to dispense important prognostications for the Rin spungs aristocracy.

¹²⁰ For more on the *bKa' brgyad* cycle, its canonical sources, and its importance for the Old School, see Tenzin Samphel, “Les bKa' brgyad – Sources Canoniques et Tradition de Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer,” *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 15, November (2008): 251-274; and Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, “Representations of Padmasambhava in Early Post-Imperial Tibet,” in *Tibet after Empire: Culture, Society and Religion Between 850-1000*, Proceedings of the Seminar Held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2011, eds. Christoph Cüppers, Robert Mayer and Michael Walter, 19-50 (Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2013), 27-29.

When considering the tense political circumstances surrounding this substance-oriented ritual, Zhig po gling pa's displays of material mastery – in both ritual and political terms – takes on a slightly different hue. Zhig po gling pa's visit to Rin spungs on this occasion occurred eleven years after the initial emergence of gTsang pa sde srid power, while the new ruler was struggling to consolidate control over gTsang. In the above episode, Zhig po gling pa assuages Rin spungs pa anxieties during this difficult transition, reassuring them that gTsang forces will only drive them back to their natal territory of Rin spungs, where the family will continue to exercise control locally for several years thereafter. In this way, the Treasure revealer is shown to perform the function of political councilor, casting predictions for the Rin spungs family about the longevity of their dwindling power and influence.

In light of this wider, volatile context, the links that this episode forms between Zhig po gling pa's accurate prognostications, his conferral upon the Rin spungs aristocracy of a wrathful, substance-oriented rite, and the amazing sensory signs that emerged during ritual proceedings, provides an overall image, with direct sensible evidence, of the Treasure revealer's prowess in commanding the forces intrinsic to the highly labile and dangerous material world. In exchange for offering his mastery over the vicissitudes of the potent world of things, the Rin spungs pa family would keep close watch over the Treasure revealer's physicality. It was they, after all, who demanded in 1583 that Sog bzlog pa, otherwise known as the physician of gDong mkhar, perform a house call to sNang rtse to administer to the physical needs of the dying Zhig po gling pa.¹²¹ In sum, this episode illustrates above all how object-oriented rites provide a kind

¹²¹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 207.6-208.1.

of fulcrum, which not only joins social, political, religious, and aesthetic elements, but also leverages them in the particular service of demonstrating control over the unpredictable volatility of the material world.

This theme of Zhig po gling pa's control over external material forces is expressed most powerfully in the Treasure revealer's consistent revelation and implementation of powerful objects, object-oriented rites, and associated prophecies, which promise protection from military invasions, natural disasters, and other undesired events of collective Tibetan concern. In his capacity of Mongol Repeller, Sog bzlog pa was of course centrally implicated in this pragmatically oriented dimension of Zhig po gling pa's revelations. Sog bzlog pa foreshadows Zhig po gling pa's role as protector of Lhasa in particular through narrating prophecies, visionary experiences, Treasure revelations, and past lives which link the Treasure revealer directly to previous Imperial and post-Imperial rulers and protectors of Lhasa such as Srong btsan sgam po (7th cent.), Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje (b. 9th cent.), Lama Zhangs g.Yu brag pa brTson 'grus grags pa (1123-1193), and sPrul sku mChog ldan mgon po (1497-1557).¹²² In a similar vein, Sog bzlog pa offers copious episodes that feature Zhig po gling pa's revelation of and prowess in martially efficacious Treasure rites and substances. He also narrates a lengthy episode

¹²² Srong btsan sgam po (7th cent.) was of course the first Dharma king of Tibet responsible originally for receiving and housing the Jo bo statue. *Zhig gling rnam thar* (25-26) depicts Zhig po gling pa in a previous life as this king's internal minister 'Gar srong btsan yul bzung, and later the king features in an important visionary experience related to the water-averting temple (62-63); Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje (b. 9th cent.) was the famed assassin of king gLang dharma (Dudjom 1981, 523). *Zhig gling rnam thar* (77-78) depicts Zhig po gling pa as this figure in a previous life; Lama Zhangs g.Yu brag pa brTson 'grus grag pa (1123-1193), the founder of the Tshal pa bKa' brgyud school, and brief ruler of Lhasa, was famous for his efforts to protect the Lhasa from destruction (Sørensen and Hazod, 2007). *Zhig gling rnam thar* (29) depicts Zhig po gling pa as a close disciple of this master in a previous life. *Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus* (219-228) recounts sPrul sku mChog ldan mgon po's (1497-1557) efforts to prevent the destruction of Lhasa by floodwaters and enemy armies. In *Zhig gling rnam thar* (60) Zhig po gling pa is reported as saying that his own effort to protect the Jo bo from floods is in fulfillment of a prophecy that is continuous with mChog ldan mgon po.

detailing the Treasure revealer's efforts to protect Lhasa and its precious Jo bo Śākyamuni statue from the ravages of floodwaters through the construction of a water-averting temple (*chu bzlog lha khang*) on the bank of the sKyid chu river.¹²³ The prophecies and plans for this project were likewise Treasures discovered by Zhig po gling pa himself.¹²⁴ The preponderance of such connections in Zhig po gling pa's biography suggests an effort on the part of Sog bzlog pa to implicate Zhig po gling pa in a political theology of legitimate rule centered on Lhasa and premised on powerful objects, object-oriented rites, and the fluidity of charismatic authority across generations and incarnations.¹²⁵ And since Sog bzlog pa frames his own activities in this pragmatic sphere as an extension of Zhig po gling pa's Treasure dispensation, the alignment of these legitimating factors for Zhig po gling pa had powerful ramifications for Sog bzlog pa's own public persona. It seems to be no coincidence that this biography's colophon is where he first refers to himself with the nickname Mongol Repeller (Sog bzlog pa).¹²⁶

The high socio-political stakes of claiming control over the wild and unpredictable vicissitudes of the surrounding material environment meant, among other things, that such religious specialists were often in competition to be recognized as the most powerfully efficacious ritualists of their day. As I discuss in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis, the Fifth Dalai Lama's writings in particular reveal a concerted effort to

¹²³ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 60.3-65.6. The project was begun the fire-female-snake year (*me mo sbrul*) of 1557 and completed the earth-male-horse year (*sa pho rta*) of 1558.

¹²⁴ For more on Zhig po gling pa's flood-averting temple, see Matthew Akester, "The 'Vajra Temple' of gTer ston Zhig po gling pa and the Politics of Flood Control in the 16th Century in 16th Century lHasa," *Tibet Journal* xxvi, no. 1 (2001): 25-35.

¹²⁵ For a thorough discussion of the role of these and other related elements in legitimating rule over Lhasa and the rest of Tibet, see Sørensen and Hazod (2007), 401-552.

¹²⁶ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 109.4.

posthumously destroy the reputation of Zhig po gling pa as a powerful revealer and implementer of Treasures. The Great Fifth's negative literary treatment seems to have been motivated in part by his concern to portray the prowess of his own previous incarnations and relatives as eclipsing that of Zhig po gling pa. For instance, the Fifth Dalai Lama's biographical depiction of Zhig po gling pa's contemporary and his own previous incarnation, the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho, parallels the career of Zhig po gling pa in many telling respects. bSod nams rgya mtsho, the hierarch of 'Bras spungs monastery, is portrayed as having taken measures to protect Lhasa from flood, as his activities in 1561 and 1562 attest.¹²⁷ Moreover, despite his primary affiliation with the dGe lugs stronghold of 'Bras spungs, the Third Dalai Lama's use of the Old School's powerful store of objects and images to protect Tibet from foreign invaders is also a prevalent theme throughout the biography. The most extended episode of this type in the Third Dalai Lama's biography depicts bSod nams rgya mtsho's reception of prophecies from the dharma protector rDo rje grags ldan, a companion of Pehar, demanding the commission of a massive army-averting *thang ka* depicting bSod nams rgya mtsho himself in central position, underneath Padmasambhava and flanked by protectors and lineage lamas.¹²⁸ The Fifth Dalai Lama, moreover, drapes all of bSod nams rgya mtsho's activities in the idiom of past Imperial glory replete with Old School associations, explicitly linking bSod nams rgya mtsho with Srong btsan sgam po and Avalokiteśvara as

¹²⁷ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Rje btsun thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar dngos grub rgya mtsho'i shing rta*, in *Collected Works of Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho*, vol. nya (Gangtok, Sikkim: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1991-1995), depicts his miraculous control of floodwaters in Lhasa in 1561 (174.6-175.1), and his construction of embankments a year later in 1562 to prevent further trouble (175.2-175.4).

¹²⁸ Ibid: 150.1-156.4. For detailed description of Pehar's iconography and history, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1998), 94-133 and 444-454.

the rightful ruler and protector of the Tibetan people and their territory.¹²⁹ Through his careful selection of tropes, moreover, the Great Fifth directly implies that this combination of elements was fused in his own persona and culminated in his rule in the seventeenth century.

This competitive dimension of protective rites, especially with regard to those intended to repel foreign armies, also meant that conflicting loyalties sometimes caused opposing sectarian factions to direct these powerful objects and performances against one another and their respective armies of supporters. For instance, Sog bzlog pa narrates an episode that gives strong expression to the suspicions that bSod nams rgya mtsho's faction of 'Bras spungs seemed to have harbored about the presumed target of Zhig po gling pa's army-averting objects and rites. As Sog bzlog pa narrates it, Zhig po gling pa related the following episode to Sog bzlog pa in 1582 from his deathbed.

Water will burst forth in Lhasa. Due to quibbling I do not imagine that the water-averting shrine will last long. In the prophecy of *Gab rgya can*, it is said that if a protection circle, which is a method for turning back foreigners, were to be interred in the *dhāraṇī* of the Gu ru seng ge sgra srog paṇḍita statue, exactly according to the certificate, that is situated beside the precious Jo bo statue, then the border armies would be turned back and Tibet would be in peace. After I did that, and there had been peace for two to three years, the Lhasa temple caretaker told Zhabs drung thams cad mkhyen pa that this was only detrimental to them. Thus, the Zhabs drung, with no value judgment in his mind, had the elder religious legislators among the 'Bras spungs pa read the *dhāraṇī* of the statue next to the Jo bo statue. It was discovered that outside of methods for averting border armies and pacifying factional conflicts in dBus and gTsang, there was not a single thing which would be harmful to the faction of 'Bras spungs, master and disciples.

The Zhabs drung thams cad mkhyen pa ordered the caretaker to read them. While saying that they are not primarily about them, Zhabs drung said that this person's [my] action was for the general welfare of the doctrine, and again ordering him to read them promptly, he rebuked the caretaker.

I thought that this had perhaps been done in the context of interring the whole thing once more, so was not made to believe that its placement [there] would be unsure.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ This is also a theme that runs throughout the biography. On the note of rNying ma pa associations, Padmasambhava prophecies feature throughout, as does the rNying ma pa protector Pehar.

¹³⁰ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: pp. 99.2-100.2. *lha sar chu rdol yong/ chu bzlog lha khang 'di yang ko long gi dbang gis yun ring po gnas snyam pa med/ gab rgya can gyi lung bstan na/ gu ru seng ge sgra sgrogs*

Such reports of 'Bras spungs's distrust for Zhig po gling pa suggests that bSod nams rgya mtsho's faction at 'Bras spungs and the Jo khang temple caretaker interpreted the Treasure revealer's public works projects as part of an agenda to further his own narrow sectarian and political aims, a perception undoubtedly based on the Treasure revealer's close connections to gTsang factions with traditional hostility toward dGe lugs pa strongholds centered around Lhasa. bSod nams rgya mtsho's visit to the Tümed Mongols in 1577, in which he formed an important priest-patron (*mchod yon*) relationship with the Mongol general Altan Khan six years prior to the Treasure revealer's death in 1583, speaks volumes to the paranoia that 'Bras spungs must have felt in the face of gTsang control over dBus and its disastrous implications for dGe lugs pa patronage and political power.¹³¹ Zhig po gling pa, moreover, must have had this trip in mind when he predicted to Sog bzlog pa from his deathbed that Mongols would ravage Tibet within his student's lifetime, and gave him rituals and instructions on how to prevent this.

As indicated by these episodes, religion and politics were deeply intertwined in the career of the Treasure revealer, to an extent that would perhaps only be exceeded with the seamless fusion of these two spheres in the office of Dalai Lama, beginning with the

paNDi ta'i cha lugs mdzad pa'i gzungs bzhugs la mtha' mi bzlog thabs kyi 'khor lo kha byang ltar bcug nas/ jo bo rin po che'i sku gzhogs su bzhugs nas mtha' dmag bzlog pa dang/ bod khams bde ba sogs yongs rgyu yin cing/ de byas nas lo gnyis gsum tsam bde mo byung song nang/ lha sa dkon gnyer dpon pas/ zhabs drung thams cad mkhyen pa la/ 'di na rang re la gnod pa kho na yod zhus pas/ zhabs drung la dgongs pa la bde dogs mi 'dug ste/ 'bras spungs pa'i che sgres chos khrims rnam pas/ sku gzhogs su de'i gzungs gzhugs klog pas/ de na mtha' dmag zlog thabs/ dbus gtsang gi sde 'khrugs zhi thabs ma gtogs/ 'bras spungs pa dpon slob phyogs la gnod pa'i rigs gcig yang mi 'dug pa dang/ zhabs drung thams cad mkhyen pas 'di na gzigs dang rang re gtso dgos med 'di ka gsung gin 'dug pa/ mi'i 'di ni bstan pa spyi'i ched yin pa 'dug/ da gzigs dang bka' bskyon byung ba 'dug/ slar zhabs bsdoms gcig bcug nas byas na bsam pa byung ste/ 'jog pa'i nges pa med bsam ma byas/

¹³¹ Tucci 1949: 39-56. For a detailed analysis of Tibetan and Mongolian records of bSod nams rgya mtsho's visit to Mongolia in 1577 and 1578, see Hidehiro Okada, "The Third Dalai Lama and Altan Khan of the Tümed," *Journal of International Association of Tibetan Studies*, 5 (1989), 645-652. Okada concludes based on Mongolian sources that the Great Fifth may have fabricated and omitted details pertaining to this visit.

Great Fifth. The Great Fifth's ascendance was presaged in important respects by the activities of bSod nams rgya mtsho, who judging from the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography, appears to have been in direct competition with Zhig po gling pa to ideologically position himself as guardian of Lhasa. As we have seen, aside from their mutual concern to protect Lhasa, these two figures were very much at cross purposes: Zhig po gling pa sought to guard Lhasa and Tibet from the very Mongol forces that bSod nams rgya mtsho and his 'Bras spungs faction were actively courting.

This story of opposing loyalties helps to contextualize why the Fifth Dalai Lama may have held Zhig po gling pa in such great disdain. The Great Fifth made no secret of his sentiment for Zhig po gling pa; it is a recurrent theme throughout his narrative writings. The Great Fifth also extended his vitriol to Zhig po gling pa's student and biographer Sog bzlog pa, and to Sog bzlog pa's student, Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, thus forming three generations of teachers and disciples who the Great Fifth had branded—"the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong." I shall address this issue in greater detail in Chapter Five of this study, where I discuss Sog bzlog pa and his milieu's legacy in the narrative writings of the Great Fifth. For now, it suffices to remark that the Fifth's disdain for these figures appears to have been connected with the influence that their shared legacy in the revelation and implementation of powerful objects and object-oriented rites exerted in the political domain. Well before the Great Fifth's time, Zhig po gling pa's influential force in the socio-political dynamics of his time was certainly a crucial factor in Sog bzlog pa's own development.

b. Sog bzlog pa's Influences from the Frontier: The Mon Treasure Revealers Yongs

'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa and Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan

In addition to Sog bzlog pa's close bond with Zhig po gling pa, the scion of sNang rtse based in dBus, Sog bzlog pa also trained under the tutelage of two notable masters from Mon, present day Bhutan.¹³² It is difficult to say for certain what first brought Sog bzlog pa to Mon. There are no details of his travels there aside from the colophon of his first composition, the *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning*, in which Sog bzlog pa records that he finished this text in 1576 in Bum thang, central Mon.¹³³ As Sog bzlog pa writes elsewhere, there was fighting that year in gTsang, suggesting that he may have fled south temporarily for reasons of personal safety.¹³⁴ In any event, Sog bzlog pa's acquaintance there with the Mon-based master Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa (16th c.), and his master Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan (1499-1587), both of whom were Treasure revealers steeped in violent rites and practices centering on powerful sacred objects, must have surely had an impact on the young physician's development. Sog bzlog pa's contact with these figures probably stemmed from his close association with Zhig po gling pa. Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa reports in his autobiography a visionary encounter with Zhig po gling pa.¹³⁵ We might speculate that this vision occurred some time during Sog bzlog pa's travels to Mon in his mid-twenties or later, perhaps while Sog bzlog pa

¹³² For more on the toponym Mon in Tibetan texts, see Françoise Pommaret, "The Mon pa revisited: in search of Mon," in *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture*, ed. Toni Huber (Dharamsala: Tibetan Library of Works and Archives, 1999), 52-73.

¹³³ For more on the region of Bumthang, in what is now Central Bhutan, see <http://www.tourism.gov.bt/map/bumthang>, in the Official Site of the National Tourism Organization of Bhutan.

¹³⁴ Recall that Sog bzlog pa reports in his biography of Zhig po gling pa (*Zhig gling rnam thar*: 90.3) that fighting in gTsang that year waylaid the Treasure revealer in Rwa lung for nine months.

¹³⁵ *sPrul sku ngag dbang grags pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar nor bu do shal*, in *The Autobiography and Collected Writings of the Bhutanese gTer-ston Yongs-'dzin Ngag-dbang-grags-pa*, ed. Zhabs-drung Gsang-sngags-rgyal-mtshan (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1985?), f. 202. Henceforth, I will refer to this text as *Ngag grags rnam thar*.

was staying in Bum thang in the company of Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan, Ngag dbang grags pa's own master.

Sog bzlog pa's close relationship with these two Mon lamas is also attested in Sog bzlog pa's *Collected Writings* and his catalogue to that collection. In the catalogue appear long life prayers and praises for both figures, although these texts are missing from the *Collected Writings* itself.¹³⁶ In the *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back*, Sog bzlog pa blames his inability to perform Mongol-averting rites in the years leading up to 1595 on his preoccupation with bestowing teachings upon Thugs sras sprul sku rin po che, among others.¹³⁷ This figure was probably the young reincarnation of Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan, who passed away just eight years prior. Furthermore, in *Verses of Heart-felt Lamentation*, which Sog bzlog pa wrote in his elderly years, Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa is recalled alongside Zhig po gling pa and rDo rje 'chang dbang bla chos kyi rje in a shortlist of three masters who Sog bzlog pa wishes had outlived him.¹³⁸ Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, moreover, in his terse biography of Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa, states, "it seems that master Sog bzlog pa also took this scholar and adept as one of his primary root masters."¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *gSung 'bum gyi tho byang*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 4.1-4.2: Sog bzlog pa lists these praises as follows: *dBang chen sprul sku zla ba rgyal mtshan la bstod pa* and *Yongs 'dzin ngag dbang grags pa la bstod pa*.

¹³⁷ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 243.

¹³⁸ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *sMre ngag gdung tshig*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 517.1.

¹³⁹ Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas, *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mдор bsdus bkod pa rin chen baiDUrya 'i phreng ba*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1 (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980), 576.4-576.5. *bla ma sog bzlog pas kyang rtsa ba'i bla ma gtso che ba zhig tu mdzad snang ngo/*

While few details of these relationships appear anywhere in writing, peering into the writings by and about these two figures reveals that their influence on the young Sog bzlog pa might have been considerable. In the absence of passages that describe their interactions with Sog bzlog pa, let us inquire instead into what kind of masters these two mentors were and to what extent their interests overlapped with Sog bzlog pa's own.

Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa's persona includes several elements that may help illuminate Sog bzlog pa's intellectual development. Judging from his autobiography,¹⁴⁰ Ngag dbang grags pa was a yogi who dwelled mostly in seclusion in the hermitage of Bod mo rin chen, enhancing his "display of luminosity," otherwise known as the "cross over" visionary experiences of the Old School. During breaks from retreat Ngag dbang grags pa toured the countryside uncovering Treasures and staging large public rituals. Among his revelations, Ngag dbang grags pa was most famous for his discovery of a wrathful Padmasambhava ritual cycle known as *Garland of Flames: The Burgundy Wrathful Guru (Gu ru drag po dmar nag me phreng)*, although it is no longer extant.¹⁴¹ Ngag dbang grags pa was also known for unearthing caches of sacred objects, such as statues, boxes, amulets, and most importantly for our discussion, edible sacra in the form of pills.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ This includes two texts: *sPrul sku ngag dbang grags pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar nor bu do shal* and *'Gro mgon ngag gi bang po de nyid kyi rnam thar bsdus pa gcig* (ff. 570-571), in *The Autobiography and Collected Writings of the Bhutanese gTer-ston Yongs-'dzin Ngag-dbang-grags-pa*, ed. Zhabs-drung Gsang-sngags-rgyal-mtshan (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1985?). Henceforth, I will refer to the former as *Ngag grags rnam thar* and the latter as *Ngag grags rnam thar bsdus pa*, respectively.

¹⁴¹ *Ngag grags rnam thar*: 140.5.

¹⁴² The centrality of Treasure substances, and specifically edible sacra, for this figure began with his first revelation and continued throughout his life. See, for instance, *Ngag grags rnam thar*: 130-131, which describes the Treasure revealer's first revelation event as including pills from the *bodhicitta* of the master of Odiyāna (*u rgyan gyi byang sems ril*). See also *Ngag grags rnam thar bsdud pa*: 570-571, which describes the same event as yielding "samaya substance pills" (*dam rdzas ril bu*), which "liberate through

Much like Zhig po gling pa, seven-times born Brahmin flesh appears to have been an especially important Treasure substance for Ngag dbang grags pa. His mass rituals often involved performances of great accomplishment rites focused on this substance. The lofty claim of “liberation through eating” attributed to the Treasure Brahmin flesh meant that Ngag dbang grags pa and others sometimes performed the associated great accomplishment on behalf of the deceased, with the belief that the substance, amplified through the rite, carries the power to “liberate” the dead from rebirth in the lower realms and even deliver them to Avalokiteśvara’s pureland.¹⁴³ Ngag dbang grags pa’s flesh-centered rituals thus seem to have attracted large and diverse audiences consisting of laity, clergy, men, and women. Adding to their popularity was the more provisional outcome of animating and increasing the store of substance by means of the group ritual proceedings, thus convincing the audience of the rite’s success and producing ample Brahmin flesh to distribute for the entire audience’s consumption. It seems that Ngag dbang grags pa may have even been deemed to be a seven-times born Brahmin himself. After his death his physical remains were fashioned by his students into pills.¹⁴⁴

Much like Zhig po gling pa, tactile and edible demonstrations of ritual prowess appear to have been a major facet of Ngag dbang grags pa’s religious identity. Numerous ritual episodes in Ngag dbang grags pa’s biography and autobiography conclude with Ngag dbang grags pa opening the vessel that contains the flesh and revealing to everyone present the exponential increase of the flesh effected through the rite. The audience is

tasting.” These episodes are most likely referring to the same item. These and other materials feature throughout the biographical literature of this figure.

¹⁴³ *Ngag grags rnam thar*: 165

¹⁴⁴ *Yongs ’dzin ngag dbang grags pa’i rnam thar smad cha skal bzang dang pa’i shing rta*, in *The Autobiography and Collected Writings of the Bhutanese gTer-ston Yongs-’dzin Ngag-dbang-grags-pa*, ed. *Zhabs-drung Gsang-sngags-rgyal-mtshan* (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1985?), 630.

always duly astonished when the flesh pills are then distributed among them. The amplification of the flesh is sometimes accompanied by other sensory signs of success such as wafting fragrant odors or the appearance of self-arisen letters. Ngag dbang grags pa even reports that on one occasion the substance took flight and landed in the laps of him and all the others present.¹⁴⁵

One striking feature of the literary images featuring the animated properties of material substances is their overtly rhetorical tone. The ritual accounts consistently conclude that the physical manifestation of such signs produced amazement among the audience and induced within them deep devotion for Ngag dbang grags pa. While the persuasive power of these vivid literary images beckons us as readers to accept the ritual audience's response to these events as our own, such rhetoric, with its repetitive insistence on ritual success, also suggests that the seven-times born Brahmin great accomplishment rite and its radical claim of "liberation through eating" may have been controversial during Ngag dbang grags pa's time.

The opening passage of Ngag dbang grags pa's *Key to Awareness: An Apologia* reveals that the seven-times born Brahmin flesh great accomplishment rite was indeed prone to controversy and critique.¹⁴⁶ In this text it is not the legitimacy of the flesh substance itself that is called into question by a critical scholar, dGe 'dun phun tshogs, visiting from bKra shis lhun po, gTsang. Rather, what disturbs him most about the rite is its audience members, in particular, their ambiguous affiliation to monastic or lay status,

¹⁴⁵ Ngag grags rnam thar: 194-195.

¹⁴⁶ Yongs 'dzin ngag dbang grags pa, *rTsod zlog rig pa'i lde mig*, in *The Autobiography and Collected Writings of the Bhutanese gTer-ston Yongs-'dzin Ngag-dbang-grags-pa*, ed. Zhabs-drung Gsang-sngags-rgyal-mtshan (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1985?), 485-548.

their tenuous links with genuinely “authentic” Buddhist traditions, and hence the inappropriateness of sponsoring mass rituals for such liminal Buddhist figures.

While I, Ngag gi dbang po grags pa dpal bzang po, was beginning a seven-times born great accomplishment rite with Bar pa sangs rgyas a rdor ma, in the service of gDong dkar Drung pa rin chen chos rdor, a Vastly Learned One (Rab ’byams pa) from bKra shis lhun po named dGe ’dun phun tshogs had this to say:

You sponsors are supporting these people who are neither full-fledged laity, nor clergy, where we cannot know for sure whether they are White Faces (gDong dkar) or Black Faces, or whether they are Dharmic forms or evil forms. Even performing a single respectful service for a group of monks would bring more fulsome merit than serving these people. Someone like Bar pa sangs rgyas seems to belong to the class of heretics. Material resources are being wasted. Through misunderstanding, their misdeeds will increase. I do not know whether this religious tradition belonging to you White Faced Ones is heretical or not.¹⁴⁷

This passage provides a rare glimpse into the kind of social setting that may have been commonplace at the public rituals of the seven-times practices, and how it must have looked in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities educated in the giant scholastic monasteries of Tibet. Ngag dbang grags pa reports that the scene inspired grave misgivings about the Buddhist credentials of his own gDong dkar (White Face) community and its leaders. The visiting scholar’s interrogations, moreover, formed the pretext for a debate with Ngag dbang grags pa on the basic principles of Buddhist practice and theory. In the ensuing dialogue, which forms the content of this apologetic text, Ngag dbang grags pa subverts the mainstream scholastic Buddhist notions and categories of his adversary by recasting them all in the Great Perfection language of

¹⁴⁷ *rTsod zlog rig pa'i lde mig: 486.1-487.4. bdag ngag gi dbang po grags pa dpal bzang po/ gdong dkar drung pa rin chen chos rdor ched phyag phyir byas nas/ bar pa sangs rgyas a rdor mas skye bdun gyi sgrub chen btsugs pa'i dus su/ bkra shis lhun po nas gyi rab 'byams pa dge 'dun phun tshogs zer ba de na re/ gdong dkar yin nam gdong nag yin nam/ yang na chos pa'i gzugs min yang na mi nag gi gzugs min pa'i skya man ser man 'di tsho la khyed yon bdag rnams kyis/ yar 'dren re zhing 'dug/ 'di tsho la zhabs tog byed pa bas/ dge 'dun pa mang po la bsnyen bkur cig drangs na yang tshogs rdzogs mod/ bar pa sangs rgyas 'di 'dra mu stegs kyi/ rigs can yin par 'dug/ rgyu cha chud zos la btang bar 'dug/ ma go ba yin pas sdiig che zer zhing 'dug/ khyed gdong dkar pa'i chos lugs 'di mu stegs yin nam gang yin mi shes par 'dug zer nas/*

experience and realization. The result is a thorough counter-critique of mainstream Buddhist scholasticism.

Yet, despite the strong rhetoric of *Key to Awareness*, Ngag dbang grags pa did not eschew mainstream Buddhist ethical principles. Unlike Zhig po gling pa and Sog bzlog pa, Ngag dbang grags pa never reports that his rituals perpetrate violence against actual human enemies, despite his revelation and implementation of a renowned wrathful ritual cycle. Ngag dbang grags pa even narrates an incident in his autobiography where he opposes his monastic peers' suggestion to practice violent rites against a foe, which they claim is injurious to the Dharma and might destroy hermitages and intimidate lamas.¹⁴⁸ Ngag dbang grags pa's entreaties to resist violent rites fall on deaf ears and the consequences for the monks are grave. After their victim falls ill, the protectors exact punishment: the walls of the monks' new building collapse and they suffer physical abuse. Recognizing the error of their ways, the monks confess and promise to never again practice ritual violence against an enemy. This episode, the only instance of violent ritual activity reported in Ngag dbang grags pa's autobiography, stands in sharp contrast to Sog bzlog pa's self-representation in the *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back* and throughout his writings. Although Sog bzlog pa clearly shared Ngag dbang grags pa's interest in powerful sacra and the rituals centered on such, and even followed Ngag dbang grags pa's lead in composing apologia to defend against related criticisms, Sog bzlog pa's self-identity was squarely premised on flagrant displays of ritual violence against actual human enemies, Mongol armies foremost.

¹⁴⁸ *Ngag grags rnam thar*: 184.5-186.6.

Unlike Ngag dbang grags pa, Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan was surely one of Sog bzlog pa's mentors in this regard. As scion of the great treasure revealer Padma gling pa (1450-1521),¹⁴⁹ Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan was a far more public figure than his student and peer Ngag dbang grags pa. Steeped in the revelations of his father, which prominently feature powerful sacra implemented for a variety of mundane and spiritual purposes, Zla ba rgyal mtshan naturally became adept in the use of potent ritual materials and their underlying logic early in his career. Zla ba rgyal mtshan's biographer frames the life story with opening passages that present the special features of his Great Perfection tradition, emphasizing its presentation of the "four, or six liberations" via sensory contact with powerful sacred objects.¹⁵⁰ Even before his birth in the illustrious family of the great Treasure revealer, claims Zla ba rgyal mtshan's biographer, the master acted in several lifetimes as a bodhisattva tantric master skilled in the four ritual activities of pacifying illnesses, increasing wealth, attracting students, and destroying enemies. Seven consecutive lifetimes in such a human form, asserts the biography, even rendered the physical flesh of Zla ba rgyal mtshan's previous physical incarnation capable of conferring "liberation through eating," a claim also attributed to some of the substances discovered by Padma gling pa.¹⁵¹ Fittingly, the Thugs sras was recognized as an emanation of Hayagrīva (*rta mgrin*)¹⁵², a wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara. This

¹⁴⁹ For more on the life and legacy of the Treasure revealer Padma gling pa see *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa*, trans. by Sarah Harding (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications); and Michael Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1989).

¹⁵⁰ *sPrul pa'i sras mchog zla ba rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan mdzes*, in *bKa' thang mun sel sgron me, Padma 'byung gnas kyi bka' thang rgyas pa*, vol. 2 (Sumra, H.P., India: Urgyan Dorji, 1978), 383-384. Henceforth, I shall refer to this text as *Thugs sras rnam thar*.

¹⁵¹ *Thugs sras rnam thar*: 390.3-390.4.

¹⁵² dBang chen (Mahendra), an epithet of Hayagrīva, appears often as a descriptor of this figure.

cemented his identity as a seven-times born one whose physical flesh would be potent enough to both liberate beings and repel enemies. The biography even relates that the infant Zla ba rgyal mtshan's first act involved a profound realization in connection with an oblation-based exorcism rite (*gtor zlog*), thus emphasizing further the incarnation's strong link with the implementation of powerful sacra.¹⁵³

Such passages set the stage for Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan's role as a repeller of Mongol armies from Tibet, which was clearly an important identity marker for this figure. The tenth chapter of his biography is entitled "Expelling Foreign Armies and Discovering Profound Treasures."¹⁵⁴ Here and elsewhere in the work, the biographer offers copious examples of Zla ba rgyal mtshan's prowess in expelling foreign armies. He even goes so far as to state, "It is very important for all to recognize that the fact that all of Tibet is peaceful up to the present is due to the kindness of this supreme, emanated son Zla ba rgyal mtshan."¹⁵⁵

The Mongol expelling ritual episodes describe Zla ba rgyal mtshan's use of "Mongol repelling substances" (*hor bzlog gi rdzas rnams*)¹⁵⁶ and invariably include images of tangible signs of ritual success, such as unseasonable thunder, lightening and hail, along with the occurrence of personal visionary dreams.¹⁵⁷ These passages, moreover, are explicit about the importance of patronage from sTag lung, sNa dkar rtse and Rin spungs in the implementation of these large-scale rites, but also highlight Zla ba

¹⁵³ *Thugs sras rnam thar*: 406.3-407.2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*: 426. *mtha' dmag bzlog cing zab gter phyan drangs pa'i skabs te bcu pa'o/*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 440. *dus da rung kyang bod khams thams cad ma bde skyid phun sum tshogs pa'i skal ba dang ldan pa 'di ni sprul pa'i sras mchog zla ba rgyal mtshan gyi sku drin yin par kun gyis shes pa gal che'o/*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 437.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 438-440.

rgyal mtshan's own heroics in secretly performing Mongol repelling rites at geomantically important locations such as Zab bu lung, Lha sa, Yer pa, Gung thang and bSam yas.¹⁵⁸

The parallels between this facet of Zla ba rgyal mtshan's persona and Sog bzlog pa's self-representation in the *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back* indicate that Sog bzlog pa felt a strong affinity with the Thugs sras on this count. Indeed, Sog bzlog pa makes it quite clear in his *History* that he envisioned his own efforts to repel Mongol armies as a continuation of his master's. Sog bzlog pa's *History* relates that despite Padma gling pa's student mChog ldan mgon po's (1497-1557) commitment to repelling Mongol armies, he encountered obstacles and died prematurely.¹⁵⁹ Thus, amidst mounting reports of Mongol exploitation and violence, the task was left to Zla ba rgyal mtshan:

[The Hor] would have become even more aggressive than that, but Padma gling pa's son, the emanation of Hayagrīva Zla ba'i zhabs, went all around the regions of dBus, gTsang, Dwags po, and Kong po in secret. With great effort he went in order to hide throughout all the lands of the upper, lower, and middle regions [of Tibet] all the materials (*bcas pa rnams*) for turning back the army. This was in accordance with a prophecy certificate (*lung byang*) that stated:

If mChog ldan mgon po should be obstructed by Māra,
Then the auspicious circumstances necessary for Tibet at that time
Should be performed by the emanation of the Great Powerful One (Hayagrīva),
Zla ba grags pa.
If his dead body (*gdung*) resides at bSam yas or at Zab bu lung,
Then border armies will be turned back for up to 100 years.

No one recognized him [during his trip] except for a crazy woman in Dwags po because she was a *dākinī*. He imparted all of Padma gling pa's religious instructions to rTse le rigs 'dzin chen po. Then, when he passed away, he had been travelling to Tibet with the intention of depositing his remains at Zab bu. However, his monks brought them to Mon, thus the border armies of these times have arrived.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Ibid: 439-440.

¹⁵⁹ E. Gene Smith, "Banned Books in Tibetan Speaking Lands" (unpublished article, 193) remarks that there is indication that this figure was murdered due to his political involvements along these lines.

This segment is quite revealing about the material basis of Mongol repelling rites. Note that in the *History* and in Zla ba rgyal mtshan's biography it is Zla ba rgyal mtshan's strategic placement of powerful substances throughout Tibet that is most crucial for his Mongol repelling rites. Sog bzlog pa highlights this essential role of substance and its association with powerful flesh even more by attributing the ultimate failure of Zla ba rgyal mtshan's endeavors to the fact that his bodily remains did not find their final resting place at Zab bu lung, as Padma gling pa's prophecy stipulates. Had it not been for Zla ba rgyal mtshan's covetous Mon students, the mere presence of Zla ba rgyal mtshan's corpse, turned powerful sacra, at the pilgrimage place of Zab bu lung, claims Sog bzlog pa, would have kept Mongol armies at bay for another one hundred years.

Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan's biography emphasizes his connection with the material domain of religious practice as extending well beyond his role as a Mongol repeller. According to the biography, Zla ba rgyal mtshan was not much of a scholar. Instead, he was a powerful ritual master who spent his public religious career immersed in activities that fused the mundane sphere with the spiritual. On this account, relates the biography, the Thugs sras became master to some of the most powerful political leaders of his time, including the Rin spungs aristocracy.¹⁶¹ As a Treasure revealer, his discoveries were primarily material objects such as statues, potent powders, and precious

¹⁶⁰ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 227.4-228. *de bas kyang gdug rtsub che ba yong rgyu la/ pad+ ma gling pa'i sras rta mgrin gyis sprul pa zla ba'i zhabs kyis/ sbas tshul du dbus gtsang dwags kong gi yul rnam su byon nas/ lung byang las/ mchog ldan mgon po bdud kyi bar bcad na/ de tshe bod la dgos pa'i rten 'brel rnam/ /dbang chen sprul pa zla ba grags pas byed/ 'das pa'i gdung yang bsam yas'am/ /yang na zab bu lung du bzhugs pa na/ /mtha' dmag lo brgya'i bar du bzlog/ ces 'byung ba ltar du/ thugs rtsol chen pos stod smad bar gsum gyi yul khams rnam su dmag bzlog gi bcas rnam sba la byon/ sus kyang ngo ma shes pas/ dags po na smyon ma zhig yod pa mo mkha' 'gro ma yin pas ngo shes/ rtse le rigs 'dzin chen po la pad+ ma gling pa'i chos bka' rnam gnan/ de nas sku 'da ba'i tshe/ zab bur gdung 'jog pa'i dgongs pas bod du pheba pa la/ grwa ba rnam kyis mon la spyang drangs pas/ ding sang gi mtha' dmag 'di thon pa yin/*

¹⁶¹ *Thugs sras rnam thar*: 491.7-496.2. This section specifically describes the Thugs sras's relationship with the Rin spungs leader Zhabs drung ngag dbang 'jigs grags (1482/1542-1595?).

stones.¹⁶² The rituals he performed emphasized the implementations of those objects for a broad range of objectives, including but not limited to the expulsion of Mongol troops from Tibet. It seems, moreover, that he performed these rituals in mass public settings, much like his student Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa.

Of particular emphasis in the biography is Zla ba rgyal mtshan's performance of seven-times born Brahmin great accomplishment rites. The biography offers detailed accounts of Zla ba rgyal mtshan's performance of this rite while *en route* to or from meetings with influential political figures, thus underscoring the social and political functions of these rites and their associated substances in bringing together many diverse elements. The rhetorical imagery present in these accounts mirrors closely Ngag dbang grags pa's analogous narrative episodes: Zla ba rgyal mtshan's seven-times born Brahmin great accomplishment rites are well attended by diverse groups and consistently result in sensory manifestations of success to the amazement of all. These sensory manifestations, moreover, often involve the animation of the substance, in a variety of ways.

c. Reflections on the Convergence of Political Power, Ritual, and Substance in Sog bzlog pa's Milieu

The narratives presented above paint a picture of Sog bzlog pa's teachers as deeply immersed in the material dimensions of Buddhist practice. This material aspect centrally involved the revelation and implementation of powerful Treasure substances and object-oriented rites. These objects and object-oriented rites variously promised "liberation" (*grol*) from adverse circumstances, or negative rebirths, through sensory contact alone; or

¹⁶² This element features throughout the narrative.

they aimed at the “abeyance” (*bzlog*) of dangerous intrusions from the margins of Tibetan civilization in the form of foreign armies, flood, pestilence, or other wild and unpredictable forces of the object world. The mastery that Sog *bzlog pa*’s Treasure revealing mentors displayed when dealing with these two aspects of power substances, by for instance animating them through ritual treatment and other sensible exhibitions of power, projected images of control over the alternately nurturing and destructive forces of the object world of humanity and nature. At times, this thrust Sog *bzlog pa*’s masters onto the political stage, where they took their place alongside Tibet’s aristocratic leaders as power brokers of Tibet acting to protect and serve the populace.

The nature of Zhig po gling pa’s involvement with the wider political chaos surrounding sNang rtse illustrate that this political leader *cum* Treasure revealer was a major player. Zhig po gling pa’s principal obligation was to protect his natal territory of sNang rtse and the wider Lhasa environment from the ravages of flood and the threats of war. This involved nurturing strategic alliances with powerful sectarian and political leaders *via* his charismatic dispensation of prophecies, Treasure rituals, and Treasure substances; and through the public works and militant sorcery projects that these sometimes entailed. In turn, such public displays undoubtedly contributed much to the Treasure revealer’s reputation as a powerful ritualist, a perception that helped catapult Zhig po gling pa to the position of court chaplain to powerful factions, where he was ready with just the right Treasure substance, ritual, or prediction to bolster strength and renew confidence at critical junctures. The charisma of Zhig po gling pa’s status as a Treasure revealer, acquired in part through the potent objects he revealed, thus paid off for Zhig po gling pa in tangible political ways. In the tense, ongoing negotiations over safety and security typical of the period, this provided Zhig gling with powerful

bargaining chips that could serve as valuable units of exchange, or fierce weapons of defense, depending on the circumstance.

When recalling that this literary image of Zhig po gling pa was assembled from various sources by Sog bzlog pa in 1599, over fifteen years after the Treasure revealer's death, the interweaving of elements that constitutes Zhig po gling pa's identity takes on additional import. Through narrativizing the compelling aspects of Zhig po gling pa's persona and illustrating the continuities of that persona with his own, Sog bzlog pa is able to share in the charisma of his master. The rhetorical movement of charismatic power between Zhig po gling pa and the objects and rituals that he implements thus extends through the text to Sog bzlog pa as well.

The influences of the Mon lamas Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa and Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan on Sog bzlog pa's development follow similar patterns. Upon the advice and prophecies of his father Padma gling pa, Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan was also drawn into the wider Tibetan conflicts, as he sought to position himself as a powerful ritual expert capable of assisting Tibetan polities against enemy factions and foreign military threats. Despite Sog bzlog pa's inheritance from Zhig po gling pa of the rites he would later implement to repel Mongol armies, it was the Thugs sras, as Sog bzlog pa recalls in the *History*, who served as his predecessor and inspiration for the implementation of such rites.

Like Zhig po gling pa, moreover, the Thugs sras was also a revealer of potent sacra, such as seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills and the like, and implemented it in public rites that implicated politically powerful figures. Even his very body, claims Sog bzlog pa, was potent enough to keep Mongol armies at bay. Ngag dbang grags pa, on the other hand, while also steeped in violent rites, did not seem to approve of their use to kill

actual human enemies. Nonetheless, he too was involved in the revelation and implementation of potent sacred substances, such as seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills, and gathered opposition precisely on this count. Ngag dbang grags pa's eloquent defense of the Great Perfection occasioned by criticisms of the social setting of his seven-times born Brahmin flesh accomplishment rite reveals that there were grave misgivings among Tibet's ecclesiastical figures about mass ritual settings focused on sacra that attracted large and eclectic audiences.

The fluidity of charismatic authority between persons, objects, places, and times, and the implications of this fluidity in the socio-political arena is the defining feature of all the episodes presented above. At the core of it all, at least rhetorically, is the Great Perfection, specifically, the cultivation of mind that this practice stipulates and the mastery of the material domain in which it culminates. Sog bzlog pa's masters are all represented as Great Perfection practitioners who spent considerable time in retreat nourishing the dynamic expression of awareness through developing strength in the visionary experiences of crossing over. The experiential emphasis in Great Perfection training on the creative display of phenomenal appearance, not to mention the social prestige of the Great Perfection as the pinnacle of all Buddhist soteriological techniques, seems to have meshed well with the pressing demands incumbent upon these figures to manifest charismatic authority in the socially and politically contentious period in which they lived.

Despite the function of Great Perfection practice and accomplishment as an explanatory device to authenticate mastery of the phenomenal realm, there is nonetheless a noticeable tension between socially and politically expedient displays of ritual prowess in the phenomenal realm of *real politik*, on the one hand, and the mind-centered,

reclusive practices of the Great Perfection, on the other. This tension is well demonstrated in the following episode, in which Sog bzlog pa narrates Zhig po gling pa's reflections on the issues of exorcism and consecration. Apropos of the Treasure revealer's efforts to protect Lhasa from flood, these considerations are sparked by his inability to perform these two ritual acts in person due to the turbulent waters of an intervening river.

An invitation arrived from a distant monastery on the other side of the river. However, the river was too wild and they were not able to travel there in a dugout boat. Without this being any fault of theirs, they took responsibility for it. The distant monastery urgently pleaded, saying:

A spirit has entered our new shrine, and thus, only inauspiciousness has befallen us. We please request you for just a single exorcism and consecration rite.

Zhig gling replied:

The spirit is your own mind. Mind is empty, so where is there a spirit?
Exorcism is just that. I will perform the consecration from here.

Focusing on a lotus plate filled with barley, he tossed the barley. He then delivered them the lotus plate, with the statement:

Now you should go and look to see if there is barley in the shrine. When there is, look to see if this vessel is filled with barley. When it is filled, the shrine has been consecrated.

They went and did exactly that. There was more barley in the shrine than ever before, and the lotus plate was filled with it. The deities also became more lustrous than before.¹⁶³

Even while spirits are mind, says Zhig po gling pa, and exorcism can therefore be performed simply through recognizing mind's emptiness, consecration still requires physical manifestations of ritual prowess, in the form of animating the objects concerned. The contrast here between exorcism and consecration points toward a deeper tension

¹⁶³ *Zhig po rnam thar*: 95.5-96.3. *tsang po pha ri'i dgon pa rgyangs tsam yod pa gcig nas gdan 'dren byung ste/ chu ches pa dang/ gdong grul phebs ma nus/ khong tshos skyon med pa nged rang tshos khag thebs/ nged kyi lha khang gсар pa cig yod pa der/ 'dre zhugs pas mi shis pa kho na byung/ bgegs skrod dang rab gnas gcig cig kyang zhu ba lags nan gyis zhugs pas/ 'dre rang sems yin/ sems stong pa la 'dre ga la yod/ bgegs skrod de ka yin/ rab gnas 'di nas bya'i gsung nas/ nas pad sder gang spyang dmigs mdzad nas gtor/ pad sder de skur nas/ da khyed rang tsho song la lha khang na nas e 'dug ltos/ 'dug na phyag nas snod 'di e khengs ltos/ khengs byung na rab gnas chags pa yin gsung/ khong rnam kyi phyin nas de ka ltar byas pas/ lha khang gi nang na sngar med pa'i nas mang po 'dug pa phyag pas pad sder gang byung/ lha rnam kyang sngar las bag gro ba 'dug/*

between mental versus physical understandings of ritual efficacy. How, we might ask, did Sog bzlog pa and his masters reconcile the mind-centered rhetoric of their Great Perfection practice with their commitment to defend the authority and power of material sacra? Before delving into this issue at greater length, however, allow me to first introduce Sog bzlog pa's own life and literary career. It will hopefully become apparent in the course of this discussion how powerful sacra and the prowess to wield it in pragmatic rites was an integral facet of Sog bzlog pa's identity. This will set the stage for the exploration in the chapters that follow of the productive tension present throughout Sog bzlog pa's life and literary career between the material and sensory domain of ritual prowess and the spiritual and mental domain of meditative cultivation and mastery.

CHAPTER TWO

PROWESS AND PERSONA IN THE WIELDING OF THINGS—EXORCISMS, OBJECTS, AND INSIGHTS IN THE LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER OF A MONGOL-REPELLING SCHOLAR-ADEPT

Sog bzlog pa's involvement with material dimension of Tibetan religion, which he inherited from his Treasure revealing masters and the special socio-political circumstances that they shared, would become the defining aspect of his career as a religious specialist. This chapter is a presentation and analysis of his religious career and writings, concluding with an extended discussion of the rhetorical self-presentation he adopts in his ritual memoir. Throughout this exploration of Sog bzlog pa's life, writings, and autobiographical self-presentation, I attempt to draw attention to the dialectical interplay between personal, or subjective and material, or objective sources of ritual power and efficacy. Tensions between personal and objective sources of power, as intimated just above, form a productive friction that animates a general orientation to action, informing Sog bzlog pa's life and legacy on a number of different registers. This chapter explores how this dynamic took shape in the details of Sog bzlog pa's life and writings, and finally, in the persona that Sog bzlog pa self-consciously crafts for himself in his autobiographical ritual memoir. This will form the backdrop for exploring in the chapters ahead how this dynamic found expression in Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections and ritual manuals.

I. The Spiritual and Material Life of an Exorcist Yogi

Owing to Sog bzlog pa's controversial status, the reasons for which will become clear throughout this chapter, there are no known third person biographical accounts of Sog bzlog pa written by his immediate peers and students. Perhaps the earliest extant biography of this figure's life is the brief life-story found in Lo chen Dharmasrī's (1654-1717) history of the *mDo dgongs 'dus* empowerment lineage, *'Dus mdo dbang gi spyi don*,¹⁶⁴ written in 1710.¹⁶⁵ A comparison of Lo chen's account with the later biography found in Kun bzang nges don klong yang's (b. 1814) Old School history *Nor bu do shal* points to anxieties during Lo chen's time about Sog bzlog pa's controversial Mongol-repelling ritual campaign and his links with Zhig po gling pa.¹⁶⁶ This is a topic that I will revisit in Chapter Five's discussion of Sog bzlog pa's legacy. When we shift our attention to the writings of Sog bzlog pa himself, particularly his memoir, the *History of How the Mongols were Turned Back*, a far more nuanced picture of the figure emerges, one that prominently features pragmatic concerns and political implications only obliquely alluded to in these later biographies. The account of Sog bzlog pa's life that follows is therefore drawn primarily from the *History*, filled in with details from the colophons and lineage notes of his other writings, and the later third person biographies just mentioned.

It should be emphasized at the outset that despite the vivid details present in the *History*, it would be slightly misleading to read Sog bzlog pa's musings as a transparent

¹⁶⁴ Lo chen Dharmasrī, *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, in *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas*, vol. *pha* (Kalimpong w.b.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987), 128.3-130.5.

¹⁶⁵ The colophon of *'Dus mdo dbang gi spyi don* records a date of iron-tiger, when Lo chen was 57 years old. This would have been 1710, nearly 85 years after Sog bzlog pa's death in 1624.

¹⁶⁶ Kun bzang nges don klong yang, *Bod du byung ba'i gsang sngags snga 'gyur gyi bstan 'dzin skyes mchog rim byon gyi rnam thar nor bu'i do shal* (Dalhousie, H.P.: Damchoe Sangpo, 1976), 296.1-297.3.

window into the events of his time. Rather, like all history writing, it must be kept in mind while perusing Sog bzlog pa’s account that the *History* is told from the particular vantage point of its author. As a memoir, moreover, it is a work of self-representation carefully crafted for maximum rhetorical effect. With this persuasive dimension in mind, we must ask what affects in light of his broader context Sog bzlog pa may have hoped to achieve among his readers through representing himself and the events surrounding him the way he did.

Sog bzlog pa was born in 1552¹⁶⁷ within the lDong clan in a location known as Thag gdong mkhar,¹⁶⁸ situated due north of gZhi ka rtse on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River as it flows east towards Lhasa through what was once the g.Yas ru district of gTsang.¹⁶⁹ Sog bzlog pa’s birth name, or “first lay name” (*ka skya ming*) was Nor bu dbang rgyal.¹⁷⁰ The identities of his parents are unrecorded in available sources,

¹⁶⁷ The date of 1552, the rat year of the ninth sixty-year cycle, is reached based on the dates in the colophons of Sog bzlog pa’s compendious apologetical work *Thunder of Definitive Meaning* (*Nges don ’brug sgra*) and his reply to Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje’s alleged critique of the Old Tradition, *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning* (*Dris lan lung rig ’brug sgra*). In the colophon of *Nges don ’brug sgra* Sog bzlog pa states, “Even though I do not have the qualifications for composition, when I was 25 years old I composed *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning: A Response to Queries* (*Dris lan lung rig ’brug sgra*).” The colophon of *Dris lan lung rig ’brug sgra* gives the 10th day of the *Sa ga* month (4th Tibetan month) of the *’dzin byed* year (*me byi lo*; 1576) as the date of composition, making 1552 Sog bzlog pa’s most plausible date of birth. The date of 1552 is further confirmed by *rNying ma dkar chags*, Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (1992), 482. However, dates in this catalogue are to be treated with great reservation; Zhig po gling pa’s date of birth is listed here as 1462, clearly impossible given his well-documented relationship with Sog bzlog pa and others. Sog bzlog pa’s birth date is further confirmed as 1552 in Dung dkar Blo bzang phrin las’s dictionary, Blo bzang phrin las (2002), 2323. Strangely, despite Blo bzang phrin las’s inclusion of Sog bzlog pa’s birth date in the concluding chronological tables, there is no separate entry for him in the body of the work.

¹⁶⁸ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 128.5; *Nor bu do shal*: 296.2. For the clan name, the former has *ldongs*, whereas the latter reads *ldong*. For the place name, the former reads Thag gdong khar, whereas the latter reads Thag gdong mkhar.

¹⁶⁹ Gyurme Dorje and Kapstein locate gDong mkhar in gTsang along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river, at the southern end of the Shangs valley, due north of gZhis ka rtse. For their map of gTsang, see Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, tr. Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1991), vol. 2, map 6.

perhaps because, as Sog bzlog pa himself alleges in the *History*, he was “an orphan abandoned by parents when young.”¹⁷¹ Indeed, by his own account, Sog bzlog pa hailed from relatively humble origins. During his youth Sog bzlog pa was neither recognized as a reincarnate lama, nor inducted into the religious vocation as a novice monk.

In fact, very little is related about Sog bzlog pa’s early education, except that he was a precocious youth who mastered language arts with ease and showed a keen aptitude for the field of traditional Tibetan medicine.¹⁷² So successful were Sog bzlog pa’s medical studies that he was appointed as personal physician to the leader of his native gDong mkhar.¹⁷³ Thus, sometime during his youth, well before earning the nickname Sog bzlog pa, “Mongol Repeller,” he became known as the “healer of gDong mkhar” (*gdong mkhar ’tsho byed*) or “royal physician Blo gros bzang po” (*lha rje blo gros bzang po*), names which sometimes appear in the colophons of his writings.¹⁷⁴

Sog bzlog pa was thus introduced early to the power of substances. Although the details of his medical education are sparse, we can be sure that as a young physician in training Sog bzlog pa would have become intimate with the physicality of the body, the forces that harm it, and the materials and procedures that restore it to health. Sog bzlog

¹⁷⁰ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 215.4.

¹⁷¹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 204.5. /*gzhon tsho pha mas bor ba ’i dwa phrug zhig/*

¹⁷² *mDo dbang spyi don*: 128.6; *Nor bu do shal*: 296.2-296.3.

¹⁷³ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 128.6, *sde pa gdong khar ba*; *Nor bu do shal*: 296.3, *sde pa gdong mkhar ba*.

¹⁷⁴ Sog bzlog pa uses the title “healer of gDong mkar” (*gdong dkar/mkhar/khar ’tsho byed*) in the colophon of *Zhig gling rnam thar*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 109.4; and in the colophon of *Rig ’dzin gyi rnam dbye*, also in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 310.2. He goes by the name Lha rje Blo gros bzang po in the colophon of *Lung rigs ’byung gnas*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975): 189.5; and in the colophon of *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 143.4. Alternatively, Sog bzlog pa goes by Lha rje blo gros in the colophon of his *bDud rtsi sman sgrub kyi lag len*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 441.4.

pa's early renown as a healer extended well beyond the confines of gDong mkhar, putting him into contact with the Rin spungs pa aristocracy, who appear to have had a particularly close bond with the gDong mkhar leadership. So often was he dispatched to attend to the medical needs of Rin spungs pa family members and loyalists that he describes his own early life, perhaps with some degree of dramatic flare, as a period of "indentured servitude" (*nang zan*), in which he "served as a messenger" (*bang chen rgyug*).¹⁷⁵

It is difficult to know for certain precisely when Sog bzlog pa entered the religious vocation, although it surely occurred some time after his initial acquaintance with Zhig po gling pa, who originally knew Sog bzlog pa by his lay name Nor bu dbang rgyal.¹⁷⁶ Sources are unanimous however that Sog bzlog pa was already an adult (*dar la bab pa na*) when his potential for the religious life was finally awakened (*rigs sad*).¹⁷⁷ This shift led to his "ordination" (*rab tu byung*), a general term which denotes any ordination status from novitiate level up to full monkhood.¹⁷⁸ At that time he also received the ordination name Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, or Blo gros rgyal mtshan for short, a name that he assumed throughout the remainder of his life.¹⁷⁹ All sources are silent, however, on whether Sog bzlog pa took ordination as a novitiate (*dge tshul*), or a full-monk (*dge slong*), and who his ordination preceptor was.

¹⁷⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 204.6.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*: 215.4.

¹⁷⁷ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 128.6; *Nor bu do shal*: 296.3.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 215.4.

There is also a paucity of information concerning Sog bzlog pa's religious education and relationships with teachers. Later, third person biographical sources recount that after gaining mastery in the fields of *sūtra*, *tantra*, and especially the entire range of Word (*bka' ma*) and Treasure (*gter ma*) teachings belonging to the Old School, Sog bzlog pa attended to their meditative implementation through the Old School's subtle body completion-stage practices of energy channels, winds, and seminal drops, along with other contemplative practices connected with the Great Perfection.¹⁸⁰ This culminated, according to our sources, in multiple signs of accomplishment, such as dream mastery, visionary experiences, journeys to celestial realms, and the reception of prophecies.¹⁸¹

Sog bzlog pa's principal religious teachers were Bla chen rdo rje 'chang grags pa rin chen, Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa (b. 16th c.), Padma gling pa's biological son Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan (1499-1587), the Treasure revealer Zhig po gling pa (1524-1538), rDo rje seng ge, and Rig 'dzin g.Yu 'brug rdo rje.¹⁸² Among them, Sog bzlog pa's relationship with Zhig po gling pa seems to have had a particularly strong impact on the young physician. The first concrete reference that Sog bzlog pa makes to his connection with Zhig po gling pa also constitutes Sog bzlog pa's earliest autobiographical reflection. The event took place at the end of 1575 at Til sgro, when Zhig gling was visiting the site in response to an invitation from 'Bri gung. Sog bzlog pa recounts that on this occasion he was a member of Zhig po gling pa's entourage,

¹⁸⁰ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 129.2-129.5; *Nor bu do shal*: 296.4-296.6.

¹⁸¹ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 129.5-129.6; *Nor bu do shal*: 296.6

¹⁸² *mDo dbang spyi don* (129.1-129.2) mentions all these names except for g.Yu'brug rdo rje, a figure whose name appears as g.Yung drug rdo rje in Sog bzlog pa's *Shel gyi me long*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 374.5 and 380.5. *Nor bu do shal* (296.3), on the other hand, mentioned Zhig po gling pa alone.

responsible particularly for overseeing the Treasure revealer's health. Sog bzlog pa goes on to credit his vigilant medical care of the ailing Zhig po gling pa for a life changing visionary dream that resulted in the sudden advancement of his own doctrinal intelligence. While there does seem to have been some prior familiarity between the Treasure revealer and the physician, this episode appears to mark when Sog bzlog pa first started to perceive Zhig po gling pa as his spiritual mentor. The importance of this event in Sog bzlog pa's development warrants inclusion of the complete passage.

At the end of that year (1575), Zhig gling was invited by 'Bri gung. At Til gro he had an elaborate vision of a *ḍākinī*, and Ye shes mtsho rgyal gave advice and so forth on techniques for turning back border armies. Zhig gling formed a connection of Dharma teachings with master Jo gdan mkhan chen rin chen shes rab pa, and his disciples. mKhan chen pa reported that he saw the Lord as the master of Oḍiyāṇa in person. In the opinion of those with wrong views, such as myself and others, we thought that this was about mKhan chen pa seeking the worldly success of scholastic renown, so we uttered idle talk, saying that he had offered ['Bri gung] Zhabs drung the master of Oḍiyāṇa at the cost of a village butcher's wage.¹⁸³

While there, Lord Zhig gling became slightly fatigued from an ailment of four waters and swirling wind, and thus I administered to him to the full extent of my ability. I undertook the hardship of foregoing sleep for up to five or six nights, for which he was extremely pleased. He gave me a few prophecies uttered to him by rGyal po chen po and mGon po zhal that he would tell no one else, such as how they would protect the doctrine of Buddha, carry off the corpse of our liberated enemy, and so forth. That night, the other attendants left to receive the profound Dharma of the 'Bri gung pa that 'Bri gung zhabs drung rin po che was teaching to Chos rje 'bab rom pa, and others. I stayed by Zhig gling's side to ensure his rest. Then, since the two yellow scrolls of the rDo rje phag mo gsang sgrub from the treasure of Garuda Nest Rock were present, one day Zhig gling ordered me to bring him Padma guru's sacred container. I brought it to him, and inside were the two yellow scrolls. Zhig gling then said:

Once I give you the scriptural reading transmission, tell no one.

Nang so Tshe rdor ba and the others would have appreciated it.

I said:

You must permit me to transcribe these [words.]

He responded:

The *ḍākinīs* tenaciously uphold the dharma.

There is no need to steal the life-force of the elderly (i.e., himself).¹⁸⁴

You will see the face of Vajravārāhī.

¹⁸³ I am unclear on this reference.

¹⁸⁴ This line and the line above it are a reference to the protective functions of *ḍākinīs*, who are believed to punish those responsible for the unauthorized reproduction and distribution of sacred materials, especially Treasure texts and substances.

Then, unclearly muttering the transmission, he did not permit me [to transcribe it]. When tears were welling up in my eyes, he finished a section then said:

Since you are a Great Perfection practitioner, at sNang rtse I will give you the *Seminal Quintessence of the Dākinīs*,¹⁸⁵ which was offered to me by bKra shis chos sding pa.

That night, an inconceivable sign appeared to me, the likes of which I had never before experienced, that my evil deeds were purified. I then awoke, and thought that I could grasp many words that my understanding could not fathom before, such as *Reciting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, the *8,000 Verse Prajñāpāramitā*, and so forth. From that day forth, it was as though my insight from understanding had improved. There was no reason for this to have happened to me, so thinking that that it was probably the blessings from having nursed Zhig gling's illness the day before, remorse arose in me for having formed a wrong view of mKhan chen pa's previous vision of Zhig gling as the master of Oḍiyāna.¹⁸⁶

While much can be remarked about this passage, it essentially narrates how Sog bzlog pa transformed, literally overnight, based solely upon his extended exposure to Zhig po gling pa. Of particular note in this episode are the associations it forms between sacred locations such as Til sgro, visionary experiences, army-repelling rituals, Sog bzlog pa's

¹⁸⁵ *mKha' 'gro yang thig*. This Treasure cycle occupies one of the four sections of kLong chen pa Dri med 'od zer's famous sNying thig yab bzhi collection.

¹⁸⁶ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 87.1-88.6. *de'i lo mjug nas 'bri gung nas gdan drangs/ til sgror mkha' 'gro'i gzigs snang rgya chen po dang/ ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi mtha' dmag bzlog thabs kyi bslab bya sogs gnang/ jo gdan mkhan chen rin chen shes rab pa dpon slob la/ bka' chos kyi 'brel pa gnang pas/ mkhan chen pas rje 'di nyid o rgyan dngos su gzigs gsung gi 'dug pa la/ bdag sogs log lta can gyi bsam pa la/ mkhan chen pa yang mi chos mkhas pa'i snyad tshol du 'dug bsam nas/ shan grong gi phog de'i rin la/ zhabs drung la o rgyan gcig phul song zer ba'i kha 'chal kyang labs/ der rje 'di la chab bzhi dang/ rlung 'khyim pa'i bsnyung gzhi'i brgyal se gcig byung bas/ bdag gis phyag g.yog gang nus zhus/ nub lnga drug gi bar du gnyid med pa'i gag po byung ba mnyes tshor che ba mdzad/ rgyal po chen po dang mgon po zhal gyis sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa bsrung gi 'dug pa'i tshul dang/ rang re'i dgra gcig bsgral ba'i ro khyer byung ba sogs gzhan la gsung ba'i bka' lung de 'dra 'ga' re gnang/ phyag g.yog gzhan rnams dgongs kha/ 'bri gung zhabs drung rin po ches chos rje 'bab rom pa sogs la/ 'bri gung pa'i zab chos rnams gsung gi 'dug pa'i zhor la zhur 'byon kyi yod pa la/ bdag gis sku gzhogs su rnal brsung ba la sdad pas/ khyung tshang brag gi gter gyi rdo rje phag mo gsang sgrub kyi shog ser gnyis po rnams 'dug pas/ nyin gcig pad+ ma gu ru'i rten sgam de thong gsung/ phul bas de na shog ser de gnyis 'dug pas/ lung gcig gnang nas su la yang la labs/ nang so tshe rdor ba la sogs pas dga' mgu byas yong gsung/ 'di zhal shus chog pa gcig dgos zhus pas/ mkha' 'gro chos la 'phreng po 'dug/ mi rgan gyi srog phrog pa la dgos pa med/ khyed rang rdo rje phag mo'i zhal mthong yong gsungs nas/ rab rib chol chol gsung nas ma gnang/ mchi zhag sgor sgor yod dus/ dum gcig song ba dang/ khyed rdzogs pa chen po ba yin pas/ ngas bkra shis chos ldings pas phul ba'i mkha' 'gro yang thig de snang rtser ster ro gsung/ de'i nub bdag la sdig pa dag pa'i rtags bsam gyi mi khyab pa sngar yong ma myong ba gcig byung ba dang gnyid sad/ mshan brjod dang brgyad stong pa la sogs pa'i tshig la go ba ma theb pa mang po la de 'di yin pa 'dra snyam pa dang/ de'i sang nas go ba'i shes rab drag tu song ba 'dra ba zhig 'dug pas/ nga la 'di 'dra yong don med/ 'di rang kha sang nas kyi smyung g.yog da'i byin rlabs yin pa 'dra bsam nas/ lngar mkhan chen pas o rgyan du gzigs pa la log lta byas pa la 'gyod pa skyes/*

medical treatment of the Treasure revealer, the Treasure revealer's private transmission to Sog bzlog pa of two Treasure yellow scrolls, and Sog bzlog pa's overnight subjective transformation. Also worth highlighting is the transition from skepticism to devotion that Sog bzlog pa's transformation occasioned. Sog bzlog pa's cynical take on master Jo gdan mkhan chen's perception of Zhig po gling pa as Padmasambhava in person suddenly turns to remorse as the future Mongol Repeller begins to understand the Treasure revealer as an extension of Padmasambhava's awakened agency in the world. Finally, the most crucial mediators in this complex sequence of events – the yellow scrolls and Sog bzlog pa's medical treatment – are material in nature. And the fact that the “reading transmission” (*lung*) of these two yellow scrolls was muttered unintelligibly to Sog bzlog pa, yet still had the power, according to Zhig po gling pa, to trigger visions of the “face of Vajravārāhī,” indicates that it is the formal, material features of the sound itself that would reap effects, outside of its communication of propositional content. Meanwhile, Sog bzlog pa opines that it was his medical care for the ailing Zhig po gling pa, above all else, that probably triggered the “blessings” (*byin rlabs*) of his expanded discursive abilities to comprehend scriptural language. In sum, this episode links a number of material and discursive elements in complex filiations of causality and efficacy, thus illustrating how interrelated subjective and objective, physical and mental domains were in the workings of transformative power in Sog bzlog pa's world.

Sog bzlog pa's earliest extant composition, *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning*, was completed at bSam gtan gling hermitage,¹⁸⁷ in Bum thang, Mon, present day Central Bhutan, on the tenth day of the fourth Tibetan month of 1576, when Sog bzlog pa was

¹⁸⁷ The hermitage of bSam tan gling is believed by locals to be the charred ruins of a temple located directly down the hill from Tharpaling Monastery, in the Chumey Valley of Bumthang, Bhutan. Tharpaling is said to have been the seat of kLong chen rab 'byams dri med 'od zer during his several-year period of exile in Mon.

twenty-five years of age.¹⁸⁸ This was within five short months of Sog bzlog pa's transformative visionary dream. Sog bzlog pa's background in the logic of the body and physical substance comes to the fore in this treatise, in which Sog bzlog pa defends the orthopraxy of the Old School's Treasure substance-based practices that promise "liberation" through sensory contact with the potent sensory and material media of visions, sounds, amulets, and pills.

Sog bzlog pa offers no details about his stay in Bum thang that year, save the date and location of *Thunder's* composition in the colophon. He does, however, provide some insight into a possible motive for visiting Mon when he did. In his biography of Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa reports that just after their encounter at Til sgro, war broke out in Rin spungs.¹⁸⁹ This forced Zhig po gling pa to stay over in Rwa lung for nine months until the fighting subsided, rather than respond immediately to an invitation to visit the war-torn region. Perhaps Sog bzlog pa too fled south for a brief respite from the conflict during this period. In any event, given the subject matter of *Thunder* and the preoccupation of Sog bzlog pa's Mon lamas Ngag dbang grags pa and Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan with potent Treasure substances, we can easily imagine that Sog bzlog pa may have also visited Mon to seek inspiration from these Mon masters.

There are no details about Sog bzlog pa's life until seven years later, in the tenth month of 1583, when he answered an urgent call from the Rin spungs pa aristocracy to

¹⁸⁸ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975): 143.4-143.5. In this work (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 85.1) Sog bzlog pa does, however, refer readers to a still earlier composition of his entitled *Stages of the Path: the Single Gate to Liberation (Lam rim thar pa'i sgo gcig)*. Nonetheless, later Sog bzlog pa did not consider this text important enough to include within his Catalogue.

¹⁸⁹ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 90.2-90.3.

visit sNang rtse and administer medical care to the ailing Zhig po gling pa.¹⁹⁰ Due to Sog bzlog pa's own illness it was not until the sixth messenger arrived that Sog bzlog pa, still convalescing, finally set out for sNang rtse.¹⁹¹ Arriving in sNang rtse amidst false rumors that the Treasure revealer had already passed, Sog bzlog pa first performed for him the purification rite of *Vidāraṇa*,¹⁹² the *Liberation from Sorcery*,¹⁹³ and other medical treatments.¹⁹⁴ Aside from lingering paralysis in his right hand, the Treasure revealer's condition gradually improved.¹⁹⁵ However, Zhig po gling pa openly disregarded his improved health and the pleas and long-life prayers from students and family: the Treasure revealer was clearly no longer interested in remaining in this world. He began to share with Sog bzlog pa visionary experiences of pure realms that he would soon visit, and testify based on prophecies about the ravages of flood and Mongol destruction that would plague Tibet soon after his death.¹⁹⁶

The dialogue that ensued is rich in details about the personal relationship between Sog bzlog pa and his master. Zhig po gling pa's appeals to prophecies and personal visionary experiences were ultimately part of an effort to convince Sog bzlog pa that he was the man destined to repel Mongol armies from Tibet's frontiers in the years to come. After thus giving to Sog bzlog pa the original handwritten manuscript of the *Twenty-five*

¹⁹⁰ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 97.5, *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 207.6.

¹⁹¹ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 98.1-98.2.

¹⁹² *rNam 'joms kyi sku khros*. This most likely refers to purification practices derived from the text *rDo rje rnam par 'joms pa zhes bya ba'i gzungs (Vajravīdāraṇā-nāma-dhāraṇī)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 750, Rgyud 'bum, dza, vol. 95 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009), ff. 265v-266v.

¹⁹³ *Byad grol=byad ka las grol ba*. This refers to a counter sorcery ritual.

¹⁹⁴ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 98.3.

¹⁹⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 208.1.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*: 208.2-209.2.

Means to Repel Armies (dmag bzlog nyer lnga'i chos skor), penned by Zhig po gling pa and his chamberlain Lha dar ba, the Treasure revealer conferred upon him aspirations of the text initiation and the entrustment authorizing him to perform these practices.¹⁹⁷ Zhig po gling pa also gave Sog bzlog pa the *Prophecy for Restoring the Teachings*,¹⁹⁸ part of the *Assembly of Conquerors* cycle,¹⁹⁹ and the *Prophecy Under Secret Seal*.²⁰⁰ These would specify the what, when, where, how, and who for the most successful implementation of this ritual campaign. Sog bzlog pa reports that he responded to these developments with a characteristic blend of cynicism, self-deprecation, and devotion. The segment of dialogue translated below highlights these rhetorical features of Sog bzlog pa's self-presentation:

At that point I thought: I need to peruse these texts for a while. These prophecies are thus some subterfuge to get me to stay as Zhig po gling pa's attendant for a little longer. How could it be possible for Mongols to come during our lives? Even if they were to come, I am not the one with the karmic propensity for repelling them.

Then, the lord of Shar pa nas fell ill, so messengers repeatedly arrived beckoning me to go attend on him. However, Zhig po gling pa did not release me. Finally, an order with an official seal arrived from Rin spungs calling for an attendant. I then had no choice but to go. Zhig po gling pa said:

Regard this averting of Mongols to be like Śākyamuni's bequeathal of the teachings to Mahākāśyapa: the two of us will not meet again in this lifetime. Keep that in mind!²⁰¹

At that, my eyes became filled with tears. Having taken a deep breath, I did not let out a word. The next morning, bringing the texts, I took his pulse, and accordingly, it was fine and his health had improved. I urgently pleaded:

Please think of the welfare of disciples! May your lotus-feet be firm! About these means for reviving the teachings, it would make sense to give them to great

¹⁹⁷ Ibid: 209.3-210.3.

¹⁹⁸ *bsTan pa gso thabs*

¹⁹⁹ *rGyal ba 'dus pa*. This refers to the Treasure cycle revealed by Zhig po gling pa entitled *Tshe sgrub rgyal ba 'dus pa*. Related rituals can be found in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 30 (dza) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980): 293-346.

²⁰⁰ Ibid: 209.3. *Lung bstan gab rgya can*.

²⁰¹ This comparison is especially poignant because Buddha entrusted the teachings to Mahākāśyapa just before passing into *parinirvāṇa*.

lamas, such as sPrul sku rin po che bDe chen gling pa, dKar po pa, Kaḥ thog pa, Brang so ba, Mnga' bdag rin po che²⁰², 'Khrang po sprul sku, and so forth. I am a lone indentured servant with a capacity that makes it difficult to even get enough food and clothing for myself. Am I someone who can accomplish something like this? Please do not reprimand me.

Consequently, Zhig gling's expression turned angry, and snapping his fingers, he yelled: Master Padma's capabilities exceed narrow minded you. Without heeding the master of Oḍiyāna, you all have no hope of heeding me.

You do whatever pleases you!

He thus reprimanded me much.²⁰³

When set in the context of Sog bzlog pa's "indentured servitude" as a travelling physician, and the scolding he receives from Zhig po gling pa on account of his reluctant acquiescence, an image emerges of Sog bzlog pa as a humble, but reluctant servant, and a devoted, but skeptical disciple. This juxtaposition of personal destiny and humility, devotion and cynicism are such a recurring theme throughout Sog bzlog pa's self-presentations and writings that we might regard them as indicative of two opposing orientations to action that run throughout every domain of his religious career. The tension between these two orientations and its implications for Sog bzlog pa's immersion in the material and ritual sphere of Tibetan life is a topic to which I shall return shortly.

²⁰² According to Khenpo Lha Tshering, principal of the Old School seminary in Gangtok, Sikkim, Mnga' bdag rin po che refers to Mnga' bdag stag sham can, a figure that I shall discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five of the present study.

²⁰³ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 210.4-211.6. *der bdag gis bsam pa la/ dpe cha 'di rnams la re shig lta rtogs byed dgos/ bka' lung 'di rnams re shig phyag g.yog la bsdad na dgongs pa'i blo brid na 'dug/ rang re 'i tshe gang la sog po 'ong ba sogs ga la srid/ yong rgyu yin na'ang de bzlog thub pa'i las 'phro can gcig nga yin pa'i yul mi 'dug bsam pa skyes/ de nas shar pa nas kyi dpon pa snyung ba la/ bdag 'bod mi yang yang byung ba la grol cha ma gnyes/ mthar rin spungs nas zhabs drung bskul ba'i bka' shog tshan dang bcas byung bas/ da mi 'gro ka med yin/ sog bzlog 'di shAkya thub pas 'od bsrung chen po la bstan pa gtad 'dra ba gcig gyis/ rang re gnyis tshe 'di la da res las mi 'phrad pa 'dug pas thugs la de zhogs gsung/ der mig mchi mas gang/ ro stod dbugs kyis brgyang nas skad ma thon/ sang nang par dpe cha rnams khyer nas phyag rtsa zhu ba dang stabs su/ phyag rtsa bde ba dang/ sku khams yar skyed 'dug pas gdul bya 'i don du zhabs pad bstan pa mkhyen/ bstan pa gso thabs 'di tsho/ sprul sku rin po che bde chen gling pa dang/ dkar po ba dang/ ka thog pa dang/ brang so ba dang/ mnga' bdag rin po che dang/ 'khrang po sprul sku la sogs pa'i bla chen rnams la gnang rigs/ bdag nang zan mi gcig 'khos khyer gis rang gi lto gos phyid par yang go nad che ba la 'di 'dra 'grub pa'i yul 'dug gam/ bka' skyon med pa gcig zhu zhes sogs nan tan du phul bas/ zhal ngo gnag cing gsung chen po dang bcas pa'i phyag gis se gol brdab nas/ gti thug khyod las slob dpon pad+ ma pho tshod che yong/ khyed tsho o rgyan la mi rtsi ba'i nga la rtsi ba'i re ba med/ gang dgyes gyis gsung nas bka' bskyon mang du byung/*

For now it suffices to remark that these contrasting forces converge on this occasion around Sog bzlog pa's equivocations regarding the underlying intent and accuracy of Zhig po gling pa's Treasure prophecies. According to Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa's misgivings derive from misunderstandings about the nature of the Treasure revealer's identity as an extension of Padmasambhava's distributed awakened agency. So interwoven are these two figures, implies the Treasure revealer, that Sog bzlog pa has no hope of obeying Zhig po gling pa without also observing the specifications of Padmasambhava's prophecies that implicate him.

Sog bzlog pa goes on to describe how over breakfast before his departure to gTsang, Zhig po gling pa presented and interpreted several visions and prophecies vis-à-vis one another to persuade Sog bzlog pa that he should indeed understand himself as the destined Mongol repeller. First, Zhig po gling pa recounts two dream visions of Ye shes mtsho rgyal, in which, claims the Treasure revealer, she clearly predicted Sog bzlog pa's role.²⁰⁴ A segment of the second vision reads as follows:

A helpful person will very shortly emerge who will make efforts in the path of means for restoring the teachings in the land of Tibet that have declined, and for averting the Hor and Mongol border troops that will come.²⁰⁵

Then, in a move to persuade Sog bzlog pa that he is a key incarnation of gNyags Jñānakumāra (b. 8th c.) predicted to play an important part in this task, and presumably to authenticate this recognition in the eyes of others, the Treasure revealer promised to give Sog bzlog pa a document detailing gNyags's incarnation line called "the rMar ru letter," written in molten bronze on blue paper.²⁰⁶ Although, relates Zhig po gling pa, he was

²⁰⁴ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 211.6- 214.6.

²⁰⁵ Ibid: 214.1-214.2. /*bod khams bstan pa nyams pa dang/ /hor sog mtha' dmag lhag pa rnams/ /bzlog dang gso ba'i thabs lam rnams/ 'bad pa'i gdong grogs byed mi zhig/ /myur du 'byung bar 'gyur ro ang/*

supposed to conceal this text at Garuda Nest Rock (*khyung tshang brag*) as a rediscovered Treasure (*yang gter*) to be a companion piece to *The Twenty-five Means to Repel Armies*, out of a sudden surge of great faith in how emanations of sNyags *lotsāwa*'s enlightened body, speech, and mind have successively emerged, he wrote it down before concealing it.²⁰⁷

In a similar vein, Zhig po gling pa then cites a prophecy from the *Sealed Prophecy*, from *Fusion of the Masters' Intent*,²⁰⁸ which predicts that someone with the name rGyal – as in Nor bu dbang rgyal, Sog bzlog pa's first lay name, and Blo gros rgyal mtshan, his ordination name – will protect the “northern realm,” and “subdue malevolent forces.”²⁰⁹ Finally, in a last-ditch effort to convince Sog bzlog pa that they are indeed prophesied by Padmasambhava to repel Mongol armies, the Treasure revealer locates himself, Sog bzlog pa, and a future patron within a passage from the *All-Illuminating Mirror*, an important prophecy text revealed by Padma gling pa:²¹⁰

Tibet will internally collapse and the Chinese and Hor will assume control...
 By the power, at that time, of the great merit of sentient beings and
 The Buddha-dharma not being extinguished,
 One with the name of Space (Nam mkha') will arouse the
 circumstantial cause, and
 One with the name of Famous (Grags pa) will act as patron.
 A noble one, who is an emanation of Srong btsan yul zung,
 And a healer, who is the re-birth of Lha rje dGe 'bum,

²⁰⁶ Ibid: 214.6-215.1.

²⁰⁷ Ibid: 215.1-215.2.

²⁰⁸ *Bla ma dgongs 'dus kyi lung bstan bka'i rgya*. *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* refers to the voluminous Treasure cycle revealed by Sangs rgyas gling pa, which presently exists in 13 vols. (Gangtok, Sikkim: Sonam Topgay Kazi, sGa rje bde chen dgon gyi par khang, 1972). The prophecy mentioned here is *Lung bstan bka'i rgya'i bu yig*, which is present in vol. 6, pp. 619-646 of that set of volumes.

²⁰⁹ Ibid: 215.3-215.6.

²¹⁰ *Lung bstan kun gsal me long*, in *Rin 'dzin padma gling pa'i zab gter chos mdzod rin po che*, vol. 1 (Thumpu: Kunsang Tobgay, 1975-1976): 19-138.

With an emanation of myself assisting them,
 Will, having gathered all the materials, perform burnt offerings.
 They will focus intently on the *btsan* and *'gong*
 crossbreed Red Yam shud.²¹¹
 Within the skulls of nine murdered Chinese generals,
 Should be inserted the effigies of nine demon generals.
 These should be buried under the feet of Śākyamuni.²¹²

Sog bzlog pa goes on to relate Zhig po gling pa's interpretive acumen in construing himself as the "One with the name of Space," Sog bzlog pa as the "rebirth" of Lha rje dge 'bum," (12th c.), and Sog bzlog pa's first patron, the leader of Bod mkhar, as the "One with the name of Famous." Particularly noteworthy in this segment is the emphasis on the material, object-oriented nature of the rites stipulated: materials are to be gathered for burnt offerings, and material effigies are to be interred inside the skulls of fallen generals and buried underneath a Buddha statue.²¹³

Despite this material emphasis, nearly each vision, prophecy, and interpretative act related throughout this lengthy episode features Sog bzlog pa's facility with contemplative techniques, particularly his Great Perfection mastery, as a major point of persuasion. In his attempt to convince Sog bzlog pa that he is the reincarnation of gNyags Jñānakumāra, for instance, Zhig po gling pa cites as evidence his Great Perfection experience and other such qualities, claiming them to be so exalted that they

²¹¹ *Btsan 'gong yam shud dmar po* is the name of a dharma protector. The protector is known as Yam shud dmar po, or red Yam shud. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (1998), 168-170, notes that some Tibetans regard this being to be a mixture between a *btsan* and a *'gong po*, two classes of spirits.

²¹² *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 228.4-229. *bod nang zhig nas mnga' thang rgya hor bsdus/.../yang tshe sems can bsod nams che ba dang/ /sangs rgyas bstan pa mjug ma chad pa'i thus/ /nam mkha'i ming can gcig gis rkyen bskul nas/ /grags pa'i ming can gcig gis sbyin bdag byed/ /srong btsan yul bzung sprul pa Arya gcig/ /lha rje dge 'bum skye ba 'tsho byed gcig/ nga yi sprul pa de'i grogs byas nas/ rdzas rnam thams cad bsdud nas sbyin bsregs byed/ /btsan 'gong yaM shud dmar po ar la gtad/ /rgya mi dmag dpon dgu bsad thod pa'i nang/ /bdud mi dmag dpon dgu'i ling ga bcug/ /shAkya mu ne'i 'og tu mnan pa bya/*

²¹³ For a general discussion of the various functions of skulls in Tibetan rituals, including their use with effigies in exorcism rites, see Andrea Loseries-Leick, "The Use of Human Skulls in Tibetan Rituals," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, ed. Shōren Ihara and Zuihō Yamaguchi, vol. 1 (Narita-shi, Chiba-Ken, Japan: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992), 159-173.

can only originate from training in previous lives.²¹⁴ In this connection it is important to note that gNyags Jñānakumāra, otherwise known as the translator (*lotsāwa*) Ye shes gzhon nu, was an 8th century scholar especially renowned for his propagation and practice of the Old School’s Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga contemplative tantric traditions, the final of which is another general designation for the Great Perfection.²¹⁵

Zhig po gling pa’s identification of Sog bzlog pa as an incarnation of Lha rje dge ba ’bum indicates the importance of yet another set of criteria, which returns the emphasis once again to the material domain. Lha rje dge ba ’bum was the famed physician and thaumaturge best remembered for having saved Lhasa’s Jo khang temple from flood.²¹⁶ Zhig po gling pa’s invocation of gNyags Jñānakumāra and Lha rje dGe ba

²¹⁴ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 215.3.

²¹⁵ bsTan ’dzin lung rtogs nyi ma, *sNga ’gyur rdzogs chen chos ’byung chen mo* (Beijing: Khrung go’i bod rig pa spe skrun khang, 2001), 144-147.

²¹⁶ Lha rje dGe ba ’bum was the twelfth- or thirteenth-century physician and student of Bla ma Zhang brTson ’grus grags pa (1123/1121-1193) known for his skill in thaumaturgy and his promotion of the Avalokiteśvara cult centered on Srong btsan sgam po and rule over Lhasa. He is especially remembered for his efforts to restore the dikes of the Brahmaputra River to prevent flooding in Lhasa. For more details on this figure, see Sørensen (2007, vol. 2): 480-483; *Rin chen phun tshogs rnam thar smad cha dad pa’i gdung ba sel byed*, in *rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs sogs kyi rnam thar* (Bir Tibetan Society, 1985), 359.3-368.3, *Blue Annals* (trans. George Roerich, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1988, repr. 1949), 1006; *Lha ldan sprul pa’i gtsug lag khang gi dkar chag shel dkar me long*, in *The Collected Works (gsung ’bum) of Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho*, vol. 19 (*dza*) (Gangtok, Sikkim, India: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1991-1995), 45a4-5; *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 229-230; *Zur thams cad mkhyen pa chos dbyings rang grol rnam thar theg mchog bstan pa’i shing rta*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung ’bum*, vol. 9 (*ta*) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?), 14.2-5; Blo bzang ’phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 235-236, 2149, 2168; Byams pa phrin las, *Bod gyi sMan pa rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 1 (Mi rigs dpe skrun khang: Beijing, 2000): 193-194; and Ko shul grags pa ’byung gnas and Rgyal ba blo bzang mkhas grub, *Gangs can mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod* (Lanzhou: Kan su’u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992): 1848. Sørensen (2007, vol 2: 480, fn. 135) convincingly argues that the dates of 1123-1182 given in the *Ming mdzod* are highly doubtful. Sørensen argues instead for ca. 1200-1250 as plausible dates for this figure. Sørensen notes (2007, vol. 2: 481), moreover, that it was the ’Bri gung figure Rin chen phun tshogs, more than anyone else, who promoted the cult of this figure and his associations with Avalokiteśvara, flood control, and political rule over the “Lhasa *maṅḍala*.” The importance of the figure of Lha rje dge ba ’bum in demonstrating legitimate rule over Lhasa is strongly indicated by the Fifth Dalai Lama’s designation of this figure as a previous incarnation of his predecessor, the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho, and consequently of himself as well (Sørensen, 2007, vol. 2: 481).

'bum as two of Sog bzlog pa's previous incarnations thus effectively fuses textual scholarship, Great Perfection mastery, medical expertise, and ritual control over the elements, thus bridging the discursive, mental, and subjective domain with the physical, material, and objective domain in the very the persona of Sog bzlog pa. It should come as no surprise, then, that these are precisely the domains that occupied Sog bzlog pa's interests throughout his religious career, thus earning him the title "scholar-adept" (*mkhas grub*).

By the end of breakfast, Sog bzlog pa had finally acquiesced to Zhig po gling pa's entreaties. This led a pleased Zhig po gling pa to dispense valuable advice to Sog bzlog pa on how best to stage the Mongol-repelling campaign:

Even though the thought that this was indeed the case did not occur [to me], since this was the master's command I reflected that I would not harbor doubts, and that I would work to turn back the Mongols as much as possible. By consenting verbally as well, Zhig po gling pa was pleased.

Zhig po gling pa also said:

Now these times are surely getting worse, so you will not be able [to accomplish] everything. Emphasize the easier ones, as well as the practice of Black and White Dhṛtarāṣṭra²¹⁷ (*yul 'khor bsrung dkar nag gi sgrub pa*). Then, if you accomplish those that need to be done in the Earth-Female-Hen year and the Iron-Male-Dog year, just that will suffice. By simply [doing] that, not even much of a charismatic attitude will be required [for success].

Then, [Zhig po gling pa] lovingly gave me religious and worldly advice, as a father would a son. Being afraid based on that [advice] of incurring the faults of breaking the lama's command, it was impossible for me not to do [as he said], and so it was [done by me].²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Dhṛtarāṣṭra, or Yul 'khor bsrung in Tibetan, literally means "protector (*dhṛta*) of the kingdom (*rāṣṭra*)," He is one of the four great mundane guardians, or great kings, who each preside over one of the four cardinal directions and exercise dominion over a particular class of spirit. Dhṛtarāṣṭra presides as lord of the gandharvas in the east, the general direction from which Mongol armies entered Tibet during this period.

²¹⁸ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 215.6-216.3. *yin bsam pa ma shar kyang/ bla ma 'i bka' yin pas/ the tshom mi byed sog bzlog gang thub byed bsam pa byas/ ngag tu yang zhus pas mnyes tshor gnang/ yang/ da dus 'di ngan du ka 'gro bas thams cad mi thub/ lass la ba 'di tsho dang/ yul 'khor bsrung dkar nag gi sgrub pa 'di la gtso bor thon/ de nas ma bya lo dang/ lcags pho khyi la byed dgos 'di tsho grub na de kas chog rgyu yin pa 'dug pas/ de tsam gyis sems brjid chen po rang yang mi dgos gsung zhing/ chos 'jig rien gyi bslab bya phas bu la byed pa ltar thugs brtse bas gnang ba la brten nas/ bla ma 'i bka' bcags pa 'i nyes dmigs byung dogs nas mi byed ka med byung bas yin gyi/*

Particularly striking in this passage is Zhig po gling pa's dismissal of "charisma" (*sems brjid*) as a decisive component of ritual efficacy. Instead of exhibiting this subjective quality, it is following key prophecy specifications regarding when and what to perform that "will suffice." As we shall see below when considering the specific episodes of Sog bzlog pa's ritual campaign, the material, object-oriented emphasis reflected in Zhig po gling pa's advice would come to characterize Sog bzlog pa's involvement with this dimension of practice.

When their conversation about Sog bzlog pa's future Mongol-averting campaign had run its course, Zhig po gling pa requested that Sog bzlog pa perform a ritual for deceiving death (*'chi bslu*). Sog bzlog pa obliged his master, incorporating the best possible offerings and auspicious circumstances.²¹⁹ Zhig po gling pa's health improved dramatically as a result. Thus, on the nineteenth day of the tenth Hor month of 1582, Sog bzlog pa set out for gTsang to answer the Rin spungs pa aristocracy's request for medical assistance in Shar pa nas.²²⁰ Subsequently, however, another physician's misdiagnosis caused Zhig po gling pa's illness to suddenly reappear.²²¹ A few months later, on the new moon of the second month of the sheep year (1583), Zhig po gling pa passed away, "showing the display of his awakened thought dissolve into the expanse of reality."²²²

Sog bzlog pa relates in the *History* that he did not begin the Mongol repelling campaign until four years later, in 1587, when Mongol troops led by a certain Kha than

²¹⁹ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 100.50-101.1.

²²⁰ *Ibid*: 101.2-101.3.

²²¹ *Ibid*: 101.4-101.5.

²²² *Ibid*: 101.5. *dgongs pa chos kyi dbyings su thim pa'i tshul bstan/*

su charged from 'U yug,²²³ an area adjacent to Sog bzlog pa's own natal territory of gDong mkhar, all the way up to Nyug mda'.²²⁴ Sog bzlog pa had not yet made the acquaintance of the prophesied patron, which he describes in the *History* as simply "the one from Bod mkhar" (Bong/Bang=Bod mkhar²²⁵ nas).²²⁶ He thus acted alone on this occasion, responding to the Mongol military presence by restoring the *stūpa* (*mchod rten gso*) at 'Bro and performing several thread-cross oblation rites (*mdos gtor*) there.²²⁷ By Sog bzlog pa's account, after performing the final rite of the Lord of Life²²⁸ an auspicious sign occurred, and he had a positive dream that night.²²⁹ Sog bzlog pa interpreted these events as confirmation that his rituals would be effective. Sure enough, reports Sog bzlog pa, autumn of that year a certain leader, Bon po'i la pa, who had just returned from the east, informed Sog bzlog pa that in China several Mongol petty kings and ministers had fallen ill and died.²³⁰ While Sog bzlog pa attributes these events to his own rites, he argues also that since he was not working in collaboration with the leader of Bod mkhar, who was stipulated by Zhig po gling pa in Padma gling pa's prophecy text, ultimate

²²³ 'O yug, or 'Od yug is an incorrect spelling for 'U yug, in gTsang. This is the river valley of the 'U yug river tributary due north of the Brahmaputra from Rin spungs. For more details, see Turrell Wiley, *The Geography of Tibet According to the 'Dzam gling rgyal bshad*, Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 25 (Rome: Istituto Italiano Per il Medio ed Esremo Oriente, 1962), 71, 121, 140 and 141.

²²⁴ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 213.2-231.3. There is no reference for Nyug mda' in Wylie (1962).

²²⁵ The *Sog bzlog lo rgyus* designates this figure as Bong mkhar nas, or Bang mkhar nas throughout. However, given that Bong/Bang mkhar is unattested as a toponym, I have corrected it to Bod mkhar, a name echoed in the title of the famous Sa skya master Bod mkhar ba Maitri don grub rgyal mtshan (1527-1587).

²²⁶ Ibid: 231.3.

²²⁷ Ibid: 231.3.

²²⁸ This refers to the tradition of ending a series of rites with a long-life ritual, in the form of either a long-life initiation (*tshé dbang*) or a long-life summoning (*tshé 'gugs*), because performing rites is believed to bring obstacles to the ritual officiant, or shorten his life-span.

²²⁹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 231.3-231.4.

²³⁰ Ibid: 231.4-231.5.

credit for protecting 'Bri gung, sTag lung, Shangs,²³¹ 'U yug, and other areas should go to 'Bri gung zhabs drung,²³² who also performed thread-cross rites on this occasion in response to the Mongol threat.²³³ The offending Mongol troops retreated and several of their soldiers and horses died along the way.²³⁴

Sog bzlog pa initially encountered “the one from Bod mkhar” two years later, in 1589. They did not meet directly at first, but through the mediation of Sog bzlog pa’s Rin spungs pa colleagues, who had incarcerated the Bod mkhar leader for his anti-Rin spungs pa involvement in the gTsang-Rong war of 1588-1589 between the crumbling Rin spungs pa aristocracy of Rong and the rising gTsang pa sde srid polity based in bSam grub rtse.²³⁵ Sog bzlog pa narrates that through his Rin spungs pa connections he was able to offer to the Bod mkhar leader in jail petitions and prophecies that would serve as convincing evidence for their collaborative role in repelling Mongol invaders.²³⁶ It seems, moreover, that the leader’s consent to Sog bzlog pa’s proposal played a part in earning him his freedom. In 1590, the Bod mkhar leader was permitted to return to his

²³¹ Shangs refers to the river valley of the Shangs tributary of the Brahmaputra river, which runs north of the Brahmaputra and due west of the 'U yug river valley. For details see Wylie (1962), 71, 129, 135, 140, and 141.

²³² This figure was most likely 'Bri gung Zhabs drung is most likely the twentieth hierarch of 'Bri gung mthil monastery, mTshung med chos rgyal phun tshogs Bkra shis dpal bzang po (1547–1602/1626), who was very close with Sog bzlog pa’s guru Zhig po gling pa, and the father of the Sixth Zhwa dmar incarnation, Gar dbang Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630).

²³³ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 231.5-232.2.

²³⁴ *Ibid*: 232.2.

²³⁵ *Ibid*: 232.2-232.4.

²³⁶ *Ibid*: 232.3-232.4.

citadel of gLing mkhar,²³⁷ where he continued to serve as leader (*sde pa*) of 'U yug region.²³⁸ The leader then invited Sog bzlog pa to gLing mkhar to commence their Mongol repelling ritual campaign.²³⁹ 'U yug would become Sog bzlog pa's primary base of operations.

'U yug, it should be noted, already carried much older associations with border protection, sectarian protection, and the Great Perfection. 'U yug is the location where, as one tradition has it, Padmasambhava subjugated the twelve brTan ma goddesses and assigned them the responsibility of protecting Tibet's borders from foreign invasion.²⁴⁰ The Treasure history entitled *Lotus Testament (Padma bka' thang)*, moreover, mentions the site of bGe'u tsang in 'U yug as the location where Padmasambhava subdued the deity rDo rje legs pa, who would become a major protector of the Old School teachings.²⁴¹ 'U yug is also where the Old School master lCe btsun Seng ge dbang phyug reached accomplishment in the Great Perfection practices of the *Seminal Nucleus of Vimalamitra*,²⁴² concealed related precepts, and finally, at the end of his life, transformed

²³⁷ gLing mkhar was the traditional fortress stronghold, or rdzong, of the 'U yug region north of the Brahmaputra river. It is listed as one of the thirteen myriarchies (*khri skor*), or constituencies consisting of 10,000 household units. For a detailed account of the Mongol administrative division of Tibet into thirteen myriarchies, and a full list of these thirteen, see Luciano Petech (1990), 50-61, who draws on *Deb ther dmar po*, 210. gLing mkhar is not listed in Wylie (1962). In his history of Tibet, *Gangs can yul gyi sa la spyod pa'i mtho ris kyi rgyal blon gtso bor brjod pa'i deb ther rdzogs ldan gzhon nu'i dga' ston dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* (182), the Fifth Dalai Lama mentions gLing mkhar as part of sKyid smad. The section reads as follows: *gcung sde pa bkra shis rab brtan pas/ gong sar yar rgyab nas zhabs 'dren zhus skabs skyid shod kyi dpung rnams lho khar bton pa sogs sde srid kyi zhabs tog tu 'gyur bar brten/ gzhis ka brag dkar gyi rdzong dpon gnang / skyid smad rnam rgyal sgang gi sgrub mchod gling mkhar du/ sne gdong yar rgyab sogs lho rgyud kyi dpung rnams 'byor pa'i steng du/ sde pa bkra shis pa nyid kiyis 'go mdzad nas mchongs pa.*

²³⁸ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 232.4-232.5.

²³⁹ *Ibid*: 232.5.

²⁴⁰ Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1998), 177. For more on the twelve brTan ma, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 181-198.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*: 154. For more on rDo rje legs pa see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 154-159

²⁴² *Bi ma snying thig*

his body into a body of light.²⁴³ 'U yug's cultic associations with deity subjugation and border protection seem to logically connect with its strategic position bordering the region of Western Hor from where Mongols, and perhaps other northern neighbors before them, would frequently launch attacks into gTsang and dBus.

That year (1590), in light of a prophecy passage that names the iron-male-tiger year as a crucial time to repel Mongol armies, Sog bzlog pa and his new patron staged a practice and erected a cairn dedicated to White Dhṛtarāṣṭra (*yul 'khor bsung dkar po 'i sgrub pa dang mtho[=tho] 'dzugs*), then performed a seven day averting dagger rite (*phur zlog*).²⁴⁴ Sog bzlog pa reports a positive dream portent that occurred for him the night the ritual let out.²⁴⁵ Events did not unfold accordingly, however. Even while 'U yug and its northeastern neighbor Western Hor remained safe, an army of 600 Mongol soldiers led by 'Khor nyi ma rdo rje wreaked havoc in Eastern Hor.²⁴⁶

Sog bzlog pa relates that around that time he became aware of mounting skepticism among the people of Rong – the traditional stronghold of the Rin spungs pa aristocracy – the aristocracy of wider gTsang, and even Zhig po gling pa's other students concerning his Mongol-repelling activities.²⁴⁷ Much of these doubts seemed to hinge on the authenticity and proper interpretation of the prophecy texts in Sog bzlog pa's possession. In spite of such criticisms, Sog bzlog pa states, sKu mdun sMon skyid nas, a

²⁴³ Roerich, *BA*: 193.

²⁴⁴ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 232.5-232.6.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*: 232.6.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*: 233.1-233.2.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*: 233.3-233.6.

minister for the leadership of the Thob rgyal²⁴⁸ region of gTsang, extended an invitation for Sog bzlog pa to visit Gang tsang.²⁴⁹ There, Sog bzlog pa showed the minister the text of *Repelling Armies* (*dmag bzlog gi bu ti*).²⁵⁰ Duly impressed, the Thob rgyal minister sent word to rTse gdong,²⁵¹ who restored a shrine (*lha khang zhig gsos*) on the bank of the Brahmaputra River in the g.Yas ru region of gTsang.²⁵² By Sog bzlog pa's account, this act effectively ended conflict in gTsang between the gTsang pa sde srid faction and the deposed Rin spungs pa aristocracy. He notes, "Since the peace and happiness within gTsang region up to the present is due to his kindness, the benefit of that act is obvious."²⁵³

These remarks about the state of affairs between bSam grub rtse and Rong/Rin spungs seem to have been based on Sog bzlog pa's actual eyewitness observations. Sog bzlog pa reports that on the thirteenth day of the third Hor month of that year, 1590, he completed his composition of *Clarifying the Intent: How to Implement the Stages of*

²⁴⁸ Wylie (1962, 142) states, "According to our text [*'Dzam gling rgyas bshad*], it [Thob rgyal] lies in or near the Rong valley; however, the available data indicate it is an area on the north side of the Tsang-po and west of Shigatse." For more details on these findings, see Wylie (1962), 72, 142, 143. Indeed, the Thob rgyal mentioned repeatedly by Sog bzlog pa seems to refer to an area north of the Brahmaputra River in the vicinity of Shangs and 'U yug.

²⁴⁹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 233.6.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 233.6.

²⁵¹ rTse gdong is the famous monastery Sa skya monastery located in gTsang. Judging by descriptions in Kun dga' bsod nams, *Sa skya'i gdung rabs ngo mtshar bang mdzod* (Delhi: Tashi Dorji, 1975) of trips made by the rTse gdong hierarchs between there and Sa skya, the gTsang rulers' stronghold of bSam grub rtse is located between them. Thus, we have no reason to doubt that the old location of rTse gdong corresponds with its current location on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the rNam gling area of gTsang.

²⁵² *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 233.6-234.1.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*: 234.1. *ding sang gi bar bu gtsang khog bde zhing skyid pa 'di khong gi drin yin pas mngon sum tu gsal/*

Accomplishing Ambrosia at Ram pa hermitage, in the Rong area of gTsang.²⁵⁴ As indicated by the title, this text gives instructions for the concoction and ritual preparation of “medicinal ambrosia,” or *amṛta*, a substance used widely in numerous tantric rituals. The author had not yet assumed the nickname Sog bzlog pa; the colophon is signed instead “the royal physician named Blo gros” (*lha rje blo gros ming can*). Sog bzlog pa credits Śākya rab ’phel ba, the “sublime heart son of the emanation body Zhig po gling pa,” with requesting the composition of this text.

A year later, in 1591, Sog bzlog pa composed yet another text treating potent substances: *A Recipe for How to Produce a Liberation Through Eating Pill, Based on Flesh from One Born Seven Times as a Brahmin*.²⁵⁵ This text provides extensive theoretical rationales and practical instructions for the production and consumption of pills whose primary ingredient is flesh from a man born as a Brahmin (or any human) for seven consecutive lifetimes. While its colophon is silent about the place of composition, Sog bzlog pa is explicit about what moved him to pen this treatise: “It was written... as a reminder of the contents of the *samaya* substance (*dam rdzas*) that liberates through eating which I myself concocted.”²⁵⁶ After reporting the contents of the concoction and its benefits, Sog bzlog pa mentions how “in order to benefit all beings,” he took the occasion to “roll it into pills, kneading it with clean barley flour, medicine, and perfume,

²⁵⁴ *bDud rtsi sgrub pa'i rim pa lag tu blangs pa'i tshul dgongs don rab tu gsal bar byed pa*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 441.5.

²⁵⁵ *Bram ze skye bdun pa'i sha la brten pa'i myong grol ril bu ji lta bar skrun pa'i dkar chag*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 443-458. The *Catalogue (tho byang)* of the *Collected Works* refers to this text as *sKye bdun gyi phan yon ril bu'i dkar chag dang bcas pa*.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 458.3. /*myong bas grol ba'i dam rdzas rang gi bsgril ba'i dkar chag dran gsor...bris pa'o//*

[thus producing] fifteen pills.”²⁵⁷ Sog bzlog pa then briefly adds, “through perfectly accomplishing them” by means of ritual procedures with a pronounced material focus, “they increased in number, spilled over the side, fragrant smoke issued forth, and virtuous portents and auspicious dreams were witnessed.”²⁵⁸ Attributing these animations of the substance to the “ever undeceiving compassion of the Conquerors throughout the three times,” rather than to his own ritual prowess, Sog bzlog pa presents himself and his ritual treatment of the flesh concoction as active human media through which the materializations of awakened being can make their liberating impact felt within the world.²⁵⁹ In line with this distributive rationale, Sog bzlog pa deems the accomplished pills “more effective to pour in water.” Thus, instead of giving them to human beings, he “tossed three liters in the Brahmaputra, three liters in lakes, such as Ya ’brog, and so forth, and appropriate amounts in the mountain streams of different locales,” and sealed the distribution with an aspiration.²⁶⁰

That same year, based on predictions in the prophecy text entitled *Means for Reviving the Teachings*,²⁶¹ the Bod mkhar leader sponsored an elaborate effigy ritual performed by Sog bzlog pa and two of his local companions, Chos rje ’O bran pa and

²⁵⁷ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 457.5-457.5. /de phyir kun la phan slad ril bu ru/ gtsang ba’i phye dang sman dang dri bzang gi/ sbras nas gril te dril bu bco lnga’i grangs/

²⁵⁸ Ibid: 457.5-457.6. /tshul bzhin sgrubs pas mang du ’phel ba dang/ tho phyir ’phur dang dri bzang du ba ’thul/ dge ba’i bltas dang bzang ba’i rmi lam mthong/

²⁵⁹ Ibid: 457.6. /dus gsum rgyal ba rnams kyi thugs rje de/

²⁶⁰ Ibid: 455.1-455.3: *chu la blug pa don che bar go nas/ gtsang po la bre gsum tsam dang/ ya ’brog la sogs pa’i mtsho rnams su bre gsum tsam dang/ yul so so’i ’bab chu rnams la ci rigs par gtor zhing smon lam’debs blo bgyis/*

²⁶¹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 234.2-235.5. *bsTan pa gso thabs*. This was one of the prophecy texts that Zhig po gling pa conferred upon Sog bzlog pa on the eve of their last meeting.

rDza ra ba.²⁶² By Sog bzlog pa's estimation, the rite involved the printing of 100,000 human effigies (*mi'i ling+ga*) and 10,000 horses on forty-five bundles of paper.²⁶³ As fortune would have it, claims Sog bzlog pa, a roster (*ming byang*) of Mongol kings and ministers fell into his hands.²⁶⁴ This enabled the small group to produce effigies of all the soldiers and horses of the Mongolian six Chakhar divisions,²⁶⁵ identifying their leaders by name.²⁶⁶ Sog bzlog pa alleges that after a month of constant ritual activity, an auspicious sign emerged: an army headed by the king of the three Thümed divisions, which had been approaching the region of Western Hor on 'U yug's border for nearly a month, retreated for no apparent reason.²⁶⁷

From 'U yug, Sog bzlog pa continued in much the same vein throughout the following two years of 1592 and 1593. In 1592, he and seven unnamed colleagues printed effigies on forty-five paper booklets and commenced a month-long ritual performance to confront a division of Mongol soldiers headed by Ba yan da ra that had reached Eastern Hor.²⁶⁸ The day after the retreat, moreover, when the group performed burnt offering rites (*sbyin sreg*), “the retreat house and all the way up to the main

²⁶² Ibid: 235.6-239.6: The name rDza ra ba simply means the “one from rDza ra,” an area within 'U yug region.

²⁶³ Ibid: 235.6.

²⁶⁴ Ibid: 235.6.

²⁶⁵ The “six Chakhar divisions” is an eastern-Mongolian socio-political structure that was first established by Dayan Khan in the early sixteenth century. See Johan Elverskog, *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra: Altan Khan and the Mongols in the 16th Century* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 3-11, for a discussion of the relevant historiographical issues related to this socio-political formation.

²⁶⁶ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 235.6-239.5. This long section constitutes the Tibetan transliteration of the entire roster of names.

²⁶⁷ Ibid: 239.6.

²⁶⁸ Ibid: 239.6-240.1.

entrance inside the fortress was permeated with the stench of Mongols.”²⁶⁹ By Sog bzlog pa’s account, this olfactory sign convinced everyone present of the rite’s efficacy.²⁷⁰ On the geopolitical front, the potency of this rite was demonstrated by the failure of the Mongol army to destroy the whole of Western Hor, and more importantly for Sog bzlog pa and his colleagues, its inability to breach the border of ’U yug township despite having sacked Western Hor a total of seven times during those two years.²⁷¹

By Sog bzlog pa’s account, during the ensuing five years or so Mongol groups suffered a series of setbacks that interfered with their abilities to aggravate Tibet. In 1593 Mongol armies attacked Ming China.²⁷² At the hands of China’s superior war technology Mongol troops suffered tremendous losses.²⁷³ From that year until 1598, moreover, Mongol warlords were embroiled in civil war, and thus mostly unable to concern themselves with external affairs.²⁷⁴

Sog bzlog pa reports that he was also experiencing setbacks of his own during those years. In 1594, he made preparations to restore pilgrimage sites at ’Bri gung and Sog chu kha in order to fulfill the stipulations of an important prophecy.²⁷⁵ The Bod mkhar leader, however, forbade Sog bzlog pa’s departure.²⁷⁶ Instead, they packed the *Twenty-five Means to Repel Armies* together with the relevant prophecies and sent Chos

²⁶⁹ Ibid: 240.1-240.2. *sgrub khang dang rdzong gi rgya sgo yan sog po’i dri mas khyab*

²⁷⁰ Ibid: 240.2.

²⁷¹ Ibid: 240.2-240.4.

²⁷² Ibid: 241.3.

²⁷³ Ibid: 241.3-241.5.

²⁷⁴ Ibid: 242.6.

²⁷⁵ Ibid: 242.6-243.1.

²⁷⁶ Ibid: 243.1.

rje Lhun grub sdings pa²⁷⁷ to present 'Bri gung zhabs drung with a request to construct a *stūpa*.²⁷⁸ The Zhabs drung seemed pleased with the prospect, but failed to follow through.²⁷⁹ In the meantime, Sog bzlog pa fell ill and was therefore incapable of performing the physically demanding army-repelling rites.²⁸⁰ When Sog bzlog pa had sufficiently convalesced, the ritual master was haunted by bad omens during his ritual proceedings.²⁸¹ Later still, he formed the plan to commence anew the *Great Repeller of Armies* in 1595, but teaching obligations prevented him from getting started until later in the year.²⁸² This involuntary hiatus from the performance of army-repelling rites, claims Sog bzlog pa, resulted in the Mongol leader Kha dan's arrival on Tibet's doorstep. In 1595 Kha dan vanquished the rule of his younger brother Ko lo ci, sacked Western Hor, and brought the entire population of the region bordering 'U yug under his command.²⁸³

Upon returning to 'U yug from his teaching obligations in dBus later that year, Sog bzlog pa performed the army averting rite of 'Char ka, which most likely refers to the practice of Kālodāyī ('Char ka nag po), a particularly fierce form of Yamāntaka

²⁷⁷ Based on the reference to bSod sdings later in the *History*, Chos rje lhun grub sdings pa is most likely lHun sdings bsod nams chos 'phel (birth 16th c.), father of lHun sdings bDud rtsi 'gyur med (birth 16th c.), an editor of the *rgyud bzhi* and personal physician to the Jo nang master rJe rtsun Tāranātha (1575-1634). lHun sdings is the name of a village in Byang ngam ring, western gTsang, home to a famous medical college and a renowned lineage of Tibetan physicians. For more details on this location, its associated figures, and the role it has played in the history of Tibetan medicine, see Teresia Hofer, "Preliminary Investigations into the Oral and Textual Sources of Byang Lugs—The 'Northern School' of Tibetan Medicine," in *Soundings in Tibetan Medicine – Historical and Anthropological Explorations*, eds. M. Schrempf (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers), 373-410.

²⁷⁸ Ibid: 243.2.

²⁷⁹ Ibid: 243.2-243.3.

²⁸⁰ Ibid: 243.3.

²⁸¹ Ibid: 243.3-243.4.

²⁸² Ibid: 243.4-243.5.

²⁸³ Ibid: 243.5-243.6.

propitiated specifically for exorcism rites.²⁸⁴ The effects of this rite, alleges Sog bzlog pa, were nearly instantaneous: Kha tan returned to Mongolia for a short time, was forced into a relationship of joint-stewardship over Western Hor, then lost eighty soldiers to severe altitude sickness there.²⁸⁵

1595 turned out to be a productive year for Sog bzlog pa on the literary front as well. On the tenth day of the sixth Hor month, once again at the mountain retreat of Rong, Sog bzlog pa completed his composition of *Roiling Lake of the Ambrosia of Definitive Meaning: A Text Teaching the Self-liberated Mind of Awakening*.²⁸⁶ As Sog bzlog pa records in the colophon, he wrote this Great Perfection text as a memorandum for himself, and especially at the urgent prompting of the spiritual friend Kaḥ thog Lama Śākya bzang po.²⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Sog bzlog continued to focus violent rites on the Mongol warlord Kha tan, but signs of his death were slow to emerge.²⁸⁸ Finally, Sog bzlog pa had a gruesome dream, in which Kha tan reached Tibet on a platform formed from stacks of Mongols bound together with serpents, and then receded.²⁸⁹ An unknown man suddenly appeared and hurled twelve goat heads and one sheep head in front of Sog bzlog pa and spoke of coming dangers, assuring him that all would be well. The dream ended with the

²⁸⁴ See, for instance, the title *gShin rje zlog byed 'char ka nag po rtsa ba'i rgyud*, *The Fundamental Tantra of Kālodāyī, the Exorcising form of Yamāntaka*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, mTshams brag edition, vol. 26 (1a) (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 724.1-749.3.

²⁸⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 243.6-244.1.

²⁸⁶ *Byang chub kyi sems rang grol du bkri ba'i yi ge nges don bdud rtsi'i rol mtsho*, in *Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan gsung thor bu* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Dzongsar Khyentse Labrang, Palace Monastery, 1985), 96.4-97.3.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 244.1-244.2.

²⁸⁹ Ibid: 244.2-244.6.

man handing Sog bzlog pa the sheep head. While cryptic at the time, confides Sog bzlog pa, he later understood this dream as a sign that Kha tan would die the next Sheep year.²⁹⁰

The following year, in 1596, Sog bzlog pa once again initiated the *Great Repeller of Mongols* (*sog bzlog chen mo*), thus ensuring, by his account, that a Mongol invasion of Byang ngam ring in northwestern gTsang left no casualties.²⁹¹ In 1597, however, “Māra got the upper hand and our own merit diminished” as Sog bzlog pa puts it, when his principal patron the Bod mkhar leader passed away.²⁹² Suspicion fell on Sog bzlog pa, he recalls, as vicious rumors began to circulate that he had murdered the leader by poisoning and was deceiving the fortress.²⁹³ Despite his own best efforts to allay such charges, and the Hor leader A chos’s unflagging support, Sog bzlog pa alleges that many Hor and Tibetans were plotting to murder him in retaliation.²⁹⁴ Sog bzlog pa therefore fled to nearby Zab bu lung for a while to restore statues of the Buddhas of the five families and the guardian king Dhṛtarāṣṭra presiding over the east.²⁹⁵ Sog bzlog pa claims that he also built an enclosure to protect the statues from rain, and then conducted burial rites (*mnan pa*) there.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Ibid: 246.6.

²⁹¹ Ibid: 245.3.

²⁹² Ibid: 245.3-245.4. *bdud kha rgyal dang/ rang bsod nams dman pa*

²⁹³ Ibid: 245.4.

²⁹⁴ Ibid: 245.4-245.6.

²⁹⁵ Ibid: 246.1-246.2.

²⁹⁶ Ibid: 246.2.

Of course, alleges Sog bzlog pa, these actions were prescribed in prophecies to help quell the Mongol threat.²⁹⁷ And sure enough, Sog bzlog pa adds, a Mongol attack on Western Hor led by the general Chu khur failed, leaving two Mongols dead.²⁹⁸ However, most of the Mongol soldiers, including Chu khur himself escaped.²⁹⁹ Sog bzlog pa blames this partial failure on his inability to follow an important step in the relevant prophecy text: Sog bzlog pa had not procured the skull of a fallen Mongol in which to place the effigies during the burial rite.³⁰⁰ This admission indicates how important material ritual protocol was for Sog bzlog pa in ensuring the efficacy of his rites.

When the memorial service for the Bod mkhar leader approached in 1598, Sog bzlog pa was exiled from 'U yug on charges of murder.³⁰¹ It seems that Sog bzlog pa took that opportunity to withdraw from public life for a spell. During the final months of 1598, Sog bzlog pa did a dark retreat (*mun 'tshams*) at dGe 'khor lhun grub rab brtan with fourteen masters and students from the area.³⁰² The group practiced the *Single Golden-Black Syllable, from the Great Perfection Yang ti Tradition*, which Sog bzlog pa had

²⁹⁷ Ibid: 245.6-246.1.

²⁹⁸ Ibid: 246.2.

²⁹⁹ Ibid: 246.2.

³⁰⁰ Ibid: 246.3.

³⁰¹ Ibid: 246.3-246.4.

³⁰² *rDzun bris zog gi yang zhun*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 508.1. The text gives *sa pho khyi lo* (1598), not *sa pho byi lo* (1588), as stated in the "Introduction," in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975).

received from his Mon master Yong 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa.³⁰³ During the dark retreat, on the fifth day of the eleventh Hor month, Sog bzlog pa had an elaborate visionary dream, which he wrote down for posterity and entitled *Delusion's Dwindling: A Refinement of Falsehood*.³⁰⁴

During the early months of 1599, moreover, Sog bzlog pa took time out to compose *A Biography and Brief Summary of the Incarnation Line of the Great Perfection Master, Incarnation Zhig po gling pa Gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal*.³⁰⁵ This text, which was completed at the sacred pilgrimage place of sNgo leb mar dag pa on the tenth day of the third Hor month, was commissioned by none other than the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud hierarch of Rwa lung monastery, Zhabs drung rin po che dpal Mi pham ngag gi dbang po chos rgyal bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (1543-1604), the son-in-law and close student of Zhig po gling pa.³⁰⁶ Furthermore, the text was transcribed and edited by the scribe Nor bu dpal bzang po from dGe 'khor.³⁰⁷ The scribe's affiliation with dGe 'khor, where Sog bzlog pa performed his dark retreat a few months prior, perhaps indicates that the pilgrimage site of sNgo leb mar dag pa was nearby. Sog bzlog pa gives his name in the colophon as "the healer of gDong dkar called 'Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po,' otherwise known as 'Sog bzlog pa.'" This marks the first recorded instance in which the

³⁰³ Ibid: 508.2-508.3. Sog bzlog pa's place in the guru lineage of this teaching is apparent in Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *rDzogs pa chen po yang tig nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig pa'i bla ma brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 91 (ha) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980), 95.4-.5.

³⁰⁴ *rDzun bris zog gi yang zhun*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 507-512.

³⁰⁵ *rDzogs chen pa sprul sku zhig po gling pa gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal gyi skyes rabs rags bsdus dang rnam thar*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 9-109. Above and henceforth, I refer to this text as *Zhig gling rnam thar*.

³⁰⁶ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 109.2-109.5.

³⁰⁷ Ibid: 109.5-109.6.

author refers to himself with the nickname Sog bzlog pa, “Repeller of Mongols.” This indicates, above all, how intertwined Sog bzlog pa’s identity as a repeller of Mongol armies was with the public persona and revelations of his master, Zhig po gling pa.

Later that year Sog bzlog pa reentered the public sphere with a bang as his fortune improved dramatically. In 1599, upon the death of the first gTsang pa sde srid Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje, his son Karma bstan srung dbang po took possession of ’U yug’s gLing mkhar fortress.³⁰⁸ Through the intervention of Sog bzlog pa’s student and associate, sKu mdun sMon skyid nas, the minister of Thob rgyal who had previously commissioned facets of Sog bzlog pa’s Mongol-repelling project, the new gTsang pa sde srid granted Sog bzlog pa a monastery and estate to perform his Mongol averting rites annually as part of the ritual calendar of the expanding gTsang pa sde srid state.³⁰⁹

Nonetheless, Sog bzlog pa reports, malicious slander that he was employing spells and poisoning leaders continued to spread, thus interfering with his plans to construct *stūpas* and install circular protective diagrams (*’khor lo*)³¹⁰ at the upper end of each and every minor valley in the region.³¹¹ Despite such setbacks, however, Sog bzlog pa’s fortuitous meeting with the gTsang pa sde srid enabled him to begin performing the

³⁰⁸ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 246.4.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*: 246.4-246.6.

³¹⁰ This term, which translates the Sanskrit word *cakra* (“circle,” or “wheel”) and can refer also to *yantra* and *maṇḍala*, broadly denotes circular diagrams that incorporate *mantra* and imagery and are believed to have a wide range of pragmatic and soteriological functions. Sog bzlog pa’s participation in a debate over the efficacy of such objects to “liberate through wearing” will be discussed in Chapter Three of the present study. For a detailed catalogue of these items as they are used and worn by Tibetans to address pragmatic concerns, including reproductions of their diagrams and speech formulas, see Tadeusz Skorupski, *Tibetan Amulets* (Bangkok: White Orchid Books, 1983). For more on such “circles” and their historical relationships with *yantra* and *maṇḍala* in the broader pan-Indian context, see Gudrun Bühnemann, “Maṇḍala, Yantra and Cakra: Some Observations, in *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*, eds. Gudrun Bühnemann et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1-56.

³¹¹ *Ibid*: 246.6-247.1

“seven day accomplishment rite in connection with the *maṇḍala* for accomplishing Vajrakīla, annually without interruption, in observation of the annual ritual calendar of the territory as a whole.”³¹² Tibet was therefore calm during the years of 1598 and 1599: Sog bzlog pa’s preventative ritual measures, he claims, had fulfilled the prophecy, “In the Earth Pig and Dog years, they will return to their own land.”³¹³

During the two ensuing years of 1600 and 1601, attests Sog bzlog pa, the ritual power of Sog bzlog pa and the military might of the gTsang pa sde srid worked in tandem to prevent the Mongol ruler Kha tan, greedy for Tibetan land and resources, from breaching Western Hor into ’U yug and ravaging gTsang and dBus.³¹⁴ The gTsang pa sde srid, moreover, was eventually successful in driving Kha tan’s army from the Zhwa dmar hierarch’s seat of Yangs pa can.³¹⁵ Later, in 1601, Sog bzlog used his new political influence and prestige to enlist the young Sixth Zhwa dmar rin po che, Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug (1584-1630), to implore the leaders of the Nag tshang³¹⁶ semi-pastoral communities north of ’U yug to restore *stūpas* and temples there believed capable of repelling the Mongol threat.³¹⁷ This act, writes Sog bzlog pa, earned him and the Zhwa

³¹² Ibid: 247.1-247.2: *phag lo de nas bzung ste/ rgyal khams spyi ’i lo rim la dmigs pa ’i phur sgrub dkyil ’khor dang ’brel ba ’i sgrub pa zhag bdun ma re ma chag pa byas/*

³¹³ Ibid: 247.2. *sa khyi phag la rang yul ’gro/ /zhes pa ltar lo de gnyis la ’jam pa byung/*

³¹⁴ Ibid: 247.2-248.2.

³¹⁵ Ibid: 248.2-248.3. Yang pa can was the seat of the Zhwa dmar incarnations north of Lhasa which was constructed by the Rin spungs leader Don yod rdo rje in 1503/1505 on behalf of the Fourth Zhwa dmar incarnation Chos grags ye shes (1453-1524). For more details on the construction of Yangs pa can, see Alfonsa Ferrari, *mK ’yen brtse’s Guide to the Holy Places of Central Tibet*. Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 14 (Rome: Istituto Italiano Per il Medio ed Esremo Oriente, 1958), 160-161.

³¹⁶ Nag tshang is known as one of the “Four Communities of Northern Tribes” (*byang rigs sde bzhi*) situated north of dBus gTsang, and specifically, the region due north of ’U yug and Shangs in northern gTsang. For details on this region see Wiley (1962), 88 and 166.

³¹⁷ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 248.4-249.2.

dmar the praise of the Ninth Karmapa dBang phyug rdo rje (1556-1603), who promised to contribute funds toward the Mongol-repelling campaign.³¹⁸ However, the Karmapa died, Sog bzlog pa laments, before his wish could come to fruition.³¹⁹

Throughout these years Sog bzlog pa busily applied himself to Mongol army-averting rites. By his own account, between the years of 1601 and 1603 he personally accomplished a little over 100,000 recitations of *The Heart of Wisdom, Averter of Demons*.³²⁰ During the years of 1602 and 1603, moreover, Sog bzlog pa recited aloud all of the more than 200 volumes of scripture present at Gos sngon temple; and performed the thread-cross rite (*mdos*) of *White Umbrella (gdugs dkar)*, the thread-cross rite of the *Seventy Excellent Protectors (legs ldan mgon po bdun cu)*, the thread-cross rite of the *Net of 1,000 Gods and Demons (lha 'dre stong gi dra ba)*, and other object-oriented rites.³²¹ Such actions, Sog bzlog pa claims, were responsible for Tibet's security during those years.³²² Late in 1602, during the tenth Hor month, Sog bzlog pa also finished his composition, *Clarifying the Intention of the Tantra Class: A Presentation of Burnt Offering Rites According to the General Secret Mantra*.³²³ Sog bzlog pa produced this text, he claims, "at the behest of many with interest, and explicitly at the behest of those exalted by the glory of many [prestigious] patrilineal and matrilineal ancestors, and who

³¹⁸ Ibid: 249.3-249.5.

³¹⁹ Ibid: 249.5.

³²⁰ Ibid: 249.3. *Shes snying bdud bzlog*. This is a liturgy of protection based on the Heart Sūtra. For more on this ritual type, see Donald Lopez (1996 and 1997).

³²¹ Ibid: 249.5-249.6.

³²² Ibid: 249.6.

³²³ *gSang sngags spyi'i sbyin bsregs kyi rnam bzhag rgyud sde'i dgongs don gsal* (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1984).

have undivided faith in the Vajrayāna teachings.”³²⁴ Given Sog bzlog pa’s repeated performance of burnt offering rites as part of his Mongol-averting campaign, we can imagine that he became regarded as something of an expert on the topic among his peers.

In 1603, Sog bzlog pa’s luck would take a turn for the worse. During the beginning of the year, Sog bzlog pa became the main suspect in the recent poisonings of rJe drung Brag nag pa and A ce tse mo.³²⁵ These allegations, Sog bzlog pa remarks, were followed shortly by the sudden death of the Ninth Karmapa dBang phyug rdo rje and the enthronement at ’Bras spungs of the Fourth Dalai Lama Yon tan rgya mtsho, a direct descendent of the Tümed ruler Altan Khan, and therefore scion of the Mongol ruling family.³²⁶ This confluence of bad omens, reflects Sog bzlog pa, caused him to reassess his ability to confront the Mongol threat.³²⁷ Thus, despite the arrival of a Mongol contingent in 1603, Sog bzlog’s discouragement led to dispondance and he spent much of the next two years on hiatus from Mongol-repelling rites.³²⁸

At the end of 1604, Sog bzlog pa was startled from his idleness when a certain Chos rje sku skye arrived from Lho brag gu ru temple to receive from him the initiation and scriptural transmission for the *Repeller of Armies (dmag bzlog)*.³²⁹ The Chos rje’s plan was to construct a temple at Sog chu kha that might help fortify the zone against

³²⁴ *Byin sreg rnam bzhag*: 135.3. *don gnyer can du mas bskul ba dang/ slad du rigs rus cho ’brang du ma’i dpal gyis mngon par mtho zhing rdo rje theg pa’i bstan pa la mi phyed pa’i dad pa mdzad pa dag gi bkas bskul ba’i...*

³²⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 249.6-250.1.

³²⁶ *Ibid*: 250.6-251.2.

³²⁷ *Ibid*: 251.1 and 251.3.

³²⁸ *Ibid*: 251.3.

³²⁹ *Ibid*: 251.4.

Mongol intrusions.³³⁰ While reciting the scriptural transmission, Sog bzlog pa noticed to his surprise that the text prescribed the construction of thirteen *stūpas* during the Dragon year of 1604 at geomantically significant locations.³³¹ Sog bzlog pa thus plunged himself with renewed vigor into the Mongol-averting project, although he was only able to begin the preparations for the *stūpas* in 1605, a year later than stipulated.³³² This one-year delay, opines Sog bzlog pa, accounted for the appearance in 1604 of Mongol armies in Tibet.³³³ The *stūpas* were not completed until 1607.³³⁴

In the meantime, Sog bzlog pa once again resumed his large-scale Mongol-averting rites. In 1605, when he was directing a mass effigy rite, the group ran out of paper.³³⁵ The timing of their shortage, reflects Sog bzlog pa, corresponded with the gTsang pa sde srid army's march on dBus.³³⁶ Having just captured the fortress of sPa rnams lhun grub rtse during his movement east toward Lhasa, the gTsang pa sde srid invited Sog bzlog pa and his colleagues to stage their rites at sPa rnams citadel, where they were promised a steady supply of paper for printing effigies.³³⁷ Once at sPa rnams,

³³⁰ Ibid: 251.4.

³³¹ Ibid: 251.4-252.1.

³³² Ibid: 251.1-252.2.

³³³ Ibid: 252.2-252.4

³³⁴ Ibid: 252.2.

³³⁵ Ibid: 252.4.

³³⁶ Ibid: 252.4. This episode happened one or two years after the son of Zhing shag pa Karma Tshe brtan rdo rje, gTsang pa sde srid Karma bstan srung dbang po's seizure of sPa rnams in 1605 during the gTsang ruler's march toward Lhasa in Dbus to expel Mongol armies and consolidate the Tibetan territories east of gZhis ka rtse. For a timeline that includes this event in the context of other major developments of the period, see Benjamin E. Bogin, *The Life of Yol mo Bstan 'dzin nor bu: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Study of the Memoirs of a Seventeenth-Century Tibetan Buddhist Lama* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005): ix. See also E. Gene Smith's entry (www.tbrc.org) for sde srid gTsang pa Ka.rma bstan srung dbang po.

the group of ritualists were able to print about 150,000 effigies.³³⁸ In the course of the ensuing nine day accomplishment rite (*sgrub pa*), several signs (*rtags mtshan*) of accomplishment of the violent, object-oriented ritual occurred for everyone present.³³⁹ Following an important prophecy text, the group also had Bon po religious specialists hurl magical weapons (*zor*).³⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Sog bzlog pa himself performed a burnt offering and a burial rite.³⁴¹ The skull of a Mongol fortuitously appeared as a vessel for the burial rite, thus indicating “auspicious circumstances” (*rten ’brel bzang*) for efficacy.³⁴² Sog bzlog pa recalls how in hindsight he understood that these rites corresponded with the gTsang pa sde srid’s defeat of Mongol armies in Ra ma sgang, and their subsequent retreat from rGyang thang sgang.³⁴³ On this occasion, he is careful to share credit for these geopolitical outcomes with the gTsang pa sde srid’s military might. The positive signs of efficacy, Sog bzlog states, seemed to have sprung from “the auspicious circumstance that the Ruler’s authority was expanding,”³⁴⁴ while the defeat of Mongol armies was from the “expansion of the Ruler’s command, which was due to his own exalted merit.”³⁴⁵

³³⁷ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 252.4-252.5.

³³⁸ *Ibid*: 252.5.

³³⁹ *Ibid*: 252.5.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*: 252.6-253.1.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*: 253.1.

³⁴² *Ibid*: 253.1.

³⁴³ *Ibid*: 253.1.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 252.5-252.6. *sde srid mtshan don rgyug pa’i rten ’brel gyis...*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*: 253.2-.3: */sde srid sku bsod mngon par mtho bas mtshan lung rgyug pa...*

That same year (1605), on the first day of the seventh month, Sog bzlog pa completed his most voluminous composition, *Thunder of Definitive Meaning: An Eloquent Apologetic against Objections to the Sublime Secret Mantra Teachings of the Early Translation School*,³⁴⁶ at the monastery of Chu mig ser po, otherwise known as the temple of Chu ser dpal gyi sde tshan, the abbatial seat of mKhan chen thams cad mkhyen pa Sangs rgyas bzang po.³⁴⁷ Sog bzlog pa recounts in the lengthy colophon of this text that it was due to the positive reception among peers of his first apology, *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning*,³⁴⁸ that Sa chen po chos kyi skyong ba'i khri dpon Nor bu padma rgyal po later requested him to compose this inclusive response to all the other criticisms that had been leveled against the Old School up to Sog bzlog pa's time.³⁴⁹ This comprehensive defense of Old School practices and theories consequently enshrined Sog bzlog pa in the annals of Tibetan literary history as the greatest apologist of his frequently criticized Old School tradition.

The following year, 1606, Sog bzlog pa composed his second longest text, the eloquent biography of Master Padmasambhava entitled *Dispelling Mental Darkness: The Life Story of the Master, the Second Buddha*,³⁵⁰ at Phun tshogs 'dod rgu'i bkod pa rnam

³⁴⁶ *Dam pa'i chos gsang sngags snga 'gyur la rtsod pa spong ba legs bshad nges pa don kyi 'brug sgra*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 261-601. I refer to this text as *Thunder of the Definitive Meaning (Nges don 'brug sgra)* throughout this thesis.

³⁴⁷ *Nge don 'brug sgra*: 599.4-601.3.

³⁴⁸ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*. This is Sog bzlog pa's response to objections to Old School practices and texts allegedly composed by the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje. This will form the subject matter of Chapter Three of this thesis.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *sLob dpon chen po sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i rnam thar yid kyi mun sel*, Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series, vol. 108 (Rewalsar, Distt. Mandi, H.P., India: Zigar Drugpa Kargyud Institute, 1985).

bkra ba temple, on the slope of bZang chags pa mountain.³⁵¹ Sog bzlog pa includes in this biography an episode in which the master of Oḍiyāna directs the performance of skull effigy rites on behalf of the Tibetan Empire to quell foreign aggression.³⁵² The rites bare a striking resemblance to Sog bzlog pa’s own skull effigy rites performed the previous year. This and other vinettes from *Dispelling Mental Darkness* thus take on the meaning of charter myths seemingly intended in part to lend legitimacy and authority to Sog bzlog pa’s army-averting ritual program.³⁵³

Sog bzlog pa followed up in 1607 with his composition of *A Midlength Generation and Completion Stage Liturgy for ‘Assembly of the Tathāgatas of the Eight Pronouncements,*³⁵⁴ which he finished on the sixteenth day of the first Hor month. Sog bzlog pa notes that he based his liturgy of this famous Old School cycle on Zhig po gling pa’s “extremely lengthy version” (*shin tu rgyas pa*), abridging his master’s work out of concern that it might be too difficult for himself and others to properly implement. Aside from these notes in the colophon, he refrains from offering any further details concerning the location or other circumstances surrounding this composition.³⁵⁵

That Sog bzlog pa’s most productive period of literary composition occurred so soon after his acquisition of an “endless supply of paper” in sPa rnam suggests that the

³⁵¹ *Yid kyi mun sel*: 164.

³⁵² *Yid kyi mun sel* (Berkeley: Dharma Publications, 2004): 652-656.

³⁵³ Sog bzlog pa appears to rely for this account upon older Treasure narratives, namely, Sangs rgyas gling pa, *bKa’ thang gser phreng* (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1985), 203-211; and Pad+ma gling pa, *bKa’ thang mun sel sgron ma* (Thimphu: Bhutan, 1981), 236-242.

³⁵⁴ *bKa’ brgyad dbe gshegs ’dus pa’i las byang bskyed rdzogs ’bring po*, in *bKa’ brgyad bde gshegs ’dus pa’i chos skor*, comp. and ed. by Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, vol. gu (Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup, 1979-1980), 337-410.

³⁵⁵ Sog bzlog pa is also attributed authorship for an abridged initiation ritual for this cycle, although only “one with the name Blo gros” (*blo gros ming can*) appears in the colophon. This text is *dBang chog bsdus pa*, in *Bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ’dus pa’i chos skor*, vol. 9 (ta) (Paro: Ngodrup, 1979-1980), 251-287.

paper rolls may have served for more than effigy rites alone. Nonetheless, paper shortages would continue to plague Sog bzlog pa and his Mongol-repelling colleagues for the next few years. In 1608, Sog bzlog pa reports, he and eighteen colleagues applied themselves in prophesied Mongol-repelling effigy practices, even though his patron sKu mdun sMon skyid pa could only equip the group with enough paper for more than 100,000 human effigies and 5,000 horse effigies.³⁵⁶ In spite of the dearth of paper, recalls Sog bzlog pa, “signs occurred exactly according to the Treasure text” and a massive Mongol army that had reached ’U yug unexpectedly retreated before it could inflict much damage.³⁵⁷

In accordance with a prophecy, Sog bzlog pa was planning to execute more effigy rites during the first and twelfth Hor months of the following year, 1609.³⁵⁸ The rites required 100 additional packets of paper, but only ten were forthcoming from a sponsor in mThong smon.³⁵⁹ However, Zhabs drung dPon sa rin po che stepped in to secure all the necessary paper from Thob rgyal, thus enabling Sog bzlog pa and twenty others to perform effigy rites for three seven-day intervals.³⁶⁰ Sog bzlog pa states that since the group of ritual specialists was so fervent and energetic, they finished in fourteen days, amidst the appearance of signs of success as described in the ritual text.³⁶¹ The group then immediately commenced burial rites, burnt offerings rites, and hurled magical

³⁵⁶ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 253.3-253.4.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 253.4-253.6. *rtags mtshan yig cha nang bzhin byung/*

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 253.6.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*: 253.6.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*: 254.1.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*: 254.2.

weapons rites (*mnan sreg 'phang gsum*).³⁶² The rituals were so potent, recalls Sog bzlog pa, he believed them capable of also quelling the conflicts prophesied for the following year.³⁶³

1609 was also the year that Sog bzlog pa composed his history of Vajrakīla lineages in India and Tibet entitled *Waves of an Awesome Ocean: The History of Glorious Vajrakīla*.³⁶⁴ While recounting the various lineage histories up to his own time, Sog bzlog pa mentions Bla chen chos kyi rgyal po and Bla ma dam pa rdo rje seng ge as the masters who initiated and instructed him in the Vajrakīla ritual traditions.³⁶⁵ Sog bzlog pa completed this text in the middle of the first Hor month and refers to himself in the colophon with his “secret” Vajrakīla initiation name Nam mkhar spyod pa.³⁶⁶

It seems that for Sog bzlog pa the year 1610 marked the end of the prophecies that prescribed his Mongol army-repelling campaign. He does not perform Mongol-repelling rites until four years later, in 1614, and then only in response to reports of an attack on northern 'U yug.³⁶⁷ On this occasion, recalls Sog bzlog pa, he and sixteen colleagues immersed themselves in “accomplishment” (*sgrub pa*), producing a sign of success after only seven days.³⁶⁸ This “sign” corresponded, alleges Sog bzlog pa, to heavy snowfall

³⁶² Ibid: 254.2.

³⁶³ Ibid: 254.2-254.3.

³⁶⁴ *dPal rdo rje phur ba'i lo rgyus chos kyi 'byung gnas ngo mtshar rgya mtsho'i rba rlabs*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 111-201.

³⁶⁵ *Phur ba'i lo rgyus*: 144.2, 156.1, 158.4, 160.1, and 168.1.

³⁶⁶ *Phur ba'i lo rgyus*: 201.4-201.5.

³⁶⁷ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 254.3-254.4.

³⁶⁸ Ibid: 254.4.

and strong winds that buried the advancing Mongol army under massive snowdrifts.³⁶⁹ This constitutes the final episode in Sog bzlog pa's memoir, the *History of How the Mongols were Turned Back*, thus placing its date of composition some time between 1614 and 1624, the year of Sog bzlog pa's death.

It seems that Sog bzlog pa continued to maintain a close relationship with the gTsang pa sde srid government until the end of his ritual campaign. About two years earlier, on the first day of the seventh Hor month of 1612, Sog bzlog pa composed his short apologetic treatise entitled *Abandoning Objections to "Buddhahood Without Meditation": A Response to Lama Gojo's Query*³⁷⁰ at bSam grub rtse palace, headquarters of gTsang pa sde srid rule.³⁷¹ It appears that 1612, moreover, marked the year when the gTsang pa sde srid Karma phun tshogs rnam rgyal, who assumed the throne after bsTan srung dbang po's death in 1611, conquered La stod byang in far western gTsang, and 'Phan po, gZhis ka sne'u and other lands in dBus, thus briefly consolidating rule over all of Tibet.³⁷²

While little is known about Sog bzlog pa's public life during his elderly years, he continued to be productive as a writer. On the third day of the second Hor month of 1612, for instance, Sog bzlog pa composed *An Exceedingly Profound Guru Yoga*.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ Ibid: 254.4-254.5.

³⁷⁰ *Bla ma go 'jo'i zhu lan ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 191-212.

³⁷¹ Ibid: 212.1.

³⁷² Benjamin Bogin (2005): ix.

³⁷³ *Bla ma'i rnal 'byor shin tu zab pa*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 459-476.

Four years later, in 1616,³⁷⁴ Sog bzlog pa completed the composition of *The Illuminating Crystal Mirror: Practical Directions for Conferring the Initiation of the ‘Sūtra of the Fusion,’ the Chief Sublime Teaching of the Scriptural Anuyoga [tantra class]*.³⁷⁵ There, Sog bzlog pa lists rJe btsun g.Yu drug rdo rje as the master who initiated him into this complex ritual system.³⁷⁶ Finally, three years later in 1619, when Sog bzlog pa was sixty-eight years old, he composed *The Divisions and Internal Framework of the Eleven Vehicles*.³⁷⁷ There, Sog bzlog pa calls himself, “the ban sde of lDong, Sog bzlog pa.”³⁷⁸ None of the colophons of these three texts mentions a place of composition, or any other details regarding his movements or associations during those years.

Later, third person biographies state that in the latter portion of his life³⁷⁹ Sog bzlog pa retired somewhat from public life to the hermitage of sKyid sbug in lower Nyang, gTsang, where he preached, performed rituals, composed texts, and sponsored publications for the remainder of his years.³⁸⁰ Sog bzlog pa passed away sometime after his 73rd birthday, in the wood rat year of 1624, a date attested to, maintains Lo chen

³⁷⁴ In the colophon of this text, Sog bzlog pa gives the date of composition as the Fire-Male-Dragon year (*me pho 'bru gi gi lo*), “871 years after Padmasambhava left Tibet to subdue the *rākṣāsas*.” By Sog bzlog pa’s account then Padmasambhava’s fateful departure from Tibet took place in 745.

³⁷⁵ *Dam pa’i chos lung a nu yo ga gtso bor ston pa ‘dus pa mdo’i dbang bskur ba’i bca’ thabs lag len rab tu gsal ba shel gyi me long*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (New Delhi: Sanje Dorji), 311-383. Below I refer to this text as *Shel gyi me long*. For more details on the controversial role of Sog bzlog pa in the transmission of this important Old School ritual system, see Jacob Dalton, *The Uses of the Dgongs pa ‘dus pa’i mdo in the Development of the Rnying-ma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (PhD. Diss., University of Michigan, 2002).

³⁷⁶ *Shel gyi me long*: 380.5.

³⁷⁷ *Theg pa bcu gcig gi rnam dbye khog 'bub dang bcas pa*, in *Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan gsung thor bu* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Dzongsar Khyentse Labrang, Palace Monastery, 1985), 107-158.

³⁷⁸ *Theg pa bcu gcig gi rnam dbye*: 156.3-156.4.

³⁷⁹ Dorje and Kapstein here mistranslate *sku tshe’i smad* as “early part of his life” rather than “latter part of his life:” p. 722.

³⁸⁰ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 130.1-130.4, *Nor bu do shal*: 297.2.

Dharmaśrī, in the colophon of Sog bzlog pa's text *'Chi ba brtags bslu'i yi ge* composed that year.³⁸¹ Unfortunately, this text is no longer extant for verification, neither are there any details about the circumstances surrounding Sog bzlog pa's death. All that remains is a prayer for Sog bzlog pa's swift rebirth in the form of a supplication addressed to him and his previous incarnations.³⁸² Author, place of composition, and other concrete details are absent from this short piece.

II. A Literature of Precedent, Protection, and Perfection:

The Writings of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan

The intellectual contours of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan's persona can be discerned foremost through his writings, a corpus of nearly one hundred texts, the majority of which have slipped into obscurity due to the suppression of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the subsequent vagaries of time. Nonetheless, thanks in large part to the late Venerable bDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, who collected many of Sog bzlog pa's texts, and the subsequent efforts of E. Gene Smith, the Bla brang of Dzong gsar mKhyen brtse Rinpoche, and many others, several of Sog bzlog pa's most renowned compositions have been recovered and exist today in published format. Despite sporadic references to him and his texts in the writings of other renowned Tibetan scholars since,³⁸³ it seems that Sog bzlog pa's collected writings and ritual traditions have survived primarily in the Tibetan cultural regions of Bhutan, and especially Sikkim, where copies of his collected

³⁸¹ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 130.4-.5.

³⁸² *mKhas grub blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i skyes rabs rnam par thar pa'i gsol 'debs* (AT 125/4: Ramshapath, National Archives of Nepal).

³⁸³ I address the topic of Sog bzlog pa's posthumous legacy in Chapter Four of this thesis.

works are kept, rituals composed by him are still practiced annually, and his treatises form objects of study by the few but committed ecclesiastical authorities invested with preserving Sikkim's rich religious heritage. There thus exists the distinct possibility that some of Sog bzlog pa's lost writings are yet to be rediscovered in the monastic libraries scattered across those Tibetan cultural frontier regions, including northern Nepal.³⁸⁴

Currently, the bulk of Sog bzlog pa's writings, twenty-five works to be precise (or eighteen, if one combines, as Sanji Dorji does, the parts of *Nges don 'brug sgra* into one text³⁸⁵), appears in the *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan* (*Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum*), a reproduction of a unique but incomplete manuscript from the library of the late Venerable bDud 'joms rin po che, which was published in 1975 by Sanji Dorji in New Delhi. Additional works appear in the short collection, *Several Hitherto Undiscovered Writings of the Rñiñ-ma Master Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, published in 1985 by the Dzongsar Khyentse Labrang, Palace Monastery, in Gangtok, Sikkim, India. Despite the title of this collection, only four of its five compositions are absent from the *Collected Writings*. Sog bzlog pa's

³⁸⁴ Recent fieldwork trips to Sikkim, Bhutan, and Kathmandu, Nepal have yielded a number of Sog bzlog pa's works. While none of these compositions are those missing from the *Collected Works*, the discovery of other versions of Sog bzlog pa's texts offers some hope of future discoveries in those regions. I had the particularly good fortune of photographing the pages of a collected volume of Sog bzlog pa's writings held at the library of rNam rgyal yang rtse monastery in Western Sikkim. This appears to be a hand-written copy based upon the same texts, now missing, that served as the basis for the published bDud 'joms rin po che edition. As an indication of the scribal infelicities that riddle this set of texts, the opening page is designated *rJe 'dren mchog dam pa skad gnyis smra ba mkhas grub blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum gyi tho byang bzhugs so*. This title combines the name of Sog bzlog pa, mKhas grub Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, with a well-known designation for his student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, sKad gnyis smra ba (speaker of two languages, i.e., translator). Since Sog bzlog pa was not known as a translator, sKad gnyis smra ba is unattested elsewhere as a descriptor for Sog bzlog pa.

³⁸⁵ I subtract from the publisher's list of nineteen works the following item: *Da. bDag po rin po che'i chos 'byung la zhal snga nas blo bzang pas dgag pa bdzad pa*. I have deduced based on this text's colophon and its later addition to Sog bzlog pa's *Catalogue* that it was in all likelihood not composed by Sog bzlog pa.

Dispelling Mental Darkness: The Life Story of the Master, the Second Buddha,³⁸⁶ and *Clarifying the Intention of the Tantra Class: A Presentation of Burnt Offering Rites According to the General Secret Mantra*³⁸⁷ have since been located and published separately. In addition, a smattering of other writings appear in the Old School compendia of liturgical and philosophical works, such as the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, *gDams ngag mdzod*, and the various recensions of the *rNying ma bKa' ma*.

The first text in the *Collected Writings* is the *Catalogue of the Collected Writings* (*gSung' bum tho byang*³⁸⁸), where Sog bzlog pa, apparently late in his lifetime, lists for posterity all the compositions he had written up to that point. A cursory analysis of Sog bzlog pa's list at once reveals that a major theme of his literary career was ritual actions and their effects on subjectivity and the material world. In the chapters to come I will argue that Sog bzlog pa's concern with the ritual dimension of Buddhist practice bears in particular on the nature of sacred objects, and that Sog bzlog pa's writings present a sustained and multifaceted argument for the power, and furthermore, the orthopraxy, of sacred objects, the figures that wield them, and the rituals through which they do so.

The *Catalogue* groups works into the three categories of apologia, literally “averting objections” (*brtsod bzlog gi bskor*), “instructions” (*khrid kyi skor*) and

³⁸⁶ *sLob dpon chen po sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i rnam thar yid kyi mun sel*, Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series, vol. 108 (Rewalsar, Distt. Mandi, H.P., India: Zigar Drugpa Kargyud Institute, 1985). This work was also subsequently published as *sLob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa padma 'byung gnas kyi rnam par thar pa yid kyi mun sel*, in *dPal o rgyan gyi gu ru padma sam bha ba'i rnam thar gyi skor* (Berkeley: Dharma publishing, 2005), 475-792; and *sLob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa padma 'byung gnas kyi rnam par thar pa yid kyi mun sel* (Delhi: Chos spyod Publications, 2005). These two publications seem to be copies of the earlier dbus med work. See also the more recent publications of this text, *bKa' thang yid kyi mun sel*, in *sNgags mang zhib 'jug*, 6 (Zi ling: Zi ling mi rigs par 'debs bzo grwa, 2003), 1-81; and *sLob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar yid kyi mun sel* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2010).

³⁸⁷ *gSang sngags spyi'i sbyin bsregs kyi rnam bzhag rgyud sde'i dgongs don gsal* (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1984).

³⁸⁸ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 1-7.

“generation stage rituals done in conjunction with averting circumstances” (*bskyed rim rkyen bzlog dang bcas pa'i skor*).³⁸⁹ Notably, the genre labels of apologia and ritual both include the term *bzlog*, “to avert” or “repel.” This term also appears in the nickname Sog bzlog pa, “The Mongol Repeller,” thus reflecting the extent to which Sog bzlog pa’s identity was wed to the act of defending against attacks, whether these occurred in the domain of sectarian argumentation, or military incursion.

Several of Sog bzlog pa’s compositions fall outside this narrow three-fold range of genres. In such cases Sog bzlog pa still tends to group similar texts together, but his spare use of genre labels makes for some ambiguity in determining how he may have regarded these compositions. For instance, Sog bzlog pa groups his four main narrative works together at the beginning of his catalogue, but the closest category heading is “apologia,” which does not appear until later, after a list of more overtly apologetic works. Given the apologetic tone of these narrative works, it stands to reason that Sog bzlog pa might have included them among apologia, thus underscoring the rhetorical work that he envisioned these writings would perform. Yet, it is nonetheless difficult to know for sure whether or not Sog bzlog pa intended his narratives as apologia proper.

Later in the catalogue there appear texts grouped together thematically, but with no possible connection to any genre label. The text titles listed after “apologia” and before “instructions” fall into this murky zone. The first group in this list consists of five texts that are directly concerned with sacred materials. These include either explanations of ritual ingredients, instructions for their arrangement, or directions for the concoction or

³⁸⁹ The text titles in the *Catalogue* often differ from their respective title pages and colophons. In this discussion I list them only as they appear in the *Catalogue*.

construction of sacred substances or objects. Then comes a long list of short prayers, which Sog bzlog pa groups into praises and supplications.

For the sake of easier analysis and discussion I have taken the liberty of dividing Sog bzlog pa's corpus of writings into four broad categories: 1) Apologia and theoretical texts; 2) Narratives; 3) Ritual and liturgical texts; and 4) Great Perfection pith instructions. Note that I separate the narrative works from apologia, a distinction that was ambiguous in Sog bzlog pa's catalogue. I also categorize works related to sacred materials and their implementation according to whether they are largely theoretical and, or apologetical in thrust, or whether they are primarily prescriptive in nature. The former I include in the category of apologia and theory, while the latter I subsume, along with all prayers, under the heading of ritual and liturgical works. This heuristic will hopefully become meaningful in the discussion ahead.

This study focuses primarily on selections from the first three of these four categories – apologia and theoretical texts, narratives, and ritual and liturgical texts. There are also some crucial references to the category of Great Perfection texts, but mostly through analysis of Sog bzlog pa's rhetorical and theoretical treatment of Great Perfection practice vis-à-vis statements about potent sacred materials, rather than through a study of his Great Perfection pith instructions themselves. Sog bzlog pa's identity as a Great Perfection master particularly connected with the Mind Class (*sems sde*) and with the Treasure cycles inherited from his masters is crucial in understanding this figure's public image and his relationship with the pragmatic and material dimensions of

practice.³⁹⁰ Tensions around issues of ritual prowess in Sog bzlog pa's diverse involvements with the Great Perfection form the subject matter of much of this thesis.

i. Apologia and Theory

Sog bzlog pa is best remembered in contemporary Tibetan Buddhist circles for his lengthy apologetic texts composed to defend against criticisms of the practices and theories of the Old School to which he belonged.³⁹¹ Sog bzlog pa's polemical wrangles were seldom strictly doctrinal in nature, but rather, focus mostly upon the practices of the Old School, and secondarily upon its texts and history. Beginning in the fourteenth century, Old School claims concerning the pragmatic and soteriological efficacy of material objects and sensory experiences such as amulets, pills, bodily substances, ritual actions, books, and visions known collectively as "Treasures" were especially vulnerable objects of criticism.³⁹² Sog bzlog pa's responses to these criticisms are some of the only theoretical discussions of such popular practices available in the Tibetan language.

Sog bzlog pa's apologia, moreover, was not just limited to defenses of the Old School. He includes within this category a polemical treatment of the Four Medical

³⁹⁰ A number of "mind-class" texts are attributed to Sog bzlog pa. These include *Byang chub kyi sems rang grol du bkri ba'i yi ge nges don bdud rtsi'i rol mtsho*, in *Sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan gsung thor bu* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Dzongsar Khyentse Labrang, Palace Monastery, 1985), 1-98; *Byang chub sems kyi don bsgom pa'i yi ge gzhi lam 'bras bu'i don gsal ba zhe bya ba blta bsgom spyod pa'i man ngag* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Library of Dzong Sar Khyentse Labrang, 1983), *rDzogs chen sems sde'i khri yig*, in *gDams ngag mdzod*, vol. ka (Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimey, 1979-1981), 275-300; and *rDzogs chen sems sde rgyud pa'i gsol 'debs byin rlabs kyi dga' ston*, in *gDams ngag mdzod*, vol. 1 (Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimey, 1979-1981), 301-310. This final title was subsequently published twice more, in *Bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 17 (tsa) (Kalimpong, W.B., India: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987), 519-532; and in *Bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa (Kah thog)*, vol. 30 (Chengdu, PRC: Kah thog mkhan po 'jam dbyangs, 1999), 519-532.

³⁹¹ *Nges don 'brug sgra* and *Lung rigs 'brug sgra* are his most renowned instances of this genre. In addition to these, *Dri ba rnam par rgyal ba'i dris lan lung rig 'byung gnas* and *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi rtsod spong bla ma go 'jo'i dris lan* are also important records of Sog bzlog pa's views on a number of related issues.

³⁹² For discussion of the history and dynamics of Treasure polemics in Tibet, see Doctor (2005), 31-38, and Kapstein (2000), 121-140.

Tantras, the main textual source for the Tibetan medical tradition.³⁹³ Moreover, Sog bzlog pa also wrote texts in defense of practices criticized from within the Old School, and responded to issues of general Buddhist relevance. Apologia constitutes the overwhelming bulk of Sog bzlog pa's entire oeuvre. For the purposes of this study five of Sog bzlog pa's apologetic and theoretical works are especially pertinent. These works will form the subject matter of Chapter Three.

1. *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning: A Response to the Formal Inquiry Posed by the Lord of Conquerors, Mi bskyod rdo rje (rGyal ba'i dbang po mi bskyod rdo rje'i chab shog gi dris lan lung rig 'brug sgra)*³⁹⁴

Sog bzlog completed this, his earliest extant composition, in the fourth lunar month of 1576, at bSam gtan gling hermitage in Bum thang, Mon, when he was twenty-five years old. The text is a response to criticisms (*rtsod lan*) of Sog bzlog pa's Old School tradition attributed to the Eighth Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554). Although the attribution of this work to Mi bskyod rdo rje is questionable,³⁹⁵ Sog bzlog pa treats the pseudonymous document as a ruse devised by the bKa' brgyud hierarch to encourage Old School adherents to critically ground some of the more significant practices of their tradition. By Sog bzlog pa's account, three responses to this letter had already surfaced

³⁹³ *rGyud bzhi bka' sgrub nges don snying po*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 213-241.

³⁹⁴ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 1-143. This work is also published as *rGyal ba'i dbang po karma pa mi bskyod rdo rjes gsang sngags rnying ma ba rnams la dri ba'i chab shog gnang ba'i dris lan lung dang rigs pa'i 'brug sgra*, in *Dris lan lung dang rig pa'i 'brug sgra sogs*, Ngagyur Nyimingmay Sungrab, vol. 2 (Gangtok, Sikkim: Sonam T. Kazi, 1971), 1-174; and *rGyal ba'i dbang po karma pa mi bskyod rdo rjes gsang sngags rnying ma ba rnams la dri ba'i chab shog gnang ba'i dris len lung dang rig pa'i 'brug sgra*, in *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 117 (Chengdu, PRC: Kaḥ thog mkhan po 'jam dbyangs, 1999), 5-250.

³⁹⁵ The issue of the Eighth Karmapa's presumed authorship of this text will be addressed in the following chapter.

by his time, but all were inadequate to the task. Over half of this text includes Sog bzlog pa's responses to criticisms of the Old School's sensory and material practices of the "four liberations" (*grol ba bzhi*), which promise "liberation" through sensory contact with powerful visions (*mtshong grol*), spoken language formulations (*thos grol*), amulets (*btags grol*) and pills (*myong grol*). In his attempts to root these in mainstream Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist theory and practice, Sog bzlog pa expressed rich and rarely voiced reflections on the efficacy of these sensory and material practices. His remarks extend also to the ritual use of powerful substances and sensory experiences more broadly, forming a kind of object-oriented ritual theory. Analysis of this text will constitute the basis of Chapter Three.

*2. Thunder of Definitive Meaning: An Eloquent Apologetic against Objections to the Sublime Secret Mantra Teachings of the Early Translation School (Dam pa'i chos gsang sngags snga 'gyur la rtsod pa spong ba legs bshad nges pa don kyi 'brug sgra)*³⁹⁶

Sog bzlog pa completed this text, which was requested by Sa chen po chos kyi skyong ba'i khri dpon Nor bu padma rgyal po, at the temple of Chu mig ser po, the abbatial seat of mKhan chen thams cad mkhyen pa Sangs rgyas bzang po, prior to the first day of the seventh month of 1605. As Sog bzlog pa's most comprehensive defense of Old School practices and theories, this treatise includes several discussions concerning the rationale and canonicity of "liberation" through the senses practices. These passages, read alongside Sog bzlog pa's other defenses of Old School ritual practices, provide further glimpses into his theoretical understanding of object-oriented ritual efficacy.

³⁹⁶ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 261-601.

3. *Abandoning Objections to “Buddhahood Without Meditation”*: A Response to Lama Gojo’s Query (*Bla ma go ’jo ’i zhu lan ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*)³⁹⁷

This short text, which Sog bzlog pa completed on the first day of the seventh month of 1612 at the great palace of bSam grub rtse, gTsang pa sde srid headquarters in gTsang, defends certain sacred materials and related notions revealed and propagated by his master Zhig po gling pa. The result is a sustained theoretical argument for the relevance, power, and efficacy of substances and phenomenal experience more broadly, phrased in terms of widely circulating Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist doctrinal notions and practices. The letter deals with three issues of contention: the possibility that seminal fluids can come from *dharmakāya* buddhas, the possibility of the existence in our age of bone relics from the six generations of Buddhas preceding Śākyamuni, and the possibility of the enduring presence of visions and the “luminous aspect” (*gsal cha*) even after having attained the realization of the final visionary stage of “crossing over” (*thod rgal*) known as the “exhaustion of suchness” (*chos nyid zad sa*).

4. *Benefits of the Seven-Born [Flesh] with a Catalogue of the Pill’s Ingredients* (*skye bdun gyi phan yon ril bu ’i dkar chag dang bcas pa*)³⁹⁸

This text, whose colophon attests only to its date of completion in 1591, provides extensive theoretical rationales underlying the production and consumption of pills whose primary ingredient is flesh from a man born as a Brahmin (or any human) for seven consecutive lifetimes. In addition to the valuable theoretical reflections, Sog bzlog pa

³⁹⁷ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 191-212. This text has also been published separately as *Dris lan nges don ’brug sgra* (Dalhousie, India: Damchoe Sangpo, 1982), allegedly reproduced from a manuscript that reflects the “Western Tibetan tradition.” See also the slightly more recent, western-style paperback edition, *Dris lan nges don ’brug sgra* (Chengdu: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 1998).

³⁹⁸ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 443-458.

also provides a list of all the ingredients he used in the concoction of the pills, a description of what happened when he made them, and how he implemented them thereafter. The theoretical aspects of this text will contribute to the discussion in Chapter Three, while its pragmatic and material dimension will be analyzed in Chapter Four, which treats Sog bzlog pa's ritual texts.

5. *Responses to the "Conqueror's Mansion, the Inquiry of Ratna gLing pa" (Ratna gling pa'i dri ba rnam par rgyal ba'i khang bzang gi lan)*³⁹⁹

This text's colophon only mentions the name of its author and that it was requested by Śākya rab 'phel, "the sublime heart son of the emanation Zhig po gling pa." However, judging by the name that Sog bzlog pa goes by in the colophon, "divine physician Blo gros bzang po," we can surmise that this text was perhaps composed relative early in the physician's literary career. The treatise consists of Sog bzlog pa's reasoned responses to difficult doctrinal issues of general Buddhist and Old School relevance posed by Ratna gLing pa (1403-1478) several decades prior. Included are discussions of the relationship between phenomenal reality and emptiness, intentionality and "awakened" activity, the phenomenal status of pure realms, and other flash points relevant to Sog bzlog pa's understanding of the role of matter and sensory experience in Buddhist practice.

ii. Narratives

Narratives, such as biography and history, are yet another significant type of literature through which Sog bzlog pa presents the material dimensions of religious practice. Sog bzlog pa is especially well known for his eloquent biographies of the Indian Buddhist

³⁹⁹ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 145-189.

tantric master Padmasambhava and his own master the Treasure revealer Zhig po gling pa. Sog bzlog pa weaves throughout these biographies episodes that attempt to demonstrate to readers through compelling narrative sequences the power of the material media, which he theoretically defends in his apologetic writings. In contrast to the apologetic writings, liturgies and recipe texts, narratives often emphasize the social, political, and economic consequences – infamy, political alliances, financial contributions – of trading in sacred substances, receiving and sharing visionary experiences, and other encounters with powerful objects. These narrative episodes complement the abstract, theoretical style of the apologetic discussions, allowing readers to glean insights into how the emphasis on material practices and sensory objects came to constitute a compelling vision of religious and political power in sixteenth and seventeenth century Tibet.

Other narratives, such as the *History of Vajrakīla*⁴⁰⁰ (a *tantric* deity propitiated to exorcise malevolent forces of all kinds) and the *History of How the Mongols were Turned Back* (concerning ritual practices performed to protect Tibetan polities against invading Mongol troops), depict the past of their respective subject matter as culminating with Sog bzlog pa himself, thus functioning as histories which blur into autobiographies once they reach Sog bzlog pa's own time. Both of these narratives tell the stories of ritual practices, which were used to exorcise the malignant influences of demonic forces often analogized to include foreign armies inimical to Tibetan political and religious institutions. Sog bzlog pa's literary representations of these ritual practices take the form of rhetorical attempts to demonstrate to readers the efficacy of the ritual actions and paraphernalia involved, as well as his own decisive role in their implementation. In the *History of How*

⁴⁰⁰ *dPal rdo rje phur pa'i chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho'i rba rlabs*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 111-201.

the Mongols were Turned Back, for instance, Sog bzlog pa interweaves accounts of his personal dreams, visions, and material signs of ritual success with prophecies that concern all of Tibet to retrospectively claim a significant role for his rituals in the defining geopolitical events of his day. Such histories *cum* autobiographies illustrate well how Sog bzlog pa endeavored to render his rituals powerful through compelling narrative depictions of their efficacy. Also of relevance are short autobiographical descriptions of particular visionary episodes, which occurred in the context of retreats, and a brief but poignant poem in which Sog bzlog pa reflects upon the difficult circumstances of his life. Once again, a group of five narrative texts are especially salient to this study. These form the basis of much of the discussion of Sog bzlog pa's life and times presented in this chapter. We shall also revisit these narratives in Chapter Five when discussing the influence of Sog bzlog pa's life and literature in the history of Tibetan religion after his death.

1. *Dispelling Mental Darkness: The Life Story of the Great Master, the Second Buddha (sLob dpon chen po sangs rgyas gnyis pa'i rnam thar yid kyi mun sel)*⁴⁰¹

Sog bzlog completed this hagiography of Padmasambhava in 1606 at Phun tshogs 'dod rgu'i bkod pa rnam bkra ba temple on the slope of bZang chags pa mountain. Sog bzlog pa threads together this prose version of the life of Padmasambhava with an argument attempting to reconcile contradictory version's of the master's birth, life, and stay in Tibet. While thus demonstrating his scholarly acumen in demarcating the parameters of the master's life, he constructs from the store of available literary images a portrait of Padmasambhava that presages important aspects of his and his masters' ritual careers,

⁴⁰¹ See above, when I first introduce this text, for references to its publication.

such as repelling foreign armies through violent rites, and dealing in efficacious sacred substances.

2. *The Life Story of sPrul sku Zhig po gling pa (sPrul sku zhig po gling pa'i rnam thar)*⁴⁰²

Sog bzlog pa completed this text at the sacred pilgrimage place of sNgo leb mar dag pa, on the tenth day of the third month of 1599. The composition was commissioned by the 'Brug pa Bka' bgyud hierarch of Rwa lung monastery, Zhabs drung rin po che dpal Mi pham ngag gi dbang po chos rgyal bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, and transcribed and edited by the scribe Nor bu dpal bzang po of dGe 'khor. This life story of Sog bzlog pa's main master and mentor in violent rites and powerful substances is replete with episodes that depict the social, political, and economic benefits of their revelation and implementation. This biography also describes Sog bzlog pa himself as the inheritor of Zhig po gling pa's military ritual program to avert Mongol armies, thus providing Sog bzlog pa with yet another important charter (in addition to his life of Padmasambhava) for his self-presentation as a powerful master of violent rites.

3. *How I Myself Turned Back the Mongols, [Written] in order to Benefit Those who will Turn Back Mongols in the Future (sLan chad kyang sog bzlog mdzad pa po rnam la phan pa'i phyir du rang nyid kyi sog bzlog bgyis tshul)*⁴⁰³

As the main source of Sog bzlog pa's life, written in his own hand sometime between 1614 and 1624, this text is important both for its documentary content and its rhetorical dimensions. In terms of its rhetoric, this text vividly reflects how Sog bzlog pa sought to represent himself during his time through extending to his own persona the power and prestige of Padmasambhava and Zhig po gling pa as constructed through his life stories

⁴⁰² *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 9-109.

⁴⁰³ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. I (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 203-259.

of those two figures. Other important rhetorical components of this text for discerning Sog bzlog pa's persona include his strategic combination of self-effacement, bravado, and violence in his depiction of the performance of violent rites, coupled with his emphasis on the economic, social, and political dynamics of his ritual project.

4. *Verses of Heart-felt Lamentation (sMre ngag gdung tshig)*⁴⁰⁴

In this short autobiographical poem, written some time later in the author's life, Sog bzlog pa presents a self-portrait of an elderly and infirmed man riddled with regrets about a life unwisely spent. The misgivings Sog bzlog pa expresses in this work gravitate around feelings of abandonment, powerlessness, and unjust accusations. Lonely and despised, the ailing Sog bzlog pa considers his past mistakes and activities with his characteristic blend of self-derision, defensiveness, bravado, and humor, but from a more intimate perspective than in his *History of How the Mongols were Turned Back*.

5. *Delusion's Appearance: A Sketch of Falsehood (rDzun snang zog gi ri mo)*⁴⁰⁵

This text is an elaborate description of one of Sog bzlog pa's wild visionary dreams, in which he engages in dialogues with animal and supernatural characters about the finer points of Great Perfection understanding and practice, among other topics. The discussions provide further insights into the rhetoric of Sog bzlog pa's self-presentation as it relates specifically to his identity as a visionary and Great Perfection practitioner.

6. *Delusion's Dwindling: A Further Refinement of Falsehood (rDzun bris zog gi yang zhun)*⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 513-519.

⁴⁰⁵ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 477-505.

⁴⁰⁶ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 507-511.

This text describes a visionary dream experienced by Sog bzlog pa on the fifth night of the eleventh Hor month of 1598, while engaging in a dark retreat at a dGe 'khor lhun grub rab brtan on the *Single Golden-Black Syllable, from the Great Perfection Yang ti Tradition* (*rdzogs pa chen po yang ti nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig pa'i mun 'tshams*) with fourteen masters and students from dGe 'khor. Sog bzlog pa presents the dream as a sign that a recently deceased political figure received some spiritual benefit from his group's practice, thus providing yet another perspective on the socio-political bent of Sog bzlog pa's rhetorical style.

iii. Rituals and Ritual Commentaries

Rituals and ritual commentaries are also well represented in Sog bzlog pa's writings. This category features texts concerned with the preparation of ritual materials and paraphernalia, and/or their implementation in rituals to turn back negative circumstances. I thus also subsume within this category texts that are not liturgies *per se*, but which discuss the preparation of materials used in ritual proceedings. These include four texts: two detail the arrangements and procedures for conferring initiation into the *mDo dgongs 'dus*, an important facet of Sog bzlog pa's ritual career; one text describes the concoction and implementation of the tantric substance ambrosia, or *amṛta*; and one stipulates the construction and benefits of various kinds of *stūpas*. I also include here yet another text, *Benefits of the Seven-Born [Flesh] with a Catalogue of the Pill's Ingredients* (*skye bdun gyi phan yon ril bu'i dkar chag dang bcas pa*), which I introduced above as a text that partakes of both the category of apologetics and theory, and the category of ritual and ritual commentaries. When these are read alongside the apologetic/theoretical and narrative texts with an eye toward their respective rhetorical effects, a consistent vision of the

efficacy and power of material media emerges, even while ritual texts and ritual commentaries argue for efficacy primarily through pragmatic details and directives rather than through theoretical reflections or narrative episodes.

I also include within this category the many supplications, praises, and long-life prayers which Sog bzlog pa composed in honor of his root and lineage lamas, as well as the texts of “generation stage rituals done in conjunction with averting circumstances.” Most of the numerous texts listed in the catalogue but missing from the *Collected Writings* come from this final section. Some of those titles are presently available, but exist only in the voluminous compendia of Old School ritual texts, such as the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, *rNying ma bKa’ ma*, and *gDams ngag mdzod*. For this study, six ritual texts from this category are especially germane for their explicit implementation of substances and objects, and for the understandings of ritual efficacy that they express. These will form the subject matter of Chapter Four of the present study.

1. *Clarifying the Intended Meaning: How to Implement the Stages of Accomplishing Ambrosia (bDud rtsi sgrub pa’i rim pa lag tu blangs pa’i tshul dgongs don rab tu gsal bar byed pa)*⁴⁰⁷

This text was completed by Sog bzlog pa at Ram pa hermitage in the Rong area of gTsang on the thirteenth day (third *rgyal ba*) of the third Hor month (*nag nya*) of 1590. In the colophon Sog bzlog pa goes by the name Lha rje blo gros and mentions that the composition was done at the prompting of Śākya rab ’phel ba, “the sublime heart son of sPrul pa’i sku Zhig po gling pa.” This text provides detailed instructions for the concoction and ritual preparation of “medicinal ambrosia,” or *amṛta* (Tib. *bdud rtsi*), a

⁴⁰⁷ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 421-441.

substance widely used in numerous tantric rituals. Sog bzlog pa also voices theoretical remarks about the “purpose,” “benefits” and “essence” of medicinal ambrosia. This combination of prescription and theory, including descriptions of the roles of language and mental contemplative exercises in the substance’s formation, provides insights into how Sog bzlog pa understood the efficacy of this important ritual substance.

2. *The Red Winds of Karma: A Clarification of the Enemy Burial Practice of the Black King Kang Yamāntaka* (*'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed king kang nag po'i dgra brub kyi lag len gsal byed las kyi rlung dmar*)⁴⁰⁸

This text is a detailed explanation and liturgy of an effigy-based (*ling+ga*), enemy burial rite (*dgra brub*) intended for the violent destruction of either human or spiritual “enemies.” Vivid descriptions of the role of the material effigy and other ritual substances vis-à-vis language formulations (written and spoken) and mental contemplative exercises makes this text an especially rich focal point through which to explore Sog bzlog pa’s underlying notions of ritual efficacy.

3. *Clarifying the Intention of the Tantra Class: A Presentation of Burnt Offering Rites According to the General Secret Mantra* (*gSang sngags spyi'i sbyin bsregs kyi rnam bzhag rgyud sde'i dgongs don gsal*)⁴⁰⁹

This text, which was completed in the tenth Hor month of 1602, provides detailed explanation of the meaning and practice of tantric burnt offering rites (Tib. *sbyin bsreg*, Skt. *homa*), which are performed for a range of purposes. Sog bzlog pa dwells at length on the different material specifications, language formulations, and contemplative

⁴⁰⁸ *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 84 (yi) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980), 389-431.

⁴⁰⁹ (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1984).

exercises required to ensure the efficacy of this rite as it is variously performed to accomplish each of the four main tantric ritual activities of pacifying (illness, among other things), enriching (i.e., increasing wealth), controlling (i.e., drawing in students, patrons, consorts...), and killing (enemies of the doctrine, ostensibly). The text is therefore clearly illustrative of associated understandings of ritual efficacy.

4. *The Illuminating Crystal Mirror: The Arrangement for Conferring Initiation into the Sūtra of the Assembly, which Primarily Teaches the Sublime Dharma of the Scriptural Anuyoga (Dam pa'i chos lung a nu yo ga gtso bor ston pa/ 'dus pa'i mdo'i dbang bskur ba'i bca' rab tu gsal ba shel gyi me long)*⁴¹⁰ and *An Exposition on the Initiation into the Nine Vehicles from the Yang rdzong ma Oral Lineage (sNyan brgyud yang rdzong ma las theg dgu'i dbang gi rnam bshad)*⁴¹¹

The first of these two related texts, composed in 1616, details the elaborate arrangement of physical materials, deities and *maṇḍalas* necessary for initiation into the *Sūtra of the Fused Intent (dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo)*. The second of these two texts, whose colophon offers no concrete details about the circumstances surrounding its production, provides explanation of the meanings behind each of the nine vehicle initiations of the *Sūtra of the Fused Intent* in the form of descriptions of the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition associated with each vehicle. The texts thus emphasize the material or discursive dimensions, respectively, of this elaborate initiation ritual, thus bringing into focus how Sog bzlog pa may have construed the relationship between these two aspects.

⁴¹⁰ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 311-383.

⁴¹¹ *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 385-419.

5. *Clarifying the Symbolic Meaning: An Exposition on the Separately Concealed Meaning of the Supreme Initiation (dBang gong ma gud du sbas pa'i don bshad pa brda don gsal ba*⁴¹²)

This text, whose colophon offers no details about its production, provides commentary on the symbolic significance of objects used to confer initiation into the *Single Golden-Black Syllable, from the Great Perfection Yang ti Tradition (rDzogs chen yang ti'i nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig)*, a Great Perfection Treasure revelation of Dung tsho ras pa practiced largely in dark retreat.⁴¹³ Sog bzlog pa remarks on the relationship between sensory experience and form, on the one hand, and emptiness, on the other, while emphasizing proper discursive understanding of the implements at use in the initiation. This discussion provides a productive point of tension and comparison with his other explanations, which emphasize more the power of material substances themselves, or their “empowerment” in combination with language and contemplative exercises

It has hopefully become evident through this brief foray into the content of Sog bzlog pa's writings that they have as a major theme one or another aspect of powerful material objects: apologia discusses such objects from a theoretical perspective, narratives emphasize the persons that wield those objects, and ritual texts tend to deal with the practical details of ritual actions through which such objects are implemented, although considerable overlap is present in each case.

As I briefly remarked above, Sog bzlog pa's emphasis on the material dimensions of Buddhist practice is best understood in light of his deep involvement with Great Perfection practice and theory. Firstly, the Great Perfection seems to have formed a

⁴¹² *Rin chen gter mdzod che mo*, vol. 91 (hi) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980), 143-163.

⁴¹³ Dung mtsho ras pa phyi ma, *Yang tig nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig pa'i chos skor*, 3 vols. (Dalhousie: Damchoe Sangpo, 1979). The title is alternately spelled *yang tig/ti* throughout.

critical lynchpin for securing Sog bzlog pa's authority as a powerful ritual specialist capable of manipulating the material world. This crucial role of the Great Perfection is apparent foremost in the rhetorical power it conveys throughout Sog bzlog pa's narrative writings. Secondly, Sog bzlog pa's role as a Great Perfection master helped shape his understanding of ritual efficacy, specifically in terms of the role of potent sacred materials and objects vis-à-vis language formulations and contemplative techniques in the workings of rituals intended to manipulate the material world. As I previously stated, this juxtaposition of Sog bzlog pa's role as a Great Perfection master, on the one hand, and his focus on the material, sensory and pragmatic dimensions of practice, on the other, forms a productive tension that runs throughout Sog bzlog pa's entire literary and ritual career. But before we begin to explore that tension more fully in the chapters ahead, let us first briefly revisit Sog bzlog pa's memoir to investigate how he used the rhetoric and imagery in his autobiographical portrait to strategically position himself within the competitive environment of late-sixteenth to early-seventeenth century Tibet. Analysis of such rhetorical aspects of Sog bzlog pa's work will provide a more nuanced portrait of this figure within his context. And it will illustrate more fundamentally how the tension between the material and subjective dimensions of practice is reflected in the features of Sog bzlog pa's public persona.

III. Rhetoric of an Exorcist: The Construction of Sog bzlog pa's Public Identity

A recurring theme in Sog bzlog pa's *History* is that his ritual activities earned him a reputation among his peers as an opportunistic charlatan who manipulated and even murdered Tibetan political leaders for personal gain. Sog bzlog pa's proposed purpose in composing his memoir, which he explicitly states in the text's opening verses, was

therefore to set the record straight.⁴¹⁴ It would seem then that Sog bzlog pa was concerned that his personal vilification might discredit his moral reputation, undermine a collective belief in the efficacy of his army-averting rites, and thereby leave open the possibility that later efforts to repel Mongol armies through sorcery might be compromised. He thus pitches his narrative in light of the growing sense of Tibetan protectionism prevalent during his time, attempting to characterize his actions as patriotic deeds altruistically undertaken for the sake of all Tibetans.

At the same time, however, the recurrence of the theme of infamy in Sog bzlog pa's self-narrative, and the highly ambivalent tone that Sog bzlog pa strikes with respect to this theme, renders ill repute an important aspect of his public identity. Thus, we can surmise that while his composition was driven in part by the wish to demonstrate that his rituals were selfless responses to a time of Tibet-wide crisis, Sog bzlog pa was also very much concerned with fashioning himself into the image of a formidable tantric ritual master violent enough to repel Mongol armies.

In episode after episode of the *History*, Sog bzlog pa attempts to create for himself a public image with just the right balance of moral integrity, selfless servitude, and dangerous power. In this regard, prophecy revelation and interpretation played a crucial role, as prophecies stipulate, among other things, the figures destined for such a task, and thus form the most authoritative store of imagery from which the identities of violent ritual masters are sculpted and authenticated in the public sphere. Equally important for Sog bzlog pa's reputation, however, was the infamy, suspicion, and fear that his violent interventions in the pragmatic sphere of geopolitics inspired among his contemporaries. Sog bzlog pa's attempt at reconciling the conflicting elements of destiny

⁴¹⁴ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 205.4-205.6.

and transgression, righteousness and violence, selfless sacrifice and personal power forms a dramatic tension that runs throughout his self-portrait in the *History*. While tracing this tension offers considerable insight into the nature of Sog bzlog pa's persona, and is therefore a worthy endeavor in and of itself, my main concern here is to illustrate how the contrasting rhetorical styles of Sog bzlog pa's self-presentation are rooted in two opposing approaches to action that dialectically interact throughout Sog bzlog pa's writings. The dissonance between these two orientations can be read as an extension of the fundamental friction between subjective and objective sources of power that animates Sog bzlog pa's power-object discourse throughout.

* * *

The Tibetan term *lo rgyus*,⁴¹⁵ often translated as “history,” which appears in the title of Sog bzlog pa's text, *The History of How the Mongols were Turned Back (Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus)* is a broad genre label for any narrative account of something's or someone's past. It is evident from its opening verses that this “history” was intended foremost as an autobiography in which Sog bzlog pa narrates his own 32-year ritual career of expelling Mongol armies from Tibet through rituals.⁴¹⁶ Yet, this “autobiography” also has collective historical dimensions – it is structured by and interwoven with prophecies that foretell the techniques, times, actors, and locations crucial for the expulsion of Mongol armies. It therefore opens with chronological

⁴¹⁵ Krang dbyi sun et al., *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Chengdu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1993) defines *lo rgyus* as “a record of past events/circumstances” (*gnas tshul byung rabs*).

⁴¹⁶ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 204.6-206.1. Here, Sog bzlog pa twice refers to his work as a biography (*rnam thar*). And it is clear from his opening remarks that he means autobiography (*rang gi rnam thar*).

biographies of the other ritual experts who presaged this endeavor, culminating with Sog bzlog pa himself. When recalling that the author's popular nickname, Sog bzlog pa, "the one who turned back the Mongols," was acquired through the execution of such rituals, even the title self-refers to Sog bzlog pa the figure as much as it refers to the wider historical phenomenon of turning back Mongol armies through ritual, thus resonating on the registers of personal autobiography and collective history with equal weight. Indeed, the title might be more loosely rendered as *The Story of How I Turned Back the Mongols*, or even *The Story of How I Became Sog bzlog pa*.

A close reading of Sog bzlog pa's memoir *cum* history *cum* biography reveals that the significance of the genre blurring witnessed in this title implicates far more than simply the murky boundaries of Tibetan literary genres alone. Throughout his memoir Sog bzlog pa strategically deploys private and public domains of experience, knowledge, and authority – exploiting the permeable boundaries between private and public worlds, personal and communal experiences, being an actor and being acted upon – to retrospectively claim that his ritual program was responsible for the major geopolitical events of his day. Sog bzlog pa weaves his self-identity from a pastiche of images ranging from public prophecies and geopolitical events to personal ritual performances, signs, and dreams. Allow us to revisit some of the more salient episodes of Sog bzlog pa's life as reported in the *History*, attending this time to the rhetorical work that they perform in helping to build Sog bzlog pa's public identity.

a. Persuasion, Cynicism, and Deceit in Sog bzlog pa's Use of Prophecy

As chronicled above, Sog bzlog pa narrates in the *History* that from his primary base of operations in the northern gTsang region of 'U yug, he spent over three decades

performing, organizing, and petitioning violent rituals intended to drive encroaching Mongol armies from Tibet. Sog bzlog pa's multiple patrons for these large-scale rites stemmed initially from his connections with the Rin spungs pa aristocracy of gTsang, to whom he offered his medical and ritual expertise long after it was clear that their power and influence had been eclipsed by the gTsang pa sde srid rulers based at bSam grub rtse.⁴¹⁷ Yet, Sog bzlog pa's friendship with the Rin spungs aristocracy did not interfere with his formation also of a close relationship with the new gTsang pa rulers, who, we may recall, usurped Rin spungs pa rule in 1565 and after twenty-five years of armed conflict, finally forced Rin spungs pa to surrender in 1590. Despite Sog bzlog pa's enduring Rin spungs pa ties, the gTsang pa sde srid leadership generously supported his violent rites as part of their own multi-pronged approach to Mongol threats well into the first two decades of the seventeenth century.⁴¹⁸

Such popularity with late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century Tibet's most powerful political rulers undoubtedly sprung from the patronage and cooperation that Sog bzlog pa's state-wide ritual project required from diverse sectors of Tibetan society. As illustrated in Sog bzlog pa's descriptions in the *History*, his army-averting program stipulated the well-choreographed implementation of large-scale building projects and ritual performances along Tibet's northern frontier and at other strategic locations. These called for a considerable investment of human and material resources from a number of

⁴¹⁷ See *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 207.6-208.1. This passage depicts Sog bzlog pa responding to the medical requests of Rin spungs brgyud pa as late as the tenth month of 1583 (*lug lo hor zla bcu pa*).

⁴¹⁸ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 252.4-252.6. That Sog bzlog pa enjoyed the patronage of the gTsang sde srid is also evident from the colophon of his *Bla ma go 'jo 'i zhu lan ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*: 211-212. There, Sog bzlog pa records that he composed this short text on the 1st day (dga' ba) of the 7th month of the water male rat year (chu pho byi ba; 1612) at bSam grub rtse palace, then the headquarters of gTsang sde srid rule. Further evidence of such comes from his *sMre ngag gdung tshig* (513-519), composed, according to Sog bzlog pa, "At kLu sding in bSam grub rtse at the basin of Nyang."

different groups. As the *History* attests, the paper alone required to print effigies of massive legions of Mongol armies and their horses was a scarce and expensive commodity which Sog bzlog pa could secure only through his diverse connections with a number of wealthy patrons. The venues for staging these rites, moreover, not to mention the materials needed for *stūpa* and temple construction and restoration, were also acquired only at considerable expense.

Sog bzlog pa inspired confidence among patrons and gained their support for his project primarily through locating them in prophecy texts foretelling the lurid details of Mongol military presence in Tibet and how that might be averted. Tibetan Buddhists often represent all of history as a sprawling narrative that unfolds according to authoritative prophecy texts. Sog bzlog pa and his Old School milieu cast such prophecies as “Treasure teachings,” (*gter chos*), which often appear in conjunction with powerful “Treasure substances” (*gter rdzas*) and ritual techniques that incorporate such substances. As Treasure texts, the reader may recall, these terse and ambiguous verse phrases were ostensibly narrated amidst the eighth century imperial Tibetan court by the Indian tantric adept Padmasambhava, then concealed by he and his consort, princess Ye shes mTsho rgyal in Tibetan soil, rocks, lakes, trees and pillars for destined disciples in future incarnations (almost invariably, future incarnations of the members of the court present at the occasion of their original annunciation) to uncover and interpret anew according to their specific contextual exigencies. These prophecies are thus believed to have sprung forth from the omniscient wisdom of master Padmasambhava, otherwise called Knower of the Three Times (*dus gsum mkhyen pa*), and are therefore held to give unflinching descriptions of future events, and flawless directives on how best to act in

specific contexts to bring about desired outcomes, or to avoid or delay undesired events.⁴¹⁹

In effect, Treasure prophecies are “revealed” and redacted precisely during the time period which they purportedly predict. The predictions in Treasure prophecies might thus be characterized as particularly expedient uses of the past, *ala* the Treasure trope, to make statements and directives about the present in order to shape the future. While prophecies are therefore considered time sensitive and specific, they are also ambiguous enough to allow contemporary, or successive generations of Tibetans to apply alternate interpretations relevant to their own situations. Consequently, prophecies are marked by a considerable degree of cultural authority, but are also open to competing and opposing interpretations, enabling successive generations of enterprising Treasure revealers and interpreters to enlist these texts in order to legitimate or decry a particular person, event, or course of action.

Complicating matters further, the Padmasambhava prophecy texts are filled with descriptions of natural and manmade calamities and misfortunes that might threaten Tibet and its people, and what Tibetans can do to avert or delay such events. During times of Mongol military threats, prophecies often describe the coming ravages of Mongol destruction in Tibet. More importantly, they stipulate, albeit often in vague and cryptic terms, the when, where, what, how, and who of powerful figures, rites, and substances capable of averting or delaying such disasters. Since such prophecies are rich in personal details and events concerning the lives and contexts of their original audience’s future

⁴¹⁹ It must be noted, however, that acceptance of the authority of Padmasambhava and his prophecies has never been unanimous among Tibetan clerics. Throughout Tibetan history several religious factions have harbored suspicions about the accuracy of such accounts. The resolution of these doubts forms a major theme in Sog bzlog pa’s biography of master Padmasambhava, *Dispelling Mental Darkness (Yid kyi mun sel)*.

incarnations, they can be regarded as a sub-genre of biographical and autobiographical writing specifically concerned with “future” histories.⁴²⁰ Thus, as communal narratives, which nonetheless partake of an autobiographical and/or biographical character, prophecies became a popular medium for Tibet’s power brokers to bring private lives into the public sphere and appropriate public discourses to serve personal ends, such as fame, wealth, and influence.

This interplay of communal events and personal lives, in light of the continuity by reincarnation of personal identities across generations, implies, according to the logic of the Padmasambhava prophecies, a deep symbiotic connection between the revelation and interpretation of prophecy texts, and the authority to implement such powerful rituals and materials to protect the state. To put it bluntly, he who unearths and/or properly interprets the prophetic clues and discerns the proper historical setting which they describe demonstrates simply through doing so that he and his associates are precisely the figures to which the prophecies refer. Thus, those who take possession of prophetic narratives implicate themselves in, or even place themselves at the helm of the rituals and materials appropriate to control the misfortunes described. Moreover, owing to the trans-local Tibetan political identity that seemed to be gaining momentum during the final quarter of the sixteenth century and the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the state-wide concerns to which prophecies sometimes refer – warfare, domestic strife, natural disasters, epidemics, etc. – became far more prevalent during this time, thus giving their

⁴²⁰ For discussions of prophecy as autobiography in the Tibetan religious context, see Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Biographies of a Tibetan Visionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 240-241, and Janet Gyatso, “Autobiography in Tibetan Religious Literature: Reflections on Its Modes of Self-Presentation.” In Shoren Ihara and Zuiho Yamaguchi eds., *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th International Association of Tibetan Studies Seminar*, vol. 2 (Narita: Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1992), 473.

revelation and proper interpretation added political importance. At the heart of prophecy texts and their use during this period was the issue of who, precisely, had the authority to wield the powerful substances and perform the powerful rituals that promise to protect Tibetans from the volatile material conditions that threaten to destroy them.

In light of the fierce contention among opposing Tibetan factions surrounding Mongol military involvement in Tibetan internal affairs, the proper interpretation of prophecies predicting Mongol invasions was an especially contentious issue during Sog bzlog pa's time. In the *History*, Sog bzlog pa is explicit about both the crucial role of prophecies in his efforts to persuade patrons, and readers, of the integrity of his project, and the highly unpredictable outcomes of that endeavor for his personal reputation. Sog bzlog pa first makes direct links between personal reputation, patronage, prophecies, and geopolitics in the opening gambit of the *History*. Here, Sog bzlog pa defends his undertakings from charges of fraudulence by appealing to the authority of the Padmasambhava prophecies to champion the credibility of his sponsors.

Furthermore, there have certainly appeared to be some who have made their living off of deceptions and lies, but since this is not appropriate conduct for one's future lives, it is solely a means for deceiving oneself, and consequently, there is no chance that it is the same [as what I have done in observance of my master's command].

When it is obvious that the many virtuous-minded and meritorious patrons from the master of Oḍiyāna's prophecies who have appeared in this world have had inalienable courage, sublime judgement and insight, and peerless intelligence with respect to worldly and religious undertakings, then how could they be fooled with deception and lies? These comments are phrases sincerely expressive of the actual situation. I ask that they be considered with an impartial frame of mind.⁴²¹

⁴²¹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 216.5-217.3. yang kha gcig ni zog dang brdzun khram gyis 'tsho ba dag kyang snang mod kyis/ mtha' tshes pa'i bya ba ma yin pa'i phyir rang nyid bslu ba'i thabs 'ba' zhig tu gyur pas na/ nam tu yang mtshungs pa'i go skabs med la/ 'dir o rgyan gyi lung bstan pa'i sbyin bdag dge ba'i thugs can bsod nams bsags pa mang po byung ba dag kyang/ chos dang 'jig rten gyi bya gzhas la/ mi 'phrog pa'i spob pa dang/ rnam dpyod dang mkhyen pa'i phul dang/ blo gros 'gran zla ma mchi par mngon sum gyis gsal na/ zog dang brdzun gyis bslu bar ga la nus/ /zhes bya ba'i gtam 'di dag kyang yin lugs drang por smra ba'i tshig ste/ gzu bor gnas pa'i thugs kyi dgongs par zhu'o/

Later in the *History* Sog bzlog pa relates the circumstances surrounding his initial acquaintance with the first prophesied patron, the leader of Bod mkhar, in the northern gTsang region of 'U yug.⁴²² Note the slightly cynical tone of the passage below, especially as compared with the panygeric description above. Particularly telling is the final line. It was *not* the Bod mkhar leader's "sublime judgement and insight" that triggered confidence on this occasion. Rather, it was the Bod mkhar leader's difficult circumstances and Sog bzlog pa's close ties with his Rin spungs pa captors that sealed the deal.

Then, during the Rat and Ox [years] (1588-1589), the gTsang Rong⁴²³ war erupted, and the one from Bod mkhar was incarcerated at gNam gling.⁴²⁴ A sentence (*sa dpyad*) of death was issued for him from Rin spungs, which was then reduced to the sentence of having his eyes gouged out and such. However, due to previous karma and aspirations, sKu mdun drung dar ba supported him. The elder Rin spung prince also highly esteemed him, and thus no harm befell him. *I was able to offer written pleas and prophecies inside the jail, via the Rin spung pa, and since these appeared in the context of his suffering, [the one from Bod mkhar] embraced these without thinking them fraudulent.*⁴²⁵

The juxtaposition of faith and *realpolitik* represented in the two preceding passages is a typical feature of Sog bzlog pa's writings. Throughout his narrative writings in particular Sog bzlog pa includes candid personal and socio-political observations, which are often self-deprecating in thrust, alongside prophecies, scriptural

⁴²² 'O yug, or 'Od yug is an incorrect spelling for 'U yug, in gTsang. This is the river valley of the 'U yug river tributary due north of the Brahmaputra from Rin spungs. Wiley 1962: pp. 71, 121, 140, 141.

⁴²³ Rong was the heartland of Rin spungs pa control in eastern gTsang (Wylie 1962, 72). This war was certainly between Rin spungs pa forces based in Rong and the newly expanding powers based in bSam grub rtse.

⁴²⁴ gNam gling is an alternate spelling of rNam ling, a region in the lower Shang valley of gTsang that is dominated by the fort, or rdzong bearing its name. rNam gling's southeast corner, once one crosses south across the Brahmaputa, is adjacent to Rin spungs (Wylie 1962, 71 and 135).

⁴²⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus: 232.2-232.4. /de nas byi glang gnyis la gtsang rong sde gzar lang nas/ bong mkhar nas gnam gling du bison la bcug/ khong gi tshes srog la 'babs pa/ chung ste mig khab kyi btsags pa sogs kyi sa dpyad rin spungs nas gnam kyang/ sngon gyi las smon gyis/ sku mdun drung dar bas tsho bzung/ rin spungs rgyal bu sgres pas kyang dbu rtsi dgongs nas skyon ma byung zhing/ btsong nang der rin spungs brgyud pa 'i bdag gis zhu yig dang lung bstan tsho 'bul thub pas/ khong 'o rgyal skabs su byung ba des zog tu ma dgongs par dang len mdzad/*

citations, and other demonstrations of devotion. Sog bzlog pa's subtle combination of these devotional and realistic elements lends his writings a strikingly fresh and familiar feeling to the contemporary reader. More importantly, his inclusion of what might be construed as critical, or even self-critical reflections about the events in his life can also be read as a conscious attempt to strike a tone of humility with his readers. To attribute the Bod mkhar leader's confidence in his Mongol-averting project to the leader's severely compromised position, rather than to his own charisma and the qualities intrinsic to prophesized patrons not only shifts the register from the domain of devotion to *realpolitik*. It also attributes to socio-political factors events that Sog bzlog pa could have, in light of his and his new patron's prophecised roles, attributed solely to their shared destiny. The note of humility he communicates through this choice of emphasis lends his narrative a sense of authenticity.

Further details can be gleaned about Sog bzlog pa's ambivalent use of prophecies from his reports of how Zhig po gling pa first compelled him to become involved in the ritual campaign. Sog bzlog pa's *History* and his biography of Zhig po gling pa both offer lengthy episodes in which Zhig po gling pa attempts to convince Sog bzlog pa that he is the right man for the job through identifying him in prophecy texts that predict Mongol invasions and the powerful figures capable of averting them. Noteworthy in the following episode is that Sog bzlog pa makes reference to his knee-jerk, cynical response to Zhig po gling pa's efforts. By Sog bzlog pa's account, he simply can not accept that the events foretold will happen, or that he is the person destined to confront them. Once again, Sog bzlog pa presents himself as a humble witness, rather than as a witting agent.

Zhig gling bestowed several such prophecies. In a state of intense weariness, Zhig gling gave me the prophecy of *Means for Restoring the Doctrine*, from within the *Assembly of Victorious Ones*, and others. Being obscured by demons, I thought that the prophecies

seemed to have the intention of procuring me for a while more as his attendant. I had the wrong perspective on it, thinking that it would not happen that a foreign army would come in the course of our lives, that the statue of the eleven-faced Jo bo would not deteriorate, and so on.⁴²⁶

Sog bzlog pa's emphasis in the *History* on cynicism and disbelief regarding the prophecy texts that he inherited from his master could lend authenticity to his account because it resonated with sentiments that were widespread among Tibetans of his time. Sog bzlog pa reflects that after the initial ritual performances of his Mongol-averting campaign, which were executed under the patronage of the Bod mkhar leader, the public of Rong and larger gTsang became suspicious of Sog bzlog pa's intentions. Judging by Sog bzlog pa's account, the cultural authority of prophecies and the contentious political environment of the time contributed to a tendency for ecclesiastical elites to fabricate prophecies to persuade others to follow a desired course of action. Even Zhig po gling pa's other students, according to Sog bzlog pa, considered the prophecies in his possession to be fraudulent, or at least strategically altered and interpreted.

At that time, most of the nobility and commoners of Rong were saying, "He [Sog bzlog pa] is perpetrating such boundless deceit." The people of gTsang were telling all the arisocrats such as Phyug po a dar, Bod mkhar nas, sKu mdun sMon skyid pa, and others that the prophecies are fabricated. Even sNang rtse nas's disciples were saying that things such as this do not exist at all in sNang rtse's Treasure teachings, and that it was totally fraudulent. Some of great experience stated that [the prophecies] seemed to have been altered from having correlated several prophecies. No one came forth who would hold them as authentic.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁶ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 100.3-100.5. /zhes pa la sogs pa'i bka' lung mang po gnang zhing/ thugs skye shas kho nas'i ngang nas/ rgyal ba 'dus pa'i nang gi lung bstan bstan pa gso thabs sogs gnang byung bas/ rang nyid bdud kyis khebs pas bsam pa la/ bka' lung 'di rnams re zhig phyag g.yog la sgor ba'i dgongs pa can yin pa 'dra/ rang re'i tshe gang la mtha' dmag 'ong ba dang/ jo bo bcu gcig zhal gyi sku nyams pa sogs mi yong ngam snyam pa'i log lta skyes/

⁴²⁷ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 233.3-233.5. de dus rong pa'i sku drag zhan phal chu bas/ 'dis mtha' mi tshes pa'i zog 'di 'dra byed zer/ gtsang pa tshos/ phyug po a dar/ bong mkhar nas/ sku bdun smon skyid pa sogs mi drag tshad la lung bstan gzos zer/ snang rtse nas kyi bu slob rnams kyang/ snang rtse'i gter chos la 'di 'dra lar med/ zog rang yin gsung/ thugs nyams che ba 'dras gsung bar/ lung bstan mang po gcig gung bsgrigs nas bcos pa 'dra gsung zhing/ tshad mar 'dzin pa ma byung/

Contention over prophecies and their proper interpretation was clearly a major factor behind the suspicions raised against Sog bzlog pa and his ritual program. This was undoubtedly because consistently demonstrating the authenticity of his prophecies and interpretations was precisely what would secure the patronage necessary to carry through with this elaborate project. Indeed, episode after episode of the *History* relates that Sog bzlog pa's communication with possible sponsors involved sharing with them the details of prophecies and their interpretation. The socio-political complexity of this process of forming alliances based to a large extent on controversial prophecies and their associated rites becomes evident when comparing the following two episodes.

sKu mdun sMon skyid nas told me to come to Gang tshang.⁴²⁸ I showed him the text of *Repelling Armies (dmag zlog)*, and he thus gained confidence in it and issued a request encouraging virtue⁴²⁹ to rTse gdong.⁴³⁰ Thereupon, the restoration of the shrine on the bank of the Brahmaputra river in g.Yas ru⁴³¹ was accomplished. Then, just as the stream of earlier and later wars had become like water reaching a boil, [the prophecy] stating “the polity of gTsang will become a stable alliance” came to pass. Thus, since the peace and happiness within gTsang region up to the present is due to his kindness, the benefit [of that act] is obvious.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ Gang tshang does not appear in Wylie (1962).

⁴²⁹ This is a way of saying “encouraging sponsorship.”

⁴³⁰ rTse gdong is the famous Sa skya monastery in gTsang. Judging by descriptions in the *Sa skya gdung rabs* of trips made by the rTse gdong hierarchs between there and Sa skya, the gTsang rulers' stronghold of bSam grub rtse is located between them. Thus, we have no reason to doubt that the old location of rTse gdong corresponds with its current location on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the rNam gling area of gTsang.

⁴³¹ gYas ru is one of the four horns (*ru bzhi*), the old Imperial, military/administrative divisions of dBus gtsang. gYas ru corresponds to the area of eastern gTsang. For a discussion of the *ru bzhi—g.yon ru, dbu ru, g.yas ru, ru lag*, see G. Uray, “The Four Horns of Tibet According to the Royal Annals,” In *Acta Orientalia: Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* (1960), 31-57. Uray (55) concludes, “the horns were the units of both military and economic (financial) administration as early as the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th,” with *ru lag* added as an ancillary (*yan lag*) horn in the year 733.”

⁴³² *Sog bzlog lo rgyus: 233.6-234.2. der sku mdun smon skyid nas kyis/ gang tshang du shog gsung/ dmag bzlog gi pu ti gzigs phul bas thugs ches nas/ rtsed gdong du dge bskul zhu ba gnang nas/ g.yas ru gtsang 'gram lha khang zhig sos grub ste/ snga phyir sde gzar gyi rgyun chu ltar khol ba yong 'phro la/ gtsang gi rgyal srid mdun ma gru bzhi 'ong zhes pa de byung ste/ ding sang gi bar du gtsang khog bde zhing skyid pa 'di khong gi drin yin pas phan po mngon sum tu gsal/.* As I mention above in the context of narrating the main events in Sog bzlog pa's life, this seems to signal the end of Rin spungs/bSam grub fighting over territory and power in gTsang.

As Sog bzlog pa presents it, the successful formation of his patron-priest alliance with sKu mdun sMon skyid pa, a partnership with long-term consequences for Sog bzlog pa's ritual project, came about through sharing with him the details of the *Twenty-five Means*. We may recall from the chronicle of Sog bzlog pa's life above that sKu mdun sMon skyid pa was a minister for the leadership of the Thob rgyal region with considerable influence in the court of the gTsang pa rulers. His "confidence" in Sog bzlog pa's ritual project was therefore decisively important in the formation of Sog bzlog pa's reputation as a powerful ritual expert.

The second episode depicts a failed attempt at persuasion. In this case, the consequences of not observing the prophecies were grave: the powerful Mongol warlord Kha dan reaked havoc in Hor.

Civil war among the Mongols was constant from the Dragon year until the Dog year (1592-1598), thus, Mongols did not come to Tibet then. Meanwhile, in the Wood-Male-Horse-year (1594), I was preparing to depart to restore sacred places at 'Bri gung and Sog chu kha, but the leader of Bod mkhar ba did not grant permission.

[A prophecy states]:

If, at a place shaped like a skeleton at the river 'Bri gung,
 A four-doored auspicious *stūpa* is constructed,
 Then all the Hor regiments from the north will be
 turned back for several years.

Accordingly, having packed the *Twenty-five Ways to Repell Armies* together with the prophecies, we sent Chos rje lHun grub sdings pa to present 'Bri gung zhabs drung with a petition. ['Bri gung zhabs drung] was thus very pleased. He promised to make the *stūpa*, but it did not come to pass. I had also fallen ill and was therefore not so capable of turning back [armies]. In rDza ra cave, when I was practicing the rite of pressing the mouth of Yamāntaka with a seal, dirt spilled on the circle, so there was no obvious benefit, only bad omens. I had planned to apply myself to the *Great Repeller of Armies*, but beginning from that time, up until the summer of the Sheep year (1595), there were many teachings that I had to offer to Thugs sras sprul sku rin po che⁴³³ and Lo ba spyān snga, masters and disciples. Thus, I did not institute [the rites for] repelling the Mongols [then]. Consequently, even though in Mongolia during that time [the Mongols] were in the midst of being burdened by fathers and sons fighting, Kha dan nonetheless came [to Tibet]. Having vanquished the rule of his own younger brother Ko lo ci, he then sacked

⁴³³ Thugs sras sprul sku rin po che most likely refers to the reincarnation of Thugs sras zla ba rgyal mtshan (1499-1587), son of the treasure revealer Padma gling pa and master to Sog bzlog pa.

the Western Hor people and brought them under [his command]. Thus the prophecy, “In the Wood-Horse and -Sheep [years] they will run like horses,” came to pass.⁴³⁴

The above episodes illustrate well Sog bzlog pa’s rhetorical use of prophecies.

Through describing his use of prophecies in persuading others to perform or sponsor his rites, along with the positive or negative consequences of following suit or not, Sog bzlog pa’s *History* itself emerges as a persuasive argument for the accuracy of his prophecies and interpretations. In other words, by reporting Sog bzlog pa’s successes and failures in convincing Tibet’s powerful figures of the authenticity of his prophecies and interpretations, the *History* presents to readers a compelling case in support of Sog bzlog pa’s authority to adjudicate such matters. The persuasion of sponsors thus becomes a literary trope employed for the persuasion of readers.

In light of this persuasive dimension, moreover, Sog bzlog pa’s frequent references to his own somewhat cynical take on prophecies, and his narration of the criticisms voice by others regarding his prophecies, emerge as powerful rhetorical strategies. In tandem, these realistic elements enable Sog bzlog pa to represent himself in a humble light, while also prefiguring and addressing possible cynical responses on behalf of the *History*’s audience of readers. Considering the skepticism with which Tibetans seemed to regard prophecies during this period, Sog bzlog pa’s admission of his

⁴³⁴ Sog bzlog lo rgyus: 242.6-243.6. *sog po rnam nang 'khrugs 'brug lo nas khyi lo'i bar du rgyun ma chad pas bod la ma lhags pa der 'dug /de nas shing pho rta la/ 'bri gung dang/ sog chu kha'i sa gnad bcos par bdag 'gro bar chas pa la/ sde pa bong mkhar bas dgongs pa ma khrol/ 'bri gung chu bo geng rus 'dra ba'i sar/ /mchod rten bkra shis sgo bzhi bzhengs pa na/ /byang gi hor dmag sde dgu lo mang bzlog/ /ces 'byung ba ltar du/ dmag bzlog nyer lnga lung bstan dang bcas nas 'bri gung zhabs drung du zhu yig 'bul bar chos rje lhun grub sdings pa btang bas/ mnyes tshor che ba gnan/ mchod rten mdzad pa'i zhal bzhes byung kyang thog tu ma khel/ bdag kyang na nas bzlog pa cher ma thub/ rdza ra brag phug tug shin rje kha la rgyas 'debs bsgrubs pas/ 'khor lo la dri ma shor bas nas tshub cha ma gtogs phan yon mngon pa ma byung/ sog bzlog chen mo 'jug rtsis byas pa la/ de nas bzung da gzod lug lo'i dbyar ngo ma song bar du thugs sras sprul sku rin po che dang/ lo ba spyang snga dpon slob la chos bka' 'bul dgos mang pa nas/ sog bzlog ma tshugs pas/ de'i tshe sog yul nas pha 'khrugs bu 'khrugs gis khag pa'i skabs su yod kyang/ kha than gyis rang gi phu bo kho lo ci'i srid blos btang nas 'ong pa dang/ hor stod pa bcom nas 'og tu bcug/ shing rta lug la rta bzhin rgyug/ /ces pa'i lung bstan thog tu khel/*

own skepticism and his narration of the accusations of prophecy fraud leveled against him give added weight and legitimacy to his account. When juxtaposed with demonstration after demonstration in the *History* of Sog bzlog pa's effective interpretation of prophecies and the actual geopolitical consequences of following those directives, we are left with an image of Sog bzlog pa as a man with substantial moral integrity, intellectual honesty, and courageous disregard for the conventions and opinions of his peers.

b. Righteousness, Infamy, and Authority in Ritual Prowess

Throughout the *History*, Sog bzlog pa portrays himself as a righteous and selfless patriot, destined to defend Tibet's borders at all costs. Much of what was at stake for Sog bzlog pa was his moral reputation. As indicated in the historical background painted earlier in this chapter, Tibetans were far from uniform in their attitudes toward Mongol military interventions. Sog bzlog pa's hyper-involvement with so many geopolitical, sectarian, and clan formations made him a vortex for the whirlwind of forces struggling for supremacy during this time. Sog bzlog pa was at cross-purposes with several very influential Tibetan factions, such as the monastic communities of 'Bras spung, dGa' ldan, and others, who were actively courting Mongol favor to bolster their own financial and sectarian interests. At the same time, he also suffered biting criticisms from skeptics who saw in his ritual efforts vain attempts at careerist self-promotion, thus extending his infamy well beyond the walls of Central Tibet's super-monasteries. Consequently, states

Sog bzlog pa, he was publicly ostracized, “exiled from the company of men and tolerated only among charlatans.”⁴³⁵

At the same time, however, so frequent are Sog bzlog pa’s references to the defamation that he suffered among his peers that he seems to revel in his ill repute as further evidence of his selfless sacrifice. Consequently, we cannot simply take at face value the vivid details of such accusations present in the *History*. Instead, we must attend to the rhetorical function of these accounts and ask what affects Sog bzlog pa may have hoped to achieve among his readers through representing himself as an object of scorn and suspicion. Let us first review some of the more salient critical self-representations.

The opening passages of the *History* offer a revealing glance into Sog bzlog pa’s autobiographical identity.

Alas! Of meager merit – not having gathered the accumulations –
Powerless, ineffectual
contempuous I,
Hurled by karma, was born in this land of Tibet.

An orphan abandoned by my parents when young,
I had a slight imprint for dharma.
Yet, overcome by the intensity of my negative karma,
I have in no way completed the triad of study, reflection, and meditation.

During the early part of my life, performing indentured servitude I
served as a messenger.
Now at the end of my life, as though at the head of a row from having
been chased by dogs,
I am one who indulges in donations from the faithful
under the title “lama.”

There is no way that a positive biography would have been recorded for an obstinate, jaded one [like me], who is incapable of Dharma. It is [thus] not at all the case that I can relate a biography capable of eliciting awe, conviction, or inspiration. However, I am unable to avert the great burden of sNang rtse ba, the regent of the Conqueror’s command.

⁴³⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 231.1: *mi khyud nas bud nas zog khyu ru zhugs/*. This phrase and others like it occur repeatedly throughout Sog bzlog pa’s memoir.

Thus, like saddling a *dzo* load onto an oxen, turning back the Mongols, a masochistic (*rang sdug*) act that would delight noone, was unwillingly saddled upon incompetent me.

Since the deeds of buddhas and their children are not objects for ordinary beings,
And the actions of great ones are not objects for the lesser,
This way was not within my experiential domain,
And I have consequently attracted slander
And purchased misery with interest.

Exiled from the company of men,
I am tolerated in the company of charlatans.

Since the strength of the god of darkness and the ranks of Māra were great,
my life was even at stake several times.
Yet, due to the compassion of the buddhas, the excellent protection of the
Oḍiyāna lineage, and my own pristine exalted motivation,
I was able to repel the Mongol border troops in accordance with the treasure
prophecy and directly manifest the realm of Tibet into peace.

If I do not describe the trifling marks of virtue that arose,
It would be an embarrassment to the Treasure revealer, as well as his lineage,
And later it will be difficult to once again repel the Mongols.
Thus, this text is for the sake of benefitting the teachings.

If you find that this is not trustworthy,
I by all means most sincerely apologize.⁴³⁶

These passages juxtapose self-deprecation and self-righteousness, resignation and mission, subdued candor and sarcastic histrionics to create a sense of subtle irony. The self-castigation in Sog bzlog pa's voice, extreme even in comparison to the overtly self-effacing tendency of much Tibetan autobiographical writing, gives way to bravado and

⁴³⁶ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 204.4-206.1. /kye ma'o bsod nams dman zhing tshogs ma bsags kyang/ /dbang med khas nyen nyams chung tha shal bdag/ /las kyis phen pas bod kyi yul 'dir skyes/ gzhon tshe pha mas bor ba'i dwa phrug zhig/ /chos kyi bag chags cung zad yod mod kyang/ /las ngan shugs drag gzhon dbang kha btsan pas/ /thos bsam sgom gsum gang yang mthar ma 'khyol/ /tshe stod nang zan byas nas bang chen rgyug/ /tshe mjug khyi yis brdas pa'i gral mgo bzhin/ /bla ma'i ming thog dkor zan snyoms las mkhan/ /spra cal chos ma nus kyi dred po la/ /bzang po'i rnam thar 'god rgyu byung dogs med/ /ngo mtshar yid ched dang ba 'dren nus pa'i/ /rnam thar brjod rgyu ci yang mi brdog go/ /'on kyang rgyal ba'i rgyal tshab snang rtse ba'i/ /bka' yi khur chen bzlog par ma nus te/ /mdzo khal glang la bkal ba ji bzhin du/ /rang sdug su mi mgu ba'i sog bzlog 'di/ /'khos med bdag gi thog tu dbang med bkal/ /rgyal sras mdzad pa so skye'i yul min la/ /chen po'i bya bya chung ngu'i yul min pas/ /tshul 'di bdag gi spyod yul ma gyur te/ /mi kha bsdus shing sdug po sbus gis nyos/ /mi khyu bud nas zog po'i khyu ru chug/ /nag po'i lha dang bdud ris stobs ches pas/ /'chi ba'i srog la'ang bab 'dra'ang mang du byung/ /'on kyang rgyal ba rnam kyi thugs rje dang/ /o rgyan brgyud pa mgon tu bzang ba dang/ /rang gi lhag bsam rnam par dag pa'i rgyus/ /gter lung ji bzhin mtha' dmag zlog thub cing/ /bod khams bde bar mngon sum gsal ba yi/ /dge mtshan cung zad byung ba ma brjod na/ /gter ston brgyud par bcas pa'i zhabs 'dren cing/ /phyis nas sog zlog mdzad pa'ang 'byung dka' bas/ /yi ge 'di ni bstan la phan phyir lags/ /gal te thugs la 'thad par ma gyur na/ cis kyang shin tu thugs mad mthol lo bshags/

proud achievement toward the end. Tinged with the nearly sarcastic tenor of Sog bzlog pa's exaggerated self-criticisms, the overall mood becomes one of defensiveness and even defiance, rather than self-pity and loathing.

Later in the narrative Sog bzlog pa reiterates these sentiments. This time, he stresses even more centrally the undesirability of taking up the project of turning back Mongol armies, as if to demonstrate the selflessness of his actions.

I understood that the way in which Mongols are averted was not my job. It was obvious that I was unqualified. I knew that the people were without a hope that [I could do] such a thing. I understood that I would be removed from the company of men and become a charlatan. I knew that it would be an obstacle and an obstruction to wandering in mountain hermitages. I consistently had the thought in mind that the [requisite] objects to be built, such as the temples, *stūpas*, and so forth at the earth's moxibustion points (*sa gnad me btsa*⁴³⁷) in the lands of Khams, Kong po, dBus, and gTsang, would never be seen, and instead of that, it would be better if I could rely on alms food and be a religious practitioner who is simply without regrets by the end of this life.⁴³⁸

Sog bzlog pa's remarks here represent the repulsion of Mongols as an odious endeavor, which he considered well beyond his capacities and wishes. It would appear then from

⁴³⁷ *sa gnad me btsa* refers to the moxibustion-like treatment of focal points of demonic interference located throughout the body of the landscape through the construction of temples and *stūpas* at those vital points. This concept appears to derive from the notion that appears in the mythology connected with the imperial period king Srong btsan sgam po (c. 7th century) in which the land of Tibet itself is a supine demoness, whose limbs needed to be "pinned down" by the construction of sacred architecture before the Jo khang, the most sacred temple in Tibet, could be completed. This body-landscape homology, with the connections it forms between landscape, spirits, the body, human ritual intervention, and sacred architecture, is clearly inflected in Sog bzlog pa's career as both physician and protector of territories. For a more detailed treatment of this set of notions, see Janet Gyatso, "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet," *Tibet Journal*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (1987), 38-53. For a critical reevaluation of Gyatso and other interpretations of this myth, see Martin Mills, "Royal Buddhist Geomancy in the Srong btsan sgam po Mythology," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, no. 3 (December 2007): 47 pp. As a point of comparison with Sog bzlog pa's use of these notions, see the analogous Mongol-averting episode in the biography of Thang stong rgyal po, in trans. Cyrus Stearns, *King of the Empty Plain: The Tibetan Iron-Bridge Builder Tangtong Gyalpo* (Ithaca and Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 333-362.

⁴³⁸ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 207.2-207.5. *sog zlog gi tshul 'di bdag gi yul du ma gyur pa yang go/ 'khos kyis mi bcogs par yang mngon tu gyur/ /mi rnams kyang de 'dra ba'i re ba med par shes/ rang mi khyu nas don nas zog gyur 'gro ba'ang go /ri khrod 'grim pa'i bar chad dang gegs su yang shes / khams dang kong po dbus gtsang gi yul rnams su sa gnad me btsa'i lha khang / mchod rten la sogs pa 'grub pa'i yul nam yang mi snang ba dang / de las bsod snyoms kyi zas la brten te tshe mjug 'dir / rang mi 'gyod tsam gyi dge sbyor cig byung na snyam pa'i 'dun pa snga phyi kun tu sems la yod...*

these two passages that one of the motives behind Sog bzlog pa's self-critical remarks was to defend against accusations that he repelled Mongol armies for self-gain.

Indeed, by Sog bzlog pa's account the publicized performance of violent rites with geopolitical ramifications had dramatic consequences for his reputation. As he reports in the *History*, Sog bzlog pa eventually received the blame for the untimely death of his initial patron, the leader of Bod mkhar.⁴³⁹ But rather than express humility or contrition on this account, Sog bzlog pa's bravado weighs heavily throughout the episode. Sog bzlog pa paints himself as a hero who disregarded grave peril and infamy to follow his master's command in service to the Tibetan people. Moreover, Sog bzlog pa is also careful to point out that it was his favor with the Hor chieftain A chos, who took over the Bod mkhar estate after the leader's passing, that provided Sog bzlog pa the security necessary to continue his project that year amidst the rising storm of threats and gossip. This twist suggests that Sog bzlog pa may have benefitted from his reputation as a violent man.

Sog bzlog pa offers a similar account of events that transpired the following year.⁴⁴⁰ Then, Sog bzlog pa is first exiled from 'U yug in connection with the anniversary of the Bod mkhar leader's death, but then protected and even rewarded by Tibet's gTsang leadership. Sog bzlog pa thus once again represents himself as a martyr, singled out and despised for spearheading rituals to protect the geopolitical integrity of Tibet's frontiers. But then, despite such accusations, the gTsang pa sde srid showers favor upon Sog bzlog pa, granting him a monastic estate through which to regularize his Mongol averting rituals as part of the annual ritual calendar of the burgeoning nation.

⁴³⁹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 245.4.

⁴⁴⁰ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 246.3-247.2.

sKu mdun sMon skyid pa reappears in this episode as an intermediary for Sog bzlog pa and the gTsang pa sde srid, highlighting once again the enduring advantages of the strategic political alliances which Sog bzlog pa forged through the promotion of prophecies.

Sog bzlog pa's account of his ability to gather support from Tibet's leadership in spite of his ill-repute suggests that Sog bzlog pa might have regarded his infamy as an asset rather than a disadvantage. Indeed, in the following episode, Sog bzlog pa is explicit that he considered his bad reputation to be proof of his power as a ritual specialist. Note Sog bzlog pa's appeals to scriptural and prophetic support to prove the meaningfulness of being slandered for his involvement in violent rites.

There were several indications that negative deeds and obscurations were being purified through vicious rumors spreading throughout the country that I had poisoned rJe drung Brag nag pa, A ce tse mo, and her servant. As it is taught in the *Sūtra of the Tathāgata's Wisdom Mudrā*:

For those who have manifestly performed any and all harmful actions for a countless eon,
It will all be purified in a future life through simply having a head ache.
It will all be purified through simply being wretched minded.
It will all be purified through simply being disparaged.
It will all be purified through simply being insulted.
It will all be purified through simply being agitated.
It will all be purified through simply being injured.
It will all be purified through having little property.
It will all be purified in only one lifetime.⁴⁴¹

Thus, it seemed as though the turning back of Mongols was purifying my negative deeds. The thought arose then that I was capable of turning back the Mongols, for just like what

⁴⁴¹ *Phags pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i ye shes kyi phyag rgya'i ting nge 'dzin ces bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo (Arya-tathāgatajñānamudrāsamādhi-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra)*, in *bKa' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh 131, *Mdo sde, da* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009), 645. The above citation appears in the *sūtra* itself as follows: *de dag gis bskal pa grangs med par gang sdig pa'i las mngon par 'dus byas par gyur pa de dag gi de yang phyi ma'i dus na klad[g.yung, li, pe, co=glad] pa na ba tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur / sems nyam nga ba tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur / skur pa btab pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur / brnyas[g.yung=brnyes] pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ thing slad byas pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ co dris[g.yung=bris; li=dres] pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ rnyed pa chung bas thams cad byang bar 'gyur / skye ba gcig kho nas thams cad byang bar 'gyur ro/*

had also happened to previous emanations such as Sangs rgyas gling pa, things were happening [to me] according to the prophecy:

Since those with a little negative karma remaining
Will experience its ripening at that time, happiness and suffering will
alternately arise.

In particular, slander, the likes of which will exhile them from the
company of men,

Will spread like wind nine times,

And their lives will be at stake 13 times.

Thus, pride also arose from the thought that aside from my teacher [Zhic po gling pa] and I, noone [prophecised] had completed their life in a state of ill-repute.⁴⁴²

Sog bzlog pa here promotes the notion that the swell of accusations and plots against him is a point of pride which proves the righteousness of his mission. It is, after all, alleges Sog bzlog pa, only he and his master Zhig po gling pa whose reputations have been sufficiently tarnished to warrant identification with the figures so prophecised. Thus, by Sog bzlog pa's account, the ill-repute that he acquired through his ritual campaign against Mongol military incursions does not detract from the legitimacy of his project, but adds to it.

It should be noted, however, that Sog bzlog pa's attitude with respect to his infamy shifts according to the criticisms involved. As witnessed in several of the passages cited above, Sog bzlog pa laments charges of prophecy fraud and patron manipulation throughout the *History*, even while he revels in charges of violence and murder. One implicit advantage of presenting his accusations of excessive violence in

⁴⁴² *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 249.6-250.6. *rje drung brag nag pa dang/ a ce rtse mo dpon g.yog la dug btang zer ya ga ngan pas rgyal khams gang bas sdig sgrib dag pa'i rtags mang du byung ste/ de ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i ye shes kyi phyag rgya'i mdo las/ des bskal pa grangs med par gang sdig pa'i las mngon par 'dus byas par gyur pa de dag gis/ de yang phyi ma'i dus na klad pa na ba tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur / sems nyam nga ba tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur / skur pa btab pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur / brnyas pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ thing slad byas pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ co dris pa tsam gyis thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ rnyed pa chung bas thams cad byang bar 'gyur / skye ba gcig kho nas thams cad byang bar 'gyur/ zhes gsung 'dug pa ltar sog bzlog 'dis sdig pa dag pa 'dra / da ni sog po bzlog thub 'dug snyam pa shar te/ sngon sprul sku sangs rgyas gling pa lta bu la yang/ las ngan lhag ma cung zad yod pa rnams/ /dus der smin phyir bde sdug spel mar 'byung/ /khyad par mi 'i khyu nas bud 'dra ba 'i/ /mi kha rlung ltar 'phyo ba lan dgu dang/ /'chi ba srog la bab 'dra bcu gsum 'byung/ /zhes lung bstan pa ltar byung 'dug pas/ gtam ngan gyi ngang la mi tshe phyid pa nged dpon slob gnyis las mu byung ba 'dra snyam pa'i nga rgyal yang skyes/*

such a positive light is that they contribute to his public image as a dangerous man capable of murder and duplicity in the extreme. Such rumors, while perhaps deplorable for the common lot, are quite felicitous for a figure actively fashioning himself as an expert in violent rites with the capability to confront Mongol armies.

Sog bzlog pa's rhetoric thus serves at least two interrelated purposes: reports of threats and slander, regardless of their content, contribute to his public image as a reluctant and long-suffering servant of Tibetan geopolitical integrity, while at the same time, accusations focused on his excessive violence help build his reputation as a ritual specialist powerful enough to protect Tibet's borders from foreign invasion. The first function emphasizes Sog bzlog pa's selfless servitude and prophecied destiny, while the second highlights his transgressive and violent power. Their combination strikes an ambivalent tone of humility and strategic self-promotion, a feature that is typical of Sog bzlog pa's self-presentation throughout his narrative works.

The consequences of Sog bzlog pa's activities in the domain of politically pragmatic rites were dire it would seem. At some time toward the end of his seventy-three years, he wrote an intimate self-portrait entitled *Verses of Heart-felt Lamentation*, in which he portrays himself as a man facing death riddled with regrets about a life unwisely spent. The misgivings Sog bzlog pa expresses in this work gravitate around feelings of abandonment, powerlessness, and incredulity in the face of unjust accusations. The society he served so assiduously had cast him out. Lonely and despised, the ailing Sog bzlog pa considers his past mistakes and activities with his characteristic mixture of self-derision, defensiveness, bravado, and humor.

c. Personal Qualifications for Ritual Prowess

The ambivalent combination of defensiveness and pride witnessed in the passages above perhaps indicates something quintessential about the image of the type of religious specialist that Sog bzlog pa hoped to portrait himself as in his memoir. The combination of insecurity and self-effacement on the one hand, and self-righteous pride tipping into bold bravado on the other colors Sog bzlog pa's *History* to its conclusion. The penultimate passage of the text expresses this feature of Sog bzlog pa's self-identity quite well. There, Sog bzlog pa defensively summarizes the underlying compassionate rationale of his violent ritual campaign and demonstrates his understanding of the proper qualifications to become an expert performer of such rites. Meanwhile, in the same passage, Sog bzlog pa complicates this sense of confidence significantly by referencing his reticence to accept his prophecied role in this endeavor, and by remarking that he participated only out of deference for Zhig po gling pa's command. Sog bzlog pa even blames the unpredictable vicissitudes of his ritual campaign on his own deficiency of important qualifications. This ambivalent passage invites the question of who, precisely, is qualified to successfully perform such rituals? What are the proper criteria of such a figure? According to the passage's concluding phrases presented below, basic qualifications include compassion, and skill in and understanding of the nature of spells.

It is taught in the *Śrī Guhyasamāja-uttara-tantra*:
 Wonderous! Samantabhadra has taught:
 Supreme compassion is unexcelled.
 [With it,] even hateful and violent actions
 Confer the fruition of Buddhahood itself.⁴⁴³
 What is the intention of such a teaching?
 It is not the same as ordinary black mantra,
 Where with deep-seated selfishness and malice

⁴⁴³ *gSang ba 'dus pa'i rgyud phyi ma (Guhyasamāja-uttara-tantra)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 443, Rgyud 'bum, ca (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009), 604. The corresponding passage from the *gSang ba 'dus pa'i rgyud phyi ma* is quite different from Sog bzlog pa's citation, although the gist is similar. The *tantra* itself reads: */e ma'o kun tu bzang po yi/ /thugs rje chen po dri ma med/ /gdug pa'i mi bzad las kyang/ /sangs rgyas nyid kyi 'bras bu stsol/*

And disregard for the truth of cause and effect,
 One applies evil spells, sowing dissension
 Among those who are a little bit higher or lower than one.
 [Rather] it comes from being skilled in and understanding the nature of spells.
 [Thus] how would it be possible [for this teaching] to be like the spells of
yakṣa and *rākṣasa*?

I have comprehended the gist of this teaching.

Generally, the turning back of the Mongols is a sublime method for all sentient beings to be at peace and to protect the Buddha's teachings. Thus, if it had been executed by one with knowledge, love, and ability; power and wealth; and communal support, then [the peace of beings and the protection of the teachings] would have occurred in full. Yet, since I am devoid of these three [criteria], a panopoly of relative ease and hardship has transpired.⁴⁴⁴

Especially noteworthy in this passage, aside from Sog bzlog pa's scriptural justification for violent ritual action, is that criteria for success include a mixture of the personal qualities of knowledge, love, and ability; and the objective qualities of wealth, influence, and communal acceptance. This list of criteria for executing violent rites points toward yet another, deeper tension that runs throughout the *History*, and which underlies much of the dynamics described thus far. I am referring to the tension between the subjective qualities of compassion, wisdom, love, selflessness, and other personal qualities valued among Buddhist practitioners, and the objective, *realpolitik* demand for figures to demonstrate prowess in violent rites within their competitive socio-political environment. In the *History*, this tension is expressed foremost in the disjunction between its explicit and repeated references to the qualities, almost exclusively subjective, incumbent upon those destined to be successful army-repellers, and its descriptions of the actual

⁴⁴⁴ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 255.4-256.2. /dpal ldan 'dus pa'i rgyud phyi mar/ /e ma'o kun tu bzang po yis/ /thugs rje mchog ni bla na med/ /sdang zhing drag pa'i las kyis kyang/ /sangs rgyas nyid kyi 'bras bu ster/ /de skad gsung pa dgongs lags sam/ /rang 'dod zhe ngan phugs su bcug/ /las 'bras bden pa khyad bsad nas/ /cung zad tsam gyi mthon dman la/ /ngan mthu gtad khram sel 'jug pa'i/ /sngags nag phal dang 'di mi mtshungs/ /mthu yi rang bzhin mkhas shing rtogs las byung/ /gnod sbyin srin po'i mthu 'dra ci la rung/ /zhes tshul yang khong du chud par gyur / spyir sog bzlog 'di sems can thams cad bde thabs dang/ /sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa bsrung thabs dam par 'dug pas/ mdzad pa po de mkhyen brtse nus par ldan pa/ stobs dang 'byor pa yod pa/ mthun snang grub pa gcig gis mdzad na yongs rgyur 'dug /bdag la ni de gsum med pas/ las sla ba dang/ dka' ba sna tshogs pa thog tu gsal/

procedures of the rites involved, which in almost every case feature powerful substances, objects, and/or sacred architecture, and compelling sensory and material signs of success.

Elsewhere in Sog bzlog pa's narratives the role of mind and its cultivation through Great Perfection meditation practice over lifetimes seems to be paramount in qualifying an individual to perform such rituals to maximum effect. By Sog bzlog pa's account, Zhig po gling pa appeals to Sog bzlog pa's Great Perfection experience when attempting to convince him to accept his role as Mongol repeller:

That said, even though you generally complain like a dog with a broken paw, you are not at all like the common lot. All those who practice the Great Perfection have come before me, but no one has been like you. Thus, [Great Perfection experience] is present [in you] as training from previous [lifetimes]. [Your] other qualities as well are nothing like learning the alphabet in this lifetime.⁴⁴⁵

The following prophetic speech from Ye shes mtsho rgyal, which Sog bzlog pa relates as one of Zhig gling's visionary experiences, is also telling in this regard.

A helpful person
Will very shortly emerge
Who will make efforts in the path of means
For restoring the teachings in the land of Tibet that have declined,
And for averting the Hor and Mongol border troops that will come.

All the secret essential points of generation, completion,
Stages of the path, view, conduct, union (*sbyor*), and liberation (*sgrol*)
Emerge from mind.
Therefore, one who makes efforts [in these],
Suffused with a compassion that is capable of exchanging self with others,
Is making efforts towards the sought after goal of skillful means
in the entire profound path, and will accomplish it.

Of all the phenomena in appearance and existence, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*,
There is nothing that does not emerge from one's own mind.
Settle upon the great, open, all-embracing expanse.

One's trust in dreams and confused appearances –
The polarity of self-reflective awareness and the perceptual fields –
Is bound together by self-grasping.

⁴⁴⁵ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 215.2-215.3: *lar khyed rang sdug skad khyi lag pa chag pa bzhin byed kyang / mi spyi pa dang 'dra ba gcig lar mi 'dug / rdzogs chen bsgom mkhan ji snyed gcig nga 'i rtsar byung ste / khyed kyis 'di 'dra su la yang mi 'dug pas / sngon sbyangs su 'dug / yon tan gzhan yang tshe 'di la ka bsblabs pa dang cung mi 'dra/*

So without clinging to “mine,” rest comfortably as you are.⁴⁴⁶

The concluding verses of the *History*, moreover, include as criteria expertise in visualization, selfless altruism, and mastery in the ritual stages of approach, accomplishment, and activities.

The heavy emphasis throughout these passages on subjective qualities ultimately derived from mental cultivation and meditation often stands in marked tension with other descriptions in the *History*'s episodes. As the reader will have noticed in the detailed chronicle of Sog bzlog pa's life, he describes several sequences in which he simply requests, often through a third party, that certain rituals be performed in his absence and without his ritual involvement even from afar. Moreover, several of the rites involve restoration of temples and reliquaries believed to lie at crucial geomantic junctures, or the insertion of powerful substances, or objects at those locations. More often than not these too do not require the presence of Sog bzlog pa, or his ritual intervention. All that seems essential is that certain powerful objects be secured at specifically powerful locations, and it is seemingly Sog bzlog pa's connections with influential political and ecclesiastical leaders, rather than his compassion or meditative powers, that secure for him the influence needed to stage these rites.

The final few folios of the *History*, which focus on the economic and social conditions and alliances behind Sog bzlog pa's ritual campaign, provide considerable insight into such material and rhetorical dimension of these practices. Here, Sog bzlog pa

⁴⁴⁶ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 214.1-214.4. /bod khams bstan pa nyams pa dang/ /hor sog mtha' dmag lhag pa rnams/ bzlog dang gso ba'i thabs lam rnams/ /'bad pa'i gdong grogs byed mi zhig/ /myur du 'byung bar 'gyur ro ang/ /bskyed dang rdzogs dang lam rim pa/ lta spyod sbyor sgrol gsang ba'i gnad/ /thams cad sems las byung bas na/ /bdag gzhan brje phod snying rje'i/ /rtsis zung 'bad pas zab lam kun/ /thabs mkhas gnyer don 'bad de sgrub/ /snang srid 'khor 'das chos rnams kun/ /rang gi sems las ma byung med/ /'ub chub klongs yangs chen po ru/ /thag chod rang rig skye mched zung/ /rmi lam dang ni 'khrul snang la/ yid ches bdag 'dzin 'ching bas na/ /nga yir ma 'dzin ci bder zhog/

critically singles out those who refused or failed to assist him in his project, and praises those who did. These passages reveal a number of striking features that warrant our attention. Most germane to the present discussion, these folios emphasize that many of the *Means to Repel Armies* involved simply the placement or construction of powerful materials and shrines at prophecied locations, often through an influential political ally. The role of subjective meditative mastery was negligible in such cases, it would seem. Once again, this stands in marked contrast with the passages presented above, which indicate that compassion, Great Perfection experience, and the charisma it carries in Tibetan society were deemed an essential component of Sog bzlog pa's credibility as an interpreter of the prophetic record and his capacity to spearhead this state-wide ritual program. Below is a sample from this three-folio litany.

Among those encouraged [to do something] in accordance with prophecy, there were many who did not act. Previously, I told the leader Mi 'gyur drung how a *stūpa* needed to be made at gNas rnying ba 'jug gdong in the Fire Male Dog year (1586), and how it would benefit the whole of Nyang stod and especially his own peace of mind. With this he put the petition under his mattress and did not issue a letter in response. I offered [petitions] to both Thon and sNye mo, and each place sent a mannered and eloquent letter in response. However, they did not perform the rituals for the teachings [as requested]...

Via the leader Bod mkar nas, I told mNga' bdag rgyal mo and sPel gror rje btsun drung of Byang that a temple needed to be built at 'Jad. They said they would do it, but did not...

Concerning those who believed in the prophecies of Master Padmasambhava, the Second Buddha, I offered the prophecies to Rin po che klu sgrub pa,⁴⁴⁷ and since the prophecy accorded with his own incarnation line, he believed in it and thus instituted at Ngam ring⁴⁴⁸ monastery the continuous [practice] of aspiration prayers and *sūtra* practices for turning back the Mongols. As this [tradition] has existed up to the present, his kindness has been great. Both g.Ya' bzang nas Zhabs drung spyang and sKu mdun sMon skyi nas, and their disciples, enacted an inconceivable [number] of strategies for generally bringing peace to the country of dBus gTsang; and in particular, [they] implemented strategies and drafted treaties inconceivable [in number] for turning back Mongols. Moreover, the Bod mkhar nas leader, and the petty leaders and kings of dPal

⁴⁴⁷ Rin po che klu grub pa of Ngam ring chos sde refers to the famous Sa skya master Mang thos klu grub rgya mtsho (1523-1596).

⁴⁴⁸ Ngam ring, otherwise known as Byang Ngam ring, was the capital of the old Byang myriarchy located in the northwestern edge of gTsang along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra River. For more details, see Wiley (1962), 67, 131, 132, 135, and 145.

sde nas also performed several rituals for turning back Mongols and bringing peace to the country of Tibet.⁴⁴⁹

d. Final Reflections on Sog bzlog pa's Rhetoric in the 'History'

In writing one's life story, one necessarily restructures experience into a patterned narrative that resonates with the collective socio-cultural norms and expectations of a target audience. At the same time, however, writing a life story is essentially a creative act, which adds novel images to the culture from which it derives meaning and augments the identity and prestige of the author. Thus, while the act of life writing might compromise or distort personal experiences in efforts to conform to socio-cultural standards, its manipulation of public contexts of meaning also serves personal goals. By bringing personal stories into the public arena, and in the process, appropriating and adapting public discourses as vehicles for personal expression, telling one's story "reworks and remodels subject-object relations in ways that subtly alter the balance between actor and acted upon."⁴⁵⁰ We may therefore characterize life writing as a process of making personal experiences public, a political act in which one constructs a public identity through the unique arrangement of images drawn from the store of

⁴⁴⁹ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus: 257.1-259.4...gzhan lung bstan ltar bskul ma zhus pa rnam kyi ni ma mdzad pa mang ste/ de snga sde pa mi 'gyur drung la me pho khyi'i skabs gnas rnying ba 'jug gdong gi mchod rten gnang dgos/ nyang stod spyi dang/ khyad par blo bde ba rang la phan tshul zhus pas / zhu yig bzhugs gdan 'og tu bcug / yig lan kyang ma gnang / thon dang snye mo gnyis su phul bas / zhu lan 'jam la legs pa re gnang byung kyang / bstan pa'i rim gro ma mdzad/...sde pa bong mkhar nas brgyud de/ byang du mnga' bdag rgyal mo dang spel gror rje btsun drung la 'jad kyi lha khang de mdzad dgos zhus pas/ byed gsung ste ma mdzad/.../slob dpon sangs rgyas gnyis pa pad+ ma 'byung gnas kyi lung bstan la thugs ches pa ni/ rin po che klu sgrub pa la lung bstan phul bas / khong rang gi skyes rabs dang lung bstan mthun pas yid ches te sog po bzlog pa'i smon lam dang/ mdo sgrub gyi rgyun ngam ring chos sder btsugs te da lta'i bar du yod pas bka' drin che / g.ya' bzang nas zhabs drung spyen snga rin po che dang/ sku mdun smon skyid nas dpon slob gnyis ni / lung dang mthun par spyir dbu gtsang gi rgyal khams bde thabs dang / khyad par du sog po bzlog pa'i thabs dang mdun ma bsam las 'das pa mdzad do/ /gzhan du sde pa bong mkhar nas / dpal sde nas khren bu ba'i sde pa rgyal po lags rnam kyi kyang sog po bzlog pa dang/ bod khams bde ba'i rim gro mang du mdzad/*

⁴⁵⁰ Michael Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press: University of Copenhagen, 2006), 16.

meaningful socio-cultural tropes, and in so doing, gains some purchase over past events for future ends.

The political nature of life writing comes into sharper focus when the images under construction carry overt political weight, as they do in the case of Tibet's ritual specialists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who were often in competition to promote their ritual prowess through performing and writing about pragmatic rites with geopolitical consequences. Prophecy texts, the most authoritative templates of cultural meanings for burgeoning tantric ritual masters set on making their personal exploits public, were a key area of contention. Contention over prophecies, moreover, centered squarely on the issue of authenticity in their revelation and interpretation. Authenticity in this domain was demonstrated precisely through shows of prophecy revelation and interpretation persuasive enough to garner the support of influential political and ecclesiastical leaders. In this regard, public reputation of ritual prowess acquired through promoting destructive power and infamy appears to have been of critical importance. The creation of literary images that feature the ability to discover powerful substances and implement these in rites with dramatic impact in the arena of Tibetan politics thus emerges as a strategy by which Tibetan ritual specialists acquired the social prestige and political influence necessary to continue to stage such rites.

Yet, the drive to publicly demonstrate prowess in violent rites with pragmatic effects in the domain of geopolitics could only operate in tension with the value placed on shows of humility, selflessness, and moral rectitude expected of a figure whose account is to be trusted by his Buddhist peers. Sog bzlog pa attempts to demonstrate such values foremost through echoing the skepticism he felt when first inheriting his Mongol-averting project from Zhig po gling po, and through reporting the challenges he

subsequently faced from critics who questioned the authenticity of his prophecies, interpretations, and motives. This tight-wire act between demonstrating ritual power, on the one hand, and humility, on the other, links up with Sog bzlog pa's ambivalent relationship with infamy, which is efficacious for building a reputation as a patriotic servant violent enough to confront Mongol armies, but also detrimental when such accusations involve prophecy fraud, patron manipulation, and general self-interest. In a similar vein, we might describe Sog bzlog pa's repeated references to subjective qualities acquirable from Buddhist practice alone as yet another rhetorical strategy enlisted to strike this balance. According to such a reading, Sog bzlog pa's references to subjective qualities function, along with his rhetoric of self-sacrifice and humility, as a counterweight to the bravado, pride, and violence that constitute the other, darker side of his public persona.

This final distinction helps to put into relief the *History's* explicit focus on the roles of compassion, meditative powers, and Great Perfection mastery in ritual power, when its episodes so often emphasize the placement of powerful objects and the construction of sacred architecture with only tenuous links to figures possessing such valued subjective qualities. The *History's* focus on the physical, the sensory, the material, the observable suggests that the social and political legitimacy gained through authoritative prophecy texts, combined with reputation for the just the right balance of integrity, infamy, and violence, required physical demonstrations more than anything else to gain force. But this physical dimension also had to be rooted, if only on the rhetorical level, in recognizably Buddhist subjective values for it to be most truly authoritative. The tensions between faith and skepticism, destiny and chance, infamy and righteousness, violent power and humility might thus be characterized as dynamics that relate more

fundamentally to questions of how we are to construe the ultimate source of authority and power in our world. To what degree does the ability to transform phenomenal reality stem from the mind and its cultivation of sublime qualities, and to what degree does this capacity reside in specialized actions, objects, technologies, socio-political influence, or other physically observable entities? Sog bzlog pa's apologetic literature, to which we turn in Chapter Three, directly confronts this issue in a series of responses to critics of his Old School tradition. For now, I would like to leave this discussion with the suggestion that the dialectical tensions between these polarities, as reflected in Sog bzlog pa's narrative works, are perhaps rooted more fundamentally in two contrasting orientations to action – one that might be characterized as fundamentally “quotidian,” or “commonsensical” in texture, dwelling on the way things seem; and another that suspends such quotidian ways of thinking and perceiving in order to participate in the ritualized, sacred character of things as they ultimately are. As we shall observe in the chapters to come, these two contrasting orientations to action form a productive friction, which finds various expressions throughout Sog bzlog pa's writings on powerful objects and associated rites. With this tentatively made distinction in mind, let us now turn to Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections on the efficacy of powerful sensory objects, where he plays with the boundaries between this and other divisions to valorize a set of practices that promises liberation through sensory contact alone.

PART II
OBJECTS IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

CHAPTER THREE
CONTROVERSIES OVER THINGS—DRAWING, BLURRING, AND
CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Introduction

The themes Sog bzlog pa addresses in his first extant composition, *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning* (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*), prefigure to a great extent the tensions between subjective and objective modes of efficacy that would surface later in his involvement with the material dimension of Buddhist practice. This chapter is an exploration of the theoretical formulations that Sog bzlog pa advances in this text, specifically as they concern the workings of powerful material objects and sensory experiences.

The discussion tacks between three distinct but related areas of inquiry. Firstly, it will examine what it means for Sog bzlog pa to be enlisting Buddhist theory early in his literary career to buttress the authority of such objects, or in other words, what precisely he may have hoped to gain by recording and circulating his theoretical reflections in writing. Secondly, this chapter explores how such theory was connected with Sog bzlog pa's involvement in the ritual sphere of Tibetan religious practice, especially since ritual action would be such a defining trait of Sog bzlog pa's identity throughout his career. Finally, this chapter relates the above two issues with recent considerations about the nature of ritual practice and its relationship with ritual theory.

For this final point, I take as a starting point Talal Asad's genealogy of the term "ritual," whose semantic shift he traces from instrumental, disciplinary practice to

representational, symbolic expression.⁴⁵¹ Asad argues in that discussion that analysis seeking primarily to determine the underlying meanings of symbols expressed through specific actions labeled “rituals” neglects their more fundamental role as disciplinary instruments enacted to inculcate certain authoritative forms of knowledge within the body. Whatever such actions may represent, express, or symbolize, these are all invariably, according to Asad, second-order developments upon the more primary role of ritual actions in the formation of disciplined subjects and sensibilities. When describing the practices of medieval Christian monasticism to illustrate his point, Asad states, “apt performance involves not symbols to be interpreted but abilities to be acquired according to rules that are sanctioned by those in authority: it supposes no obscure meanings, but rather the formation of physical and linguistic skills.”⁴⁵² The rejection of symbolic analysis in the study of cultural forms is not limited to Asad. As I discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, his work typifies a general shift in academia away from language-centered models of analysis in the interest of getting at how material objects and actions can function in their own right, without recourse to the meanings or values presumed to be in the minds of users or performers.

One possible criticism of this approach is that by opposing the disciplinary effects that the formal features of ritual performances have on performers from the ability of rituals to also communicate discursive, symbolic meanings, this line of reasoning can lead to the severance of form from content, medium from message, and embodied practice from cognitive knowledge. Such an approach can then end up inserting an

⁴⁵¹ Talal Asad, “Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual,” in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 55-82.

⁴⁵² Ibid: 62.

artificial cleft between these sets of twin spheres, thus foreclosing analysis into how they might dynamically interact to produce an entire range of effects with ripples felt throughout every area of human life and expression. To be fair, the anthropologist William Sax has correctly pointed out that interventions in the undue priority given to the symbolic, expressive domain do indeed appear to make genuine headway toward exposing the prevalent, albeit often implicit belief among contemporary students of culture that other people's actions are "rituals" only when their means are disproportionate to their ends, or, in other words, when "we" the cultural analysts deem them "irrational," or technically ineffective in the way they purport to be.⁴⁵³ And much cultural analysis has been concerned precisely with demarcating the "real" effects that such actions can have in lieu of the technical impossibility, from "our" perspective, to bring rain, turn back armies, heal diseases, or whatever else "natives" might think that they do.⁴⁵⁴ Yet, locating this dissonance in an epistemological distance between "us" and "them" – the cultural analyst and the native – ends up reinforcing the naïve stereotype that "natives" are unconcerned with or incapable of developing their own theoretical arguments along those lines, while it also neglects the possibility of alternate models of ritual efficacy, where technical, disciplinary, and symbolic functions are not necessarily opposed, but might work together in surprising and fresh ways that call these very distinctions into question.

I will attempt to complicate the line of thinking typified in Asad's approach by illustrating firstly that Sog bzlog pa uses ritual theory to not only legitimate, but also to

⁴⁵³ William Sax, "Ritual and the Problem of Efficacy," in *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy*, eds. William S. Sax, Johannes Quack, and Jan Weinholt (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-16.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid: 3-4.

understand his own rituals and to communicate that understanding to others; and secondly, that Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections at times bear directly upon the dividing line between technical/instrumental and expressive-symbolic types of action, a distinction whose genesis Asad would rather locate in the pre-Enlightenment west. This chapter shows how Sog bzlog pa, a sixteenth-seventeenth century Tibetan ritual specialist, also weighs in on that and other related distinctions when it comes to the efficacy of his own practices, thus providing a particularly rich illustration for how alternate approaches to ritual action can perhaps better be understood as modalities of being in the world, which take various expressions at different times and places, even for a single individual, rather than paradigms that typify incommensurable "modern" and "traditional," or "western" and "non-western" epistemologies.⁴⁵⁵

The issue of ritual efficacy, as Sax has illustrated, is always closely related to underlying assumptions about the nature of actions as either instrumental and technical, or expressive and symbolic.⁴⁵⁶ When certain cultural practices are regarded as technically ineffective in the way that they claim to be, but there still remains a desire to explain those practices as functional on some level, analysts and theorists often resort to symbolic modalities, linguistic tropes, psychological currents, or other hermeneutical strategies to "make sense" of them. While each of these approaches has its own specific contributions to offer the study of human cultures, they are all alike in presupposing a model in which an underlying thought, feeling, or belief finds expression in a reiterative performance, which contributes to satisfy a sense of efficacy on the sociological,

⁴⁵⁵ This sentiment echoes Stanley Tambiah's reflections in *Magic, Science, and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 105-110) on the commensurability, from the individual perspective, between what he terms "causal" and "participatory" orientations to the world.

⁴⁵⁶ Sax (2010), 6.

aesthetic, and/or psychological level. Sog bzlog pa's arguments about the efficacy of his own practices are one strong response to these tendencies as they forcefully took shape during his time, one ritual specialist's attempt to push back and reinvigorate the sphere of ritual action against the criticisms of rationalists, who would rather account for potent objects and actions largely in terms of what they represent than what they do. And yet, as we shall come to observe in the course of this chapter, Sog bzlog pa's response is not to unilaterally defend the side of direct material efficacy against his opponent's representational logic. He aims instead to model a contextual, relational, and distributed sense of efficacy, in which potent sensory objects work in tandem with the sensate minds and bodies of beings in a variety of ways that cut across such strict subject-object, person-thing distinctions.

To frame Sog bzlog pa's remarks with greater precision and thereby tease out their consequences for his understanding of ritual, this discussion implicitly draws on a six-fold distinction developed by Quack and Töbelmann⁴⁵⁷ concerning the analysis of ritual efficacy: what in such objects is held to be efficacious, who or what is held to be affected, on what level (spiritual, physical, aesthetic, sociological...), by what means, under what circumstances are such affects held to take place, and from whose perspective. In tracing these features, this chapter attempts first and foremost to delineate how Sog bzlog pa valorized the role of the phenomenal, sensory, and material dimensions of religious life in ways that lent substantial charismatic authority to this object-oriented sphere of practice.

⁴⁵⁷ Johannes Quack and Paul Töbelmann, "Questioning 'Ritual Efficacy,'" *Journal of Ritual Studies* 24.1 (2010): 13-28.

Sog bzlog pa composed *Thunder* in 1576 when he was only twenty-five years old, nearly a decade before he embarked on his Mongol-repelling campaign. Sog bzlog pa would remark decades later, in the colophon of his compendious *Thunder of Definitive Meaning* completed in 1605, that it was *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning* that first earned him a reputation as a master theoretician and apologist of Buddhist doctrine and practice.⁴⁵⁸ Indeed, over half of that text represents an attempt by Sog bzlog pa to formulate a coherent account of how sacred substances and potent sensory experiences do what they are purported to do. Even at this early stage in his career we can see Sog bzlog pa's arguments outlining the theoretical underpinnings of what might be called a logic of materiality. More pointedly, we see him develop here a rationale for the potency and use of objects whose charisma would seem to be instrumental for Sog bzlog pa in fashioning himself into an authoritative wielder of such things. I read his formulations in *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning* (henceforth in this chapter referred to simply as *Thunder*), his most extensive considerations on the topic, as a philosophical charter, or canonical justification for the material practices that would occupy him throughout his life.

Secondly, Sog bzlog pa's demonstrations of scholarly command over the discursive contours of such objects and their functions amount to a broader claim of authority over the physical, sensory, and material dimensions of Tibetan religious life as a whole. As I discussed in Chapters One and Two, Sog bzlog pa produced his writings at a critical juncture in Tibetan history, when the power of sacred substances and object-oriented rituals was presumed to be instrumental in protecting Tibet's borders from foreign aggression. In light of this broader context, the act of championing this

⁴⁵⁸ *Nges don 'brug sgra*: 599.4-601.3.

dimension of practice in theoretical writings was perhaps a key way for Sog bzlog pa to demonstrate his interpretative authority over this domain and thereby share in the charisma of the objects concerned. This strategy would have presumably helped catapult Sog bzlog pa into the public spotlight as a powerful ritual expert capable of efficaciously wielding powerful objects for a range of ends.

Finally, such observations set the stage to juxtapose Sog bzlog pa's understandings with the general claim that ritual efficacy involves more the formation of aptitudes than the expression of meanings. We will see in the details of Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections that he and his colleagues were contending precisely over the issue of ritual efficacy in ways that refract and complicate any fast and easy dichotomy between disciplinary practice and symbolic interpretation. More than that, it will be a claim of this chapter that Sog bzlog pa's play with the boundaries presumed and presented in *Thunder* and elsewhere is not just an approach confined to his theoretical writings, but typifies a certain kind of ritual ethos that runs throughout his entire life's activities.

* * *

Turning now to the text, Sog bzlog pa claims to have been impelled to compose *Thunder* as a response to a document that had already been circulating for at least two decades. This short letter forcefully called into question some of the most revered practices and theories belonging to Sog bzlog pa's Old School of Tibetan Buddhism. Roughly half of this critique concerns how, precisely, the practices of seeing visionary experiences, hearing sacred sounds, wearing sacred amulets, and eating sacred pills might serve as

causes of “liberation” from various levels of *saṃsāra* and its associated sufferings. Such radical claims of liberation by means of sensory contact with powerful sacred media, the author of this critique alleges, is a peculiar feature of the Old School’s Great Perfection tradition that runs counter to Buddha’s teaching, which highlights instead the role of effort in meditation and other methods of cognitive cultivation and personal karmic purification in the process of spiritual development.

Old School texts have dubbed these practices and their objects “liberation through seeing” (*mithong grol*), “liberation through hearing” (*thos grol*), “liberation through wearing” (*btags grol*) and “liberation through eating” (*myong grol*), framing them within the rubric of “four liberations,” (*grol ba bzhi*), or sometimes “six liberations” (*grol ba drug*) when adding liberating through “touching” (*reg pa*) and “smelling” (*tshor ba*), or sometimes “recollecting” (*dran pa*). The Old School has promoted this set of practices as special techniques belonging to the Great Perfection tradition that promise “Buddhahood without meditation” (*ma bsgoms sangs rgyas*). Objects and instruction texts alike are sometimes said to possess all four liberations, which usually signals that liberation through “wearing” and “eating” are replaced with liberating through “touching” and “recollecting.” As we saw in the case of Sog bzlog pa’s master Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan, the power of such objects can extend also to persons. Being someone endowed with the four liberations, one with whom any kind of sensory contact brings others spiritual progress, is described in much Great Perfection literature as the highest form of beneficial action in the world, theoretically achievable only by sublime beings that have perfected themselves for the welfare of others. The charisma of certain objects, texts, and persons believed to liberate through sensory contact alone meant also that possession of liberation-through-senses objects became a popular component of institutional prestige

even outside Old School circles. The monasteries and institutions of other sectarian groups, such as the Sa skya school's Zhwa lu monastery, among several other examples, gained considerable renown for their possession of relics, reliquaries, or texts similarly dubbed as items that could purify immeasurable negative karma, and sometimes even bring liberation, simply through sensory contact.⁴⁵⁹

Despite important differences between sight, sound, physical contact, and consumption with respect to the relative materiality of the objects involved, these four share the presupposition that there are certain especially potent objects of the senses, which when encountered, can stimulate radical transformations in the subjective and/or physical state of the viewer, hearer, wearer, or eater. A belief in the powers of sacred sensory media and material objects, in and of themselves, to bring about transformations in the conditions of beings has an ancient pedigree in traditional Buddhist theory and practice. This notion is in all likelihood linked with the practice, prevalent in a number of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, of bodhisattvas making aspirations to materialize in whatever form is needed to benefit sentient beings, such that just seeing their form, hearing their voice, eating their flesh, or otherwise coming into sensory contact with them may heal beings and lead them ultimately to salvation.⁴⁶⁰ Another related theme was surely the formulas that appear repeatedly throughout many Mahāyāna *sūtras*, which promise to fulfill

⁴⁵⁹ sKal bzang and rGyal po, *Zha lu dgon gyi lo rgyus* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dbang dpe skrun khang, 1987), 34-42. See also Benjamin Wood, *The Jeweled Fish Hook: Monastic Exemplarity in the Shalu Abbatial History* (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2012) for more on this aspect of Zhwa lu monastery's institutional prestige.

⁴⁶⁰ See Paul Demiéville, *Buddhism and Healing: Demiéville's Article 'Byō' from Hōbōgin*, trans. Mark Tatz (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1985), 46-50.

pragmatic and soteriological aims, including bringing the Buddha into presence, simply through copying, reciting, carrying, or wearing them.⁴⁶¹

Formulas that spell out the merits in store for handling, or being in the physical presence of a particular *sūtra* were expanded in later Indian Buddhist *dhāraṇīs* and *tantras* to include a wider range of mundane effects and even the purification of negative karma. For instance, the *Mahāsahasrapramardana-nāma-sūtra* promises:

Any fully-ordained monk or nun, or any man or woman with lay vows, who in the future worships the physical relics of the *tathāgata*, down to even a mustard grain in size, and who *receives, holds, reads aloud, teaches, and masters* this queen of all incantations, ‘*Mahāsahasramardana*,’ the teaching that liberates from all *grahas*, the seal of as many perfectly awakened *tathāgata arhats* as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, will never be afflicted by any fever, peril, harm, epidemic, assault, strife, fight, bondage, argument, dispute, or even slander. Such a person will be unaffected by the painful karma from non-virtuous evil deeds. Such a person will be unaffected by any harm doers.⁴⁶²

It later became a standard feature of Indian *tantras* to include numerous techniques for producing material objects, such as talismans, amulets, potions, powders, pills, medicines and other contraptions or devices, which likewise purport to address a whole panoply of mundane and soteriological concerns through physical, sensory contact alone.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ One of the earliest and most famous examples of this formula is the passage from the *Vajracchedikā-sūtra* studied by Gregory Schopen, “The Phrase ‘sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet’ in the *Vajracchedikā*, in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 25-62.

⁴⁶² *Mahāsahasrapramardana-nāma-sūtra* (*sTong chen mo rab tu 'joms pa zhes bya ba'i mdo*), Tōh. 558, DK rgyud 'bum, vol. pha, 79a.1-79a.4. *phyi ma'i dus na dge slong ngam/ dge glong ma'am/ dge bsnyen nam/ dge bsnyen ma'am gang su yang rung ba dag de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku gdung ring bsrel yungs 'bru tsam la mchod pa byed pa dang/ stong chen po rab tu 'joms pa'i rig sngags kyi rgyal mo gdon thams cad las thar par byed pa'i chos kyi rnam grangs de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas gang gA'i klung gi bye ma snyed kyi sangs rgyas kyi phyag rgya 'di 'dzin cing 'chang ba dang/ klog cing ston pa dang/ kun chub pa byed pa de dag la yams kyi nad dang/ 'jigs pa dang/ 'tshe ba dang/ nad 'go ba dang/ 'khrugs pa dang/ 'thab pa dang/ rtsod pa dang/ 'ching ba dang/ kha mchu dang/ shags dang/ tha na phra ma dang/ sdig pa mi dge ba'i sdug bsngal ba'i las kyis mi tshugs shing/ 'tshe bar byed pa thams cad kyis mi thub par 'gyur ro/*

⁴⁶³ See, for instance, David Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka) (Śrītherukābhīdhāna), A Study and Annotated Translation* (New York: The American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University in New York, co-published with Columbia University's Center for

When compared with these earlier Indian formulations, especially in light of the traditional Buddhist doctrinal emphasis on the inalienability of individual karmic retribution and the primary role of personal mental cultivation in the achievement of the highest good, the Tibetan Old School's promise of "Buddhahood without meditation," or "liberation" through sensory contact alone stands out as one of the most radical claims made in the history of Buddhist theory. Members of Tibet's more conservative ecclesiastical establishment were undoubtedly aghast. The author of our critique targets precisely the denial of mental cultivation, intentionality, discursive understanding, and personal karma entailed by such formulations. Given this author's invocation of these mainstream Buddhist doctrinal notions, his opinions must have surely represented an influential strain of thinking on this topic among Tibet's ecclesiastical scholars.

The authorship of the critique waged against the Old School practices is a matter of some question. It was originally attributed to none other than the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507-1554). The Karmapa hierarchs, as possessors of the oldest incarnation line in Tibet and personal masters to some of the most powerful political leaders in the region, were arguably the most influential religious leaders in sixteenth and early-seventeenth century Tibet.⁴⁶⁴ The appearance of a letter signed by the Eighth Karmapa objecting to widespread Old School practices must have surely been quite a blow to the prestige of that tradition. But Mi bskyod rdo rje's biographer and direct disciple dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504-1564/66) remarks that the document had

Buddhist Studies and Tibet House US, 2007); and G. W. Farrow and I. Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra With the Commentary Yogaratnamala* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1992). See also the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa-tantra*, trans. Wiesiek Mical (forthcoming, Reading Room page of <http://84000.co/>) and the many other *tantras* that are beginning to appear in English translation courtesy of 84000.

⁴⁶⁴ For more information on the Karmapa sect and its illustrious line of hierarchs, see Hugh Richardson, "The Karma-pa Sect: A Historical Note," in *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture*, ed. and intro. Michael Aris (London: Serindia Publications, 1998), 337-378.

been falsely attributed to the Karmapa, adding that this prompted Mi bskyod rdo rje to compose a well-considered rebuttal of the very document that had been ascribed to him, wherein he denies having written the original critique and defends the Old School.⁴⁶⁵

Nonetheless, news of the Eighth Karmapa's compensatory composition seems not to have circulated far beyond his immediate circle, despite this figure's public renown. There is even some question as to whether he actually wrote it. Although the title of this rebuttal appears in dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba's biography of his master, in the opening folios of the rebuttal itself the author rejects the claim that he could have written the original critique "when residing at sNye mo in the Wood Male Rat year," as the work's colophon alleges, even while the author of the response admits to having been in sNye mo that year.⁴⁶⁶ Yet Mi bskyod rdo rje, who was born in 1507 and died in 1554, never lived through any Wood Rat year – neither 1504, nor 1564. Scribal infelicities notwithstanding, the presence of this impossible date for Mi bskyod rdo rje in the alleged rebuttal casts some doubt on its authorship.

In any event, whether the original critique was the work of the Eighth Karmapa, or only falsely attributed to him, there seems to have been a general suspicion that it was indeed the Karmapa himself who instigated the attack. Further, by all appearances, Old School figures were unaware or dismissive of the rebuttal that was also attributed to him. Thus, the circulation of the original critique bearing the Eighth Karmapa's name set off a heated debate during the following few decades about the possible roles of sensory

⁴⁶⁵ Dpa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (Chengdu: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999), 1297. Mi bskyod rdo rje's alleged rebuttal has recently resurfaced as *gSang sngags snga 'gyur las 'phros pa'i brgal lan rtsod pa med pa'i ston pa dang bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa drang po'i sa bon*, in *dPal rgyal ba karmapa sku 'phreng brgyad pa mi bskyod rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, Vol. *Ga* (Lhasa: S.N., 2004), ff. 350-486. Henceforth I shall refer to this work as *Seed of Sincere Expression (Drang po'i sa bon)*.

⁴⁶⁶ *Drang po'i sa bon*: 353.

experience and material media in Buddhist spiritual development, in which Sog bzlog pa seems to have considered that he was responding to the Karmapa's letter.

The Eighth Karmapa died in 1554, when Sog bzlog pa was only three years old. By the time Sog bzlog pa began to compose treatises some 22 years later, he had already inherited the practices of liberation through sensory media from his closest masters and was poised to join the ranks of other theoreticians who had defensively responded to this letter. Sog bzlog pa remarks that three rebuttals were already in circulation before he composed *Thunder* in 1576. Sog bzlog pa refrains from mentioning any of these titles and authors by name. He simply remarks that he added his contribution because the others had all “failed to understand precisely the intended meaning of the inquiry.”⁴⁶⁷ In this way, Sog bzlog pa does not call into question that the original critique was the work of the Eighth Karmapa. But interestingly, he implies that it was written with the “indirect intention” (Tib. *Idem dgongs*, Skt. *abhisandhi*) of encouraging Old School adherents to critically ground some of the more significant practices of their tradition. In this it seems that Sog bzlog pa had a hard time believing that the Karmapa was truly against these Old School practices.

All of the texts involved in this debate have yet to resurface. Today, in addition to Sog bzlog pa's response, we are fortunate to have a recently published edition of the treatise purported to be the Eighth Karmapa's own rebuttal, as well as one other rebuttal composed in 1557 by mKhyen rab rgya mtsho, an Old School adherent about whom little is known aside from his affiliation with the tradition of the Treasure revealer Padma gLing pa.⁴⁶⁸ The original critique, i.e., the alleged Karmapa critique, only exists as it is

⁴⁶⁷ *Lung rig 'brug sgra*: 142.

⁴⁶⁸ *Chos 'byung nor bu'i 'phreng ba* (Thimphu: National Library of Bhutan, 1984), 121.

reproduced with several minor variations in Sog bzlog pa's *Thunder* and in the rebuttal attributed to Mi bskyod rdo rje.

Naturally, the conventions of theoretical debate, with its appeals to the standard tropes of textual authenticity and proper interpretation in terms of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, prefigured to a significant degree the language and tone that Sog bzlog pa would adopt in responding. For instance, Sog bzlog pa's defensive stance induced him to couch his arguments in mainstream Buddhist notions and terminology, so as to create a space for the role of personal karma and the impact of cognitive cultivation and intentionality in the workings of such objects. This strategy was in part motivated specifically by the way that the critic framed his arguments to begin with. The rejection of such Buddhist doctrinal mainstays as individual karma and mental cultivation implied by the promises of "Buddhahood without meditation" and "liberation" through sensory contact alone was perhaps this critic's strongest problem with such practices.

Nonetheless, when Sog bzlog pa casts these controversial practices within a mainstream theoretical framework, he displays considerable creativity, acumen, and attention to detail in deploying the notions and terminology supplied by the critic. This level of sophistication reveals that Sog bzlog pa himself was quite concerned, above and beyond his role as respondent, to enlist these categories for his own ends, namely, the valorization of the material dimension of religious practice. In so doing, Sog bzlog pa ends up making a number of innovative connections, forging new theoretical ground while casting his material practices in terms of a set of issues with a venerable pedigree in Buddhist philosophical argumentation.

In sum, Sog bzlog pa's response is "theoretical" in that it presents a concerted strategic effort to formulate a systematic doctrinal scheme which can account for the

power of specialized objects, both sensory and material, in bringing about transformations in body, psyche, and world.⁴⁶⁹ Sog bzlog pa's "theory" is therefore not a set of programmatic guidelines through which to approach this set of practices, but a subsequent reflection upon how these items function, especially given their widespread popularity and the controversies surrounding their presumed efficacy.⁴⁷⁰ Sog bzlog pa's greatest challenge in this regard is to explain how mental cultivation, intentionality, karma, and other subjective aspects interact with objects to achieve their range of effects. By seeking to demarcate the nature and distribution of efficacious power across sensory objects and sensate minds, Sog bzlog pa makes claims that implicate the very nature of subjectivity and objectivity itself. Thus, ultimately at stake in this argument is more than just the nature of Buddhist practice; it is the nature of and relationship between objects, persons, bodies, and minds more broadly, along with the authority to make such distinctions.

We will witness in the discussion below how Sog bzlog pa's contributions to this argument go far toward granting efficacy and power to the objects concerned, even while he also retains an important role for cognition, cultivation, and karma. In the process, Sog bzlog pa exhibits erudition and an attention to detail that extends well beyond the boundaries of the original critique. In later texts, Sog bzlog pa revisits this theme to give an even more systematic presentation of how substances work in light of mainstream Buddhist understandings of the primacy of mind and mental cultivation.

⁴⁶⁹ I derive this notion of "theory" in part from the insightful discussion of Sheldon Pollock, "The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History," *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 105, No. 3, *Indological Studies Dedicated to Daniel Ingalls* (Jul.-Sep., 1985): 499-519.

⁴⁷⁰ On this note, Sog bzlog pa's "theory" diverges sharply from the nature of Indian *śāstra* theory described by Pollock (1985), where *śāstra* precedes and guides the actions it describes.

To more fully appreciate Sog bzlog pa’s specific contributions to this debate, the discussion will situate his remarks in relation to the criticisms that they address, and compare his reflections on certain points to the rebuttal allegedly composed by the Eighth Karmapa. Since Sog bzlog pa revisited these themes in some of his later compositions, this chapter will also analyze these later passages for their specific contributions, considering how Sog bzlog pa’s views may have changed over the years.

My discussion begins with visions, and then proceeds to explore sacred sound, amulets, and finally, pills. The original critic, whose argument Sog bzlog pa reproduces and responds in kind, similarly groups together remarks about the four liberations. His argument, however, sequentially treats visions, sound, pills, and finally amulets. In an attempt to trace the trajectory of the increased materiality of the media concerned, which will hopefully become clear as we progress through this chapter, I have exchanged the position of pills and amulets. This new order, I feel, will help to most fully appreciate the nuances and problems of the issue of material efficacy under consideration.

I. Visionary Glimpses

The discussion begins with an exploration of the theoretical rationale that Sog bzlog pa provides to defend the power of visionary experiences. His defense concerns the Great Perfection practices of “crossing over” (*thod rgal*), in which he was deeply invested, including the physical practices of inducing them, and the radical claim that they provide “liberation through seeing.”⁴⁷¹ Here we see Sog bzlog pa enlist Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna

⁴⁷¹ For a full description of the practice of “crossing over” and its series of four visions (*snang ba bzhi*), see David Germano, *Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of the Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1992), 125-127; and more recently, Chris Hatchell, *Naked Seeing: The Great Perfection, the Wheel of Time, and Visionary*

doctrinal notions, terminology, and scriptural citations to argue for the prominent place of phenomenal appearance *qua* visionary experience in the Buddhist soteriological project. But more particularly at issue here is the Old School's use of physiological manipulations of the eyes and external light sources to elicit visual experiences of ultimate gnosis in the form of a series of four visions (*snang ba bzhi*). The rejection of this practice has broad implications for the soteriological role in Buddhist practice of all physical action, including ritual action, in eliciting experience of unconditioned gnosis. This section traces how Sog bzlog pa enlists the Buddhist doctrinal notions invoked by the critic – particularly, unconditioned gnosis versus conditioned means, and *pramāṇa* (Tib. *tshad ma*) categories of perception, among others – to champion the visionary experiences of crossing over as a specialized mode of seeing rooted in the very core of the person. This opening maneuver, I will argue, lays the groundwork for Sog bzlog pa's further reflections upon sounds, amulets, and pills, which likewise claim to “liberate.”

To most fully appreciate the particular features of Sog bzlog pa's maneuvers, we will subject his argument to a close reading in light of the criticisms that they intend to address. The critic begins with an accurate, albeit sketchy characterization of the Old School position. He states that according to the Old School, visionary encounters with “reality's immediacy” (*chos nyid mngon sum*), the first of the four visions of crossing over (*thod rgal gyi snang ba*) in the parlance of the Great Perfection tradition, can be induced through physically pressing the eyes, applying unction or other materials to the eyes, or gazing into the sun. According to Old School theory, adds the critic, such induced visions of ultimate reality are visions of *actual* pure realms – luminous

Philosophy in Renaissance Tibet (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2009). Hatchell's thesis focuses specifically on the light-related practices of cross-over visionary experiences.

expressions of somatic gnosis, ever-present within the hearts of all beings, which can emerge through the eyes to fill the visual field in four visionary stages, eventually resulting in a direct experience of a complete *maṇḍala* of one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities. Glimpses of such pure visions, the critic alleges, are therefore believed by the Old School to confer liberation from the fetters of *saṃsāric* existence, hence the associated moniker “liberation through seeing” (*mthong grol*).⁴⁷²

After presenting the Old School position, the critic contends that because ultimate reality is uncompounded – the essence of mind – it is impossible for an experience with it to be induced through physiological manipulations. Such “visions” of ultimate reality should rather emerge effortlessly, or based solely on effort in meditation.⁴⁷³ Moreover, alleges the critic, as visions of ultimate reality, such experiences cannot possibly be sensory in character. Since it is meditative equipoise on emptiness that confers liberation and not the powers of special sensory objects, all sensory objects, ranging from repulsive vomit to sublime pure lands, are alike as either conditions of liberation or bondage, depending on the cognitive understanding of the observer.⁴⁷⁴ The critic continues that despite the Old School claim that these experiences are visions of actual pure lands, the practice of invoking them physiologically renders them too easily accessible to beginners who have yet to purify their minds.⁴⁷⁵ Such a claim, states the critic, runs counter to the Buddhist teachings and counter to the Old School teaching itself, which maintains, the critic adds, that these visions, like visionary experiences on the path and unlike visions of

⁴⁷² *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 72.3-.4-.5.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*: 72.6.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 74.3-.4.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*: 74.5-75.1.

ultimate reality, are to be relinquished at the most refined levels of spiritual development, the fourth and culminating vision of “exhaustion of suchness” (*chos nyid zad sa*).⁴⁷⁶

In sum, the critic’s remarks can be characterized as capitalizing on the tension between the uncompounded nature of ultimate gnosis, a baseline position among probably all Tibetan Buddhists, and the coercive, sensory means used to elicit it. When, as our critic implies, we link uncompounded ultimate reality too closely with labile sensory experience, we compromise the unconditioned nature of ultimate reality, we minimize the role of mental training in its development, and we render the ultimate too easily accessible through the senses to all who have learned to elicit it.

A major rhetorical component of these criticisms is the critic’s invocation of the *pramāṇa* language of “direct perception,” which he retrieves from Old School descriptions of the first vision of crossing over, “reality’s immediacy” (*chos nyid mngon sum*), to interrogate the epistemological status of this vision vis-à-vis the categories of “direct perception of visionary experience” (*nyams snang gi mngon sum*) and “sensory direct perception” (*dbang po’i mngon sum*). The epistemological language of *pramāṇa*, or “valid means of cognition,” concerned as it is with authoritative standards of knowledge, became an influential discourse among Tibetan exegetes for adjudicating the authenticity of conflicting truth claims. Although only the category of sensory direct perception comes explicitly from the *pramāṇa* discourse, by intoning and rejecting, in turn, three possible epistemological categories, the critic attempts to exclude the Old School’s practices of visionary experiences from the domain of sensibility and authenticity. If, the critic claims, such visions are direct perceptions of ultimate reality,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid: 75.1-.3.

as the Old School contends, they are necessarily neither direct sensory perceptions, nor visionary experiences on the path, since both of those are inherently faulty and limited in scope.

Soon after the year 1000, most notably after rNgog *lotsāwa* Blo ldan shes rab (1059-1109) provided the first Tibetan language translations of many of Dignāga's (480-540) and Dharmakīrti's (600-660) epistemological treatises, knowledge of standard scholastic Buddhist epistemological inquiry became an increasingly prestigious benchmark of authenticity in Tibet.⁴⁷⁷ Inspired in part by Indian tantric commentaries, Tibetan writers on tantric topics began to integrate language and concepts drawn from the *pramāṇa* discourse. This seems to have stemmed from efforts to bolster the prestige of their traditions, and also from the awareness that Buddhist scholastic epistemological materials share with *tantra* a number of common concerns.⁴⁷⁸ Most notable among such commonalities are a deep interest in the status of vision and perception, the role of language, and by extension scriptural statements, in the process of coming to know what is of ultimate value, as well as the role of conceptuality and analysis in this process, and within the context of path structures more generally.

The combination of the two discourses of *tantra* and *pramāṇa* became an important theme in Tibet beginning from the eleventh century, as Tibetans sought to

⁴⁷⁷ Prior to rNgog lo tsa ba, Atiśa (b. 972/982) and many of his Tibetan followers felt that Dharmakīrti's epistemological treatises were largely irrelevant to Tibetans, since they were composed in an Indian context to refute non-Buddhist opponents. For more details and other aspects of the transmission of *pramāṇa* to Tibet, see George Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and Its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany: SUNY, 1997), 21-22.

⁴⁷⁸ For a rather reductionist argument that *pramāṇa* was used in tantric contexts solely to augment the prestige of *vajra* masters, see Ronald Davidson, "Masquerading as *Pramāṇa*: Esoteric Buddhism and Epistemological Nomenclature." In *Dharmakīrti's Thought and Its Impact on Indian and Tibetan Philosophy – Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Dharmakīrti and Pramāṇa*, ed. Katsura Shoryu, (Vienna: Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1999), 25-35.

systematically integrate the multiple conflicting scriptural claims that were rapidly sweeping across the plateau. To give but a few known examples: the famous Sa skya Path and Fruit (Lam 'bras) subtle-body completion-stage practice system is organized according to four *pramāṇa*, and other terms from mainstream Buddhist epistemology appear throughout.⁴⁷⁹ The 'Bri gung pa, most likely taking the Sa skya Lam 'bras as their precedent, integrated key terms and rubrics from Mahāyāna epistemology in the *tantra* sections of their defining text, *The Single Intention (dGongs gcig)*.⁴⁸⁰ Even Bon traditions incorporated standard Mahāyāna epistemological logic as a preparatory phase to understanding the radical monism of their Great Perfection system of theory and practice.⁴⁸¹

The Old School was particular invested in couching their tantric practices in the language and terminology of Mahāyāna *pramāṇa*. Perhaps the most famous instance of such efforts is Rong zom chos kyi bzang po's *Establishing Appearances as Deity in the System of the Adamantine Vehicle of Secret Mantra*,⁴⁸² a text rooted in Old School

⁴⁷⁹ See Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), for a detailed description and analysis of the Lam 'bras and its integral role in the formation of the Sa skya tradition.

⁴⁸⁰ See Dan Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures: Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer, with a General Bibliography of Bon* (Leiden: Brill, 1994) for a description of the atypical use of Mahāyāna epistemological language in the 'Bri gung *dGongs gcig*. Martin suggests the Sa skya connection. On the quasi-tantric, soteriological use of *pramāṇa* terms in the 'Bri gung *dGongs gcig*, see also Leonard van der Kuijp, "An Early View of the Soteriology of Buddhist Epistemology," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 15 (1987): 57-70.

⁴⁸¹ Anne Klein, *Unbounded Wholeness: Dzogchen, Bon, and the Logic of the Nonconceptual* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸² *gSang sngags rdo rje theg pa'i tshul las snang ba hlar bsgrub pa*, In *Rong zom chos bzang gi gsung 'bum*, vol. 1 (Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Chengdu, 1999), 557-568. For a complete English translation and study of this seminal Old School text, see Heidi I. Koppl, *Establishing Appearances as Divine: Rongzom Chökyi Zangpo on Reasoning, Madhyamaka, and Purity* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).

traditions of *Guhyagarbha-tantra* exegesis,⁴⁸³ particularly, the *Garland of Views* attributed to Padmasambhava.⁴⁸⁴ A still earlier source for *Guhyagarbha*-related tantric *pramāṇa* is *Stages of the Path*,⁴⁸⁵ a text that the Old School attributes to the eighth century Indian Mahāyoga scholar Buddhaguhya/gupta.⁴⁸⁶ The second chapter of that text offers a list of so-called syllogisms (*gtan tshigs*) as methods for coming to understand the Mahāyoga view. Formal syllogisms drawn from *pramāṇa* literature that were crafted specifically as means to resolve (*gtan la 'bebs*) a uniquely *tantric* view (*lta ba*) also appear in the writings of the first two Kaḥ thog hierarchs, Dam pa bde gshegs (1122-1192)⁴⁸⁷ and his disciple gTsang ston rdo rje rgyal mtshan (1137-1227).⁴⁸⁸ Furthermore, the close lineal ties between Dam pa bde gshegs and the third Zur clan hierarch sGro

⁴⁸³ The *Guhyagarbha-tantra* has been one of the single most important esoteric scriptures for the lineages claiming descent from Tibet's dynastic period known as the Old School. Despite controversies surrounding its Indian provenance due to the unavailability of a Sanskrit manuscript for several centuries, successive generations of Old School scholars have composed commentaries on this important esoteric scripture. It appears, in fact, that demonstrating knowledge of this *tantra* and the many interpretative issues born from its exegesis was a prerequisite for being deemed a scholar of the Old School tradition. Thus, any scholar worth his salt felt compelled to pen a commentary, making the list of *Guhyagarbha-tantra* commentators read like a *Who's Who* of the greatest Old School scholars active from the eleventh to the twentieth centuries. A perusal of the *sNying ma bKa' ma rgyas pa*, Vol. 'A (Kalimpong, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987) catalogue reveals that 14 volumes (vols. 23-36) of the collection's 58 volumes include commentaries on the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*. For a complete English language translations of one particularly influential commentary on this seminal tantric text, see Jamgon Mipham, *Luminous Essence: A Guide to the Guhyagarbha Tantra*, trans. Dharmachakra Translations Committee (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2009).

⁴⁸⁴ Padmasambhava, *Man ngag lta ba 'i phreng ba*, in *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23 (Kalimpong, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987), 177-278.

⁴⁸⁵ sLob dpon sangs rgyas gsang ba, *Lam rim chen mo*, in *sNying ma bKa' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 23 (Kalimpong, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987), 3-134.

⁴⁸⁶ The Indian provenance of this title was called into question by Pho brang Zhi ba 'od, in his "open letter" translated and analyzed by Samten Karmay, "An Open Letter by Pho-brang Zhi-ba-od," in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths and Beliefs in Tibet*, vol. 1 (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 17-40.

⁴⁸⁷ See for example Dam pa bde gshegs and Ye shes rgyal mtshan, *Theg pa spyi bcings rtsa 'grel* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997), 371-389.

⁴⁸⁸ See for example gTsang ston rdo rje rgyal mtshan, *Man ngag lta ba 'i phreng ba 'i bshad pa rgyud don rin po che snang nyed*, in *rNying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 88 (Chengdu: Kaḥ thog mkhan po 'jam dbyangs, 1999), 125-532.

phug pa Śākya Senge (1074-1134), as well as the importance of Buddhaghya's *Stages of the Path* for the early Zur lineage,⁴⁸⁹ suggest that the two first Kaḥ thog hierarchs had inherited their treatment of tantric syllogisms from the illustrious Zur tradition's (bKa' sde zur lugs) exegetical approach to the *Guhyagarbha-tantra* prior to the founding of Kaḥ thog monastery. This hypothesis is further supported by the fourteenth century master g.Yung ston rdo rje dpal's systematic use of tantric syllogisms in the third and eleventh chapters of his Zur-tradition based *Guhyagarbha* commentary.⁴⁹⁰

All of this suffices to say that by the sixteenth century the Old School had a long tradition in place of enlisting *pramāṇa* to aid in the understanding of important doctrinal points, and to authenticate their theories and practices in the eyes of critical onlookers. We will witness below how Sog bzlog pa utilizes his Old School tradition's preoccupation with tantric *pramāṇa* in order to theoretically ground the visionary experiences of crossing over. In his particular use of *pramāṇa* Sog bzlog pa seems to have been unique. Even while previous Old School masters, most notably Rong zom, had addressed the status of visionary experiences via *pramāṇa* concepts and terminology, the four visionary experiences of crossing over are left out of those earlier discussions. To my knowledge, Sog bzlog pa's attempts to situate these particular visionary experiences in the context of *pramāṇa* categories of direct perception, together with the detail and acumen that he displays in doing so, signals an unprecedented approach to Old School appropriations of the *pramāṇa* discourse.

⁴⁸⁹ mDo grub chen bstan pa'i nyi ma's *Guhyagarbha-tantra* commentary *dPal gsang ba'i snying po'i rgyud kyi spyi don nyung ngu'i ngag gis rnam par 'byed pa rin chen mdzod kyi lde mig*, in *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, vol. 37 (Kalimpong, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987, 442.1) names Buddhaghya's *Stages of the Path (lam rim)* as the source for the Zur tradition's tantric syllogisms.

⁴⁹⁰ g.Yung ston rdo rje dpal, *gSang ba snying po la tīkā gsal byed me long*, in *sNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*, Vol. 28 (Kalimpong, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987).

* * *

In an opening maneuver to ground visual phenomena in gnosis Sog bzlog pa begins his argument with a sweeping reminder that the “essence of Buddha’s teachings is emptiness suffused with compassion.”⁴⁹¹ With the support of several scriptural citations from New Translation tantric sources, Sog bzlog pa then broadens the formula of the unity of emptiness and compassion to mean “the perfectly pristine great gnosis of the *sugatas*, which is the luminosity of the very form of emptiness itself, endowed with the supreme of all characteristics and beyond all discursive analysis.”⁴⁹²

Having in this way taken a page from his Old School tradition to root phenomenal visual experiences of buddhas and their pure lands in the very dynamic of gnosis’s unfolding,⁴⁹³ Sog bzlog pa then shifts his register toward the domain of Mahāyāna Mind-Only and *pramāṇa* concepts and terminology. His first move in that direction is to invoke the Mind-Only notion that all phenomenal objects, including visionary appearances, are nothing more than “mere mental appearance” (*sems kyi snang ba tsam*).⁴⁹⁴ He explains that while the “luminosity” (*’od gsal*) experienced in visual encounters with empty-forms is perceived as though it has phenomenal characteristics

⁴⁹¹ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 76.2-76.3 ...*sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa’i snying po stong nyid snying rje yin...*

⁴⁹² Ibid: 76.5-76.6: ...*rnam par dpyad pa thams cad las ’das pa / bde bar gshegs pa rnams kyi yang dag pa’i ye shes chen po de ni ’od gsal rnam pa thams cad kyi mchog dang ldan pa’i stong pa nyid kyi gzugs de nyid yin...*

⁴⁹³ The notion that the visionary dimension of religious experience is rooted in the gnostic core of the body derives from general Old School orientations to gnosis and its fundamental embodiment. This is a feature that can be observed most clearly in the Old School’s *Guhyagarbha-tantra* commentarial traditions, which spell out this theory in great elaboration.

⁴⁹⁴ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 78.1.

(*mtshan ma*), it is not a thing (*dngos po*) per se, but merely an epiphenomenon of the mind, much like reflections in a mirror.⁴⁹⁵

Sog bzlog pa further develops this blanket Mind-Only formulation by invoking the standard *pramāṇa* definition of “mental direct perception” (*vid kyi mngon sum*) to affirm that mind too partakes of “direct perception, which is non-conceptual and unmistaken.”⁴⁹⁶ With this enlistment of the standard definition of “mental direct perception” as platform, Sog bzlog pa recites *pramāṇa* terminology associated with mental direct perception to push the visionary domain beyond its confines. He does this primarily through interrogating the limits of mental direct perception as defined in the *pramāṇa* literature of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, the two Indian progenitors of Buddhist epistemology.⁴⁹⁷

The standard Indian Buddhist *pramāṇa* concept of mental direct perception, which George Dreyfus calls “one of the most obscure notions in Buddhist epistemology,”⁴⁹⁸ involves the unmistaken, non-conceptual reception by the mental consciousness of a sense object’s representation to a sensory cognition. According to the

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid: 78.1. The notion of visionary experiences as epiphenomena of mind is also a strong current in the Old School and broader Indo-Tibetan Mahāyāna and tantric traditions. Contrasting formulations of gnosis as intrinsically perfected within the formation of the psychophysical organism, or as an epiphenomenon of mind created through meditative cultivation exist in marked tension throughout Old School tantric exegetical traditions. This opposition is represented best by a comparison between Rong zom chos kyi bzang po’s Mind-Only inspired concluding reflections on visionary experience in his *sNang ba lha grub* (1999) and kLong chen pa’s critical assertions about the non-imaginary quality of tantric visualization exercises in his commentary on the *Guhyagarbha-tantra*, *dPal gsang ba de kho na nyid nges ’grel phyogs bcu mun sel*, in rNying ma bka’ ma rgyas pa, Vol. 26 (Kalimpong, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987), 486.3-486.4.

⁴⁹⁶ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 78. ...*sems kyang rtog pa dang bral shing ma ’khrul pa ’i mngon sum nyid yin...*

⁴⁹⁷ While much scholarship has been devoted to the thought of these two figures, particularly lucid and comprehensive studies include Dreyfus (1997) and more recently, John Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004). I draw my brief explication of *pramāṇa* terms and concepts from Dreyfus (1997).

⁴⁹⁸ Dreyfus (1997), 560, fn. 14.

perceptual theory of Dharmakīrti, mental direct perception operates at the intersection of raw percepts of direct sensory perception and self-cognizing perception, the self-presencing that allows for the non-conceptual awareness of perceptions, mental states, and the like. To these three modalities of direct perception Dharmakīrti adds yogic direct perception to account for the refined perceptual fields of yogis. This addition makes four types of valid direct perception, each of which is taken to be non-conceptual and unmistaken with respect to its object. The other pole of Buddhist *pramāna* theory consists of inference (Skt. *anumāna*, Tib. *rjes dpag*), which is conceptual by nature, and deals only with the cognitive realm of imagination and idea. Dharmakīrti presents his two valid cognitions of perception and inference as inclusive of broader, structurally opposing domains. Perceptual valid cognition passively apprehends bare particulars, real things with a momentary and “manifest” (Skt. *abhimukī*, Tib. *mngon gyur*) character, which operate within the matrix of efficacious causal relations. Inferential valid cognition, on the other hand, apprehends only unreal, conceptual constructs. These are “hidden phenomena” (Skt. *parokṣa*, Tib. *lkog gyur*) that require the use of indirect conceptual means, such as reason-centered logical syllogisms, or authoritative testimony to reveal their import. The stuff of conceptuality is by definition incapable on its own of causal efficacy in the world. Yet, concepts are necessary fictions that provide the components for Buddhist paths, eventually becoming effective only after they feed into direct perception.

Sog bzlog pa exploits the under-theorized notion of mental direct perception – a mode of knowing that is at once mental, non-conceptual, unmistaken, and rooted in the senses – to argue that visionary experiences appear as its objects. In so doing, he ends up bending that category to include far more than its original authors had intended. In

particular, Sog bzlog pa argues that “mental appearances” of the “visions of direct crossing,” as “mere appearances,” are neither conceptual appearances produced by habitual patterns, nor appearances associated with faulty sensory cognition, like two moons appearing to someone with a visual disorder.⁴⁹⁹ They are neither appearances associated with a faulty mental faculty, nor are they appearances for cognitions associated with the five sense faculties, since there is no corresponding object.⁵⁰⁰ Instead, Sog bzlog pa boldly asserts, these visions are “appearances of an undefiled mental cognition”⁵⁰¹ – “appearances of the ultimate all-ground” (*don gyi kun gzhi'i snang ba*), which is not to be confused with “the all ground consciousness that constitutes one of the eight collections of consciousness.”⁵⁰² Summarizing his arsenal of scriptural citations, Sog bzlog pa remarks:

There is no statement that these [visions] are mistaken appearances. Rather, they are exclusively appearances of direct perception (*mngon sum kyi snang ba*). They are not mere signs. Rather, being the essence of what is lauded as “unity,” they are the great, awakened body of the Conqueror.⁵⁰³

We can surmise then from Sog bzlog pa’s comments that such visionary experiences do indeed afford glimpses of ultimate gnosis, and this, presumably, is what constitutes the power of such visions to liberate upon sight.

In order to buttress the validity of the perceptual means by which such visionary encounters are accessed, Sog bzlog pa plumbs even deeper into the resources of the

⁴⁹⁹ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 78.2-78.3.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid*: 78.3.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid*: 78.4. /*ma bslad pa'i yid kyi shes pa'i snang ba*...

⁵⁰² *Ibid*: 78.6. ...*nam shes tshogs brgyad kyi ya gyal kun gzhi'i rnam par shes pa*...

⁵⁰³ *Ibid*: 79.1-79.2. /'di dag 'khrul ba'i snang bar yang gsungs ba med kyi/ mngon sum gyi snang ba kho na yin la / rtags tsam zhig kyang ma yin gyi / zung du 'jug pa zhes rab tu bsngags pa de'i ngo bo nyid du gyur nas rgyal ba'i sku chen por 'gyur...

pramāṇa discourse. First, he methodically describes the meaning of “direct perception” with reference to Dharmakīrti and his standard division of valid means of cognition (Tib. *tshad ma*, Skt. *pramāṇa*) into direct perception (Tib. *mngon sum*, Skt. *pratyakṣa*) and inference (Tib. *rjes dpags*, Skt. *anumāna*).⁵⁰⁴ He then shifts registers to assert that *tantra* also includes precisely these two means of valid cognition, citing the *sādhana* (*sgrub thabs*) chapter of the *Kālacakra-tantra*⁵⁰⁵ for support.⁵⁰⁶ Summarizing the gist of those citations, we notice once again that Sog bzlog pa pushes the notion of direct perception to the very edges of the *pramāṇa* discourse to recast it in a language more suitable to his aims. He states:

Such an object of direct perception is not known through direct perception by anything from the sensory direct perception of ordinary beings up through the yogic direct perception of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. Thus, it is an exalted object of direct perception, which is arrived at through the direct perception of meditating on “inner suchness” (*nang gi de kho na nyid*).⁵⁰⁷

Notice here that Sog bzlog pa invokes the notion of “yogic direct perception,” one of the four modes of valid direct perception from Dharmakīrti’s *pramāṇa* discourse, implying that we might construe what he calls “inner suchness” as an object of yogic perception accessible only to bodhisattvas. Yet, rather than explicitly link “inner suchness” with yogic direct perception, Sog bzlog pa blends *pramāṇa* language with a specialized notion of suchness qua Buddha-nature: he defines suchness as “that which is not an appearance

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid: 79.3-79.5.

⁵⁰⁵ *mChog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas las phyung ba rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal dus kyi 'khol lo zhes bya ba* (*Parama-ādibuddhodhrīta-śrī-kālacakra-nāma-tantrarājā*), in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 362, Rgyud 'bum, ka (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid: 79.5-80.1.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid: 80.1-80.2. /*de la mngon sum yang tha mal pa'i dbang po nas nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas kyi bar gyi rnal 'byor gyi mngon sum gyis ni shes pa ma yin pas / mngon sum khyad par can nang gi de kho na nyid bsgom pa'i mngon sum gyi gtan la 'bebs pa yin no/*

defiled by the various cognitions mistaken with respect to phenomena, but which remains unchanging from the level of sentient beings all the way up through buddhahood.”⁵⁰⁸

This notion of refined awareness differs fundamentally from Dharmakīrti’s notion of yogic direct perception, which has a special connection with inferential valid cognition.

According to Dharmakīrti, after the conceptual confidence gleaned through contemplating doctrinal themes such as impermanence, selflessness, suffering and the like becomes sufficiently internalized through training in calm abiding (Skt. *śamatha*, Tib. *zhi gnas*) and insight (Skt. *vipaśyanā*, Tib. *lhag mthong*), one’s understanding eventually becomes so lucid as to cross the outermost limits of conceptuality and spill into direct perceptual awareness. Sog bzlog pa’s “inner suchness,” on the other hand, while also contingent upon meditation, comes about through recognizing what has been one’s own nature all along.

Sog bzlog pa then enlists a lengthy citation from the *Testimony of Mañjuśrī* (*’Jam dpal zhal lung*),⁵⁰⁹ which, he concludes, demonstrates what he calls “visionary direct perception of inner suchness” (*nang gi de kho na nyid kyi mthong ba’i mngon sum*).⁵¹⁰

With these maneuvers in place, Sog bzlog pa provides a citation from a commentary on the New Translation *tantra Vajra Essence*,⁵¹¹ which recites the standard four-fold

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid: 80.2-80.3. /*de yang chos rnam la ’khrul pa’i shes pa sna tshogs kyi bslad pa’i snang ba ma yin pa / sems can nas sangs rgyas kyi sa’i bar du rigs mi ’gyur bar gnas pa de la kho na nyid ces bya ...*

⁵⁰⁹ This refers to the *Rim pa gnyis pa’i de kho na nyid sgom pa zhes bya ba’i zhal gyi lung* (*Dvikramatattvabhāvanā-nāma-mukhāgama*), in *Bstan ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 1853, Rgyud ’grel, di (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985). This “New Translation” commentary, attributed to the Indian scholar Buddhaśrījñānapāda (c. eighth century A.D.) is famously cited by ’Gos lotsāwa gZhon nu dpal (1392-1481) in *Blue Annals* (ed. and trans. George N. Roerich, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949-1953, 168) to defend the Indian provenance of the Old School’s Great Perfection tradition.

⁵¹⁰ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 81.2-81.3.

classification of valid cognition, recast in the tantric language of spiritual attainment and experience.

Sensory direct perception,
Mental direct perception,
Yogic direct perception,
And self-aware direct perception
Elicit demonstrating,
Engaging,
Attaining,
And experiencing, respectively.⁵¹²

With this citation as a further bridge between the discourses of *pramāṇa* and *tantra*, Sog bzlog pa then mimics the *pramāṇa* style of providing inclusive, analytic definitions of basic perceptual categories. In particular, we see him continue to stretch the boundaries of Dharmakīrti's discourse of logic and epistemology to accommodate his formulation of visions of ultimate gnosis. He defines the "essence of direct perception" (*mngon sum gyi ngo bo*) in this context as "a non-conceptual and unmistakable cognition that sees clearly, like stars in the sky, form replete with all characteristics, through the five kinds of eyes, like the fleshly ones and the rest, by means of meditating on the yoga of suchness, which is compassion and emptiness."⁵¹³

⁵¹¹ *rDo rje snying po*. This refers to *Kye'i rdo rje bsdu pa'i don gyi rgya cher 'grel pa* (*Hevajrapañḍārthatīkā*), in *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 1180, Rgyud 'grel, ka (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985).

⁵¹² *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 81.3-81.4. *dbang po'i mngon sum dang/ yid kyi mngon sum dang/ rnal 'byor gyi mngon sum dang/ rang rig pa'i mngon sum ste/ ston par byed pa dang/ 'jug par byed pa dang/ thob par byed pa dang/ nyams su myong ba'i mtshan nyid can no/*. This passage from the *tantra* itself (*Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 1180, Rgyud 'grel, ka, 806-807, Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985) differs on a number of points from Sog bzlog pa's citation above. The corresponding passage of the *tantra* reads as follows: *dbang po'i mngon sum dang yid kyi mngon sum dang/ rnal 'byor mngon gsum dang. rang rig pa'i mngon sum zhes pa ste/ shes pa de nyid ni nye bar ston par byed pas 'jug par byed pa dang thob par byed pa dang/ nyams su myong ba'i mtshan nyi can no zhes bya 'ol/*

⁵¹³ *Ibid*: 81.4-81.5. *de kho na stong nyid snying rje'i rnal 'byor bsgoms pas sha la sogs pa'i mig lngas rnam pa thams cad pa'i gzugs nam mkha' la skar ma bzhin du gsal bar mthong ba'i shes pa rtog pa dang bral zhing ma 'khrul ba de la bya...*

Having upheld the visions of crossing over as direct perceptions of suchness, Sog bzlog pa moves on to argue that their status as unconditional, absolute gnosis in no way impinges on their role as “experiential direct perceptions.” The critic, we may recall, assumed that experiential signs of meditative progress are like chaff that must be discarded in order to arrive at the husk of genuine realization. This position on the dispensability of visionary experiences echoes the majority of Old and New School views on the topic.⁵¹⁴ For Sog bzlog pa, on the other hand, such visions are “the natural manifestation of primordial suchness, which shines forth, from the beginning, as the self-effulgence of gnosis.”⁵¹⁵ According to such a view, the four visions of crossing over signal a progressive deepening of experiential participation with gnosis, in the form of light, sound, and imagery, as gnosis unfolds from within the very core of the mind-body complex. As such, these visions function as actual insights into ultimate reality, and the path toward its full realization consists of developing and refining such glimpses until they reach peak vividness and detail. Sog bzlog pa illustrates this dual role by strategically mapping the four visions of direct crossing to the visions of the ten signs discussed in New School *tantras*, which according to New School adherents appear only in the context of the path.⁵¹⁶ Thus, the Old School’s four visions are, by Sog bzlog pa’s

⁵¹⁴ See for example Janet Gyatso, “Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Mar., 1999): 113-147; and Dan Martin, “A Twelfth-century Tibetan Classic of Mahāmudrā, *The Path of Ultimate Profundity: The Great Seal Instructions of Zhang*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15/2 (1992): 243-319.

⁵¹⁵ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 85.1-85.2. /ye gdod ma’i chos nyid ye shes kyi rang ’od du ye nas ngang gi gsal ba yin par...

⁵¹⁶ Ibid: 82.2-85.1. Sog bzlog pa cites a number of tantric textual sources in this section. He cites in particular the *dBang mdoṅ bstan* (*Śekhodeśa*), in *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 361, Rgyud, ka (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Based on this sources he lists the ten signs (*bcu rtags*) as follows: Smoke, mirage, a lit sky, a lamp, fire, moon and sun, darkness, attributes, light drops, and a plethora of luminous forms. He also cites the *Kālacakra-tantra*’s list of ten signs: smoke, mirage, light, a

estimation, both “direct perceptions of suchness” (*chod nyid kyi mngon sum*)⁵¹⁷ and “direct perceptions of meditative experience” (*nyams kyi mngon sum*),⁵¹⁸ a combination that the majority of Tibetan interpreters of visionary experience have been reluctant to make.

Finally, Sog bzlog pa tackles the thorny issue of whether or not such visions can also be regarded as sensory direct perceptions. To get a better sense of the trajectory of Sog bzlog pa’s reasoning on this issue, let us examine each point of his argument in turn. Sog bzlog pa boldly begins with an explicit rejection of the critic’s assertion that it is laughable for suchness to appear as a sensory object.⁵¹⁹ It is precisely through the eyes, Sog bzlog pa counters, that one glimpses such visions. After providing a scriptural citation from the *Jewel Peak Great Assembly*⁵²⁰ to that effect, Sog bzlog pa remarks that the Old School’s two *Seminal Heart* traditions (*snying thig rnam gnyis*)⁵²¹ also explain visions as direct sensory perceptions. Yet, just when he is on the verge of granting unmitigated sensory status to visionary experiences, Sog bzlog pa backtracks to qualify his remarks considerably. He states that the intention (*dgongs*) behind the *Seminal Heart* position stipulates that it should *not* be understood as a definitive statement about the

stainless sky alit, a butter lamp, fire, a *vajra* moon, a *vajra* sun, the attribute of the supreme, and light drops.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid: 85.1.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid: 85.5.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid: 85.2.

⁵²⁰ *’Phags pa ’dus pa chen po rin po che tog gi gzungs zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo* (*Mahāsaṃnipātaratnaketuḥāraṇī-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra*), in *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 138, Mdo sde, na (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁵²¹ The “Two Seminal Heart traditions” refers to the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* attributed to Padmasambhava, and the *Bi ma snying thig* attributed to Vimalamitra. These two traditions, along with the *Bla ma yang thig*, and *Zab mo yang thig*, were systematized and commented upon by kLong chen rab ’byams pa Dri med ’od zer (1308-1364) in his famous *Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*, Delhi: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1975-).

sensory epistemological status of visions. Rather, Sog bzlog pa explains, the *Seminal Heart* traditions simply indicate that the eyes are the pathways through which the light of gnosis emerges.⁵²² The basis of his concession on this point is both theoretical and pragmatic in nature. Sog bzlog pa states:

In reality, [these visions] are not direct sensory perceptions. This is because the wisdom of buddhahood, primordially self-radiant as the self-effulgence of the five wisdoms, is beyond the sphere of something seen with the eyes. It is because one can see it even in a dark room, when one cannot see even the palm of one's hand. And it is because one can see it even during the intermediate state,⁵²³ when one has parted with one's eyes.⁵²⁴

Sog bzlog pa then revisits the commentarial tradition of the *Vajra Essence tantra* for an alternative account that interprets the four visions as involving all four types of direct perception, including even direct sensory perception.⁵²⁵ Yet, even while the citation directly mentions the entire four-fold typology of direct perception from mainstream Buddhist epistemology – sensory, mental, yogic, and self-reflective – Sog bzlog pa excludes sensory direct perception from his exegesis. Instead, he glosses this passage as though it only intends to discuss the latter three direct perceptions of mental direct perception, yogic direct perception, and self-reflective direct perception.⁵²⁶

When tracing the trajectory of Sog bzlog pa's argument on this point, it does appear that he grants a certain kind of sensory status to visions. It is indeed, he claims, primarily through the “fleshly eyes” that we first experience such things. Yet, he stops

⁵²² *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 85.6-86.1.

⁵²³ The “intermediate state” refers to the interval between death and rebirth which the consciousnesses of all beings ostensibly undergo after mind and body part ways at death.

⁵²⁴ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 86.1-86.2. /don du dbang po'i mngon sum ma yin te/ sangs rgyas kyi ye shes gdod ma nas ye shes lnga'i rang 'od du rang gsal ba de nyid / mig gi mthong bya mthong byed kyi yul las 'das pa'i phyir dang / mun khang du rang gi lag pa brkyangs pa mi mthong ba'i tshes na'ang mthong ba'i phyir dang/ bar dor mig dang bral ba'i dus na'ang mthong ba'i phyir...

⁵²⁵ Ibid: 86.4-86.6.

⁵²⁶ Ibid: 86.6-87.2.

short of giving visions the authoritative status of sensory direct perceptions, presumably because this would render the visions, and their status as primordially present gnosis, dependent on the labile domain of sensory experience. It would seem then that according to Sog bzlog pa these visions can be experienced *through* the senses, but are never truly *of* the senses.

After his intricate use of *pramāṇa* concepts frames his understanding of the epistemological status of visionary experiences, Sog bzlog pa concedes that the visions provoked through physiological manipulations like covering the eyes and staring into sunlight are in fact “not the actual gnosis of awareness” (*rig pa'i ye shes dngos ma yin...*).⁵²⁷ To this end, Sog bzlog pa enlists a typology of three kinds of introduction to gnosis, a rubric coined in Old School tradition texts for the varying degrees of immediacy communicated and accessed in the practice of transmitting an experience of ultimate reality from teacher to student.⁵²⁸ He states: “In this tradition there is the ‘three fold introduction of metaphorical, actual, and symbolic [gnosis].’”⁵²⁹ According to Sog bzlog pa, external physiological introductions only elicit experiences on the most superficial level of “metaphorical gnosis” (*dpe'i ye shes*).⁵³⁰ Since the practices of manipulating the eyes and their field of vision introduce imagery based on examples, these are claimed to have only a “signifying” (*mtshon byed*) function; they are resolutely not, Sog bzlog pa

⁵²⁷ Ibid: 87.2-87.3.

⁵²⁸ The provenance of this three-fold distinction is unknown to me.

⁵²⁹ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 87.3. 'di pa'i lugs la dpe don rtags gsum gyi ngo sprod ces 'byung...

⁵³⁰ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 87.3. The notion of “metaphorical gnosis” appears in a number of tantric contexts to explain the preliminary phase of participation in gnosis. For a cursory explanation of this term, see Matthew Kapstein, “We are All Gzhan stong pas,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7 (2000): 117-118. Although Kapstein refers to the distinction between “metaphorical gnosis” (*dpe'i ye shes*) and “actual gnosis” (*don gyi ye shes*) as a specifically New Translation tantric concept, he offers no citation to that effect.

insists, “direct perceptions of gnosis” (*mngon sum ye shes*). To go further and trigger a direct perception of absolute suchness, the first of the four visions, still requires the deepening of these metaphorical glimpses through meditation equipped with the proper orientation. In this way, Sog bzlog pa provides a role for meditative cultivation, even in light of his claim that access to such visions alone brings liberation. For Sog bzlog pa, “unlike a child viewing a temple, we must develop the view of meditative equipoise with respect to the luminous appearances.”⁵³¹ To learn how to best proceed, moreover, Sog bzlog pa advises that we “consult the instruction manuals of the aspects of meditation on the six yogas, and the instruction manuals on crossing over in the Great Perfection.”⁵³² Here we have an instance when the disciplinary practice of forming subjectivity in the image of practice manuals is preceded, guided, and mediated by a metaphorical introduction to the meaning of what is to be cultivated. Contrary to Asad’s generalizations about ritual action broached at the opening of this chapter, the acts of interpreting symbolic meanings and cultivating sensibilities work in tandem in Sog bzlog pa’s understanding of visionary practice.

⁵³¹ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 89.5. /’od snang de dag gi steng du mnyam gzhag gi lta ba mi skyong bar byis pa lha khang lta ba lta bu ni ma yin te/

⁵³² Ibid: 89.5. /de’i tshul ni sbyor drug pa’i bsam gtan gyi yan lag dang/ rdzogs chen po’i thod rgal gyi khrid yig rnams su blta’o/. The “six yogas” (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*, *sbyor ba yang lag drug*) are the *Kālacakra-tantra* tradition’s six stages of practice through which visionary experiences are induced. For more details on this practice and its history in India, see Vesna Wallace, *The Kālacakratāntra: The Chapter on Sādhana together with the Vimalaprabhā*. Tanjur Translation Initiative, Treasury of Buddhist Sciences Series (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, co-published with the Columbia University’s Center for Buddhist Studies and Tibet House. 2010); Gavin Kilty (trans.), *The Ornament of Stainless Light: An Exposition of the Kālacakra Tantra*, by Khedrup Norsang Gyatso (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004); Giacomella Orofino, “On the Ṣaḍaṅgayoga and the Realization of Ultimate Gnosis in the Kalacakratāntra,” *East and West* 46 (1996); and more recently, Chris Hatchell’s (2009) masterful summary and analysis. Hatchell’s outstanding dissertation centers on comparative analyses of the *Kālacakra*, Old School, and Bon traditions of visionary practice, specifically as these opened up arenas for philosophical reflection in Tibet.

Nonetheless, Sog bzlog pa is careful to immediately add that the role of the subject and his meditative cultivation are still not decisive. He states, “it is also incorrect to say that seeing these light rays and seeing a pile of vomit are the same if you know how to sustain meditative equipoise.”⁵³³ Despite their metaphorical character at first, and despite the role of meditative cultivation in their enhancement, induced visionary experiences still partake of the specialized field of embodied gnosis. It is simply a matter of deepening these visions until they reach peak vividness. By Sog bzlog pa’s account, such visions are, in and of themselves, potent visual experiences of the “*maṇḍala* of the definitive Buddha” – “just seeing them brings liberation,”⁵³⁴ or “severs the continuity of the city of the womb, such that one no longer wanders in *saṃsāra*.”⁵³⁵ He concludes in the same vein by strictly differentiating the status of such visions from other sensory objects, even despite a common perceptual basis. He states: “although to one with the right orientation a pile of vomit is not truly existent, since seeing it has no such good qualities, it is only vomit.”⁵³⁶ This is where we see Sog bzlog pa open the visionary realm as an ontological field of sensory gnosis, reflecting the seminal core of corporeal being, and not just a particular manner of perceiving objects brought on through training. This ontological approach contrasts strongly with the epistemological leanings of his opponent. Sog bzlog pa’s ontological orientation with respect to the visionary realm

⁵³³ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 89.6. /zer de mthong ba dang/ ngan skyug gi phung po mthong ba mnyam gzhas gi skyong tshul shes na mnyam par gsungs pa yang mi 'thad do/

⁵³⁴ Ibid: 89.6. 'di nges pa'i don gyi rgyal ba'i dkyil 'khor yin pas mthong ba tsam gyi grol ba yin te/...

⁵³⁵ Ibid: 90.3. mngal gyi grong khyer rgyun gcod pas na phyis 'khor bar mi 'khyams te/

⁵³⁶ Ibid: 90.1-90.2. /ngan skyug gi phung po ni lta ba can la don du ma grub po yin kyang/ mthong ba la de lta bu'i yon tan med pas ngan skyug nyid du zad do/

sheds some light on his creative adaptations of standard Buddhist epistemological categories, which were not intended to frame modes of being, but modes of perceiving.

The visions of direct crossing thus involve actual “*sambhogakāya* pure realms.”⁵³⁷ Yet, on this point Sog bzlog pa offers two contrasting opinions that significantly mitigate this claim. Firstly, Sog bzlog pa cites “previous masters of the six yogas” (*sbyor ba’i bla ma gong ma rnams*) connected with the *Kālacakra* tradition as saying that the visual element of those experiences is the *nirmāṇakāya* aspect, while only the corresponding aural element is the *sambhogakāya* aspect.⁵³⁸ Sog bzlog pa then explains what he calls the Old School position on the topic, namely that the visions are actual *sambhogakāya* realms, but only for those who have reached the vision of the “culmination of awareness” – the third of the four visions – and only within their own subjective perceptions.⁵³⁹ Indeed, claims Sog bzlog pa, such practitioners perceive wherever they are as a *sambhogakāya* realm and whoever is at hand as a *sambhogakāya* entourage. Those who have only glimpsed the first and second levels of visionary experience, Sog bzlog pa maintains, have no such claim on the actuality of their visionary experiences.⁵⁴⁰ Here we see that Sog bzlog pa does not just valorize an ontological approach over an epistemological one. Rather, variant modes of perceiving become progressively more

⁵³⁷ *Sambhogakāya*, which translates as “body of beatitude” or “body of rapture,” refers most generally to a subtle level of awakened embodiment accessible only to yogis and bodhisattvas in visionary experiences. As part of three-body (*trikāya*) Mahāyāna theory, fully awakened beings are said to manifest from the most refined level of embodiment, the *dharmakāya*, or “body of reality,” into *sambhogakāya* forms to altruistically alight upon whoever can sense them. The *nirmāṇakāya* forms of awakened beings, while also form, constitute the grosser level of flesh and blood persons, or other beings and objects that manifest to benefit beings on the level of coarse materiality. For a detailed study of Mahāyāna Buddhism’s theory of three *kāya*, or bodies, see John Makransky, *Buddhism Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).

⁵³⁸ Ibid: 92.1.

⁵³⁹ Ibid: 92.2-92.4.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid: 92.2-92.4.

consistent with the ultimate ontological mode of being as the practitioner becomes more self-aware of his or her own intrinsic mind-body gnosis as the common basis for the expression of all phenomenal existence. Complete awakening, according to this formulation, amounts to nothing more or less than the coalescence of one's individual mode of perceiving (*snang tshul*) and the ultimate mode of being (*gnas tshul*), an event signaled by the final collapse of this and all other subject-object dualities.

Sog bzlog pa follows up by delivering his final and perhaps most controversial maneuver to valorize the domain of visionary experience: he rejects the critic's characterization of the Old School's fourth and ultimate vision, the "exhaustion of suchness" (*chos nyid zad sa*), as the dissolution of all phenomenal appearances at the culmination of complete liberation and awakening. Instead, Sog bzlog pa strongly affirms, gnosis does not decline, even at the most refined levels of spiritual development. To illustrate this point, he enlists the position of "the Indian and Tibetan *Kālacakra* scholars and adepts," who he claims have all extolled "emptiness endowed with the supreme of all characteristics" – empty yet luminous forms that arise in progressively greater density and clarity within the context of the path – as a description of their pinnacle realization.⁵⁴¹ Armed with two citations that point toward a view of gnosis as free of dissolution,⁵⁴² Sog bzlog pa argues that visions, as the phenomenal expression of gnosis, are also free of disintegration and are therefore not to be discarded even at the

⁵⁴¹ Ibid: 93.1-93.2: *rgya bod gnyis su byon pa'i dus kyi 'khor lo'i mkhas grub thams cad kyi rnam kun mchog ldan gyi stong nyid ces gces spras su mdzad...*

⁵⁴² The source of the first citation is unnamed. The second citation is given as *dBang mdor bstan* (*Śekhodeśa*), in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 361, Rgyud, ka (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985).

culmination of spiritual progress.⁵⁴³ In this way, Sog bzlog pa uses the critic's attempt to catch the Old School in a contradiction, namely, that the culminating vision signals the dissolution of all visions, as a foil against which to argue for the enduring presence of the visionary, and the entire domain of phenomenal appearance for that matter, in the experience of spiritually refined subjectivity.

* * *

When considering Sog bzlog pa's argument as a whole, several idiosyncratic features come to the fore. Here there is only space enough to highlight a few of those. Most conspicuous is the dizzying array of scriptural citations that Sog bzlog pa deploys. A total of forty-eight citations and textual references appear within the seventeen folios of his remarks on the topic of visionary experience. Nearly all of these are drawn from New Translation tantric textual materials that would have been considered canonical by adherents of bKa' brgyud and other New Translation schools. I read this forceful demonstration of erudite command over such a vast body of scriptural literary material as not only part of Sog bzlog pa's effort to defend his Old School practice in the face of New School criticisms, but also as a reflection of his concern to position himself as an authoritative interpreter of the theoretical issues concerned. Given that command of scriptural sources was an important component of traditional religious authority and scholarly reputation in the high prestige zone of philosophical argumentation, Sog bzlog pa's

⁵⁴³ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 93.1-93.4.

exaggerated use of citations can be read as a strategy to buttress his visionary practices and forge his own reputation as a scholar in a single stroke.

Secondly, we can see that Sog bzlog pa walks a fine line in this argument. Even while he vehemently defends sensory access to visions of ultimate reality, he is also very careful to avoid relegating visions, which are by definition, “direct experiences of ultimate reality,” to the conditioned and fickle domain of sensory experience. Sog bzlog pa maneuvers carefully through this terrain, deftly tacking back and forth between the valorization of the power of visionary experiences, in and of themselves, on the one hand, and the mitigating roles of the physiological methods through which they are elicited, and the meditative cultivation through which they are enhanced, on the other. Sog bzlog pa swings back and forth between bold gestures on the side of visionary power and strategic rapprochements with cultivation and conditional physiological manipulations. This dynamic ends up blurring the theoretical boundaries between unconditional gnosis and the conditional methods for accessing it. Owing to the implications of this tension between ends and means for the role of all physical action and sensory experience in triggering transformations in person and world, Sog bzlog pa’s playful deliberations on this point, I believe, constitute his attempts to work out the theoretical underpinnings of the ritual sphere of practice, above and beyond just the specific practice of inducing visionary experiences.

A comparison with the remarks on visionary experience in the rebuttal attributed to the Eighth Karmapa, Mi bskyod rdo rje, further illustrate that ritual action as such is centrally implicated in this issue. The author contends that experience of gnosis, which he terms “*dharmakāya*,” or “one’s own stainless mind,” as being present in ordinary consciousness can indeed be induced through physiological manipulations. In the

citation below, the author spells out under which circumstances the realization of gnosis depends on physiological action.

How can one understand that the *dharmakāya*, one's own stainless luminous mind, is present in mind, awareness, and cognition? Those of inferior and middling fortune for the unexcelled *vajra* vehicle produce certainty in this by removing the superimpositions and denigrations of confused mind, awareness, and cognition, like a swan separating milk from water, through the manipulations (*byed bcing*) of the auspicious connections of *maṇḍala* and *mudrā* associated with the mantra of the *vajra* vehicle. Those of superior faculties recognize the *dharmakāya*, like meeting someone well known previously, as their very own nature based on the auspicious connection of taking devotion in *mantra* as the path, without regard to the ritual proceedings (*cho ga*) of *maṇḍala* and the rest. They thus realize, based on concepts belonging to mind, awareness, and cognition the primordial nature of *dharmakāya*, the essence of the *sugatas*, otherwise known as ordinary cognition. When realizing such, concepts have dawned as *dharmakāya*, through which one will attain the accomplishment of Mahāmudrā called “confusion dawning as wisdom.” The former way of realizing this is to gradually do so based on *karmamudrā*, *dharmamudrā* and *samayamudrā*, through the performance of the vase, secret and wisdom-knowledge initiations. The latter way of realizing this is to do so instantaneously based on the Mahāmudrā through the performance of the fourth initiation. Such “levels” is the practice tradition, peerless throughout the three worlds, emphasized by Glorious sGam po pa.^{544 545}

The passage above invokes the various spiritual “levels” of individuals to carve a theoretical niche for the importance of ritual action in eliciting experience of ultimate gnosis, but only for those of lower and middling capacities. Sog bzlog pa too, by relegating the visions elicited through physiological manipulations to the category of “metaphorical gnosis,” and by limiting access to actual *sambhogakāya* realms only to

⁵⁴⁴ *Drang po 'i sa bon*: 419.4-420.4. *dri ma med pa 'i rang sems 'od gsal ba chos kyi sku sems yid rnam shes la gnas pa 'di ji ltar shes par bya zhes na/ rdo rje thegs pa bla na med pa 'i skal pa dman 'bring la rdo rje thegs pa 'i sngags kyi dkyil 'khor dang phyag rgya 'i rten 'brel gyi byed pa bcings gis/ chu la 'o ma ngang pas 'byed pa ltar sems yid rnam shes 'khrul pa 'i sgro skur bsal nas nges par byed la/ dbang po mchog la ni dkyil 'khor sogs kyi cho ga la ma ltos par sngags /kyi mos gus lam 'byed kyi rten 'brel las chos sku de nyid sngar 'dris kyi mi dang 'phrad pa ltar rang ngo rang gi shes te sems yid rnam shes kyi rnam rtog las chos sku bde gshegs snying po ye ji bzhin pa 'am/ tha mal gyi shes pa de nyid rtogs pa yin la/ de ltar rtogs pa na rnam rtog chos skur shar bas 'khrul pa ye shes su 'char ba zhes bya ba 'i phyag rgya chen po 'i dngos grub 'thob par 'gyur ba yin no/ rtogs tshul snga ma 'di ni bum pa dang gsang ba dang shes rab ye shes kyi dbang gi byed pas las chos dam tshig phyag rgya las brten nas rim gyis 'jug pa yin la/ rtogs tshul phyi ma 'di ni bzhi pa 'i dbang gi byed pas phyag rgya chen po 'i phyag rgya la brten nas cig car 'jug pa 'i rim pa zhes bya ba dpal sgam po pas rtsal 'don du mdzad pa 'i sgrub srol sa gsum na 'gran zla dang bral ba byung ba de 'o/*

⁵⁴⁵ sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen (1079-1153) is the renowned student of Milarepa credited with inaugurating the Karma bKa' bgyud, or Marpa bKa' bgyud tradition. For more on sGam po pa and his teachings, see Jampa MacKenzie Stewart, *The Life of Gampopa* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2004).

those who have reached the third and penultimate level of visionary experience, accomplishes the somewhat similar aim of placing unmitigated access to ultimate, “actual” gnosis on the murky borderline between unconditioned being and conditioned human action. For Sog bzlog pa, this essentially means that the sphere of human action is only obliquely and incompletely relatable to the visionary domain of actual gnosis. Yet, at the same time, he also promotes physiological manipulations of the eyes, and other actions, as a particularly viable entryway into sensory experiences of gnosis’s unfolding. Even if such glimpses of indwelling gnosis are imperfect and “metaphorical,” they still provide a basis, suggests Sog bzlog pa, for enhanced participation in this ultimate dimension of corporeal being.

A final point that should be emphasized here in Sog bzlog pa’s response to the original critique is his consistent efforts to locate phenomenal reality in the very ground of gnosis and in the most refined levels of gnosis’s unfolding. I read this aspect of Sog bzlog pa’s thought as providing a theoretical, ontological charter for the prominent and enduring place of sensory experience and human action in the Buddhist soteriological project as a whole. Given Sog bzlog pa’s emphasis on this notion of ultimate gnosis’s essential embodiment, which happens to be the Old School’s theoretical basis for inducing visionary experiences, the contention over visionary experience emerges as a disagreement over the very nature and location of gnosis itself. For Sog bzlog pa and his Old School tradition ultimate gnosis is foremost embodied. More than that, gnosis is the primordially present, luminous essence of the mind-body complex, the creative element of phenomenal reality itself, residing at the heart in the form of a tiny five-color sphere of light. It is this mind-body-gnosis continuum, as I shall henceforth call it, which manifests through the eyes in the form of luminous pixels and gradually coalesces into buddhas and

their pure realms over the course of four visionary stages. For Sog bzlog pa, then, visionary experiences are not only embodied. They are hybrid experiences that are at once bodily components, gnostic principles, and objects of visual cognition. It is precisely this hybrid character with which the critic takes issue when he relegates visions to the sphere of signs on the path, produced through the formation of positive habitual patterns, which must finally be discarded to make way for genuine realization to dawn. And it is precisely this rejection of the hybrid nature of gnosis with which Sog bzlog pa disagrees.

The notion of gnosis's fundamental embodiment, as Sog bzlog pa himself successfully proves through countless citations and careful argumentation, is in no way limited to Old School circles. Rather, it stands out as a fundamental assumption of the Indian Buddhist tantric tradition as a whole. Yet, in valorizing the phenomenal pole of spiritual practice and experience, Sog bzlog pa goes farther than most others, including even his Old School colleagues, by arguing that the fourth and final vision of crossing over, the "level of the exhaustion of suchness," resolutely does not signal the dissolution of phenomenal appearances qua sensory experience. Sog bzlog pa concludes his discussion of visionary appearances in *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning* on the issue of the "level of the exhaustion of suchness." But he revisits it with greater elaboration over the next several decades, in response to criticisms of Sog bzlog pa from within Old School circles. Sog bzlog pa's opinion on this particular topic thus appears to have been a point of considerable controversy, even while *Thunder* in general seems to have cemented his reputation as a master theoretician of Buddhist doctrine.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁶ As I remarked in Chapter Two, in the colophon of Sog bzlog pa's 1605 *Thunder of the Definitive Meaning*, which perhaps more than anything has enshrined him in Old School lineage histories up to the

Before exploring Sog bzlog pa's later reflections on this issue, it is important to remark that Sog bzlog pa's argument in *Thunder* for the special powers of visionary experiences is where we notice him lay the first foundation stones for a theory that can extend to the efficacy of other sensory and material media such as sacred sound, amulets, and pills. Whether this was because of the ethereality of visionary experience relative to the other three modes of liberation through sensory contact, or simply because of the primacy of vision within Buddhist theory in general is difficult to say. But by theoretically grounding phenomenal appearance within the hybrid matrix of mind-body-gnosis, among other strategies, Sog bzlog pa's argument for the power of the visionary experiences of crossing-over can be construed as providing the beginnings of the theoretical, ontological foundations for the efficacy of potent material and sensory objects as a whole. In the section that follows, we shall see how Sog bzlog pa builds on this theory in his explication of sacred speech that "liberates through hearing" to recast all sensory experience and human action as expressions of embodied gnosis. But before we delve into that facet of the argument, allow us to conclude this section with a consideration of how Sog bzlog pa's position on visionary experience developed over the ensuing decades.

* * *

Sog bzlog pa revisited the topic of the status of visionary experiences in a text entitled *Abandoning Objections to "Buddhahood Without Meditation:?" A Response to Lama Go*

present, he credits the requests for that later treatise to the scholastic reputation he acquired from *Thunder of Scripture and Reasoning*.

'jo's Query.⁵⁴⁷ He composed this short letter in 1612 in response to queries posed by Lama Go 'jo, a fellow Old School master and student of treasure revealer Zhig po gling pa, on controversial points concerning the status of Treasure pills revealed by Zhig po gling pa and phenomenal appearance more generally. The passage most relevant to our current discussion reads as follows:

Lama Go 'jo stated in a letter:

In a conversation I had with lama rGyal mtshan, he said that in your opinion it is taught that during the exhaustion of suchness of the Great Perfection luminous appearances are not exhausted. How is this the case? Previous masters have taught:

When suchness is exhausted, all outer luminous appearances vanish, like a spider absorbing its web.

Others say:

Directly perceived luminous appearances are the sheath of experience, not genuine wisdom.

Is this right? Since you are extremely renowned as a scholar in the Great Perfection, please deliver a response that satisfies the intellect and the Word of Buddha.⁵⁴⁸

Sog bzlog pa's response is as follows:

The Great Perfection calls the fruition the “exhaustion of intellect,” or the “exhaustion of phenomena.” The exhaustion of intellect is as explained in *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

The ultimate is not the purview of the intellect
Because the intellect is relative.⁵⁴⁹

The intellect is the aspect of confusion, so this is therefore called the “exhaustion of confusion.” The “exhaustion of phenomena” is the “exhaustion of suchness.” To elaborate, through the exhaustion of the confused intellect inwardly, the expansion of its external expression is exhausted. Thus, there is no increase in the appearance of light,

⁵⁴⁷ *Bla ma go 'jo 'i zhu lan ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 191-212. Henceforth, I refer to this text as *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*: 208.2-208.5. *yang chab shog tu/ bla ma rgyal mtshan dang gleng mo byung ba la/ khyed kyi bzhed pa la/ rdzogs chen gyi chos nyid zad pa 'i skabs su 'od snang rnam zad pa min gsungs par 'dug zer ba ji ltar yin/ bla ma gong ma tshod ni/ chos nyid zad pa na/ phyi 'i 'od snang thams cad ba thag bsdu pa ltar yal 'gro/ zhes gsungs bda/ gzhan dag zer ba la/ mngon sum 'od gsal gyi snang ba nyams kyi sbun pa yin/ ye shes mtshan nyid pa min zer ba e bden/ khyed rdzogs chen la mkhas pa 'i grags pa shin tu che bar bda' bas/ blo bka' chog pa 'i lan gcig bskur dgos/ ces gsungs pa la/*

⁵⁴⁹ *Byang chub sems dpa 'i spyod pa la 'jug pa*, (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), in *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 3871, Mdo 'grel, vol. 1a (Beijing: Krung go 'i bod rig pa 'i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985), 1017. These two lines appear here as follows: */don dam blo yi spyod yul min/ /blo ni kun rdzob yin par brjod/*. However, in Sog bzlog pa's citation, provided below, this citation appears as follows: *don dam blo yi spyod yul min/ /blo ni kun rdzob yin phyir ro*.

pure realms, enlightened bodies and seminal drops, and neither are there any concepts of clinging to their mere appearance. Once the material body of the four elements is ripened into light, it mingles with awareness, which has been present since the beginning as an enlightened body of light. The exhaustion of outer perceived objects and the inner perceiving mind brings about a severance of the continuity of confusion. Just as a candle inside a vase shines inside and not out, the gnosis of empty bliss abides in unwavering self-illumination, through which one seizes the citadel of *dharmakāya*. Thus, its essence abides as an enlightened body. Its nature abides as light. Its compassion abides as light rays. Those luminous appearances do not disappear. This is the time when clinging to light is exhausted. It has been given the name, “the pure land of the youthful vase body.”...

Thus, taking as an example the full moon on the fifteenth day, which cannot increase any further, it is taught, “during the exhaustion of suchness, the increase of appearances is exhausted. However, since its nature is present as light, compassion illuminates equally, like the shining sun.” The intention behind these statements in commentaries by the previous great learned and accomplished ones has been construed by those today with little insight to mean that no luminous appearances manifest at all. They cite ‘Does not manifest, appear or illuminate,’ and so forth. Yet this means that even though there is no manifestation, appearance, or illumination outwardly, it is not the case that there is no appearance or illumination inwardly.... Thus, it is taught that appearance does not disappear once it is exhausted.⁵⁵⁰

While much can be said of Sog bzlog pa’s explanation, allow us to focus on just a few features that are most salient for our discussion. Firstly, rather than interpret the term “exhaustion of suchness” as the final dissolution of all phenomenal reality into the nature of emptiness, as most other Old School adherents had and still do, Sog bzlog pa interprets this stage as the dissolution of confusion and clinging with respect to phenomena, or the end of dualistic perception, in which the gross materiality of the body transforms into

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid: 208.5-210.4. *rdzogs chen pas/ 'bras bu blo zad chos zad zhes zer/ blo zad pa ni/ don dam blo yi spyod yul min/ /blo ni kun rdzob yin phyir ro/ /zhes spyod 'jug tu bshad pa ltar/ blo ni 'khrul pa'i cha yin pas/ 'khrul pa zad pa la zer/ chos zad zhes pa chos nyid zad pa zhes/ de yang nang du 'khrul pa'i blo zad pas/ phyi ru nyams kyi 'phel zad pas/ 'od dang zhing khams sku dang thig le'i snang ba che ru 'gro rgyu med cing/ shar ba tsam du 'dzin pa'i rtog pa yang med/ lus 'byung ba bzhi gdos bcas 'od du smin nas/ rig pa 'od kyi sku ru ye nas gnas pa de dang 'dras/ phyi bzung ba'i yul dang nang 'dzin pa'i sems zad pas/ 'khrul pa rgyun chad/ bum nang gi mar me nang du gsal yang phyir mi gsal ba ltar/ bde stong gi ye shes de rang gsal 'pho 'gyur med par gnas pas chos sku'i btsan sa zin pas/ ngo bo sku ru bzhugs/ rang bzhin 'od du bzhugs/ thugs rje zer du bzhugs pa yin/ 'od snang de dag yal 'gro ba ma yin/ 'od du 'dzin pa zad pa'i dus yin/ 'di la gzhon nu bum pa sku'i zhing khams zhes ming du btags pa yin te/...[209.5] tshes bcwo lnga'i zla ba nya gang ba'i slar 'phel du med pa dpe ru mdzad nas/ chos nyid zad pa'i dus su snang ba'i 'phel zad kyang/ rang bzhin 'od du yod pa'i phyir/ thugs rje nyi gsal bzhin snyoms mdzad pa/ zhes gsungs pa yin no/ /'di dag gi dgongs don sngon gyi mkhas grub chen po rnams kyis dkral ba rnams la/ ding sang gi shes rab chung ba rnams kyis/ 'od snang ci yang mi mngon pa la byas nas/ mi mngon mi snang gsal byed min/ /zhes sogs lung 'dren byed de/ phyi ru mi mngon mi snang mi gsal ba yin kyang/ nang du mi snang mi gsal ba ma yin te...[210.4] zad nas med 'gro bar ma gsungs so/*

light and merges with the intrinsic light of gnosis. At this stage, explains Sog bzlog pa, the visionary experience of buddha bodies and their pure realms reveals itself as the very expression of one's own intrinsic mind-body-gnosis continuum, now refined to the fullest extent possible. In the wake of this heightened experience, the luminous manifestations of phenomenal reality neither increase, nor dissipate, but stabilize as the enduring presence of this most subtle level of phenomenal reality.

Secondly, we can see in this argument that Sog bzlog pa enlists the notions of essence, nature, and compassion, a triad of terms that commonly appear in Great Perfection instruction manuals to refer to the qualities of basic awareness qua gnosis as empty in essence, cognizant in nature, and all-pervasive in capacity. Here, however, Sog bzlog pa recasts this triad to denote the enduring appearance of luminous physical forms, lights, and light rays, at this most refined level of spiritual development. The hybrid nature of visionary experience, and now all of phenomenal reality, as simultaneously mind, body, and gnosis means that while the body *dematerializes* into gnostic light, awareness – in its essence, nature, and capacity – *materializes* into the selfsame gnostic light. The collapse of mind-body and subject-object dualities entailed in this series of “exhaustions” thus finds expression in an all-encompassing luminosity.

Finally, we witness Sog bzlog pa address the issue of how this mind-body luminosity manifests in perception by enlisting the contrast between outer and inner dimensions of experience. He argues that the illumination of this “pure land of the youthful vase body” expresses itself inwardly rather than outwardly, thus explaining why others do not perceive these luminous displays, when adepts so clearly experience themselves and others as luminous bodies and their effulgence. According to this formulation, since “inward appearances” remain, it's not as if there are no appearances at

all in awakened experience, even if less refined subjectivities are not privy to them “externally.”

Overall, the developments expressed in the above passage illustrate Sog bzlog pa’s ongoing concern with the issue of grounding visionary experience, and all phenomenal reality, within the fabric of mind-body gnosis. Contrary to the critics’ construal of a monolithic “Old School position” on this issue, Sog bzlog pa advanced a relatively distinctive formulation that allowed him to promote the centrality of the phenomenal dimension of reality in Buddhist practice and experience more than the majority of his Old School contemporaries did.

II. Powerful Speech

In keeping with the structure of the original critique to which Sog bzlog pa’s reflections are a response, we now shift gears to consider the distinctive strategies that Sog bzlog pa advances to provide theoretical rationales for the efficacy of powerful spoken language in the process of spiritual development. His remarks on this issue are phrased specifically in defense of the Old School tradition’s funerary practice of “liberation through hearing” (*thos grol*), which prescribes the recitation into the ears of the dying or recently deceased oral instructions believed to liberate his or her consciousness from rebirth in undesirable *saṃsāric* states.

The efficacy of spoken language qua Buddha Word (*buddhavacana*) has been a sensitive issue in Buddhist thought since its inception. Early in the development of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, the roles of scriptural books and their public recitation extended well beyond simply the communication of subject matter. The ritual use of scriptural books, including the enunciation of their sacred formulas, has long been a

common way for Buddhist religious specialists and communities to address a wide range of mundane and spiritual concerns without recourse to the conveyance of propositional linguistic meanings. Several early Mahāyāna *sūtra* and *dhāraṇī* texts promote the efficacy of their techniques by promising that just “hearing” their potent formulas and the names of buddhas that they contain can even confer positive rebirths and sometimes even ultimate soteriological aims.⁵⁵¹ Such claims have always existed in marked tension with the Buddhist doctrinal emphasis on personal karma and cultivation in the achievement of higher rebirths and liberation, where the primary role of scripture has often been to impart content that provides prescriptive guidelines for how to most effectively cultivate the person toward those goals.

Sog bzlog pa’s defense of the efficacy of “liberation through hearing” instructions throws into relief the tensions between these two contrasting approaches to the enunciation of scripture, both of which are well represented in Buddhist literature. Fundamentally at issue is the role of scripture as powerful sound, whose force, when heard, can make its impact felt upon the person beyond the level of discursive comprehension; versus the role of scripture as linguistic code, whose force depends upon discursive comprehension and intentional implementation. In much the same vein as the debate about liberation through seeing, then, Sog bzlog pa and his interlocutor are arguing about the place in Buddhist spiritual development of contact with the powerful sensory media of sound in relation to discursive understanding, mental cultivation, and karma. While pushing for the efficacy of oral instructions heard at death, Sog bzlog pa

⁵⁵¹ The *Sukhāvātīvyūha sūtra* (Luis O. Gomez, *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha Measureless Light*, Honolulu: Hawaii, 1996, 26 and 71-75) for example, describes the benefits that attend the recitation of the name of Buddha Amitābha. The texts of the *Pañcarakṣā* collection, moreover, also promise a range of mundane and soteriological benefits from hearing these texts recited out loud. For a discussion of this scriptural collection’s claims to intrinsic power, see Todd Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000).

attempts to forge a rapprochement between these two strains of thinking that favors the special efficacy of the medium of sacred spoken language, in and of itself, to affect transformations in hearers. We will see that Sog bzlog pa once again goes about this primarily by capitalizing on language and concepts conjured by the author of the critique – specifically the roles of intentionality, karma, meditation cultivation and other Buddhist doctrinal mainstays that are problematized by the claim of “liberation through hearing” – to carve out a place for powerful speech formulas vis-à-vis understanding its message. Through stipulating the relationships between these domains, I will argue, Sog bzlog pa endeavors to build on the theoretical groundwork of his reflections upon “liberation through seeing” to work out a blueprint for the efficacy of potent speech formulas as a whole, and by extension, the entire range of sensory experience and action.

To best understand Sog bzlog pa’s specific contributions to this issue, allow me to first summarize the critical remarks to which he responded. The crux of these objections concerns the limits of the power and efficacy of sacred speech in light of the process of understanding its content and engaging in a program of mental cultivation based on that understanding. The author of the critique begins by succinctly characterizing the Old School’s “liberation through hearing” practice as prescribing the recitation of a text into the ears of the corpse with the false belief that this will lead the consciousness of the deceased to a higher rebirth, or a more refined spiritual condition.⁵⁵² The critic then raises the question of what, precisely, is responsible for such so-called “liberation,” the act of merely hearing the phrases, or having the meaning emerge in the mind. After rejecting the first option out of hand, the critic contends that if meaning were an important facet of this tradition, then its radical claim of “liberation through hearing”

⁵⁵² *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 93.4-.5.

would be exaggerated and misleading. The critic then invokes a standard Buddhist formulation of the graduated process by which the understanding and assimilating of sacred speech should ideally take place. He states: “In order for it’s (i.e., language’s) meaning to arise in one’s mind-stream, one must comprehend it. In order to comprehend it, one must understand it. In order to understand it, an intentional hearing of its phrases and meanings must have arisen, and one must have subsequently put it into practice.”⁵⁵³ This formulation utterly negates the special efficacy and power of the medium of sacred speech and instructions beyond the gradual, intentional, cognitive comprehension and cultivation of its messages.

The critic then sets his sights on the negligence of personal karma, intentionality, and meditative cultivation implied by the promise of “liberation through hearing.” He takes issue specifically with the Old School notion that the sacred instructions claiming to “liberate through hearing” involve an introduction to the pantheon of peaceful and wrathful deities, which are present in the hearts and brains of all beings in the form of the light and sound of gnosis, but which dawn as frightening sights and sounds within the first few days of the intermediate period after death and before rebirth.⁵⁵⁴ Indeed, the Old School had for centuries stipulated the recitation of “liberation through hearing” instructions to the dying precisely in order to introduce these forms and sounds as the manifold self-expressions of the mind-body-gnosis intrinsic to all beings. The practice of reading such instructions, better known to English-speaking audiences as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*,⁵⁵⁵ had been a major component of the Old School’s repertoire of

⁵⁵³ Ibid: 93.6-94.1.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid: 95.6-97.3.

funerary practices from at least the fourteen century, when the Treasure revealer Karma gling pa (b. 14th c.) uncovered one of its most popular versions.⁵⁵⁶ Ever since, it has been a mainstay of Old School theory that these instructions can elicit the deceased's recognition of the dynamic displays of gnosis that unfold during the intermediate state, and thereby instantaneously trigger the realization of intrinsic gnosis, and hence, liberation from *samsāra*. More provisionally, and perhaps more commonly, the "liberation" brought through "hearing" can also mean freedom from undesirable rebirths within *samsāra*.

Armed with a very different notion of gnosis, the critic argues that encounters with gnosis in the form of deities can only result from having assembled all the necessary causes, conditions, and auspicious circumstances, such as having the requisite karmic propensity, undergoing initiations, extensive training in deity yoga, mental purification, and so forth. In short, deities can only appear, according to the critic, after having formed the right mental habitual patterns through extensive meditation, as guided by previous karmic propensities. This means for the critic that the mental body of the deceased can arise during the intermediate state of the afterlife in the form of the meditation deity that one practiced while living, but only if mental cultivation in deity yoga has reached a sufficient level of depth and refinement. It also means that such deities can only appear

⁵⁵⁵ The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is better known to Tibetan audiences as the instruction which "liberates through hearing in the intermediate state" (*Bar do thos grol*) between death and rebirth. This text was a Treasure teaching revealed by Karma gling pa as part of his *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor* (New Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1975-1976). English translations include W.Y. Evans-Wentz (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1975), Robert Thurman (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), Stephen Hodge and Martin Boord (London: Thorsons, 1999), and Gyurme Dorje (London: Penguin, 2005). For a critical history of the western reception of this book, see Donald Lopez, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁵⁵⁶ For more on the history of "liberation through hearing" practices in Tibet and their Indian antecedents, see Bryan Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York, London: Oxford University Press, 2003).

for human beings, since humans are the only type of being capable of training in such practices. Such post-mortem mental afterimages of habitual deity yoga practice, stridently claims the critic, differ fundamentally from the Old School assertion that at death the “frightening” sounds and images of one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities “emerge from the body” of all beings, ranging from the tiniest insects to the most accomplished yogis. How, the critic rhetorically asks, can the uniformity of Old School post-mortem theory account for the many different karmic perceptions of the universe’s myriad creatures, whose frightening and pleasant sounds and appearances are so fundamentally different in character. Frightening post-mortem experiences, jabs the critic, are “only the appearances of habitual patterns and karma” – all creatures, including worms, ants, and the like, would never have had the opportunity to form the necessary habits to encounter *actual* gnosis deities.

In a final blow to peaceful and wrathful deity theory, the critic introduces three possible origins of the gnosis deities purportedly encountered in the intermediate state. Even granting that such experiences might appear for beings at death, baits the critic, gnosis deities can only emerge because 1) corresponding habitual mental patterns have been established through intensive meditative cultivation, 2) gnosis deities reside in the syllables of the subtle energy channels (Tib. *rtsa*, Skt. *nadi*) within the body while alive, or 3) the mind-stream has been visited by external gnosis deities at death. The first option is the critic’s own position, which contravenes Old School theory; the second option, the critic claims, is impossible, since the mental body (*gid lus*) possessed by the deceased in the intermediate state is no longer equipped with a subtle body of energy channels; and the third option, which the critic concedes as a possibility, can only happen

by his estimation for minds that have been purified through meditative cultivation during life, and not for sinners and yogis alike, as the Old School maintains.

In sum, by the critic's account, the forms and sounds associated with gnosis deities can only appear at death to a human mind that has been sufficiently purified while alive through in-depth cultivation of the contemplative exercises of tantric deity yoga, and resolutely not through the recitation of sacred words into the ears of the deceased. Rephrased slightly, our critic strenuously rejects the notion that the formal materiality of language, even special sacred language, has the power, through its mere enunciation in an act of speech, to trigger freedom from the undesirable states of *samsāric* existence. The intentionality and sustained attention of the hearer, not to mention his understanding and cultivation of the content so understood, are essential to achieve soteriological goals.

* * *

At the root of all these criticisms is a very different paradigm of what constitutes the ground of visionary and auditory contact with gnosis deities. The critic's remarks, together with Sog bzlog pa's response, unwittingly charts contrasting theories concerning the enchanted or disenchanting nature of corporeal existence. Is the body coextensive with gnosis, a physical *maṇḍala* of primordially present gnosis deities, which appear in the afterlife, as Sog bzlog pa's Old School would have it; or is the body *crafted* into the image of a divine being, such that through cultivation and hard work in cognitive, imaginary practices while living one might *learn* to see oneself that way at death, as the critic vehemently maintains? We shall see that each of these positions has distinct

consequences for the role of the senses and meditative cultivation in making contact with ultimate gnosis.

* * *

Sog bzlog pa begins his response to this set of criticisms with what seems like a major concession on the side of meaning and against the efficacy of pure sound as such. He states that liberation through hearing indeed “means that through hearing words, meaning arises in the mind-stream and one is liberated.”⁵⁵⁷ After then offering citations from unnamed Mahāyāna *sūtras*, which, he states, illustrate this formulation, Sog bzlog pa shifts registers to *tantra* and begins to strategically wend his way back toward the theoretical pole of the efficacy of sacred speech in and of itself. He initiates this backpedaling process by appropriating the critic’s emphasis on the term “understanding” (*rtogs pa*) and locating that term in the New Translation’s *Inconceivable tantra*,⁵⁵⁸ which connects “understanding” with instantaneous realization. The citation states:

Understanding (*rtogs pa*), then complete cultivation (*goms pa*)
Do not pertain here.
At the very moment of understanding
On surely abides on the fourteenth level^{559 560}.

⁵⁵⁷ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 94.2. *de ni tshig thos pas don rgyud la skyes te grol ba yin te/*

⁵⁵⁸ This *tantra* is in all likelihood the *dPal 'khor lo sdom pa'i gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* (*Śrī Cakrasaṃvaraguḥya-acinta-tantrarāja*), in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 385, Rgyud, ga (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁵⁵⁹ The “fourteenth level” mentioned here refers to one typology, particular to *tantra*, for the stage of final liberation.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid: 94.4. */rtogs dang goms pa mthar phyin pa/ 'di la yod pa ma yin te/ rtoqs pa'i skad cig de nyid la/ /bcu bzhi'i sa la nges par gnas/*. This citation does not appear in the aforementioned *tantra*. It does, however, appear nearly verbatim as a citation in *Mi zad pa'i gter mdzod yongs su gang ba'i glu zhes bya ba gnyug ma'i de nyid rab tu ston pa'i rgya cher bshad pa* (*Dohanidhikoṣaparipūrṇagīti-nāma-nijatattvaparakāṣatikā*), in *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 2257, wi (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe

Dispensing with the need for cultivation, Sog bzlog pa glosses this statement as, “one easily understands the meaning of oral instructions after having them introduced to the mind-stream *through simply hearing their content exclaimed.*”⁵⁶¹ Thereafter, in a further maneuver to render understanding contiguous with hearing, Sog bzlog pa invokes the prestige that Sanskrit learning held among Tibet’s intelligentsia. He claims that in “Sanskrit” (*sang krI ta*), the translation equivalents (*skad dod*) for the Tibetan terms *rtogs pa*, which means “understanding,” and *go ba*, which means both “comprehension” and “hearing,” are identical.⁵⁶² Sog bzlog pa declines to note the Sanskrit terms, or his textual source. With the proper rapprochement between “hearing” and “understanding” in place, Sog bzlog pa weighs in on the dynamics involved with speech utterances that claim to liberate through hearing:

By not forgetting what is understood, like a letter entrusted to a trustworthy deliveryman, one recognizes as self-manifestations the appearances, sounds, light rays, and so forth, of the intermediate state. Through this, in the manner of a meeting between mother- and child-like luminosities, or in the manner of their unity, one is instantaneously awakened, and thus ‘liberated.’ This is the meaning of the statement, ‘One moment makes a difference. In one moment complete Buddhahood.’ Since this is like an occasion in which understanding and liberation are simultaneous, or in which appearance and liberation are simultaneous, one is automatically liberated through *only not forgetting the instructions given*. Thus, one need not implement the effort required by other paths.⁵⁶³

skrun khang), 616. The passage appears in that text as follows: *rtogs dang goms pa mthar phyin pa/ /’di la yod pa ma yin te/ /rtogs pa’i skad cig de nyid la/ /bcu bzhi sa la nges par gnas/*

⁵⁶¹ Ibid: 94.5. *’dir gdams ngag gi don sgrags pa de thos pa tsam gyi rgyud la ngo ’phrod nas bde blag du rtogs pa yin zhing/*

⁵⁶² Ibid: 94.5.

⁵⁶³ Ibid: 94.5-95.2. */de ltar rtogs pa de nyid mi brtan po la phrin bskur ba ltar ma brjed par byas pas/ bar do’i snang ba sgra ’od zer gsum la sogs pa rang snang du ngo shes pas/ ’od gsal ma bu phrod pa ’am/ zung du ’jug pa’i tshul gyi skad cig de nyid la ’tshang rgya ba skad cig gi bye brag phyed/ skad cig cig gi rdzogs sangs rgyas/ /zhes gsungs ba ltar grol ba’o/ ’di ni rtogs pa dang grol ba dus mnyam pa ’am/ shar grol dus mnyam gyi skabs dang ’dra bas/ gdams pa btab pa ma brjed pa kho nas rang grol ba yin pas na lam gzhan ltar ’bad pa nyams su blang dgos pa ma yin te/*

Clearly, then, for Sog bzlog pa cultivation of meaning is not a necessary component in the workings of language, only understanding. And by understanding, Sog bzlog pa does not seem to mean a complete discursive comprehensive of the content of language's message, but simply the sensory encounter of hearing and registering it. The intentionality of the hearer does not seem to be a necessary precondition. Rather, its role appears to be circumscribed to simply the act of bringing attention to the formal quality of "liberation through hearing" instructions, not necessarily to their content. All that is required for liberation is that the hearer can carry the linguistic form of the instructions through the death experience so as to discursively interpret its content later, in an act of recognition during the intermediate state, precisely when they are needed. Prior to death it is simply the materiality, or form of the message that must be heard and retained, and not the interpreted, or discursively comprehended content. When understanding qua interpretation of this message takes place during the intermediate state, an event triggered by direct encounter with the sights and sounds described in the message, liberation is instantaneous with recognition. The cultivation of content is absolutely superfluous.

We can see that by emphasizing that liberation comes through "simply not forgetting" what was heard, "like a message conveyed through a trusted deliveryman," Sog bzlog pa underscores the efficacy of the materiality of the medium, over interpretation of its discursive content. For Sog bzlog pa, the specialized language of descriptions of the intermediate state operates at the edges of meaning, trading in language's material form more than it's meaning. The signifying sounds of language, much like mnemonic devices, or codes, only communicate content when they are triggered through encounters with signified content. Stated differently, only during the

post-mortem encounter with the profusion of visual and auditory stimuli in the intermediate state can interpretation qua *recognition-as* trigger liberation.

Sog bzlog pa next shifts gears to address the critic’s attacks on the Old School post-mortem theory undergirding the practice of liberation through hearing. Here we witness Sog bzlog pa spell out the theoretical underpinnings of “liberation through hearing” with much greater detail than in his remarks on the practice of “liberation through seeing.” This theory, as we shall see, has practical consequences for an approach to embodiment and sensory experience that extends throughout the entire range of human action and experience.

Sog bzlog pa begins with the general assertion that visual and auditory afterlife experiences of peaceful and wrathful wisdom deities are indeed grounded in the gnosis intrinsic to the physical bodies of all sentient beings, including worms, ants, and humans alike.⁵⁶⁴ Armed with citations from the *Hevajra*,⁵⁶⁵ *Kālacakra*,⁵⁶⁶ and *Samputa tantras*⁵⁶⁷ of New Translation renown, Sog bzlog pa invokes the notion of Buddha-nature to forcefully make this point. He states, “even though worms, ants, and the like do not have habitual patterns for those deities, they nevertheless see them, since each of their respective all-grounds, the essence of the *sugatās*, is naturally endowed with the five eyes

⁵⁶⁴ *Lung rigs ’brug sgra*: 97.3.

⁵⁶⁵ *Kye’i rdo rje zhes bya ba rgyud kyi rgyal po (Hevajratāntrarāja-nāma)*, in *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 417, Rgyud, nga (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). For a Sanskrit edition and complete English translation of this *tantra*, see G. W. Farrow and I. Menon (1992). See also the much earlier edition and translation of David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (Hongkong: Orchid, 2010). Snellgrove’s work, however, suffers from his editorial prejudices, in which he deemed objectionable and dispensable the *tantra*’s more overtly sexual and antinomian elements.

⁵⁶⁶ *mChog gi dang po’i sangs rgyas las phyung ba rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal dus kyi ’khol lo zhes bya ba (Parama-ādibuddhoddhrita-srī-kālacakra-nāma-tāntrarājā)*, in *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 362, Rgyud, ka (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁵⁶⁷ *Yang dag par sbyor ba zhes bya ba’i rgyud chen po (Saṃpūṭi-nāma-mahātantra)*, in *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 381, Rgyud, ga (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

and so forth.”⁵⁶⁸ To also account for personal karma in the divergent manifestations of gnosis, Sog bzlog pa argues that even while such experiences, as the self-expression of embodied gnosis, do not depend on having established habitual patterns through meditative cultivation, sentient beings can experience these gnosis deities in disparate ways after death due to the different limitations and potentials of their respective karmic patterns.⁵⁶⁹ This means for Sog bzlog pa that all sentient beings experience frightening visions and sounds after death in the general form of “the universe shaking and shimmering, the sky being filled with fire, the rumbling of sound as loud as a thousand thunder cracks, and the rest,” even if the particular features of these manifestations coalesce differently based on variant karmic propensities.⁵⁷⁰

Sog bzlog pa is quick to add that only humans, and more specifically practitioners, have the capacity to comprehend which manifestations to pursue and which to reject – which experiences are, in effect, manifestations of intrinsic gnosis and which belong to the sphere of karmic delusion.⁵⁷¹ For Sog bzlog pa, this is the fundamental point of “liberation through hearing:” the recognition of post-mortem manifestations as one’s own intrinsic gnosis instantaneously results in liberation from uncontrolled cycling through *samsāra*, while the failure to recognize this signals further bondage. Sog bzlog pa insists that this unique post-mortem opportunity of human beings is not contingent upon cultivation while alive – simply recollecting the instructions imparted at death will

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid: 97.4-97.5. *srin bu dang grog ma lta bu la lha de dag gi bag chags med kyang/ de dag rang rang gi kun gzhi bde bar gshegs pa'i snying po de la spyang lnga la sogs pa rnams rang chas su yod pas mthong ba yin te/*

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid: 98.2.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid: 98.2-98.4. */'on kyang stong khams shig shig yom yom 'gul ba dang/ nam mkha'i khams kun mes gang ba dang/ sgra drag po 'brug stong ldir ba la sogs pa la ni skrag par 'gyur mod/*

⁵⁷¹ Ibid: 98.3-98.4.

suffice. Sog bzlog pa is careful nonetheless not to utterly neglect a role for meditative cultivation in the process of this recognition. He concedes that the process of gaining familiarity with the peaceful and wrathful deities of intrinsic gnosis prior to death through deity yoga can indeed function to render afterlife experiences clearer and longer-lasting, so as to ease the process of recognition. And yet, Sog bzlog pa claims, “when the body and mind part ways, those wisdom beings come out and manifest to the reaches of space” for all beings alike.⁵⁷²

Sog bzlog pa then takes on the critic’s rubric of three possible grounds of post-mortem experience: mental habits, physically present subtle syllables, or external blessings. Sog bzlog pa’s first maneuver is to equate the Old School’s theory of embodied peaceful and wrathful deities with the New School *tantras*’ own analogous theory. He concludes his comparison by mapping the particular features of the Old School’s *maṇḍala* of peaceful and wrathful deities to each of the facets of sentient corporeal existence:

It is taught that the peaceful and wrathful deities manifest to every being. These are not the deities from whatever *maṇḍala* one has practiced, emerging through the power of habitual patterns. In this regard, all sentient beings are identical: The five aggregates are the five males buddhas, the five elements are the five consorts, the four cognitions and the four sense faculties are the eight male bodhisattvas, the four objects and the four times are the eight female bodhisattvas. The five poisons plus miserliness are the six sages, and the four gates of earth, water, fire and wind are the male and female gatekeepers. This makes up the divine assembly of the forty-two peaceful deities. From their expressive dynamism manifests the fifty-eight wrathful blood-drinkers – the five aggregates and the five elements are the male and female Herukas, the eight collections of consciousness are the eight Mātrikas, the eight aggregates are the eight Phra men goddesses. The quadrant of love, compassion, joy and impartiality are the four gatekeepers. The twenty-eight vertebrae of the spinal column, or the twenty-eight afflictions, when purified in their own place, are the twenty-eight Īśvaras. In that way, it is taught that the peaceful and wrathful deities, which primordially abide as one’s aggregates, constituents, and sense fields, manifest.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷² Ibid: 98.6. *lus sems bral bar gyur pa de’i tshe ye shes de dag phyir thon pas nam mkha’ khyab tshad du ‘char ba yin no/*

Having thus dispensed with the notion that such manifestations stem from mental habitual patterns, Sog bzlog pa goes on to argue that they are ultimately rooted in the syllables situated throughout the subtle body's network of energy channels. With a citation from the tantric Āryadeva⁵⁷⁴ as support, Sog bzlog pa claims, “visions of the syllables in the subtle energy channels, the elemental essences of the constituents, the essence of wind and so force, which are all situated in the body, come forth, due to exchanging body and mind, once the flow of vital wind's movement is severed, upon the cessation of the life-force.”⁵⁷⁵ Contrary to the critic's opinion, then, but consistent with Old and New School tantric theory alike, Sog bzlog pa states, “even though the mental body [of the intermediate state] has no subtle energy channel syllables, the subtle energy channel syllables from the previous body come forth.”⁵⁷⁶ We shall see that this coextension of the mind-body-gnosis continuum with a network of letters distributed throughout the subtle body, while nothing novel in and of itself, has dramatic

⁵⁷³ Ibid: 99.4-100.2. /de las thams cad la zhi khro 'char bar gsungs pa yin/ rang rang gi nyams su gang blangs pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi lha rnams bag chags kyi dbang gi 'char ba ma yin/ 'dir sems can thams cad la mtshungs par phung po lnga rgyal ba rigs lnga/ 'byung ba lnga yum lnga/ shes pa bzhi dang dbang po bzhi sems dpa' brgyad/ yul bzhi dus bzhi sems ma brgyad/ dug lnga ser sna thub pa drug /sa chu me rlung gi sgo bzhi rnams sgo ba yab yum ste/ zhi ba bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis kyi lha tshogs dang/ de'i rtsal las khro bo khrag 'thung lnga bcu rtsa brgyad du shar ba ni/ phung po lnga dang 'byung ba lnga he ru ka yab yum bcu/ rnam shes tshogs brgyad ma mo brgyad/ phung po brgyad phra men ma brgyad/ byams snyin rje dga' ba btang snyoms bzhi sgo ba bzhi/ rgal tshigs sam nyon mongs pa nyi shu rtsa brgyad gnas su dag pa las dbang phyug ma nyi shu rtsa brgyad ste/ de ltar du rang rang gi phung kham skye mched la ye gdod ma nas gnas pa'i zhi khro 'char bar gsungs pa yin no/

⁵⁷⁴ For more on the “tantric” Āryadeva, see Christian Wedemeyer, *Āryadeva's Lamp that Integrates the Practices (Caryāmelāpakapradīpa): The Gradual Path of Vajrayāna Buddhism According to the Esoteric Community Noble Tradition* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, 2007).

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid: 100.2-100.3. de ltar srog 'gag nas mtsho ba'i rlung 'byung 'jug gi rgyu ba chad de lus sems brjes pa'i rkyen gyi/ lus la gnas pa'i rtsa'i yi ge dang kham gyi dangs cha dang rlung ngo bo nyid la sogs pa phyir 'thon pa'i snang ba yin par...

⁵⁷⁶ Lung rigs 'brug sgra: 100.5. yid lus la rtsa yig med kyang/ lus snga ma'i rtsa yig phyir shar ba yin no/

implications for Sog bzlog pa's account of how sacred speech can bring about its powerful effects.

Sog bzlog pa acknowledges that post-mortem experiences can also be regarded as the manifestation of “gnosis deities resulting from the mind-stream being blessed, since the fruition of Buddhahood is conferred through only recognizing them at that time.”⁵⁷⁷ But to avoid granting undue efficacy to forces extrinsic to the mind-body-gnosis continuum of beings, Sog bzlog pa is quick to add that it is precisely the lack of recognition of indwelling gnosis, due to individual ignorance, that causes sentient beings of the three realms to circulate through *samsāra* in the first place.⁵⁷⁸ In other words, post-mortem gnosis deities appear like external agents at first, but must be recognized as reflections of indwelling gnosis for their “blessings” to take hold. It is the ongoing objectification of these indwelling deities that results in *samsāric* bondage, and this is precisely what the oral instructions of “liberation through hearing” are intended to circumvent.

Sog bzlog pa's elaborate presentation of Old School post-mortem theory provides him the leverage necessary to once and for all distinguish the manifestation of primordially abiding gnosis from the fruits of standard tantric deity yoga, and to thereby ground the practice of “liberation through hearing” in the dynamic interplay of the mind-body-gnosis continuum. To this end Sog bzlog pa makes the bold claim that the purification of body, speech, and mind in a lengthy program of self-cultivation through the tantric contemplative practice of deity yoga is only how “gradualist types of people”

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid: 100.5-100.6. /*rgyud byin gyi brlob pa'i ye shes kyi lha yang yin te/ dus der ngo shes pa tsam gyi sangs rgyas kyi 'bras bu ster bas so/*

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid: 101.1-100.2.

(*gang zag rim gyis pa*) see the face of their tutelary deity.⁵⁷⁹ By Sog bzlog pa's account, the manifestation of forms from the fabric of mind-body-gnosis intrinsic to all embodied beings is fundamentally different in kind from, and superior in potency to the act of creating divine forms through the cultivation of habitual patterns by means of deity yoga. More than that, for Sog bzlog pa "there are no gnosis deities whatsoever beyond this"⁵⁸⁰ dimension of self-manifesting mind-body-gnosis, and ignorance of this dimension is precisely what propels beings through *samsāric* existences.⁵⁸¹

The mere fact that post-mortem manifestations of peaceful and wrathful deities are rooted in intrinsic mind-body-gnosis – a continuum that theoretically renders language, sensory experience, and physical action all contiguous with indwelling gnosis – provides Sog bzlog pa a sufficient basis to account for the efficacy of powerful speech utterances in general, above and beyond the discursive content of instructions. Sog bzlog pa deduces that it is precisely the mind-body-gnosis ground of sentient corporeality that functions as the basis for powerful speech utterances to affect the subjectivity of the dying, regardless of whether or not they were familiar before with the specialized terms and notions descriptive of gnosis and its unfolding.

Now with the theoretical foundations of gnosis as fundamentally embodied well established, Sog bzlog pa finally revisits the issue of spoken language's efficacy with the radical claim that even just hearing the names of the peaceful and wrathful deities once at death confers liberation from the deepest recesses of hell.⁵⁸² The rationale for this

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid: 102.4-100.5.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid: 102.6... '*di las gzhan pa'i ye shes kyi lha gang yang med te/*

⁵⁸¹ Ibid: 102.6.

efficacy, Sog bzlog pa adds, rests on the fact that the referents of such names are rooted in the very fabric of sentient embodiment.⁵⁸³ When recalling the associated theory of the subtle body as consisting of subtle syllables that coalesce into divine forms during the afterlife, it appears that in conjunction with the embodied nature of gnosis, we are dealing also with a correspondence theory of language that stipulates an intimate connection between the formal medium of intoned sacred language and its referents inside the mind-body-gnosis continuum of beings.⁵⁸⁴

By introducing the consequence of “liberation from hell,” moreover, Sog bzlog pa extends the semantic range of the term “liberation” to signal not only the ultimate level of liberation from *samsāra*, but also the more provisional goal of positive rebirth within *samsāra* as a human being, a god, or some other positive rebirth. This strategy of demarcating different levels of “liberating” effects works in tandem with the theoretical formulations of gnosis’s embodiment and the links between sacred language and the body. The admission of a range of liberating effects allows Sog bzlog pa to champion the special powers of sacred sound and its resonance with unconditioned mind-body-gnosis, while also accounting for variations in experiences and effects based on the contingencies of individual karma, previous meditative cultivation, and the like. Stated differently, the variability of possible liberating effects in the afterlife allows for an acknowledgment of unconditioned, embodied gnosis and its connection with sacred sound that nearly

⁵⁸² Ibid: 103.5-100.6. *zhi khro'i lha de dag gi mtshan lan gcig thos pas kyang na rag chen por mi ltung ba'i dgos pa chen po yod par bshad la...*

⁵⁸³ Ibid: 103.6. *de'i sems rgyud de ka ngo sprod pa'i rten yin.*

⁵⁸⁴ This feature faintly echoes earlier Indian theories of language, which, in the case of the Mīmāṃsā school, figure into a theory of ritual efficacy, particularly the efficacy of Vedic injunctions. For more details on non-Buddhist and Buddhist Indian theories of language, specifically in relation to their promotion, or rejection of a correspondence theory of language, see Johannes Bronkhorst, *Language and Reality: On an Episode in Indian Thought*, trans. Michael S. Allen and Rajam Raghunathan (Leiden and Boston: Brill Publishers, 2011).

bypasses any role for intentionality, understanding, and cultivation in its efficacy, without utterly neglecting the conditioning influences of karma and cultivation in the process. We will see Sog bzlog pa capitalize on this distinction between levels of efficacy to even greater advantage in his theoretical reflections on the workings of amulets and pills claimed to liberate through wearing and eating. There too, Sog bzlog pa utilizes the semantic range of “liberation” – meaning pragmatic freedom from adverse conditions, temporary freedom from negative rebirths, and ultimate freedom from *samsāra* as a whole – to make a place for the personal and subjective variables of individual karma, meditative cultivation, intentionality, and the like, without, at the same time, compromising the unequivocal power of potent objects and sensory experiences rooted in the unconditioned domain of awakened gnosis.

Sog bzlog pa finally backtracks once again to secure a place for karma and meditative cultivation in his theoretical account. First, he explains precisely how afterlife manifestations of gnosis can be obscured by karmic patterns, thus limiting the capacity of humans to recognize gnosis, regardless of having received the requisite instructions.⁵⁸⁵ The opacity of karmic reflections in turn implies a more important role for meditative cultivation while living: It is precisely the cultivation of skill in meditative absorption, Sog bzlog pa concedes, that extends the period of the clear manifestation of gnosis deities, thereby increasing the potential for their recognition.⁵⁸⁶ Sog bzlog pa continues in the same vein by acknowledging that practitioners too can be obscured by a variety of personal karmic patterns in the afterlife. If they fail to recognize the stages of death and the emergence of lights during the intermediate state of death, and the ensuing flash of

⁵⁸⁵ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 105.4-100.5.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 105.5-.105.6.

ultimate reality during the intermediate state of suchness, manifestations of indwelling gnosis will be indeterminate and post-mortem liberation will be difficult indeed.⁵⁸⁷ In such cases, Sog bzlog pa powerfully concludes, the liberation-through-hearing instructions of the intermediate state of becoming can function like “the installation of a gutter in a cracked irrigation ditch,” thus ensuring the passage of consciousness to a desired rebirth.⁵⁸⁸ In lieu of complete liberation, then, the formal, material features of the sound of post-mortem instructions, specifically the names of the peaceful and wrathful deities, is powerful enough, in and of itself, to conduct one’s consciousness to a positive rebirth.

* * *

To summarize Sog bzlog pa’s remarks on the efficacy of liberation-through-hearing instructions: First, he places strict limitations on the role of intentionality, understanding, and cultivation in the process of liberation, even to the point of granting the power of liberation from hell realms to simply hearing the names of the peaceful and wrathful deities. And yet, intentionality still retains some role, since the cultivation of meditative absorption while alive increases the clarity and extends the duration of afterlife experiences of intrinsic gnosis. Nonetheless, Sog bzlog pa stereotypes meditative cultivation as a “gradualist” (*rim gyis pa*) approach to liberation, which the proper instructions at death can circumvent, even while karmic patterns, as these color the

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid: 106.2-106.3.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid: 106.2-106.3: *yur ba skong chag pa la/ wa 'dzugs pa lta bu...* Although not explicitly designated as such by Sog bzlog pa, this passage derives from Karma gling pa’s *Srid pa bar do 'i ngo sprod gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo*, in *Zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Sherab Lama, 1975-1976: 161.1). It reads as follows: *yur ba rkang chad pa wa 'dzugs pa lta bu...*

manifestations of intrinsic gnosis, bring about indeterminate and highly labile post-mortem experiences. So even while Sog bzlog pa comes close to granting governing efficacy to sacred spoken language beyond the understanding or intent of the hearer, he does so by tracing internal-external correspondences, in effect linking the power of sacred speech to the syllabic substrate of the mind-body-gnosis continuum intrinsic to all beings. Sog bzlog pa also extends the semantic range of the term liberation to mean not just liberation from *samsāra*, but also liberation from negative states within *samsāra*, a move which accounts for the conditioning roles of intentionality, cultivation, and karma in the variability of individual experiences and effects, without compromising the power of sacred sound and its resonances within the mind-body-gnosis continuum of hearers. Through this careful balancing act, Sog bzlog pa ends up distributing the efficacy of intermediate state instructions and other potent utterances to conditions and factors located both inside and outside the hearer, even while final efficacy rests, by his account, with the potency of sacred speech itself, as it reflects and is reflected in the subtle body of the person.

Much like visionary experiences, Sog bzlog pa undergirds the efficacy of speech utterances with reference to their hybrid character. It can be argued that all spoken language is inherently hybrid, in that it straddles the domains of medium and message, form and content, materiality and immateriality, personal agency and objective structure. But for Sog bzlog pa in this context it is specifically the hybrid nature of what I have termed the mind-body-gnosis continuum, now extended to include its subtle syllabic substrate, that lifts the materiality of sacred speech into the sphere of agency and lends it such power.

* * *

To better understand the implications of Sog bzlog pa's particular account of the hybrid character of sacred sound, let us briefly examine an analogous formulation put forth in the rebuttal attributed to the Eighth Karmapa Mi bskyod rdo rje. Much like Sog bzlog pa, this author defends the notion that sound can indeed have special efficacy. And also like Sog bzlog pa, it is the hybrid quality of certain special speech formulations that gives them the capacity to act on beings and world. Yet, the Eighth Karmapa's understanding of hybrid language is markedly different from Sog bzlog pa's formulations in *Thunder*. Instead of locating the potency of powerful speech in the mind-body-gnosis fabric of all beings, this author theorizes how the previous aspirations of bodhisattvas crystallize through the accumulation of vast stores of merit and gnosis into the "enlightened activity of the doctrine of the three jewels,"⁵⁸⁹ meaning more precisely, linguistic and material instantiations.⁵⁹⁰ The Eighth Karmapa-attributed response thus emphasizes more the objective power of sacred sound. By his account, when bodhisattvas first arouse the altruistic attitude set on supreme awakening, they form the wish, "May simply seeing, hearing, recollecting, and touching me be capable of establishing all sentient beings in great, non-abiding awakening!"⁵⁹¹ Such a wish, when stabilized through the progressive

⁵⁸⁹ *Drang po'i sa bon*: 425.6-426.1...*dkon mchog gsum gyi bstan pa'i 'phrin las...*

⁵⁹⁰ Todd Lewis (2000, 123) remarks that the notion of bodhisattvas transforming into mantras or other powerfully efficacious linguistic formulas is present in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and *Mahāvastu*.

⁵⁹¹ *Drang po'i sa bon*: 426.1-426.3. ...*bdag mthong thos dran reg tsam gyis sems can thams cad kyang mi gnas pa'i byang chub chen po la 'god nus par gyur cig...*

refinement of spiritual cultivation, materializes into sensory objects capable of bringing manifold positive affects to those who come into contact with them.⁵⁹²

Such an explanation is reminiscent of the “invisible” or “unperceived physicality” (Skt. *avijñaptirūpa*, Tib. *rnam par rig byed ma yin pa'i gzugs*) of vows, and other intentions as explained in Buddhist Abhidharma literature.⁵⁹³ At once unseen and physical, vows exist on the margins of materiality. Unlike visible forms, which have extensionality in space and time, invisible forms have only temporal extensionality. In the case of the powerful types of language under discussion here, however, the invisible forms of intention cross the threshold of materiality to assume the forms of buddhas’ names or other specialized linguistic formulas known as *dhāraṇī*, *mantra*, and *vidyā*. With such types of language it is simply their formal aspect that brings effects, rather than their communication of propositional content. As condensations of awakened intentionality, such linguistic forms constitute a mind-gnosis-language continuum, but one that, strictly speaking, acts upon listeners from outside their own mind-body complex.

The author does make efforts, nonetheless, to fit this rationale to the circumstances of hearers. And he does this precisely by invoking temporal extensionality in a way that resonates with the Abhidharma notion of “invisible physicality.” He explains that statements such as “one will be born in Sukhāvati in the next life from

⁵⁹² The Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of physical transformations and materializations rooted in bodhisattva vows and ethical training is explored in detail by Susanne Mrozik, “Cooking Living Beings: The Transformative Effects of Encounters with Bodhisattva Bodies,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32.1 (2004): 175-194.

⁵⁹³ For a summary discussion of the Abhidharma notion of “invisible form” (*avijñaptirūpa*) see Vasubandhu *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, trans. from Skt. by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, trans. from French by Leo M. Pruden. vol. 1 (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1988-1990), 67-68.

saying once, ‘I pay homage to medicine Buddha, king of beryl light,’ are instances of “indirect intention” (Tib. *ldem dgongs*, Skt. *abhisandhi*), i.e., said with the knowledge that there will surely be a result in the future, no matter whether the speaker is overcome by virtue or non-virtue at present.⁵⁹⁴ For this author, Buddha promoted the recitation of such formulas with a view to another time in the future, once the hearer or speaker of the powerfully efficacious language has reached a higher stage of spiritual development. But, in a circular line of reasoning, it is precisely this kind of language – the names and specialized formulas that are the materializations of Buddha’s intentions – that can serve as an impetus for spiritual development in the first place. For this author, then, just hearing the enlightened activity of the buddhas serves as a *condition* for liberation from *samsāra*, and this goes even for the limit case of those guilty of especially heinous acts of violence. Yet, hearing is only one condition among many, all of which must come together to trigger results. In this way, he ends up locating the efficacious power of language both in language’s materiality, which is the result or materialization of the intentions of buddhas, and in the subjectivity of hearers, who experience diverse effects depending on their particular conditions and intentions. Furthermore, the author extends the power of language beyond the sphere of hearers’ subjectivity, admitting of real material affects such as bountiful harvests, prevention of warfare, and safety from natural disasters. These affects too, he claims, are rooted in the intentionality of buddhas, once their positive wishes materialize into powerful speech formulas.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁴ *Drang po’i sa bon*: 426.3-426.5. *sangs rgyas sman gyi bla bai DUrya ’od kyi rgyal po la phyag ’tshal lo/ zhes lan gcig brjod pas tshe phyi mar bde ba can du skye ba sogs...sdem dgongs...*

⁵⁹⁵ *Drang po’i sa bon*: 427.3-429.5.

* * *

Returning now to Sog bzlog pa, a few final observations are in order. Firstly, his theory, as I read it, grounds more than just efficacious speech acts. Sog bzlog pa extends the ontological mind-body-gnosis theory that he introduced in the context of defending the visionary experiences of “liberation through seeing” to spell out the broader implications of this theory for the efficacy of sacred language utterances. By thus locating efficacious speech in the deepest recesses of embodied subjectivity – the subtle syllabic substrate of the mind-body-gnosis continuum of all beings – Sog bzlog pa’s careful navigations emerge as part of a wider effort to draft a blueprint for an entire approach to embodiment that foregrounds sensory experience and action as potent avenues through which to participate in ultimate gnosis. This shows, above all, that Sog bzlog pa took the domain of the senses very seriously, a fitting proclivity for a religious specialist who would be so centrally occupied with the ritual dimension of Buddhist practice.

Secondly, when contrasted with analogous remarks attributed to Mi bskyod rdo rje, we begin to notice that Sog bzlog pa’s strategy foregrounds more the person, specifically his/her intrinsic embodiment of gnosis and language, than the external forces of powerful speech utterances *per se*. Even while Sog bzlog pa’s theory implicates more the hearer than the speaker of powerful utterances, its emphasis on the intrinsic agency qua innate gnosis of the person in the workings of powerful sensory experiences might be read as the initial stirrings of a charter for personal ritual prowess.

Finally, what we have witnessed here is an argument between the roles of form and content, materiality and meaning in variously accounting for how sacred utterances achieve their affects on hearers. For the author of the critique, it is only through

understanding meanings and working them into the body, speech, and mind that their true significance can be fully experienced. For Sog bzlog pa, on the other hand, speech is most potent when its formal features can suddenly exert influence directly upon hearers during speech acts, without recourse to cultivation or even the proper assimilation of content. Yet, even for Sog bzlog pa, the shaping of sensibilities through meditative cultivation does not subtract from the ability of language, in all its materiality, to act upon hearers directly. Cultivation instead can prolong experiences of the referents of powerful language, thereby enhancing the efficacy of language during peak transition moments. In this and other ways, the boundaries between the referential/symbolic and formal/material functions of language are rendered malleable and porous in Sog bzlog pa's account, even as he variously draws and redraws them for maximum rhetorical affect. Here, the role of speech to perform functions and form sensibilities does not conflict with its ability to communicate meanings, but presupposes it. In the end, however, it is the power of sound itself, in all its raw materiality, which impacts hearers most forcefully. The communication and cultivation of propositional content, no matter how compelling or instructive, simply can not serve, like "a gutter in a cracked irrigation ditch," to conduct consciousness to a better rebirth. For most, only the rarefied forms of certain especially potent sounds can help in the afterlife.

III. Amulet Practice

We now turn to a set of practices that involves the handling, wearing, and ingestion of the material objects of amulets and pills, beginning with amulets. In the discussion that follows, I will explore how Sog bzlog pa works out the theoretical grounding for the efficacy of amulets, specifically regarding the Old School claim that certain types of

amulets have the power to “liberate through wearing” (*btags grol*). Tracing the rhetorical strategies through which Sog bzlog pa defends the efficacy of these powerful amulets and their radical claim of agency will shed further light on his views concerning the roles of objects vis-à-vis persons in the workings of potent objects and object-oriented rites.

Liberation-through-wearing amulets, like most other kinds of amulets worn throughout the Tibetan cultural sphere, mostly consist of powerful speech formulas, such as *dhāraṇī*, *mantra*, *vidyā*, or short instruction manuals, which are written down with prescribed materials, on prescribed sacred days, according to specific ritual procedures. These are then folded carefully, often together with special sacred substances, wrapped in silk or colored fabrics and threads, then consecrated and worn around the neck, arm, or wrist, or tied in the hair. What primarily distinguishes the amulets under consideration in this discussion is not so much their appearance and ritual treatment, but the promise that liberation will come through wearing them.

Generally speaking, the practice of wearing amulets is one of the most visible and ubiquitous facets of Tibetan religious life. The vast majority of amulets are created and worn specifically to address pragmatic this-worldly concerns. There are amulets designed for any number of such practical purposes. Some are worn to ward off the negative influences of spirits, illness, epidemics, warfare, conflict, natural disasters, slander, poverty and any number of other misfortunes. Others are intended to bring desired outcomes such as wealth, childbirth, success in studies and other endeavors, safe travels, and the like. While still others are malevolent in design, intended to deprive, banish, overpower or even kill enemies or enemy armies.⁵⁹⁶ As we saw in Chapter Two,

⁵⁹⁶ For a catalogue of such pragmatically oriented amulets, including reproductions of their diagrams and speech formulas, see Skorupski (1983). Skorupski’s pictorial survey of Tibetan amulets includes no mention of liberation-through-wearing amulets.

Sog bzlog pa himself buried amulets in the form of circular magical diagrams (*'khor lo*, *cakra*) on numerous occasions at prophesied locations explicitly with the goal of repelling enemy Mongol troops. Liberation-through-wearing amulets promise freedom not just from pragmatic setbacks and misfortunes, but more fundamentally, from negative rebirths or even *samsāra* as a whole.

When discussing such amulets, Sog bzlog pa once again follows his tendency to strategically enlist arguments and scriptural citations drawn from Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna sources, but this time with the agenda of defending the power of these objects, in and of themselves, to affect radical changes in the psyche and spiritual condition of wearers. The sources that Sog bzlog pa draws upon here are in large part based on the criticisms that his remarks are intended to rebut. Nonetheless, we witness once more Sog bzlog pa appropriate the themes introduced by the critic to forge a creative rapprochement between the power of sensory object and the roles of intentionality, meditative cultivation, and personal karma in ways that valorize the efficacy of materiality and sensory experience.

Before delving into the details of Sog bzlog pa's argument, I will once again provide a brief sketch of the criticisms they address. The critic begins with the charge that the Old School promotes the false belief that mass-printed texts (*glegs bam*), syllables (*yig 'bru*), and circular diagrams (*'khor lo*) can bring vast benefit to beings, and even confer "liberation" when worn at the armpit, or around the neck or arm.⁵⁹⁷ Citing the formula often repeated in scripture that certain *dhāraṇīs* are of great benefit to

⁵⁹⁷ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 113.5-113.6.

whoever “writes down, recites, wears, and perfectly memorizes”⁵⁹⁸ them, he concedes that Buddha did indeed teach that amulets have a certain kind of efficacy.⁵⁹⁹ Yet, he is quick to add, these statements are not to be interpreted literally, since the “dharma teachings of the definitive meaning” (*nges don kyi chos*) all assert that liberation comes solely from practicing the path, and not from wearing especially efficacious amulets.⁶⁰⁰ Shifting to the New Translation *tantras*, the critic concedes that most of those texts likewise give prescriptions for writing down and wearing them.⁶⁰¹ And yet, he continues in a similar vein, this practice is done only as a support for recollecting indispensable tantric commitments (Tib. *dam tshig*, Skt. *samaya*); it does not directly confer liberation.⁶⁰² As a consequence, the critic stridently concludes, the *Six Tantras that Liberate through Wearing* of the Old School’s *Seminal Heart* (*sNying thig*) tradition, and other texts that claim to “liberate through wearing” are not actual revelations, but texts composed by Tibetans, which only falsely purport to be authentic scriptures.⁶⁰³

The critic next broaches the topic of the excessive ease of the purported liberation through wearing. He contrasts it with the example of Buddha Śākyamuni’s assiduous

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid: 114.1....*bris pa dang bklag pa dang bcangs pa dang/ kun chub par byas pa...*

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid: 114.1-114.2.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid: 114.2.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid: 114.2-114.3.

⁶⁰² Ibid: 114.3.

⁶⁰³ Ibid: 114.3-114.4. The *Six Tantras that Liberate through Wearing* (*bTags grol rgyud drug*) are part of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* Treasure cycle purported to be revealed by Padma las ’brel rtsal (birth 1248). This set of six *tantras* most famously appears in the *Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*, Delhi: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1975-, vol. X, *mKha’ ’gro snying thig*, part I, 16-25), a collection of texts belonging to the four Seminal Heart traditions of *mKha’ ’gro snying thig*, *Bi ma snying thig*, *Bla ma yang thig*, and *Zab mo yang thig*, which was compiled and commented upon by kLong chen rab ’byams pa Dri med ’od zer (1308-1364). The six *tantras* also appear in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980, vol. Ni, 133-152) compiled in the nineteenth century by ’Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas (1813-1899/1900).

performance of austerities along the bank of the Nairañjanā River for six years prior to his final awakening, and to the severe hardships undergone by the many subsequent accomplished masters of India and Tibet for the sake of dharma instructions. All of these figures, argues the critic, applied effort on the path toward awakening without recourse to amulets.⁶⁰⁴

In keeping with the strategy we observed in his objections to liberation through seeing and hearing, the critic once again poses in the form of a question two possibilities for how liberation through wearing can work according to Old School theory: Does the blessing (*byin rlabs*) of the amulet occur while alive in this current body, or does it occur after the body has been left behind at death?⁶⁰⁵ The critic abruptly rejects the first option with the sweeping generalization that since wearers of amulets also practice the path, there has never been a witnessed instance of liberation, or, for that matter, even the slightest reduction of delusion, clinging to *samsāra*, or increase of intelligence through solely wearing an amulet.⁶⁰⁶ In contending with the second option, the critic maintains that if a being experiences no spiritual development through wearing an amulet while alive, it is untenable that he should experience any transformation through it at death, when body, amulet, and consciousness all go their separate ways.⁶⁰⁷ Moreover, even if liberation were to occur for an ordinary being at death, it could not possibly stem from

⁶⁰⁴ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 114.4-115.1.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid: 115.1-115.2.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid: 115.2-115.4.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid: 115.5.

the blessings of an amulet, since the amulet, as material, would have already lost contact with consciousness, which is immaterial.⁶⁰⁸

The critic continues by trying to catch the Old School in a contradiction. He attributes to the Old School the practice of “introducing the meaning” (*don ngo 'phrod*) of liberation through wearing amulets, which, he claims, is followed by the implementation of that meaning in practice. Holding on to the book, according to the critic, then emerges as a prop for maintaining mindfulness and observing the tantric commitments. Such a practice amounts to “liberation through meditation,” thereby exposing the exaggerated claim of “liberation through wearing” to be “an invention of tantric priests,”⁶⁰⁹ rather than an authentic claim rooted in genuine Buddhist scriptures.

The critic concludes with an interrogation of the belief that the appearance of rainbows in the sky, relics amidst bodily remains, and other observable materializations at death constitute definitive “proof” that a powerful amulet on the body, or pill in the mouth has actually “worked” to liberate the consciousness of the deceased.⁶¹⁰ The public occurrence of such displays during or immediately after a figure’s death or funeral proceedings has been a traditional way for Tibetans to predict the spiritual level of the deceased and, in turn, the future circumstances of his or her consciousness and next incarnation. The critic takes issue with this interpretative practice by arguing that rainbows are “an assembly of elemental interdependent originations, which appear on

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid: 115.5.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid: 115.6-116.1.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid: 116.1-116.2. Controversies surrounding relics and other post-mortem signs of beatitude had long been a strong current in Tibetan intellectual circles. For more on this aspect of Tibetan religious history, see Dan Martin, “Crystals and Images from Bodies, Hearts and Tongues from Fire: Points of Relics Controversy from Tibetan History,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita, 1989*, vol. 1, eds. Ihara Shoren and Yamaguchi Zuiho (Narita: Niritasan Shinshoji, 1992), 183-191; and Dan Martin “Pearls from Bones: Relics, Chortens, Tertons and the Signs of Sainly Death in Tibet,” *Numen*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Sept., 1994): 273-324.

occasions without fixity...”⁶¹¹ He goes on to claim that rainbows and relics might indeed be a sign that the deceased was liberated, but these things do not occur for everyone who wears powerful amulets and eats powerful pills. And more importantly, he adds, such “signs” of liberation can also be manufactured by demons upon the death of sinners and butchers, with the express aim of leading ordinary people to misinterpret unrighteous behavior as leading toward positive results.⁶¹²

To summarize the critic’s argument: Rather than reject amulet practice altogether, the critic specifically addresses the nature and range of an amulet’s power in light of the Old School claim that some can “liberate through wearing.” For the critic, amulets can only have a mnemonic function. They remind their wearers of the commitments and vows they have taken, serving as props for mental cultivation. Amulets do not, in and of themselves, have the power to directly elicit subjective transformation, let alone liberation from *samsāra*. Acknowledging that there exist authoritative scriptures in which Buddha is reported to have taught that amulets do indeed have such power, the critic couches his argument in terms of the multiple levels of interpretation of Buddha’s speech. He contends that such teachings cannot be taken literally, but must be interpreted to mean something else. It is only the Old School, so claims the critic, who by misinterpreting these scriptural citations to be definitive and literal promulgates the wearing of amulets designated with the moniker “liberation through wearing.” Underlying this issue for the critic, among other notions, is a vision of body and mind as partially or fundamentally incommensurable by nature. Amulets, although they circulate within the symbolic, discursive order as mnemonic devices,

⁶¹¹ Ibid: 116.2-116.3. *'byung ba rten 'brel tshogs pa'i 'ja' ni ma nges par skabs 'ga' rer snang/*

⁶¹² Ibid: 116.3-116.4.

cannot directly impact the nature of subjectivity, since, as material objects, they partake of a separate order of being. Only through mental cultivation can one hope to achieve the radical transformation of “liberation.” And intentionality, effort, and meditation, argues the critic, are crucial in this process.

* * *

Turning now to Sog bzlog pa’s rebuttal, we notice in his opening maneuver that Sog bzlog pa flips the critic’s initial charges into an advantage. That New School *tantras* do not directly mention liberation-through-wearing amulets does not call the Old School *tantras* into question. Rather, it demonstrates the inferiority of the New School *tantras*. Armed with a citation from *Means of Explanation of the Secret Assembly*,⁶¹³ composed by the esteemed fourteenth century Sa skya scholar Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364), Sog bzlog pa subordinates the New Translation Schools’ highest yoga *tantras* to the Old School’s *tantras* precisely on account of the Great Perfection tradition’s superior spiritual technology of liberation-through-wearing amulets. He states that just as Bu ston lists the protective power of amulets taught in the highest yoga *tantras* as one of the “ten suchnesses” (*de kho na nyid bcu*) that distinguish this category of scripture as superior to the other three classes of New Translation *tantras*, so does the power of amulets to “liberate” in the Old School render its *tantras* superior to the highest yoga *tantra* class.

And yet, Sog bzlog pa continues, the New Translation Schools of secret *mantra* already do unwittingly accept as canonical a number of scriptures that implicitly explain

⁶¹³ *gSang ba 'dus pa'i bshad thab*. This text appears under the title *gSang ba 'dus pa'i rgyud 'grel gyi bshad thabs kyi yan lag gsang ba'i sgo 'byed* in Rin chen grub, *gSung 'bum*, vol. ta (Lhasa: Zhol par khang, 2000), 7-112.

liberation through wearing, even without using the moniker. Sog bzlog pa begins his attempts to demonstrate this with reference to lengthy citations from the *Mahāpratisarā-vidyārājñī*.⁶¹⁴ This text traditionally belongs to the *Pañcarakṣā* collection of *dhāraṇī* literature, which largely addresses practical this-worldly concerns, such as illness, natural disaster, spirit possession, quarrels, warfare, corporal punishment, and childbirth.⁶¹⁵ Sog bzlog pa hones in one of the few passages in this entire collection of texts that touches upon goals extending beyond the pragmatic sphere. The citation reads as follows:

Great Brahmin, whoever writes down this queen of incantations, and fastens it around their wrist or neck should be understood as one who is blessed by all *tathāgatas*. He should be understood as the body of all *tathāgatas*. He should be understood as a great *vajra* body. He should be understood as possessing the essence of the relics of all *tathāgatas*. He should be understood as the eye of all *tathāgatas*. He should be understood as possessing a blazing and radiant body. He should be understood as possessing indestructible armor. He should be understood as one who vanquishes all foes. He should be understood as one who overcomes all obstructions and misdeeds. He should be understood as one who purifies migrations into hells.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁴ *'Phags pa rig sngags kyi rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo (Mahāpratisarāvidyārājñī)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 561, Rgyud, pha (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). For a Sanskrit critical edition, complete English translation, and study of this important text see Gergely Hidas, *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī = the great amulet, great queen of spells: introduction, critical editions and annotated translation* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 2012). For an even more recent English translation based on the Tibetan *Bka' 'gyur* editions of this text, see James Gentry, in collaboration with Dharmachakra Translation Committee (Reading Room, <http://84000.co/>, forthcoming).

⁶¹⁵ For an especially insightful discussion and analysis of the history of *Rakṣā* (protective) literature in Indian Buddhism, see Peter Skilling, “The *Rakṣā* Literature of the *Śrāvakayāna*,” *Journal of the Pali Text Society*. vol. XVI (1992): 109-182. For details on the place of the *Pañcārakṣā* collection in Newari religious culture, along with an English translation of a popular modern Newari version, see Todd Lewis (2000), 119-164.

⁶¹⁶ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 118.5-119.2. *bram ze chen po gang la la zhid gi rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ma chen mo 'di cho ga bzhin du bris te lag pa'am mgul du btags na/ de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi byin brlabs par rig par bya'o/ /de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi skur rig par bya'o/ /de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi ring bsrel gyi snying po can yin par rig par bya'o/ /de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi spyang yin par rig par bya'o/ /de rdo rje chen po'i lus su rig par bya'o/ /de 'bar ba 'od 'phro ba'i lus dang ldan par rig par bya'o/ /de mi bshig pa'i go cha can du rig par bya'o/ /de dgra thams cad rab tu 'joms par rig par bya'o/ /sgrub pa thams cad rab tu 'joms par rig par bya'o/ /de sems can dmyal ba'i 'gro ba rnam par sbyong bar rig par bya'o/* This passage appears with minor variations in *'Phags pa rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo* (2006-2009), 373-374. There, it reads as follows: *bram ze chen po gang la la zhid rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo 'di cho ga bzhin du bris te lag pa'am/ mgul[g.yung, pe='gul] du btags[g.yung=brtags; li, pe=gtags] na/ de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi[snar, zhol=kyi] byin brlabs[g.yung, pe=rlabs] par rig par bya'o/ /de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi skur rig par bya'o/ /rdo rje'i lus yin par rig par bya'o/ de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi ring bsrel gyi snying po*

Sog bzlog pa follows this citation with one of *Mahāpratisarā*'s lengthy narrative episodes, which illustrates the extreme circumstances under which this text qua amulet can function and the incredible power it can wield. The story involves a lapsed monk, who committed the serious crime of living off of food stolen from the *saṃgha*. When he incidentally falls ill and is on the verge of dying, a lay bystander fastens around his neck the *Mahāpratisarā* amulet. The blessing from the amulet manages to soothe his agony before death. And after death, it even delivers him and all his fellow hell denizens from their infernal domain, thus ensuring their rebirth in the god realms.⁶¹⁷ For Sog bzlog pa, this narrative episode seems to function rhetorically as a limit case, perhaps thought to be more compelling than straightforward claims in its persuasive power. He concludes, “even though this is not called liberation through wearing, it is absolutely identical in meaning.”⁶¹⁸ More fundamentally, Sog bzlog pa carefully points out, this story from a canonical source depicts the amulet as so potent that its liberating blessings are felt before and after death, regardless of its conjunction or not with body and mind.⁶¹⁹ The amulet's blessings even extend in the next life to pervade the hells, lifting everyone present to the god realms.

can[khu=dang] yin par rig par bya'o/ /de de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi spyen yin par rig par bya'o/ /de rdo rje chen po'i lus su rig par bya'o/ /de 'bar ba 'od 'phro ba'i[g.yung, pe='phro'i] lus dang ldan par rig par bya'o/ /de mi shigs[li=shig] pa'i go cha can du rig par bya'o/ /de dgra thams cad rab tu 'joms par[19] rig par bya'o/ /de sgrib pa dang sdig pa thams cad rab tu 'joms[li='jom] par rig par bya'o/ /de sems can dmyal ba'i 'gro ba rnam par sbyong bar rig par bya'o/. For Sanskrit of this passage, see Hidas (2012), 133-134.

⁶¹⁷ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 119.2-121.1. The story originally appears in *'Phags pa rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo* (2006-2009), 374-376. For Sanskrit and English versions, see Hidas (2012), 134-139 and 218-222.

⁶¹⁸ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 121.1. ...*ming btags grol du ma btags kyang/ don la mtshungs pa nyid do/*

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid*: 121.3-121.4.

Particularly noteworthy in this account is that “liberation” here signals freedom from negative rebirths and adverse conditions within *saṃsāra*, rather than freedom from *saṃsāra* as a whole. As Sog bzlog pa begins to intimate in his reflections upon liberation through hearing practices, exploiting the semantic ambiguities and potentials of the term “liberation” in Buddhist discourses allows us to accept the intrinsic power of objects to “liberate,” while also accounting for how the mitigating factors of personal, subjective qualities can condition the range of their liberating potencies. This maneuver, moreover, has the added advantage of linking, in a single object-oriented practice, the soteriological, karmic, and pragmatic orientations of Buddhist theory and practice as a whole.⁶²⁰

Wearers of amulets can do so with the aim of liberation from *saṃsāra*, liberation from negative rebirths, and/or liberation from adverse circumstances in this lifetime. And as we witnessed in the illustration from the *Mahāpratisarā*, the widened semantic range of “liberation” renders such amulets (and, as we will see, pills) especially important for funerary practices intended to benefit the post-mortem condition and future rebirth of the deceased.

Sog bzlog pa sets the stage to expand the semantic range of amulets’ “liberating” powers by citing the staggering range of their effects described in authoritative scriptures. In a demonstration of erudition, Sog bzlog pa provides a litany of references to other similar claims made in texts that the New Translation schools all regard as canonical. These include instructions that entering a doorway underneath the *dhāraṇī* of Padmoṣṇīṣa

⁶²⁰ I draw this tripartite distinction from Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982), 11-15. Spiro describes these three as nibbanic, kammatic, and apotropaic orientations, respectively. In a comparison between Tibetan and Theravada societies, Geoffrey Samuels (*Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993, 27) astutely observes that in Tibetan societies there is considerable “mutual involvement” between the nibbanic, or “bodhi” orientation, as Samuels calls it, and the pragmatic orientation.

can purify karmic obscurations accumulated over the course of 100,000 lifetimes; instructions in the tradition of Atiśa (b. 972/982) about a circular magical diagram that closes the door to bad migrations; a technique for attaining Buddhahood through only wearing on one’s body a design in the pattern of Vajrāsana⁶²¹ and the eight holy places; a circular diagram called “the city liberating circle,” by which an entire city is freed from *samsāra* and attains liberation through its mere presence; and a circular diagram from Pa dam pa sangs rgyas’s Pacifying (*zhi byed*) tradition that “liberates” anyone who sees, hears, recollects, or touches it, anyone blown by a breeze that has blown on the body of someone wearing it, or anyone who drinks water that has cleansed the body of someone wearing it. Sog bzlog pa closes the list with a citation from the *dhāraṇī* of Uṣṇīṣavijaya,⁶²² which makes similar promises, along with a brief reference to the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-kalpa*⁶²³ as teaching the same.⁶²⁴ All of these texts and practice traditions, Sog bzlog pa forcefully reiterates, dispense techniques to achieve liberation simply through holding, wearing, or otherwise physically encountering the material object of an amulet.

To account for all these various effects of amulet practice, and to counter the critic’s charge that the Buddha’s own life example included austerities but no amulets,

⁶²¹ Vajrāsana, or “adamantine seat,” is the traditional location in present day Bodhgaya, India, where Buddha Śākyamuni is believed to have reached complete and final awakening.

⁶²² There are a number of Uṣṇīṣavijaya-related *dhāraṇī* texts that appear in the available *bKa’ ’gyur* versions. See for instance *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 594, 595, 596, 597 and 598, Rgyud ’bum, pha (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁶²³ *De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa’i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjid kyi rgyal po’i rtog pa zhes bya ba (Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorājāyatathāgatasya-arhatesamyaksambuddhasyakalpa-nāma)*, in *Bka’ ’gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 483, Rgyud, ta (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁶²⁴ Ibid: 121.2-122.5.

Sog bzlog pa explicitly introduces the notion of a scale of perceptual capacities relative to the activities of perfected beings such as Buddha. He recites the theory that Buddha was always already awakened, and out of his illustrious omniscience he illustrated an infinite array of deeds and taught an infinite array of techniques suited to the perceptual proclivities of infinite sentient beings.⁶²⁵ In this way, Sog bzlog pa ends up twisting the critic's rhetorical use of an early standard narrative of Buddha's awakening into evidence of the critic's ignorance of the multiple paradigms of Buddha's life and activities, and the reinterpretation of Buddha's austerities called for in those alternate paradigms. Sog bzlog pa concludes that the Buddha, even while "he himself did not rely on wearing a liberation through wearing amulet, for the sake of completely liberating sentient beings, did teach out of his omniscient gnosis limitless profound and vast *mantra* types, such as liberation through wearing, and so forth."⁶²⁶

In keeping with the theme of how persons, with their relative subjectivities and perceptual capacities, have variously interacted with and construed the awakened activity of Buddha, Sog bzlog pa explicitly broaches the topic of how the term "liberation," which appears in the above textual citations, signals various levels of freedom from suffering and *samsāric* existence. As noted above, the range of amulets' liberating effects includes the pragmatic sphere of healing illness and physical pain, the karmic sphere of delivery from negative rebirths, and the soteriological goal of freedom from *samsāra* as a whole. Sog bzlog pa uses this broad scope of effects outlined in canonical sources to systematically chart how the efficacy of amulets interacts with the person. He does so by

⁶²⁵ Ibid: 122.5-123.3.

⁶²⁶ Ibid: 123.2-123.4....*rang nyid btags grol 'chang ba la ma ltos mod kyang/ sems can rnams rnam par grol ba 'i slad du thams cad mkhyen pa 'i ye shes kyi btags grol la sogs pa 'i rigs sngags zab cing rgya che ba mtha' yas pa nyid ston par mdzad yin no/*

arranging effects along a hierarchical gradient based on the individual’s respective level of spiritual development. This strategy of coherently systematizing the disparate effects of amulet use stipulated in scripture allows Sog bzlog pa to account for the various levels of cultivation and karmic purification of amulet wearers without compromising the powerful claim of liberation through wearing. We can also notice that Sog bzlog pa bolsters the authority of his hierarchy of “liberations” with recourse to specific Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna concepts, such as three-*kāya* theory⁶²⁷ and the hermeneutic rubrics of the six limits and four modes of *tantra*,⁶²⁸ among others – a tactic that further illustrates the extent of Sog bzlog pa’s concern to exploit the murky semantic boundaries of the term “liberation” to authoritatively ground this set of practices. In fact, the importance of this typology of “liberations” for Sog bzlog pa’s theoretical approach to the efficacy of sensory experience cannot be overstated. This model would become the inspiration behind his reflections on the effects of pills and material objects in general. The entire passage reads as follows:

As for how this manner of liberation pertains to ordinary people as well, it is taught:
 Regardless of whether one’s five sense faculties are impaired,
 Regardless of age, gender, or moral character,

⁶²⁷ For a detailed study of Mahāyāna three-*kāya* theory, see John Makransky (1997).

⁶²⁸ The “six limits” (*mtha’ drug*) and the “four modes” (*tshul bzhi*) are rubrics through which exegetes interpret the often-divergent statements made in Buddhist *tantras*. The six limits are 1) “with special intent” (*dgongs pa*) and 2) “without special intent” (*dgongs pa ma yin pa*); 3) “interpretable meaning” (*drang don*) and 4) “definitive meaning” (*nges don*); and 5) “literal meaning” (*sgra ji bzhin pa*) and 6) “figurative language” (*sgra ji bzhin ma yin pa*). The four modes are 1) the “literal” (*tshig gi don* or *yi ge’i don*), 2) the “common” (*spyi’i don*), 3) the “hidden” (*sbas pa*) and the “ultimate” (*mthar thug pa*) levels of interpretation. For more on these rubrics and their roles in tantric exegesis, see Michael Broido, “*Bshad thabs*: Some Tibetan Methods of Explaining the *Tantras*,” in *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History and Culture Vol. 1*, ed. Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1983), 15-45; Ernst Steinkellner, (1978) “Remarks on Tantristic Hermeneutics,” in *Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Memoria! Symposium: Held at Matrafured, Hungary, 24-30 September 1976*, Louis Ligeti, ed. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), 445-58; and Robert Thurman, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald Lopez, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 6 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 119-148.

Regardless of the positive or negative value of ones habitual patterns,
Through wearing just this, one will reach Buddhahood.

This statement has a meaning hidden by the six limits and four modes of *tantra*. But according to the pith oral instructions, it means that there are different manners of liberation in accordance with what each being has respectively accumulated. It is likewise the same with liberation through eating, and the rest. To elaborate, it is said:

Amazing is this self-arisen letter.

If one were to fasten it to the crown, or neck of a dying person,
Then cremate him, if that dying person was one who acted for the
welfare of sentient beings

There is no need to say that it would mean his or her liberation.

Even one who has committed the five acts of immediate retribution
Would have a fate equal to a *śrāvaka*.

Even one with a perspective in which one clings to mental activities
Would certainly become equal to Vajradhara.

For a being who holds just this,

The place where he resides

Becomes liberated from bad migrations,

And he attains the supreme and common accomplishments.

A being who possesses signs of actual innate awareness

Need not be cremated for that to happen.

Through encountering it at the time of death,

He or she will reach accomplishment.

Therefore, the three liberations of [1] superior people, for whom the ground of liberation (*grol gzhi*) is liberated into the expanse of the *dharmakāya*; [2] middling types, for whom self-appearance is liberated into the *sambhogakāya*; and [3] inferior types, for whom the nature is liberated into the *nirmāṇakāya*, are the manners of liberation for yogis who are on the paths. It is explained that ordinary beings are liberated from negative migrations, reborn as humans, then enter the gate of dharma and become liberated in stages, for it is taught that those who have committed the five acts of immediate retribution take rebirth as *śrāvakas*, and so forth.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁹ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 124.4-125.5. /'di'i grol tshul gang zag phal ba dag la yang/ dbang po rnam lnga 'og gyur cing/ rgan gzhon pho mo dge sdig med/ bag chags bzang ngan med pa ru/ 'di nyid bcangs pas sangs rgyas so/ zhes gsungs pa ni rgyud mtha' drug tshul bzhi sbas pa'i don yin la/ man ngag ltar na rang rang gi bsags pa dang mthun pa'i grol lugs tha dad pa yod pa yin te/ myong grol la sogs pa la yang mtshungs so/ de la yang/ e ma rang byung yi ge 'di/ sems can gzhan gyi don byed na/ tshe 'das de yi spyi bo'am/ mgul du btags te bsregs na ni/ 'di yi grol bar smos ci dgos/ mtshams med lnga po spyad pa yang/ nyan thos rnams dang skal ba mnyam/ yid spyod 'dzin pa'i lta ba yang/ rdo rje 'chang dang mnyam par nges/ 'di nyid bcangs pa'i skyes bu ni/ gang na 'dug pa'i sa phyogs kyang/ ngan song dag las grol bar 'gyur/ mchog dang thun mongs dngos grub thob/ rig pa dngos kyi rtags yod pa'i/ skyes bu de la sreg mi dgos/ 'chi khar phrad pas 'grub pa yin/ ces pas gang zag rab rnams grol gzhi chos sku'i dbyings su grol/ 'bring rnams ranf snang longs sku'i zhing du grol/ tha ma rang bzhin sprul pa sku'i zhing du grol ba gsum ni lam dang ldan pa'i rnal 'byor pa rnams gyi grol tshul yin la/ skye bo phal pa rnams ni ngan 'gro'i skye gnas las grol nas mir skyes te/ chos kyi sgor zhugs nas rim kyi grol bar bshad pa yin te/ mtshams med lnga byas pa nyan thos su skye ba len pa la sogs pa gsungs shing/

Sog bzlog pa then revisits the aforementioned citation from the *Mahāpratisarā* to give another demonstration of how his classification works as a viable hermeneutical approach to these kinds of scriptural claims.

This is also evident from statements in the *Pratisarā*:

He should be understood as one who overcomes all obstructions.⁶³⁰
 Here, the teaching on being free of obscurations is intended for superior people.
 Moreover, the other types are understood through the following statements:

He should be understood as one who purifies migrations into hells.⁶³¹

And furthermore:

Hold on to this, attaching it to your body as prescribed,
 And it will forever and totally liberate you from all suffering and hardship,
 And you will cross over all the anxieties and fears of going to bad migrations.^{632 633}

Complicating his previous claims significantly, Sog bzlog pa next cites Padmasambhava to add that while wearing such powerful amulets, the effects of both virtue and non-virtue increase exponentially.⁶³⁴ The power of liberation-through-wearing amulets, according to this alternate formulation, comes through demanding increased attention and mindfulness on behalf of the wearer, lest dangerous results ensue. This renders the nature of the amulet's power to unequivocally elicit positive changes in all wearers ambiguous and unstable. As a concession to intentionality and personal karma,

⁶³⁰ The corresponding passage appears in *'Phags pa rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo* (2006-2009, 373) as follows: "He should be understood as one who overcomes all obscurations and [karmic negativities]" (*de sgrib pa dang sdig pa thams cad 'joms par rig par bya'o/*).

⁶³¹ The corresponding passage appears verbatim in *'Phags pa rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo* (2006-2009), 374.

⁶³² The corresponding passage appears in *'Phags pa rig pa'i rgyal mo so sor 'brang ba chen mo* (2006-2009, 376-377) as follows: */cho ga bzhin du rtag tu lus la btags[g.yung, pe=brtags; snar=rtags] nas bcang bar bya ste/ de rtag tu sdug bsngal zhing nyam[g.yung, li, pe, co=nyams] thag pa thams cad las yongs su thar bar 'gyur/ ngan 'gro 'i 'jigs skrag[g.yung, pe=skrags] pa thams cad las rgal bar 'gyur ro/*

⁶³³ Ibid: 125.5-126.1. *so sor 'brang mar yang/ sgrib pa thams cad rab tu bcom par rig par bya'o/ zhes sgrib bral du bstan pa ni gang zag rab rnam la dgongs pa yin la/ de sems can dmyal ba 'i 'gro ba rnam par sbyong bar rig par bya'o/ zhes pa dang/ cho ga bzhin du lus la btags nas bcang par bya ste/ de rtag tu sdug bsngal zhing nyams thag pa thams cad las yongs su thar par 'gyur/ ngan 'gror 'gro ba 'i 'jigs shing skrag pa thams cad las rgal bar 'gyur/ zhes gsungs pa nyid kyi shes so/*

⁶³⁴ Ibid: 126.1-126.3.

this notion particularly compromises the capacity of the amulet to “liberate” in limit cases such as animals and hardened criminals utterly unaware of the distinction between moral and immoral conduct. The distinctions that Sog bzlog pa makes earlier concerning the various levels and manners of liberation evince his concern with showing how the intentionality, karma, and meditative cultivation of wearers works closely with the power of amulets to create overall affects. Yet, this final citation from Padmasambhava on the ambivalent nature of an amulet’s liberating power constrains what is an otherwise unequivocal argument for the liberation of all beings, to some degree or another, regardless of moral character, cultivation, or even intention. We are left wondering whether Sog bzlog pa believes that amulets positively impact all beings, or whether it depends on their conduct and intentionality while wearing the amulet.

Sog bzlog pa implies through his inclusion of this citation that a liberation-through-wearing amulet can simultaneously function both as a mnemonic device for the recollection of virtue and as a powerful agent in its own right. According to this formulation, the amulet partakes of the symbolic order, while still trading in its own powerful physicality. This is a concept reminiscent of Edward Casey’s reflections on the nature of reminding and the function of material mnemonic devices. Casey claims that in many cases it is the sheer physicality or sensuous quality of a mnemonic device, such as a string tied around the finger, which functions to elicit recollection of an action, object, or state of affairs.⁶³⁵ In this sense, a mnemonic circulates within conceptual discourse precisely by virtue of its materiality. It is, after all, the pull of the string on the finger, or perhaps in this case, the weight of the amulet around the neck and against the chest,

⁶³⁵ *Remembering: A Phenomenological Case Study* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 97-98.

together with its texture, look, and smell that trigger recollection. And yet, unlike the string on a finger, the mnemonic function of a liberation-through-wearing amulet is not finished with a onetime recollection. Instead, when such an amulet is believed to amplify the positive or negative karma of its wearer, its mode of recollection, which *Sog bzlog pa* astutely maps to mindfulness, becomes continuous. It then emerges as a technique to discipline the wearer's sensibilities through prolonged and habituated action that is mnemonically induced by the continual presence of the amulet as an allusion to prescribed virtuous conduct.

Casey cogently describes how reminding always takes place by means of “evocation” or “allusion,” rather than through direct denotative designation. This is because the act of reminding must allow for the recollection of possibilities that do not or never will exist. We often, Casey rightfully observes, remind ourselves of things that are yet to be accomplished and might never be. This obliqueness of reference, he continues, connects with the fact that the reminder is most often only arbitrarily related to the object of recollection, and that it occupies an intermediary role between the object of recollection and the mind of the reminded.⁶³⁶ Liberation-through-wearing amulets, as *Sog bzlog pa* presents them in this context, complicate Casey's formulation by introducing a situation where allusion works in tandem with direct denotation. Here, the material presence of the amulet arbitrarily alludes to prescribed virtuous actions through directly denoting the real power it possesses to amplify through physical contact the negative or positive affects of wearers' actions. *Sog bzlog pa*'s combination of these elements with reference to Padmasambhava's words allows him to accommodate the

⁶³⁶ Ibid: 99.

critic's claim that such amulets function as mnemonic devices for the recollection of tantric commitments, and, at the same time, reject the critic's charges that an amulet's mnemonic function necessarily negates its role as a direct agent of change. These two functions are not incommensurable for Sog bzlog pa, even though he leans more heavily in favor of granting amulets direct agency than assigning them the indirect disciplinary role of the mnemonic.

Sog bzlog pa turns next to the critic's rejection of post-mortem signs, such as the appearance of rainbows in the sky and relics amidst bodily remains, as proof of the liberation of the deceased. Sog bzlog pa opens his response by invoking the trope of "inconceivability" with reference to the *Ārya-Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra*.⁶³⁷

The power of *vidyā-mantra*, medicine, physical therapy/message,⁶³⁸ and interdependent origination are inconceivable.

The experiential domain of buddhas' and bodhisattvas' means, meditative absorptions, and miraculous powers is inconceivable.⁶³⁹

Locating the appearance of post-mortem signs beyond the pale of conceivability enables Sog bzlog pa to clear the ground at the outset for the advancement of his own distinctive theory. He does so, essentially, by reminding us that there are certain aspects of

⁶³⁷ *'Phags pa dkon mchog brtsegs pa chen po'i chos kyi rnam grangs le'u stong phrag brgya pa (Ārya-mahāratnakūṭa-dharmaparyāya-śatasāhasrika-grantha)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, ka-ca (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).

⁶³⁸ *'khyud [=mkhyud] dpyad* translates the Sanskrit term *muṣṭiyoga*, a traditional type of physical therapy that resembles massage.

⁶³⁹ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 123.4-123.5. *'phags pa dkon mchog rtsegs pa las kyang/ rig sngags dang/ sman dang/ 'khyud dpyad dang/ rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i mthu ni bsam gyis mi khyab po/ /sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnam kyi thabs dang ting nge 'dzin dang rdzu 'phrul gyi spyod yul ni bsam gyis mi khyab po/*. Key word searches through TBRC's *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma* did not yield this citation anywhere, let alone in the *Ratnakūṭa-sūtra*. However, a very similar passage appears in the *karma* section of the *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa (Abhidharmasamucchaya)*, in *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 4049, sems tsam, ri (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985), 247. It reads as follows: */nor bu dang sngags dang sman dang mkhyud dpyad[pe, snar=bcas] dang ldan pa'i las bsam gyis mi khyab po/ /rnal 'byor pa thams cad kyi mthu'i las bsam gyis mi khyab po/ /byang chub sems dpa' rnam kyi dbang gi las bsam gyis mi khyab ste/*

phenomenal reality which are inaccessible through strictly discursive channels. In other words, these domains – ritual language, medicine, interdependent origination, and awakened activities and expressions – which happen to circumscribe Sog bzlog pa’s area of expertise, confound discursive appropriations, calling for other, non-discursive modes of knowing.

Sog bzlog pa goes on to cite the systematic interpretative framework of such publically observable signs which appears in Atiśa’s *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*:⁶⁴⁰

A subsequent omen is a clear sky,
 For pure ethical discipline, flowers descend,
 For bodhisattvas, relics and rainbows,
 For one with [expertise in] generation stage, divine bodies appear,
 One of pure ethics has a pure bodily heap,
 Which is worshipped by all of the gods.
 An irreversible one has a swirling conch shell,
 And, for bodhisattvas who will not abandon cyclic existence,
 It is explained that their hearts and tongues emerge.
 Generally, for departed sublime ones,
 As an omen of [rebirth as] a god, rainbow lights appear.
 An omen of the innate nature is a cloudless [sky].
 Those are only the communal portends.⁶⁴¹

Although Atiśa’s remarks apply to post-mortem signs in general, Sog bzlog pa takes this passage to refer also to the specific cases of liberation-through-wearing amulets and liberating-through-eating pills. Implicit in Sog bzlog pa’s use of Atiśa’s typology is a hierarchy of signs that corresponds with the full range of effects promised through

⁶⁴⁰ *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*, 2 vols. (Sarnath, Varanasi: Kalsang Lhundrup, 1974).

⁶⁴¹ Ibid: 123.5-124.2. *phyi ltas nam mkha’ dangs pa yin/’tshul khrims gtsang la me tog ’bab/’byang chub sems la ring bsrel ’ja/’bskyed rims can la lha sku ’byon/’khrims gtsang chung po gtsang ma de/’lha rnam kun gyi gsu bar byed/’phyir mi ldog pa dung ’khyil te/’khor ba mi spong sems dpa’ la/’thugs dang ljags ni ’byon par bshad/’spyir ni dam pa gshegs pa la/’lha yi snga ltas ’ja’ ’od ’byung/’gnas lugs snga ltas sprin med yin/’de ni thun mongs snga ltas tsam/’zhes gsungs pas/*. This citation appears with several important variations in *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*, vol. 1 (1974: 240) as follows: */shi ltas nam mkha dangs ba yin/’tshul khrims gtsang ma me tog ’bab/’byang chub sems la ring bsrel ’dzag/’skyes rim can la lha sku ’byon/’khrims gtsang chung po gtsang ma ste/’lha rnam kun gyis bsu bar byed/’phyir mi ldog la dud ’khyil te/’khor ba mi spong sems dpa’ la/’thugs dang ljags ni ’byon par bshad/’spyir ni dam pa gshegs pa la/’lha yi snga ltas ’ja’ ’ong ’byung/’gnas lugs snga ltas sprin med yin/’de ni thun mong snga ltas tsam/*.

various persons' interactions with such powerful objects. For Sog bzlog pa, moreover, phenomenal appearances of this sort are neither elemental compounds nor magical apparitions concocted by demons, but extraordinary manifestations of the skillful means of buddhas and bodhisattvas, produced as certain signs of liberation through physical contact with powerful substances, as these variously interact with the spiritual levels and karmic particularities of beings.⁶⁴² He declines, however, to stipulate the precise relationship between these signs and the elemental material world, presumably because this is not amenable to discursive appropriation.

Finally, in a more radical bid to accommodate intentionality and cognition with amulet practice, Sog bzlog pa shifts registers dramatically to offer an account of an Old School liberation-through-wearing practice where no amulet is actually required. Sog bzlog pa refers specifically to the *Six Tantras that Liberate through Wearing*, the authenticity of which, we may recall, was flatly denied by the critic. Sog bzlog pa makes reference to a tradition of exegesis on these six *tantras* from the *Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs* (*mKha' 'gro snying thig*) and elsewhere, which plays with the semantic range of the Tibetan term *btags pa* – “to wear, affix, and impute” – and its similarity in spelling to the Tibetan verb *brtags pa* – meaning “to investigate, analyze.” The result is an “amulet” practice recast in the mind-centered rhetoric of Sog bzlog pa’s Great Perfection tradition: “liberation through wearing,” in effect, becomes “liberation through wearing/imputing/analyzing.” Although he refrains from mentioning the title, Sog bzlog pa opens with a citation of all seven lines of the *Seven-Line Tantra, the Essence of*

⁶⁴² Ibid: 124.2-124.3.

Liberation through Wearing,⁶⁴³ the first of the *Six Tantras that Liberate through Wearing*:

Moreover, it is taught in a *tantra*:

The root of existence, only self-fixation,
Outer and inner imputations liberated, primordially empty.
Rest loosely, without provocation, effortlessly –
Luminous emptiness, the doors of the five frequencies open,
At its core, empty luminosity, the freedom from extremes.
Essence, nature, compassion – the three –
Awakened as the liberation of imputations/through wearing (*btags grol*).⁶⁴⁴

Sog bzlog pa follows with an interpretation:

This *samsāric* existence comes about from fixating on self. When thoroughly investigating (*brtag pa*) well into its nature, externally and internally, it is liberated (*grol*) into the essence of the great non-conceptual primordial emptiness, which does not exist anywhere at all. From within that state, one develops capacity in the four visions according to the explanations of liberation [through] wearing/imputing (*btags grol*) in the essential instruction texts (*don khrid*), such that one then practices cutting through (*khregs chod*) and crossing over (*thod rgal*) as a unity, and is thereby liberated into Buddhahood – the indivisibility of the triad of essence, nature, and compassion. This is the case according to one exegetical tradition. Consequently, it is explained in the *Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs* and so forth to be *liberation through realizing the meaning, even without wearing the book*.⁶⁴⁵

It should be noted that the emphasis on the cognitive dimension in Sog bzlog pa's explanation does not negate the practice of actual amulet wearing. It only adds an extra layer of interpretation. The closing verse of the *Seven-Line Tantra, the Essence of*

⁶⁴³ *bTags grol snying po'i rgyud*. This short text appears as the first of the *bTags grol rgyud drug*, in *sNying thig ya bzhi* (Delhi: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1975-) vol. X, *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, part I, 16-17. This text also appears in *Rin chen gter mdzod* (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980), vol. Ni: 134.

⁶⁴⁴ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 127.2.-127.3. *yang rgyud las/ srid pa'i rtsa ba bdag 'dzin nyid/ /phyi nang kun btags[YZ=brtags] ye stong grol/ /stong gsal mdangs lnga'i sgo phye ste/ /til[YZ=ti] la gsal stong mtha' bral nyid/ /rkyen med brtsol[YZ=rtsol] bral lhug par bzhag/ /ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje gsum/ /btags grol nyid du sangs rgya'o[YZ=buddha'o]/ /ces gsungs pas/*

⁶⁴⁵ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 127.3-127.6. *'khor ba 'di bdag tu 'dzin pa las byung zhing/ de'i ngo bo la phi nang kun du legs par brtag pa na/ gang du yang ma grub pa'i ye stong blo bral chen po'i ngo bor grol ba yin la/ de'i ngang nas gtags grol don khrid du bshad pa bzhin snang ba bzhi la rtsal sbyangs te/ khregs chos dang thod rgal zung 'jug tu nyams su blangs pas ngo bo rang bzhin thugs rje gsum dbyer med pa'i sangs rgyas su grol ba yang bshad pa lugs gcig la yod pas/ de la ni glegs bam ma bcangs kyang don rtogs pas grol bar mkha' 'gro'i snying thig la sogs par bshad do/*

Liberation through Wearing unequivocally states, “Through wearing this *Quintessence of Tantras in Seven Lines* *samsāra* will be emptied.”⁶⁴⁶ In this way, Sog bzlog pa can carve a space for an amulet practice that is at once material and cognitive, presumably depending on the aptitude and inclination of the person.

* * *

To summarize Sog bzlog pa’s remarks, we can notice that his argument arcs dramatically from a point of origin that promotes the power of liberation-through-wearing amulets, in all their materiality, regardless of wearers’ circumstances, to the gradual introduction of the mediating roles of wearers’ karma, spiritual level, and intentionality, until finally, liberation-through-wearing is recast solely in terms of internal cognitive processes, yet in a way that still does not negate the special power of the object. Sog bzlog pa’s schematic typology of liberation, which accounts for four levels of liberation-through-wearing depending on the circumstances of wearers, forms the midpoint in this arc’s trajectory. It opens up the possibility to introduce further subjective and cognitive factors, while never truly neglecting the power of the amulet qua material object. The result is more a sustained tension than a final resolution. And Sog bzlog pa leaves this tension in tact to the end, refusing to settle the matter with facile generalizations or scriptural deferrals.

This refusal to resolve the internal-external, instrumental-symbolic paradoxes introduced by the critic is, most conspicuously, part of Sog bzlog pa’ strategy to gain tactical advantage in the argument. We have now seen how this allowed Sog bzlog pa to

⁶⁴⁶ *tshig bdun rgyud kyi yang snying 'di/ btags grol bcangs pas 'khor ba stong/*. *Nying thig ya bzhi* (Delhi: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1975-), vol. X, *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, part I, 17; and *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, ni (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980), 134.4-135.1.

craft a kind of rapprochement between the power of amulets, in and of themselves, on the one hand, and the mitigating roles of the object as mnemonic and the subjective conditions of wearers, on the other. Yet, on another level, this strategy also points toward deeper structural tensions present within Buddhist scriptural traditions between hosts of polarities, each side of which is supported in scripture, thereby resisting final closure and eliciting vibrant and creative hermeneutical activity on behalf of exegetes. Further along these lines, we can read Sog bzlog pa's efforts to relate objective and subjective poles of experience as an attempt to work out the features of an object-relations theory, which plays with the productivity of unresolved tensions and paradoxes in a way that is evocative of D.W. Winnicott's notion of transitional objects and phenomena.

Winnicott developed the theory of transitional objects to account for the affectionate relationship that children have with their first "not-me" possessions, such as a security blanket or a teddy bear, which occupy "an intermediate area between the subjective and that which is objectively observed."⁶⁴⁷ Transitional objects, states Winnicott, "are not part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to the external world."⁶⁴⁸ Rather, they belong to a "third space" in-between, which Winnicott describes as "an area that is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated."⁶⁴⁹

Winnicott goes on to extend this type of experience to the adult domains of religion, the arts, and creative work more broadly, which, much like the temporary

⁶⁴⁷ D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971), 4.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 3.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 3.

deferral of binary logic required to play along with a child's make-believe game, also call for the suspension of either-or thinking that bifurcates experience into the domains of either purely subjective, private thoughts and feelings, or purely objective, communally observable "facts." Transitional objects – whether these operate in the areas of childhood experience, religious rites, or artistic creation and appreciation – partake of a subjunctive *as if* modality, which involves playing with the permeable boundaries between self and other, subject and object often rigidly presupposed in the indicative *as is* modality of the quotidian world. The personal and social implications of immersion in this *as if* modality are manifold. Just as the temporary suspension of disbelief during the frame of make-believe opens up a potential space for shared illusory experiences, the *as if* modality likewise creates possibilities for individuals to commune around their shared participation in worlds and worldviews that call into question the boundaries between self and world, and more fundamentally, reality and illusion. The temporary erasure, bracketing, or blurring of such boundaries allows for participants to renegotiate, or recalibrate the terms of these divisions in the ongoing human struggle to strike just the right balance between individual agency, group identity, and the world of things. By providing a third space to test out these balancing acts, the liminal zones of play, and more fundamentally, the quasi-subjective transitional objects that populate those regions, become formative elements in the sense of personhood and communal identity that emerges.

In light of Winnicott's objects-relations theory, Sog bzlog pa's careful maneuvers emerge as an attempt to graft from Buddhist terms and concepts a theoretical account of hybrid, transitional objects that acknowledges their resistance to unambiguous classification into purely objective or purely subjective modalities of experience. Sog bzlog pa ends up forging a vision of liberation-through-wearing amulets that takes stock

of the porous boundaries between subject and object in their workings, without attempting to resolve once and for all the tensions inherent to such an account. His theory therefore represents not only an attempt to defend the efficacy of his tradition's amulets by grounding them in widely accepted scriptural notions and terminology, nor simply his impulse to demonstrate erudition and interpretative authority over the field of powerful objects, although these two factors were certainly involved. More fundamentally, Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections demonstrate a genuine concern with creating and preserving a "third space" that is rife with paradoxes and tensions endemic to the sphere of powerful sacred objects and the rituals that incorporate them. This suggests that Sog bzlog pa, much like Winnicott, recognized all too well the generative potential that exists in the interstice between the unresolved polarities of an *as if* worldview. As a ritual specialist well seasoned in the use of powerful amulets, Sog bzlog pa occupied that liminal space and was invested in and by its powers.

The playful deferral of closure in the workings of such amulets shares much with the ritual sphere of action as a whole. Ritual action too might productively be characterized as the performative creation of an *as if* worldview that calls for the temporary suspension of quotidian logics in the interest of participating in shared experiences framed within a particular setting. Sog bzlog pa's reflections on the nature of liberation-through-wearing amulets as hybrid devices that operate at the margins of subjectivity and objectivity can therefore easily be extrapolated to include the entire range of ritual actions with which Sog bzlog pa was deeply involved throughout his religious career. What is more, his object-relations theory, while working with the tensions intrinsic to Buddhist amulet practice, has implications for the opposition between technical/instrumental and symbolic-expressive types of ritual action. By laying

the groundwork for a vision of amulets as sites for a “third space” between subject and object, which trade both in what they represent and the real power they directly exert, Sog bzlog pa complicates any easy classification of amulets as either purely instrumental or purely symbolic in their function. For Sog bzlog pa, amulets, and by extension all ritual action, because of their participation in this “third space,” share qualities of both poles and thereby belong purely to neither. The boundaries between these and perhaps all other dyads are rendered porous and oblique, even as Sog bzlog pa’s theoretical reflections continue to draw them.

IV. Brahmin Flesh and other “Liberating” Edibles

One final debate topic that will shed light on Sog bzlog pa’s involvement with the material dimension of Buddhist practice centers upon the authenticity of the Old School’s edible sacra that promise “liberation through eating.” Here we will see Sog bzlog pa extend his thinking upon visions, sounds, and especially amulets to consider how interactions between persons, actions, and potent objects affect the workings of powerful edibles. Sog bzlog pa’s reflections are in response specifically to criticisms of the Old School practice involving the revelation, ritual production, and consumption of pills whose primary active ingredient is flesh purported to originate from a person born for seven consecutive lifetimes as a Brahmin, or human. We saw in Chapters One and Two the extent to which Sog bzlog pa and his milieu were steeped in the revelation of this substance and mass great accomplishment (*sgrub chen*) practices centering upon it. This discussion investigates the strategies Sog bzlog pa employs to defend the efficacy of this substance, particularly its claim of conferring “liberation,” and how his formulations changed over the decades of his religious career.

* * *

Before we dive into Sog bzlog pa's argument, allow us to first explore the critical remarks to which it responds. The critic begins with a brief characterization of the Old School practice of liberation through eating as stipulated on the erroneous assumption that liberation can be attained through eating a pill composed of the flesh from someone born seven consecutive lifetimes as a human being.⁶⁵⁰ He then systematically attacks the scriptural source, nature, and capacity of the Old School's flesh pills. The critic calls into question the scriptural source of this pill by pointing out the irrationality of its charter myth. He first cites a story from an unnamed scriptural source:

There was a girl named Mandharava, who was the daughter of the universal monarch of Zahor named King Śāstradhara. There were many matchmakers through which the surrounding kings of India, China, were requesting her as their queen. Not acknowledging that she was of age, Mandharava's parents sent her to the turret of the castle to contemplate who it would be. Then, one time, the King ran out of meat, so he sent Mandharava to buy meat at the market fair, giving her rice as payment. But the rains were too heavy so the market fair did not convene. [Having veered] the wrong way, [Mandarava] spotted the corpse of a deceased child. She shaved off some of his flesh and offered it to the king. This is known as the seven-times-born [flesh].⁶⁵¹

The critic proceeds to point out three absurdities which, he claims, seriously compromise the authenticity of this origin narrative: 1) the king, as a universal monarch, could not have run out of meat; 2) with so many servants, he would never have sent his daughter to the market to fetch meat; and 3) there was no tradition of cannibalism among the people

⁶⁵⁰ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 106.4-5.

⁶⁵¹ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 106.5-107.2. *za hor rgyal po gtsug lag 'dzin zhes bya ba 'khor los bsgyur ba 'i rgyal po zhig gi bu mo mandha ra ba bya ba gcig yod pa la/ rgya dkar nag la sogs pa phyogs kyi rgyal pos bisun mor bslong ba 'i snye bo mang ste/ yab yum gyis byin ngo ma shes par mandha ra ba nyid su la dang pho brang gi yang rtser bsam gzhigs btong bcug pa las/ lan cig rgyal po 'i skrums sha 'thogs te mandha ra ba la rin du 'bras bskur te tshong 'dus su sha nyor btang ba na char ches nas tshong 'dus ma 'dzom/ log pa 'i lam na byis pa shi ba 'i ro zhig 'dug pa las sha breg ste rgyal po la zhus pas skye bdun du rig ces smra/*

of Zahor. These incongruities prove, insists the critic, that this story was “the invention of tantric priests” (*...sngags btsun skye bo dag gi blo gzor...*).⁶⁵²

The critic moves on to call into question the “nature” of the substance. He insists that there has never been a Buddha liberated through eating the seven-times-born Brahmin flesh. Nor, he adds, has anyone in the mass assemblies where such pills are distributed attained a modest level of accomplishment, or even a visionary experience for that matter, as a result of this substance’s powers. Rather, the minds of beings remain totally normal after consuming this substance, thus demonstrating once again that the designation of this flesh as being capable of conferring “Buddhahood,” or “liberation” is a highly inappropriate and misleading “invention of tantric priests.”⁶⁵³

Finally, the critic takes on the “capacity” of the flesh. Here, he interrogates how, precisely, the substance purportedly works, and the range of its alleged efficacy. He once again introduces and rejects two possibilities for the flesh’s efficacy: 1) Does the flesh, according to the Old School, liberate because it comes from a being born seven consecutive times as a human being; or 2) does its liberating power depend on this person’s contact with and successful practice of the Dharma throughout those seven consecutive lifetimes? The latter option, states the critic, would render the Dharma the active ingredient, and thereby problematize the notion of liberation through flesh,⁶⁵⁴ whereas the former option, he adds, is clearly impossible. He states:

⁶⁵² Ibid: 107.2-107.5.

⁶⁵³ Ibid: 107.5-108.3.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid: 108.3-108.4.

Since that person would not be possessed of Dharma, despite having taken seven births, his consciousness-continuum would itself not be liberated, and thus, remaining totally ordinary, how could we be liberated through eating a little of his flesh?⁶⁵⁵

The critic closes with reference to the New School practice of eating seven-times-born flesh, as advocated in the traditions of the *Hejavra-tantra*⁶⁵⁶ and the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*.⁶⁵⁷ He argues that rather than directly confer liberation, the New School *tantras* enjoin the consumption of such flesh simply to enhance the “conventional *kunḍa*” (*kun rdzob kun dha*), in other words, physical seminal fluid, which can then serve as the basis for “ultimate *bodhicitta*” (*don dam byang chub sems*), or gnosis, during the transformations elicited through sexual yoga practices.⁶⁵⁸ According to his formulation, the sphere of efficacy of this substance is resolutely physiological, not spiritual. It forms the nutritional basis for the production of seminal fluid, which is in turn used to elicit gnosis in sexual yoga. But it does not, in and of itself, cross the threshold of physiology to elicit gnosis.

In sum, the criticisms mostly revolve around the permeability between the mental and the physical spheres presupposed in the Old School claim of “liberation through

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid: 108.4-108.5. *mi de chos dang mi ldan pas skye ba bdun blang kyang kho rang gi shes rgyud ma grol bar tha mal du khre se lus nas/ de'i sha cung zad zos pas nged rang grol bar ci la 'gyur/*

⁶⁵⁶ *Kye'i rdo rje zhes bya ba rgyud kyi rgyal po (Hevajratantrarāja-nāma)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 417, Rgyud, nga (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). The *Hevajra-tantra* specifically prescribes the consumption of flesh from a “seven-times born” or “seven-times returner” (*saptavartan*) in chapters 7 and 11.

⁶⁵⁷ The *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* is also known as the *Śrītherukābhīdhāna* and *Tantrarāja-śrīlaghusaṃvara-nāma*. Tibetan bKa' 'gyur editions refer to it as *rGyud kyi rgyal po dpal bde mchog nyung ngu zhes bya ba (Tantrarāja-śrī-laghusaṃvara-nāma)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 368, Rgyud, ka (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). For edited Sanskrit and Tibetan editions, see Janardan Shastri Pandey, ed. *Śrītherukābhīdhānam Cakrasaṃvaratantram with the Vivṛti Commentary of Bhavabhaṭṭa*, Rare Buddhist Texts Series no. 26 (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2 vols, 2002). The *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* specifically teaches the benefits of consuming the concretion or bezoar (*rocanā*), found in a person ‘born seven times a man,’ in chapters 11, 12, and 49. For more details, see David Gray (2007).

⁶⁵⁸ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 108.6-109.3.

eating.” First, the critic takes issue with the claim that the efficacy of the flesh resides in its materiality, and not in the Dharma with which it is imbued during the seven lifetimes of the person. If the mind of the flesh’s owner, argues the critic, is endowed with Dharma, then it is the Dharma with which his flesh is in contact that performs the function of liberation, not the flesh itself. We then see the critic extend this logic to the flesh’s sphere of efficacy, arguing that flesh, as material, can only bring direct affects on the physiological plane, and not on the spiritual level, even as physiological seminal fluid can serve as an instrument for spiritual practice. In this way, the critic demands a stricter demarcation between the mental and soteriological sphere, on the one hand, and the physiological and material sphere, on the other.

* * *

Let us now turn to Sog bzlog pa’s response. Sog bzlog pa’s opening maneuver is to affirm that many *sūtras* and *tantras* indeed teach that “access to celestial realms” (*mkha’ la spyod pa*) is attained precisely by eating the flesh of the seven-times born. Thus, he adds, neither its scriptural source, nor its history are spurious.⁶⁵⁹ In a move to counter the critic’s dismissive treatment of the substance’s charter myth, Sog bzlog pa argues for the sensibility of that account by noting 1) that the king had the merit for attaining liberation based on this flesh; 2) that the Brahmin flesh spoken of in the story hailed from none other than Avalokiteśvara, who incarnated for seven consecutive lifetimes to benefit beings through its powers; while the princess was none other than a *ḍākinī*, with the

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid: 109.3-109.4.

nature of a goddess, who alone had the fortune to take hold of it; and 3) that the king of Zahor would eat for his evening meals what the queens had eaten the previous night, according to rank.⁶⁶⁰ In other words, implies Sog bzlog pa, the critic understands neither the extraordinary, awakened nature of the figures involved, not the cultural practices in which these figures were participating at the time. He further combats the critic's reference to scripture with his own alternate scriptural citation from an unnamed *sūtra*:

When it came time for the lowliest queen to serve at the feet of the king, she could not find any meat, so she shaved some flesh from the corpse of a dead child in a cemetery, and cooked it at home. When its steam struck her face her feet lifted off the ground. Seeing that, he [the king] was amazed. He scolded her, so she became frightened and offered up the best of it, and then explained. He then told her to bring the rest to him. Eating it, he flew into the sky.⁶⁶¹

Sog bzlog pa follows immediately with copious scriptural references and citations from New Translation *tantras*, commentaries and traditions – including the *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra*,⁶⁶² *Hevajra-tantra*, *Samputa-tantra*,⁶⁶³ *Mahāmudrātilaka-tantra*,⁶⁶⁴ *Mahāmāyā-tantra*,⁶⁶⁵ *Abhidhāna-uttaratantra*,⁶⁶⁶ *Śrī-dākārṇava*,⁶⁶⁷ *Śrī-heruka-abhyudaya*,⁶⁶⁸ the oral

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid: 109.4-110.1.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid: 110.1-110.3. *rgyal po rkang btsun mo chung ba ngan shos kyi bsnyen bkur res la bab pa na/ sha gzhan ma snyed pas dur khrod na byis pa shi ba'i ro zhig 'dug pa las sha bregs te khyim du btsos pa dang/ de'i rlangs pa byad bzhin la phog pas mo rkang pa sa la ma reg par 'gro'o/ /de khos mthong nas ngo mtshar te/ mo la sdigs pas skrag ste/ mchog byin nas bshad pa dang/ lhag ma kun yang khyer shog zer te zos pas kho nam mkha' la 'gro'o/*

⁶⁶² Ibid: 111.5. Sog bzlog pa specifically refers to Chapters 11 and 49 of this *tantra*.

⁶⁶³ *Yang dag par sbyor ba zhes bya ba'i rgyud chen po (Sampūti-nāma-mahātantra)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 381, Rgyud, ga (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Sog bzlog pa (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 111.6) makes reference specifically to Chapter 17 of this text.

⁶⁶⁴ *dPal phyag rgya chen po'i thig le zhes bya ba rnal 'byor ma chen mo'i rgyud kyi rgyal po'i mnga' bdag (Śrī-mahāmudrātilakam-nāma-yoginī-tantrarāja-adhipati)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 420, Rgyud, nga (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Sog bzlog pa (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 111.6) makes reference to Chapter 24 of this *tantra*.

⁶⁶⁵ *sGyu 'phrul chen po'i rgyud ces bya ba (Mahāmāyā-tantra-nāma)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 425, Rgyud, nga (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Sog bzlog pa (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 111.6) makes specific reference to Chapter One of this *tantra*.

tradition of Pa dam pa sangs rgyas's (b. 11th c.) Pacifying (*zhi byed*) tradition,⁶⁶⁹ the great translator Shong ston's⁶⁷⁰ (b. 13th c.) commentary on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*,⁶⁷¹ and others – which all promise that eating the flesh of a “seven-timer” confers flight to celestial realms, access to pure lands, and even liberation.⁶⁷² In a show of erudition not witnessed elsewhere in his argument, Sog bzlog pa takes pains here to cite several texts not only by title, but also by chapter number.

Sog bzlog pa turns next to the critic's charge that pills can only bring liberation if they are somehow imbued with Dharma, by virtue of the mind to whom the flesh belonged containing Dharma, and not solely through the flesh qua powerful material substance. In response, Sog bzlog pa makes the radical assertion that efficacy does indeed reside in the flesh itself, regardless of whether or not the person with the flesh possessed Dharma in his mind. By Sog bzlog pa's account, we can be “liberated” through consuming such potent flesh even if the person to whom the flesh belonged was himself not liberated. He states:

⁶⁶⁶ *mNgon par brjod pa'i rgyud bla ma zhes bya ba (Abhidhāna-uttaratantra-nāma)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 369, Rgyud, ka (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Sog bzlog pa (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 111.5) cites this *tantra* as *bDe mchog nges brjod bla ma* and refers specifically to Chapter 66.

⁶⁶⁷ *dPal mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho chen po rnal 'byor ma'i rgyud kyi rgyal po zhes bya ba (Śrī-dākārṇava-mahāyoginī-tantrarāja-nāma)*, in *Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 372, Rgyud, kha (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Sog bzlog pa (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 111.5) calls this text *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro rgya mtsho* and refers specifically to Chapter Two.

⁶⁶⁸ *dPal khrag 'thung mngon par 'byung ba zhes bya ba (Śrī-heruka-abhyudaya-nāma)*, Tōh. 374, Rgyud, ga (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). Sog bzlog pa (*Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 111.6) makes reference to Chapter 42 of this *tantra*.

⁶⁶⁹ *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 112.3-113.3.

⁶⁷⁰ This figure is otherwise known as Shong ston *lotsāwa* rDo rje rgyal mtshan.

⁶⁷¹ *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i 'grel pa bdud rtsi'i thigs pa sgron ma gsal ba zhes bya ba (Ārya-mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti-amṛtabindupratyālokavṛitti-nāma)*, in *Bstan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 1396, Rgyud 'grel, pha (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1982-1985).

⁶⁷² *Lung rigs 'brug sgra*: 110.1-113.3.

It is not taught that despite having taken the seven [times] born [flesh], since that person has not possessed Dharma, and was therefore not liberated, we are also not liberated through his flesh. Rather, just as masters obviously implement the power of transference belonging to substances such as magnets and so forth, and just as treated mercury transforms base metals into gold, here also *the capacity of the substance* brings about the attainment of celestial realms.⁶⁷³

Sog bzlog pa's comparison here with magnets and mercury, substances that exhibit both solid metallic as well as motile or liquid characteristics, reveals exactly what kind of substance he believes can have the types of powers attributed to seven-times-born flesh. What we talking about here are protean, hybrid substances that resist easy classification by virtue of partaking in two or more discrete domains at once. In this way, Sog bzlog pa once more invokes the theme of boundary blurring to gain the upper hand in the argument. But this time, he does so by appealing to hybrid material compounds that are widely regarded to impact their surroundings directly through only the force of their own physical makeup. This is perhaps one of Sog bzlog pa's strongest statements throughout this debate in support of the potency of material objects in and of themselves to directly transform the mind-body complex of beings. Here it is the "capacity of the substance" itself, which, much like magnets and mercury, acts upon persons and environments.

And yet, Sog bzlog pa concludes with a serious caveat. In a strategy seemingly intended as a last ditch effort to complicate the critic's sharp distinction between the domains of physiological and soteriological efficacy, Sog bzlog pa closes this section with a cursory acknowledgement of meditative cultivation as a factor that mediates the power of these pills to act on beings. He states:

Given that [it is taught] in the above manner that via only the flesh of the seven-times-born the fruition of celestial travel is conferred, I ask you, how is it that one would not

⁶⁷³ Ibid: 113.3-113.4. /de la skye ba bdun blangs kyang mi de chos dang mi ldan pas kho rang ma grol bas nged rang de'i shas mi grol gsungs pa yang ma yin te/ rdo khab len la sogs pa'i rdzas gyi 'pho ba'i nus pa mngon sum du gsal ba bla ma rnams phyag len du mdzad pa dang/ dngul chu dul mas lcags kyi khams rnams gser du sgyur ba bzhin du/ 'dir yang rdzas kyi nus pas mkha' spyod nyid 'grub par byed pa yin no/

attain liberation through accomplishing it perfectly according to means of accomplishment that stem from *tantra* and scripture?⁶⁷⁴

Implicit in this statement is a hierarchy of liberating affects, similar to what Sog bzlog pa outlined in his discussion of liberation-through-wearing amulets, that can account for the power of flesh, in and of itself, and also carve a space for personal meditative cultivation, karma, and intentionality in augmenting its range of affects. We may recall that when Sog bzlog pa first introduced his typology of “liberation,” he was explicit that a similar schema applies also to liberation-through-eating pills, and the rest of the liberations.⁶⁷⁵ Perhaps because he felt that this statement would sufficiently enable readers to extrapolate this statement to the other “liberation” through the senses practices, he refrains here from elaborating upon the precise details of this type of hierarchy as it pertains specifically to pills. However, over the next several decades Sog bzlog pa would revisit this topic on more than one occasion to construct a full-fledged theory of the efficacy of powerful edibles that builds upon crucial distinctions first voiced in *Thunder* with regard to liberation-through-wearing amulets. But before we explore these later developments, a few observations are in order about Sog bzlog pa’s theory of flesh pills as expressed in *Thunder*.

Firstly, we can notice in Sog bzlog pa’s remarks a pronounced concern with demonstrating acumen in the domain of New Translation *tantras* that prescribe the practice of consuming seven-times-born flesh. Not only does Sog bzlog pa cite and reference an impressive array of relevant scriptural sources, he is also careful in his

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid: 113.4-113.5. /de ltar skye bdun gyi sha kho nas kyang mkha’ spyod kyi ’bras bu ster ba nyid na/ rgyud lung las byung ba’i sgrub thabs bzhin du tshul bzhin sgrub pas grol ba thob par ci ste mi ’gyur zhes gsol ba lags/

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid: 124.6.

scriptural citations to note chapter numbers in addition to titles, a strategy that is unprecedented in the debate. We can read his show of erudition in the scriptural sources that discuss this substance as a continuation of his tactic to demonstrate command over the entire discursive terrain concerned, and by extension, the significance and function of the flesh itself.

Secondly, we can see that Sog bzlog pa weighs in firmly on the side of the efficacy of flesh, in all its materiality, to bring about changes in the psychophysical state of beings. Moreover, owing to the New Translation *tantras*' emphasis on "celestial realms" as the major effect achieved through consuming this flesh, Sog bzlog pa's adumbration of affects shifts subtly from "liberation" to "celestial realms" as he strategizes how best to account for the mediating roles of meditative cultivation, karma and other factors that reside in the person. However, unlike in his discussion of liberation-through-wearing amulets, here Sog bzlog pa refrains from providing any guidance about what, precisely, he means by the term "celestial realm," except to imply at the finale of his argument that it signals a level of attainment that is inferior to liberation from *samsāra* as a whole.

Finally, Sog bzlog pa once again appears to be trading in the ambiguity of unresolved paradoxes as he resists closure in favor of open-ended deferrals. To start with, Sog bzlog pa's account of the flesh's active ingredient is fraught with tension. Recall that he begins the section with the claim that the "seven-timer" is actually Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, manifesting as a human for seven consecutive lifetimes to be of service to beings through the potent properties of his flesh. This formulation implies that the flesh should be construed as a materialization of Avalokiteśvara's awakened intentionality, a formulation we witnessed in the response

attributed to the Eighth Karmapa. Then, Sog bzlog pa shifts tactics and introduces the analogy of magnets and mercury to forcefully illustrate that certain substances just have the right physical makeup to perform certain extraordinary functions in the world. In such a case, argues Sog bzlog pa, it is simply the flesh’s physical constitution that gives it power, above and beyond its connection with a “liberated” being. And yet, Sog bzlog pa shifts again, the physicality of the flesh’s efficacy does not limit the range of its affects only to the physiological level. “Celestial realms” can be attained solely through its consumption. But, Sog bzlog pa is quick to add, “liberation” through the pill still depends on augmenting its power through other factors, such as meditative cultivation. The result is a flesh that straddles the physical and the mental, the physiological and the spiritual in a way that is reminiscent of how Sog bzlog pa played with boundaries – blurring them even as he drew them – to create a productive “third space,” neither fully subjective, nor objective, but an amalgam of both, for liberation-through-wearing amulets to inhabit. Sog bzlog pa’s strategy in *Thunder* toward creating a similar “third space” for flesh pills was to invoke the relatively simple notion that meditative cultivation can add to the power of already potent substances. Now we will explore how Sog bzlog pa developed this strategy over time by considering two later texts, which outline more rigorously the various dynamics that augment or limit the efficacy of this substance.

* * *

Sog bzlog pa first returned to the theme of “liberation-through-eating” flesh pills in 1591, 15 years after *Thunder*, with his composition of *A Recipe for how to Produce a Pill that*

*Liberates Upon Eating, Based on the Flesh of a Seven-times Born Brahmin.*⁶⁷⁶ In this short treatise, which I briefly introduced in Chapter Two, Sog bzlog pa develops his theory of flesh by drawing on the complexity of Buddhist causation theory to distribute efficacy across a wide range of causes, connections, and conditions – some objective, material and physical, and others subjective and mental. In these formulations we notice that Sog bzlog pa expands upon and applies to flesh pills the theoretical reflections that he first advanced in *Thunder* with respect to liberation-through-wearing amulets. In addition to the previously discussed variables of personal cultivation and karma, Sog bzlog pa introduces in his *Recipe*, as I shall call this text, the notions that the potency of accompanying substances, whether or not the flesh has been treated through ritual, and other external factors, can also interact with personal subjective factors to create an even greater diversity of effects. Sog bzlog pa begins to delineate this broad range of outcomes by forging a typology of “celestial realms,” access to which is promised in a wide variety of New Translation tantric sources as the primary fruition achieved from eating this potent flesh. We will see that this strategy enables not only a rapprochement between objective and subjective, material and immaterial sources of efficacy. It also appears to have been an important way to harmonize Old School claims of “liberation through eating” with the broader New Translation *tantras*’ claims of “conferral of flight,” or other modes of access to celestial realms.⁶⁷⁷ Sog bzlog pa opens the discussion as follows:

⁶⁷⁶ *Bram ze skye ba bdun pa'i sha la brten pa'i myong grol ril bu ji ltar bskrun pa'i dkar chag*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 443-458.

⁶⁷⁷ Holly Gayley (2007, 470, fn. 28) makes the claim that Sog bzlog pa “made explicit” a distinction between the New Translation *tantras*’ “seven-times” flesh and Old School Treasure “seven-times” flesh based on their distinct goals of “flight” and “liberation,” respectively. However, as we will see in the discussion ahead, Sog bzlog pa’s analysis of “celestial realms” vis-à-vis “liberation” is clearly intended to

To elaborate, here, “celestial realms” are three-fold: the great celestial realm endowed with eight good qualities refers to the levels from the first [bodhisattva] level up until the level of Buddhahood, for Indian and Tibetan masters have claimed that the first level obtained by noble Nagārjuna was “the obtainment of the celestial realm endowed with eight good qualities.”

The lesser celestial realm is two-fold: the celestial realm in this very life, and the celestial realm after having exchanged bodies. These are [each] also two-fold: the celestial realm of desire, in which one’s body and enjoyments are identical to a god of the desire realm; and the celestial realm of form, in which one’s body and enjoyments are identical to a god of the form realm. “The desire realms based on substances, such as a sword, the flesh of the seven [times] born, and so forth, are primarily celestial realms of desire.” Such is one of the claims of previous scholars.⁶⁷⁸

Sog bzlog pa next introduces another, more complex typology of “celestial realms.” He states:

Alternatively, [others claim] “celestial realms” have the three divisions of great, middling, and lesser. From among these, the great celestial realm is as follows: It is stated in the *Śrī Kālacakra*:

The body becomes totally perfected through the signs of becoming
translucent and its atoms collapsing.
The plethora [of] the three worlds appears like a dream,
Translucent and totally free of obstructions.
Language becomes totally uninterrupted, and
Enters the hearts of others, according to their
Own multiple other languages.
The mind becomes filled with sublime bliss, does not waver, [and]
Courses with the innate at all times.⁶⁷⁹

forge a rapprochement between these two seemingly distinct goals. So rather than “signal a shift from an alchemical register...to a charismatic register...” as Gayley (470) maintains, Sog bzlog pa’s discussion aims to include the fullest range of effects possible, extending from mundane flight and positive rebirths all the way up to complete awakening. This is further evinced by the fact that Sog bzlog pa uses the term “celestial realm” in the opening and closing verses of the treatise to frame the efficacy of the substance in general.

⁶⁷⁸ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 444.3-444.6. /de la 'dir mkha' spyod ces pa la rnam pa gsum ste/ mkha' spyod chen po yon tan brgyad dang ldan pa ni sa dang po nas sangs rgyas kyi sa'i bar la bya ste/ 'phags pa klu grub kyi sa dang po yang thob/ mkha' spyod yon tan brgyad ldan thob ces rgya bod kyi bla ma rnams bzhed pas so/ /mkha' spyod chung ba la gnyis te/ tshe 'di nyid kyi mkha' spyod dang/ /lus brjes pa'i mkha' spyod gnyis/ de dag la'ang 'dod pa'i lha dang lus dang longs spyod mtshungs pa'i 'dod pa'i mkha' spyod dang/ gzugs khams kyi lha dang lus dang longs spyod mtshungs pa gzugs kyi mkha' spyod gnyis yod cing/ ral gri dang skye bdun gyi sha la sogs pa rdzas la rten pa'i mkha' spyod rnams ni 'dod pa'i mkha' spyod shas che'o/ /zhes sngon gyi mkhas pa rnams kyi bzhed pa phyogs gcig go/

⁶⁷⁹ *mChog gi dang po'i sangs rgyas las phyung ba rgyud kyi rgyal po dpal dus kyi 'khor lo* (*Parama-ādibuddhodhrīta-śrī-kālacakra-nāma-tantrarājā*), in *Bstan' gyur dpe bsdur ma*, Tōh. 362, Rgyud, tha (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009), 227-228. The citation appears in the *tantra* as follows: “The body becomes totally perfected through the signs of becoming translucent, its atoms collapsing, becoming like space, and the like./ The plethora [of] the three worlds appears like a dream, translucent and totally free of obstructions./ Language becomes totally uninterrupted, and enters the hearts of others, according to their own multiple other languages./ The mind becomes filled with sublime bliss, unwavering, [and] suffused with the innate (/ *lus ni dang zhing rdul phran nyams nam mkha' dang*

*Guhyasamāja*⁶⁸⁰ practitioners mention “a rainbow body, a *vajra* body.” Great Perfection practitioners mention a “body of great transference.” Or, alternatively, it is stated in a [Great Perfection] *tantra*: “The indivisibility of the *dharmakāya* and the *rūpakāya*⁶⁸¹ is the *vajra* body.” Thus, [the great celestial realm] refers to the obtainment of such.

The middling is two-fold: the celestial realm of this life, and the celestial realm from having transferred birth. Each of these, like the above [explanation], has both a celestial realm of desire and a celestial realm of form. The [form realm celestial realm] involves overpowering a *yakṣinī* and so forth through the power of mantra recitation and so forth of deities explained in Action and Performance (*bya spyod*) [*tantra* classes], such that, being transported by them, one reaches the form realm, where one’s lifespan, enjoyments, and physical appearance are indistinguishable from the gods in the form realm.

The celestial realm of desire refers to reaching the desire realm, being transported there by the gods of the desire [realm], and like before, (i.e., like the form realm explanation above), becoming equivalent [to them]. What is more, even here in this realm of desire practitioners of Path and Fruit say that Sa skya chen po’s student ‘Chad ma nam mkha’ has been present at Jo mo nags rgyal up until the present; Great Perfection practitioners say that Nyang ting nge ‘dzin (b. 9th c.) resides at Jewel rock, on rTsang mountain; and moreover, it is like the talk of such and such vidyādhara being present on such and such mountain.⁶⁸²

The celestial realm from having transferred births is said to be one’s birth into such [a realm] immediately following the transference of one’s life.

The least of these, the celestial realms from substances, are the many ways taught in *tantra* based on the sword from the reanimation of a corpse, and based on the flesh of the seven [times] born.⁶⁸³

mtshungs mtshan la sogs pa rnams kyis rab rdzogs ‘gyur/ /sna tshogs ‘jig rten gsum po nyid ni dang zhing sgrib pa rnam par bral ba rmi lam bzhin du snang/ /skad ni kun nas chad pa med cing du ma’i skad gzhan dag gi gzhan gyi snying la ‘jug pa ste/ /sems ni dam pa’i bde bas gang zhig mi g.yo thams cad dus su lhan cig skyes pas ‘khyud’o).

⁶⁸⁰ *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs kyi gsang chen gsang ba ‘dus pa zhes bya ba brtag pa’i rgyal po chen po (Sarvatathāgata-kāyavākīcittarahasyo-guhyasamāja-nāma-mahā-kalparāja), in Bka ‘gyur dpe bsdur ma, Tōh. 443, Rgyud, ca (Beijing: Krung go’i bod rig pa’i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009).*

⁶⁸¹ The *rūpakāya*, or “form body,” according to Mahāyāna Buddhism’s three-*kāya* theory, is a category of embodiment that includes the subtler “*sambhogakāya*,” or “body of rapture,” and the coarser “*nirmāṇakāya*,” or “emanated body.” For more on these terms and their various meanings in Buddhist philosophical discourse, see Makransky (1997).

⁶⁸² This section refers to the belief that certain masters who have gained control over life-force dwell forever in specific locations.

⁶⁸³ Ibid: 444.6-446.3. */yang mkha’ spyod ces pa la che ‘bring chung gsum yod pa las/ mkha’ spyod chen po ni/ dpal dus kyi ‘khor lo las/ lus ni dangs shing rdul bran nyams pa mtshan la sogs pa rnams kyis rab rdzogs ‘gyur/ /sna tshogs ‘jig rten gsum po nyid ni dangs shing sgrib pa rnam par bral ba rmi lam bzhin du snang/ /skad ni kun nas chad pa med cing du ma’i skad gzhan dag gi gzhan gyi snying la ‘jug pa ste/ /sems ni dam pa’i bde bas gang zhig mi g.yo thams cad dus su lhan cig skyes pas ‘jug pa’o/ gsang ‘dus pa dag gi ‘ja’ lus rdo rje’i sku/ zhes pa dang/ rdzogs pa chen po ba rnams ‘pho ba chen po’i sku/ zhes pa ‘am/ rgyud las/ chos dang gzugs skur dbyes med rdo rje sku/ /ces pas de lta bu thob pa la bya/ ‘bring po la/ tshe ‘di’i mkha’ spyod dang/ skye ba ‘phos pa’i mkha’ spyod gnyis/ de re re la’ang gong ltar ‘dod pa’i mkha’ spyod dang gzugs kyi mkha’ spyod gnyis yod de/ de ni bya spyod kyi rgyud nas bshad pa’i lha’i sngags*

We can notice in this passage that for Sog bzlog pa the fruition of “celestial realms” promised in New Translation *tantras* spans the this-worldly domain of flight, the karmic domain of positive rebirth, and the soteriological domain of progress through the bodhisattva “levels” (Skt. *bhūmī*, Tib. *sa*) and complete awakening itself. Moreover, not only is this typology relevant to practitioners of the New School *tantras* of *Kālacakra* and *Guhyasamāja*. It also applies to Old School Great Perfection practitioners.

With this final category of “celestial realms from substances” as segue, Sog bzlog pa shifts to consider the particular case of seven-times-born Brahmin flesh. After providing scriptural citations from *tantra* and *sūtra* that promise “flight to celestial realms” through eating the flesh, he states:

Concerning those [citations], here the flesh of the seven-born, alone, from the sole perspective of being substance, is the lesser celestial realm. However, it should be understood that *due to distinctions in the continuity that is their receptacle for blessings, in being substances that come from different tantra classes, in being transformed by mantra, and the relative quality of the persons accomplishing them, [substances can] also fulfill the greater and middling [celestial realms]*.⁶⁸⁴

For Sog bzlog pa, then, it would seem that the flesh serves as a primary material cause, while the variant results hinge on consumers’ personal levels of cultivation and karmic purification, the relative potency of other substances with which the flesh is combined, the relative power and profundity of the *tantra* class from which the substance hails, the ritual treatment of the flesh through mantra, and finally, the relative power of the

bzlas pa sogs kyi nus pas gnod sbying mo la sogs pa dbang du bsdu nas/ de dag gi khur te gzugs khams su phyin pa dang/ gzugs khams kyi lha rnam dang tshe dang longs spyod gzugs byad la sogs pa khyad med du gyur pa yin/ 'dod pa'i mkha' spyod ni/ 'dod pa'i lhas khur nas 'dod khams su phyin pa dang sngar ltar cha mtshungs par 'gyur ba la bya/ der ma zad 'dod pa'i khams 'di na yang/ lam 'bras pa dag/ sa skya pa chen po'i slob ma 'chad mo nam mkha' ding sang gi bar du jo mo nags rgyal la yod zer ba dang/ rdzogs chen pa dag/ rtsang ri rin chen brag la nyang ting 'dzin bzang po bzhugs zer ba dang/ gzhan yang ri che ge mo la rigs 'dzin che ge mo yod zer ba lta bu yin/ skye ba 'phos pa'i mkha' spyod ni/ tshe 'phos ma thag tu de 'drar skye ba la zer ba yin no/ /tha ma rdzas kyi mkha' spyod ni/ ro langs sgrubs pa las byung ba'i ral gri dang/ skye ba bdun pa'i sha la brien pa mang zhig rgyud rnam su gsungs la/

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid: 447.1-447.2. /de la 'dir skye bdun gyi sha nyid rdzas kyi ngo gang nas mkha' spyod chung ngu yin la/ byin brlabs rten gyi rgyun dang/ rgyud sde so so las byung ba'i rdzas dang sngags kyi kha bsgyur dang/ sgrub pa po gang zag mchog dman gyi dbye bas che 'bring nyis tshang ba yang go bar bya'o/

officiating ritual specialists. Thus, a number of mediating factors – material, objective, performative, and spiritual, subjective, and mental – all contribute to a plethora of effects on both the physical and metaphysical planes. And yet, Sog bzlog pa is careful to point out, the substance itself, minus any other contributing conditions, leads only to positive mundane results in this lifetime, or physical rebirth in a condition more conducive to the practice of Dharma. He thus delimits the effects of substance qua substance to delivery from the three lower realms at best. Only when combined with other features can the substance effect the radical transformations of consciousness such as obtainment of the bodhisattva levels or complete awakening. Sog bzlog pa thus allows for subjective, spiritual transformations from gustatory encounters with substance. Yet, in the same stroke, he stipulates terms and conditions for such transformations in the subtle relationships between the physical and extra-physical domains, so as to constrain the role of materiality, even while championing its potency.

Sog bzlog pa follows up by reproducing his account, first devised in *Thunder*, for the four types of “liberation” granted through liberation-through-wearing amulets, but recasts this set of goals as destinations, or locations, rather than states of being *per se*. This strategy enables Sog bzlog pa to harmonize, in part, the Old School promise of liberation-through-eating with the more generalized New Translation *tantras*’ emphasis upon access to “celestial realms.” He states:

In this great vehicle of secrets there are six vital points that bring Buddhahood without meditation, such as liberation [through] eating, and so forth. Among the [variety] of faculties of people who are the support [for these], for the superior type, the ground of liberation is liberated into the *dharmakāya*; for the middling, self-appearance is liberated into the *sambhogakāya* pure realm; for the inferior, the nature is liberated into the *nirmāṇakāya* pure realm; while the lowliest of all are liberated from mad migrations, such that they are born in the higher realms, and so forth.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid: 447.3-447.4. *gsang ba'i theg pa chen po 'dir/ myong grol la sogs pa ma sgom par sangs rgyas pa'i gnad drug yod pa la/ rten gyi gang zag gi dbang gi/ rab grol gzhi chos skur grol ba dang/ 'bring rang*

Sog bzlog pa next strengthens this final claim of liberation from lower realms with reference to the limit case of animals. Noteworthy is that he sets up his remark as an apologetic response to criticism. He argues:

However, those of wrong views have discussed at length:

About your seven-times [born pill], what if it were established according to direct perception that a goat, a dog, and so forth were not liberated after having been given one and then killed.

Those [animals], generally, are indeed the very nature of non-comprehension. Yet, nonetheless, since [liberation] is a matter of carrying a single meager link,⁶⁸⁶ masters have taught that it is a cause of liberation eventually for them too. Thus, it is [an instance] of the compassion of Buddha's skill in means.⁶⁸⁷

Sog bzlog pa's concluding appeal to the "compassion of Buddha's skill in means" is telling. It is precisely through this awakened "skill in means," Sog bzlog pa implies earlier in the *Recipe*, that Brahmin flesh and other substances manifest for those "who can be tamed through substance." As we shall see shortly, Sog bzlog pa's notion of a class of beings for whom contact with powerful substance is the only viable means to set them on the path toward liberation would reappear in his later treatment of the topic.

In the wake of the *Recipe's* forceful arguments for the power of the flesh, in and of itself, to bring transformations in the karmic condition of beings, Sog bzlog pa makes a final caveat that has serious implications for his role as an authoritative producer of flesh pills. Sog bzlog pa nuances his emphasis on the power of the flesh considerably by

snang longs sku'i zhing du grol ba dang/ tha ma rang bzhin sprul pa sku'i zhing du grol ba dang/ yang tha ngan song las grol te/ mtho ris su skye ba la sogs pa yin na yang/

⁶⁸⁶ This description of seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills as powerful enough to ensure liberation through "carrying a single meager link" ('*brel ba sna gcig thogs pa yis...*) with a being, regardless of the involvement of intentionality or conscious awareness, seems to originate in O rgyan gling pa, *Pad+ma bKa' thang shel brag ma* (Rewalsar, distt. Mandi, H.P. India: Zigar Drukpa Kargyud Institute, 1985), 651.4-651.5.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid: 447.4-447.6. *log lta can dag ni/ khyed kyi skye bdun nam de ra dang khyi la sogs pa dag la byin la bsod dang/ des grol ma song ba mngon sum du grub na/ zhes gleng ba mang la/ de dag kyang spyir ma go ba'i rang bzhin nyid yin mod kyang/ 'on kyang 'grel[= 'brel] pa sne gcig thogs pa yin pas de dag kyang rim gyi grol ba'i rgyur 'gyur bas/ sangs rgyas thabs mkhas pa'i thugs rje yin zhes bla ma rnam gsungs so/*

emphasizing in the following passage the necessity of ritual and ritual specialists in its preparation, presumably lest his argument for the flesh's autonomous potency compromise the important socio-religious phenomenon of “great accomplishment rites” and their officiating ritual specialists.

Generally, if the flesh of the seven-born is obtained, then through eating that alone one will accomplish the celestial realms. Thus, one need not produce it via ritual proceedings (*cho ga*) and so forth. However, these days [the flesh of a seven-born] is difficult to find, so one should understand it to be a means that causes the attainment of liberation, as accomplished through rituals from *tantra* and scripture (*rgyud lung las byung ba'i cho gas sgrubs*), based on only the previously derived material collateral (*gta'*) and catalyst (*phabs*).⁶⁸⁸

To understand Sog bzlog pa's appeal here to the rarity of the substance as a plea for the continuing necessity of the mediating roles of authoritative rituals and ritual specialists in its production, we must recall that one of the immediate goals of a seven-times born great accomplishment rite is precisely the exponential increase, and other animations of the substance, through the power of ritual proceedings. Great accomplishment rites centering on this flesh, we must also recall, are mass ceremonies, through which the substance, once ritually treated, amplified, and animated, becomes a precious commodity for the public. Sog bzlog pa's insistence on the importance of ritual intervention in the flesh's workings alludes also to the authoritative use of “*tantra* and scripture” from which the appropriate rites derive, thus placing the literate, ritual specialist/scholar at the crest of the dynamic that secures the flesh's power. Sog bzlog pa's concluding reference to the “material collateral” and “active ingredient” of the flesh as the only truly efficacious features – the primarily material causes of its efficacy, as it were – emerges as a final

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid: 456.6-457.1. */lar skye bdun gyi sha rnyed na ni de nyid kho na zos pas mkha' spyod 'grub pa yin la/ cho ga la sogs pas sgrub mi dgos kyang/ ding sang ni rnyed par dka' bas/ sngon byung ba'i gta' dang phabs tsam la rten te/ rgyud lung las byung ba'i cho gas sgrubs te/ grol ba thob par bya ba'i thabs yin par go bar bya'o/*

rhetorical attempt to distribute efficacy between the flesh qua its materiality, and the ritual specialist who “accomplishes” it via the rites culled from tantric scriptural sources. What results is a sharing of authority between the substance and the ritual experts who wield it. Sog bzlog pa’s scholarly treatment of this issue thus enables him to maintain his extreme position on the efficacy of powerful substances, while fitting that into a broader doctrinal and ritual context. In this way, he manages to have his cake and eat it too.

* * *

Sog bzlog pa revisited the theme of powerful material substance yet again in *Abandoning Objections to “Buddhahood Without Meditation”*: *A Response to Lama Gojo’s Query*,⁶⁸⁹ which, we may recall, he composed in 1612, some 35 years after *Thunder*. Here, Sog bzlog pa makes further efforts to provide theoretical grounding for the efficacy of edible substance, specifically a Treasure pill discovered by Zhig po gling pa whose consumption guarantees “Buddhahood without meditation.” As discussed earlier, Sog bzlog pa’s remarks come in the form of a response to the critical reception of this pill within New School and Old School circles alike, as reported to Sog bzlog pa by Lama Go ’jo, a student of Zhig po gling pa from eastern Tibet. The criticisms revolve in particular around this pill’s designated contents, which purportedly include semen and menstrual discharge from the union of *dharmakāya* buddhas, and the bone relics of the seven *tathāgatas* of previous eons, among other fabulous items. Sog bzlog pa reproduces the relevant passages from Lama Go ’jo’s letter as follows:

⁶⁸⁹ *Bla ma go ’jo ’i zhu lan ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975), 191-212.

It is taught in sPrul sku Zhig po gling pa's *Buddhahood without Meditation Pill*:

This is a special pill rolled from the white and red seminal fluids from the *dharmakāyas* Amitabha and Pāṇḍaravāsīnī, the *sambhogakāyas* Avalokiteśvara and Ḍākīmā, and the *nirmāṇakāyas* Padma lha and lJam Mandharava, along with the bones of the seven generations of buddhas.

There has been several New School masters and monks, and a few exalted personages (*sku yon can*) among our own Old School adherents who have been saying:

Such is utterly untrue; there is no white and red seminal fluids coming from *dharmakāya*. This has not been mentioned anywhere at all. Moreover, regarding the bones of the seven generations of buddhas, only a smattering (*a mi?*) of Śākyamuni's relics and bones are extant. As for the emergence of the bones of the other previous buddhas, several eons have passed [since their times,] thus it is improbable that they would emerge.

When carefully investigating into this, the thought occurred to me that they might be right. When I was in Shas khog, at a place where there was a large assembly of monks, some Kaḥ thoḥ lamas asked me about this. I did not know how to respond and was therefore ashamed. Now, given that your reputation as Zhig po gling pa's learned and accomplished heart disciple has circulated far and wide, and I do not know anyone here in the region of Khams who can respond, you must, out of consideration for the doctrine, deliver a brief but meaningful explanation that is consistent with the *tantras* and scriptures, and can satisfy everyone.⁶⁹⁰

At issue for Lama 'Go jo was how to understand the presumed presence of ingredients in Zhig po gling pa's Treasure substance that just do not seem possible in the face of critical onlookers and his own rationality. The *dharmakāya* "form" of buddhas is understood by most mainstream Tibetan Buddhists as formless. Thus, the emergence in material form of their seminal fluids seemed, by the estimation of Lama 'Go jo and his Old and New School associates, to contravene the limits of reason. And according to quotidian notions

⁶⁹⁰ *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*: 192.4-193.4. /sprul sku zhig po gling pa'i ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi ril bu 'di la/ chos sku 'od dpag med dang gos dkar mo/ /longs sku spyan ras gzigs dang DA ki ma/ /sprul sku pad+ma lha ljam mandha ra 'i/ /byang sems dkar dmar sangs rgyas rab bdun gyis/ /gdung las sgril ba 'i ril bu khyad par can/ /zhes sogs gsungs pa 'di la/ khong gsar ma ba 'i bla ma dang ban dhe mang zhig dang/ rang re rnying ma ba 'i sku yon can 'ga' zhig gis/ de 'dra cang mi bden chos sku la byang sems dkar dmar 'ong ba med/ gang nas kyang ma bshad/ sangs rgyas rab bdun gyi gdung la yang/ shAkya thub pa 'i ring bsrel dang gdung tsam a mi yod/ de gong gi sangs rgyas gzhan tsho 'i gdung 'ong ba la/ skal pa mang po 'das zin le yin pas/ a 'ong mi shes zer mi mang po byung/ zhig tu brtag na khong tsho 'ang bden pa 'dra bsam pa shar/ shas khog tu ban 'du chen po gcig gi sar/ ka thog pa 'i bla ma 'dras nged la dris byung dus/ lan lab ma shes pas ngo tsha ba byung/ da khyed zhig po gling pa 'i thugs sras mkhas grub chen po red/ zer ba 'i snyan grags brda' ba dang/ nged kyi khams phyogs 'di na lan 'debs mi su yang ma rig le yin pas/ rgyud lung dang mthun pa 'i bshad pa tshig nyung la don rgyas pa/ mi rngun[=kun] du ngoms chog pa cig/ /bstan pa la bsam te bskur dgos/ zhes gsungs pa la/

of duration and material decay, moreover, the enduring presence of Buddha relics from eons past also seems to stretch the limits of rationality.

Sog bzlog pa begins his response by explaining that such misconceptions about the relationship between *dharmakāya* buddhas and the sensory world of the body stems from the assumption that *dharmakāya* buddhas have no form whatsoever. Yet, Sog bzlog pa counters, *dharmakāya* is not to be understood as an empty void, but the generative matrix of all manifest possibilities within the scope of appearance and existence. Any sensate experience whatsoever can and does emerge from it.⁶⁹¹ As a strategy to bridge the near-formlessness of *dharmakāya* and the sensate world of objects and physiology, Sog bzlog pa then offers an elaborate presentation of the three Buddha bodies – *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya* – in which each body is further subdivided into three – *dharmakāya-dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya-dharmakāya*, and so on – making a total of nine Buddha bodies.⁶⁹² This proliferation of bodies between the most refined levels of beatific embodiment and the grossest material crystallizations, a model which Sog bzlog pa cites as originating with Vimalamitra’s *Ati Pith Instructions: A Cycle of Nine Lamps (A ti man ngag sgron ma dgu skor)*,⁶⁹³ grants him the interpretative leverage to make a space for *dharmakāya* buddhas as operating at the very edges of corporeality.⁶⁹⁴ The model of nine Buddha bodies, which the Vimalamitra citation claims are responsible for the dispensation of nine distinct categories, or “vehicles” of Buddhist

⁶⁹¹ Ibid: 193.5-193.6.

⁶⁹² Ibid: 194.1-196.2.

⁶⁹³ This cycle appears more commonly as *gSang ba bla med sgron ma sgu skor gyi gdams pa*, in *rNying thig ya bzhi*, vol. 4, *Bi ma snying thig*, part II (Delhi: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1975-), 150-237. This cycle opens with discussion of three-*kāya* theory.

⁶⁹⁴ Sog bzlog pa also employs this model of nine Buddha bodies to frame the cosmic *cum* corporeal existence of Padmasambhava in the opening gambit of his biography of the master *Dispelling Mental Darkness (Yid kyi mun sel*, Rewalsar, Distt. Mandi, H.P., India: Zigar Drugpa Kargyud Institute, 1985).

teachings, in turn provides Sog bzlog pa the platform to make the further claim that a *dharmakāya* buddha, while surely not gross material form, can still have bodily attributes and thus dispense Dharma teachings that impact the world. With this link between the physical and vocal attributes of *dharmakāya* buddhas in place, Sog bzlog pa then maintains that if we accept that speech can come from a *dharmakāya* Buddha – a far more common position, at least for Old School followers – then physical bodies and bodily substances ought to as well.⁶⁹⁵

Sog bzlog pa next strategically combines this set of notions with the concepts of the altruistic intent of awakening, or *bodhicitta*, intrinsic to buddhas’ awakened existence, and that of the “inconceivability” of buddhas’ skillful means in enacting or materializing this altruistic intent. The hinge in this aspect of Sog bzlog pa’s argument is his connection of the Mahāyāna understanding of *bodhicitta* as “altruistic intent” with its physiological tantric meaning in a way that mirrors the gradient of nine Buddha bodies from ethereal principles down to physically manifest bodily forms.⁶⁹⁶ Unlike its common Mahāyāna significance as altruistic and awakened intentionality, the term *bodhicitta* in tantric contexts came to connote the physiological seminal fluids produced by a male and female during yogic sexual intercourse.⁶⁹⁷ This is their “spirit of awakening,” as it were, which masters and their consorts distribute for initiates to consume as sacraments in certain tantric initiation ritual settings, specifically the wisdom-knowledge initiation,

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid: 196.2-196.4.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid: 196.4-197.2.

⁶⁹⁷ For more on the tantric notion of *bodhicitta* as seminal fluid, see Jacob Dalton, “The Development of Perfection: The Interiorization of Buddhist Ritual in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 1-30.

third in the standard sequence of four highest yoga *tantra* initiations.⁶⁹⁸ The “inconceivability” of buddhas’ skillful means refers here to the mystery, from a quotidian perspective, of how this type of “spirit of enlightenment” can materialize from the sexual union of ethereal, quasi-immaterial *dharmakāya* buddhas, so that recipients can consume it in a gesture that mimics the dynamics of the wisdom-knowledge initiation of tantric ritual. Just as he did when discussing liberating-through-wearing amulets, it would appear that Sog bzlog pa is alluding to another, non-discursive way of understanding such materializations, beyond the domain of ordinary, conceptual rationality.

Sog bzlog pa then introduces the notion that the buddhas’ “inconceivable skillful means” of manifesting such substances is enacted to benefit a particular type of being. We may recall that Sog bzlog pa had already proposed the category of “those who are tamed through substance” in his 1591 treatment of the issue in the *Recipe*. Here, in a novel twist on this previous formulation, Sog bzlog pa remarks that such substances are more specifically for those “that are not suitable vessels for meditating on the path and do not have the fortune to practice Dharma.”⁶⁹⁹ When keeping in mind Sog bzlog pa’s strategy of relating the physical and spoken manifestations of *dharmakāya* buddhas as simply different modes of awakened expression in this sensate world, seminal fluids can be understood as a physical surrogate for Dharma teachings, intended for those who would never be reached through spoken discourse. The entire trajectory of Sog bzlog

⁶⁹⁸ For more on the development of this typology of four initiations, especially as it pertains to Indian Yoginītantras, see Harunaga Isaacson “Tantric Buddhism in India (from c. A.D. 800 to c. A.D. 1200),” in *Buddhismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 1998). Isaacson’s analysis of the Yoginītantras’ development of a “fourth initiation” suggests that the four-initiation structure is a particular feature of this class of *tantras*, even while it is not ubiquitously present there.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*: 198.3-198.4. *sems can gang dag lam bsgom pa’i snod du ma gyur cing chos byed pa’i skal pa dang mi ldan rnams la/*

pa's argument – from his elaboration upon three-*kāya* theory to his enlistment of the concept of the “inconceivability” of awakened skillful means – must then be understood in light of the theoretical and doctrinal advantages it brought for Sog bzlog pa's extreme position on the nature and function of potent material substances. To understand how substances materialize from the rarified quasi-immaterial forms of *dharmakāya* buddhas requires us to suspend the quotidian logic of discursive conceptuality and accept the permeability and fluidity between material and immaterial domains of awakened being.

Moreover, beyond just providing a far more comprehensive and cogent account of precisely how such sublime substances come into being and for whom they are intended, I read Sog bzlog pa's theoretical efforts to ground sacred substance in the subtlest reaches of awakened subjectivity as part of his lifelong work to secure a prominent and prestigious place within the socio-religious landscape of Tibet for sensory objects and the rituals that incorporate them. Sog bzlog pa's references to the class of beings for whom such objects are intended, combined with his appeals to Buddhist scholastic categories, presents itself as a further attempt to bridge the various orientations to Buddhist practice – the pragmatic, karmic, and soteriological – through the substance of Brahmin flesh.

Sog bzlog pa summarizes the gist of his argument as follows:

Thus, since *dharmakāya* does not waver from suchness, it is devoid of concepts. Yet, like stars appearing on a lake, since it sees all the wishes, faculties and latent predispositions of all beings, from undefiled basic space *bodhicitta* which appears as though it is defiled radiates forth *for any sentient being that is not a suitable vessel for meditating on the path and does not have the fortune to practice Dharma*. The *dharmakāya* thus gradually establishes beings in enlightenment and liberation *based on the blessing-power of that substance (rdzas de'i mthu byin la brtan nas)*. Moreover, it appears as seven-times born Brahmins and the like, such that eating the substance (*rdzas*) of its flesh, blood and so forth connects beings with the state of celestial realms. In these and other ways, the gates of skillful means by which buddhas act for the benefit of beings are inconceivable. It is said in the *Ārya-Mahāratnakūṭa*:

The power of medicine, substance, *vidyā-mantra*, physical therapy/massage and so forth is inconceivable.

The gates of buddhas' and bodhisattva's skillful means are inconceivable.⁷⁰⁰

The final citation in this passage is particularly telling about the attitude to adopt when approaching powerful substances. We may recall that Sog bzlog pa also cites this famous passage in *Thunder* when discussing the manifestation of relics, rainbows, and other post-mortem signs of liberation for beings that die wearing liberation-through-wearing amulets or consuming liberation-through-eating pills. It is remarkable that this list of “inconceivable” items, which features substance, mantra formulas, medicine, and physical treatments, circumscribes precisely the domain of ritual arts and medical science. Sog bzlog pa's repeated reference to this citation can thus be read as a kind of scriptural charter for the set of material practices and objects with which he was so centrally involved throughout his life. His consistent appeal to the “inconceivability” of this sphere of practice might then be interpreted as a strategy to lift his own sphere of activity safely outside the domain of logical and philosophical speculation and contestation. According to such a reading, the master of this domain – the doctor, ritual expert, bodhisattva – becomes the only authoritative arbiter of the truth claims and epistemologies that characterize the workings of powerful objects and material practices, even as powerful substances issue from the *dharmakāya* as crystallized awakened intentionality for whoever can be reached through them.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ma bsgom sangs rgyas kyi brtsod spong*: 198.2-199.1. *chos sku de kho na nyid las ma g.yos pas rnam par rtog pa mi mnga' yang/ rgya mtsho la gza' skar shar ba ltar/ sems can rnams kyi bsam pa dang/ dbang po dang khams dang bag la nyal mtha' dag gzigs pas/ sems can gang dag lam bsgom pa'i snod du ma gyur cing chos byed pa'i skal ba dang mi ldan pa rnams la/ zag pa med pa'i dbyings nas zag bcas ltar snang ba'i byang sems spros te/ rdzas de'i mthu byin la brten nas rim gyis byang grol la 'god par mdzad pa dang/ bram ze skye ba bdun pa la sogs par snang nas kyang de'i sha khrag la sogs pa'i rdzas la rten pas mkha' spyod kyi go 'phang la sbyor ba la sogs pa sangs rgyas rnams 'gro don mdzad pa'i thabs kyi sgo ni bsam gyis mi khyab ste/ 'phags pa dkon mchog rtsegs par yang/ sman dang rdzas dang rigs sngags dang 'khyug spyad la sogs pa'i mthu ni bsam gyis mi khyab po/ /sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams kyi thabs la mkhas pa'i sgo ni bsam gyi mi khyab po/ /zhes gsung so/*

When taking his remarks at face value, however, we can construe in Sog bzlog pa's repeated references to "inconceivability" a suggestion that in order to understand this domain of practice we must suspend our ordinary discursive habits of thought and approach it instead through a refined sensitivity to the sensory, non-discursive dimension of experience. "Inconceivability," according to such a reading, signals an orientation to action in which the mundane, indicative *as is* approach to self and world, bound by quotidian discursive logic, is temporarily bracketed to make way for a subjunctive *as if* appreciation of things and events that can not fit neatly into binary, discursive rationality.

Taking his argument in *Abandoning Objections* as a whole, we can see that Sog bzlog pa departs from his previous arguments. He makes no attempt to qualify the efficacy of pills and other powerful substances with reference to the subjective condition, or karma of beings. He severs their workings from the qualities of the person as consumer, locating them instead in the rarified and "inconceivable" compassionate activity of awakened beings. This changed emphasis foregrounds more the special qualities of the substance itself, its rootedness in the most sublime dimensions of awakened awareness, than did his previous formulations.

V. Concluding Remarks

This close reading of Sog bzlog pa's arguments on the roles of sensory experience and powerful sensory objects in Tibetan religious life has brought a number of noteworthy features to the surface. On the most superficial level perhaps, Sog bzlog pa's displays of scholarly acumen in determining the efficacy of sensory objects, along with his efforts to position the ritual specialist as a vital mediator in securing their powers, can be read as a demonstration of authority over the entire discursive terrain concerned. As we have

witnessed, this is a terrain whose internal divisions implicate not only the potency of substances and sensory experiences, and their affects on world and psyche, but also the very nature of mind, body, person, gnosis, subject, and object. By assuming interpretative authority over this discourse, Sog bzlog pa was able to represent himself as master over such objects and their powerful influence in the world, a strategy that could have helped catapult him into the position of foremost expert in efficacious actions and materials, precisely during a period when these were seen as vital instruments for safeguarding Tibet's borders from foreign invasion and bolstering strength at home.

When considering the details of his arguments, we have witnessed how far Sog bzlog pa goes toward granting efficacy to material and sensory objects, as well as the strategies that he deploys toward that end. In the final analysis, Sog bzlog pa ends up recasting the practices of liberation through the senses within the mainstream Buddhist rhetoric of reason and scripture, and thereby successfully carves for them a legitimate theoretical space. Yet, Sog bzlog pa also exploits this doctrinal niche in *Thunder*, and even more so in later formulations, to elevate the status of substance and phenomenal appearance in general to the highest echelons of refined experience and realization. It is specifically through his appeal to embodied gnosis and the Great Perfection, as well as his detailed categorization of “liberation” and “celestial realm” – the two fruits promised through eating powerful pills and wearing powerful amulets – that enabled Sog bzlog pa to demarcate the precise rolls of mental cultivation, personal karma, ritual treatment, and of course, substance itself, in the workings of such objects, all in a way that tips the scales clearly toward the power of objects and the masters that wield them. At the same time, Sog bzlog pa's exploitation of the semantic range of the term “liberation” to include a full spectrum of Buddhist goals serves to bridge around these “liberating” objects the diverse

pragmatic, karmic, and ultimate soteriological orientations of Tibetan Buddhist society as a whole. It is up to the individual wearer or eater, specifically his or her personal karma, cultivation, and intentionality, that determines upon which level these objects reap their liberating effects. But the practices of seeing, hearing, wearing, and eating especially potent sensory forms is open to all persons, regardless of the divergent aims and results of individuals.

The shifting contours of Sog bzlog pa's formulations from his initial reflections in *Thunder* to his development of these ideas in later texts illustrates, first and foremost, his ongoing concern with providing theoretical grounding for these practices in light of the prominence in Buddhist theory of personal karma, meditative cultivation, and intentionality, which overtly conflict with claims regarding the powerful affects of sensory objects alone. Moreover, we can notice in the historical trajectory of Sog bzlog pa's theoretical accounts that he gradually became more radical about the power of objects over the years, a movement that perhaps reflects his growing commitment to and authority in the domain of material religion, in light of the increasing importance of his role as ritual expert for the leading political authorities of his day.

We witnessed how in Sog bzlog pa's 1591 treatment of the issue of powerful pills in the *Recipe* he systematizes further the typology of liberation that he introduced in *Thunder* and newly applies it to the notion of celestial realms. The erudition he displays in positioning the literate ritual specialist/scholar as an indispensable mediator to ensure the "accomplishment" of substances into powerfully efficacious agents coincides temporally with the first few years of his Mongol army-repelling campaign, when he was still scrambling to position himself as a legitimate ritual expert capable of wielding

authoritative knowledge, rites and substances powerful enough to counteract the foreign threat.

By the time Sog bzlog pa revisited the topic in 1612, he had assumed his identity as the Mongol-repeller *par excellence* and was on the cusp of concluding his ritual campaign just as the gTsang pa sde srid government was consolidating control over Lhasa and thereby gaining the domestic foothold necessary to secure Tibet's borders. Sog bzlog pa in fact composed his final contribution to the set of issues while temporarily residing in the court of the gTsang pa rulers at the palace of bSam grub rtse during this critical political transition. His exclusive focus then on the special attributes of powerful substances as spontaneous crystallizations of the *dharmakāya* sphere of non-conceptual, awakened awareness, along with his appeal to the "inconceivability" of the material sphere of practice which he so assiduously positioned himself as expert over throughout his career, certainly reflect an emboldened stance on the issues. At this later phase of his career, Sog bzlog pa seems to have no longer felt the need to carefully account for personal karma and meditative cultivation in the workings of such objects.

Despite such shifts, one thread that runs throughout Sog bzlog pa's diverse strategies is his concern to establish the naturalness of this set of objects by demonstrating that they are not the arbitrary and spurious byproducts of general Tibetan cultural practices, but reflect and resonate with the given order of the universe and/or the seminal core of the psychophysical organism. He demonstrates the naturalness of these objects at first with recourse to his Old School theory of gnosis, through which he roots the efficacy of powerful visions and sounds in a field of embodied knowledge that is not learned, but innate to all beings. He next demonstrates the naturalness of liberation-through-wearing amulets with reference to the rhetoric of naturalism and awareness qua

innate gnosis present in his Great Perfection tradition, a strategy that ends up bridging cognitive and bodily understandings of how amulets achieve their powerful affects on wearers. Finally, Sog bzlog pa demonstrates the naturalness of liberation-through-eating pills by locating their origins in the rarified subjectivity of awakened awareness itself, *dharmakāya*, which altruistically manifests material objects for beings whose only hope of transformation lies in sensory encounters with such things. By Sog bzlog pa's estimation, then, the way things are, naturally, is that mind and body, material substance and immaterial intentionality overlap and even merge along a continuum of materiality: awakened intentionality materializes as amulets, language, pills, and other potent objects; while it is the subtle mind-body-sound-gnosis continuum intrinsic to all beings from which phenomenal experience ultimately emerges, and which accounts for the way visions and sounds reap effects upon persons and other beings. In fact, Sog bzlog pa goes so far as to suggest that it is the progressive refinement of subjectivity through the Old School's "cross over" practices of visionary and auditory experiences with embodied gnosis that ultimately transforms one's flesh, blood, and bones into powerful materializations of awakened intentionality capable of positively impacting others long after one's own demise.⁷⁰¹

Further along these lines, despite their intrinsic powers, this set of four objects cannot, by Sog bzlog pa's account, assume their full potencies in isolation from the human interventions of meditative cultivation, material formation, and multi-media ritual performances. This introduces yet another layer of hybridity – natural object/human artifact. This further complicates these four objects' combined bodily/mental,

⁷⁰¹ Dan Martin (1994, 291) notes that Padma gling pa specifically prescribed accomplishment in the first two of the Old School's "four visions" (*snang ba bzhi*) as a necessary precursor to transforming one's body into relics (*ring bsrel*) that can benefit beings.

material/immaterial properties. In sum, these four objects emerge through Sog bzlog pa's reflections as hybrid quasi-subjects/quasi-objects, things that straddle and fuse within themselves the various binaries of mind and body, symbol and substance, natural object and human artifact, person and thing, even as their naturalness and intrinsic power is emphasized in each case. Clearly, then, the workings of these objects also break down the more provisional bifurcation of symbolic expression from disciplinary action, which, we may recall from the introduction of this chapter, Talal Asad invoked as fundamental to understanding how ritual works in general. In the case of Sog bzlog pa's power objects, symbolic expression, cognitive and bodily cultivation, and intrinsic objective power work off of each other to produce creative tensions and transformational opportunities for the beings who encounter them.

All of this points to a deeper theme, which is present throughout all these arguments: Sog bzlog pa's proclivity to play with boundaries, even as he draws them, and the implications of this strategy for his career as a whole. In *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, Seligman, Weller, Puett and Simon forcefully argue that "ritual," by which they mean a whole approach to life that extends beyond the religious domain to include all areas of human endeavor, creates a subjunctive 'as if' or 'could be' universe" that "makes our shared world possible."⁷⁰² Opposing ritual's "subjective as if" worldview to what they term "sincerity," which projects an "unambiguous vision of reality 'as it really is,'" these authors draw on the reflections of several "modern" and "traditional" ritual theorists, including Winnicott, to claim that fundamental to ritual's capacity to create shared worlds is its tendency to play with

⁷⁰² Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay in the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

boundaries – to accommodate the “dual role of boundaries as both separating and uniting” by producing framing boundaries around actions in conjunction with mechanisms for crossing those boundaries.⁷⁰³ An appreciation of the ritual modality, specifically its formal features more than its content, they argue further, is fundamental to address the complexity of today’s globalized world:

Rather than trying to eliminate boundaries or to make them into unbreachable walls—the two approaches that so typified the twentieth century—ritual continually renegotiates boundaries, living with their instability and labile nature. Only by paying closer attention to the play of ritual—to its formal elements, even when those formal rhythms may overwhelm claims of content—can we find the way to negotiate the emergent demands of our contemporary world.⁷⁰⁴

Sog bzlog pa, who was immersed in the ritual dimension of Tibetan life, demonstrates in his theoretical reflections on the practices of liberation through sensory contact a fundamental concern with boundaries, both in their separating and uniting functions. As a healer, exorcist, and doctrinal apologist, moreover, we can characterize nearly all facets of his career as work, or better yet, play with boundaries, whether these were bodily, territorial, or doctrinal in register. In light of Sog bzlog pa’s enduring preoccupation with the creation, fortification, and negotiation of boundaries in these diverse domains, his remarks on the set of four liberations can perhaps be better understood as a continuation, in the domain of writing, of the central governing paradigm of his life as a whole. Sog bzlog pa’s rituals, medical practices, and writings then emerge as variations on the singular theme of a “ritual” modality of living, in the sense invoked by Seligman, Weller, Puett and Simon, which is more properly concerned with creating

⁷⁰³ Ibid: 13.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid: 11.

opportune events for shared participation in a dynamic space where the lines between body, mind, object, person, and world are drawn, crossed out and recalibrated, again and again, than in providing a closed worldview that offers no room for ambiguity or negotiation. We have witnessed in Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections on the four liberations how his proclivity to demarcate and blur boundaries complicates and renders porous any tidy division of actions, language, and objects into technical and instrumental or symbolic and expressive in thrust. The balancing act that Sog bzlog pa models between the intrinsic powers of objects themselves to act upon humans, and the role of human ritual interventions, and personal subjective qualities in augmenting or limiting the range of objective power, certainly seems, in this sense, to have served an important strategic function as he struggled to negotiate the pressing demands of his own contemporary world and work out a vision of how his powerful objects operate vis-à-vis persons.

Yet, the tantric ritual universe in which Sog bzlog pa was steeped, with its naturalistic grounding of sublime objects in refined, awakened subjectivity, invites us to exchange our own limited vision of things as they seem now with how things could potentially be, or in fact are, on an ultimate level. When we make this transition, as Sog bzlog pa suggests, the subjunctive *as if* world of powerful objects and rites is finally revealed to be the way things have always been all along. The balancing act of Sog bzlog pa's boundary play thus emerges as a particularly powerful technique to bring about non-dual gnosis, collapsing the provisional ways in which we perceive and the ultimate nature of how things are into a single sphere of awakened awareness that integrates mind, body, and substance in a dynamic interplay of gnostic phenomena/awareness. In light of this non-dual goal, the acts of drawing, blurring, crossing, and collapsing the boundaries

between sensory objects, sensate minds, and sensing bodies is more than just a strategy for defending the efficacy of powerful objects in the eyes of critical onlookers. At root, this dynamic mutually implicates persons and things in a shared and distributed sense of identity, agency, and efficacy, where the impossible is rendered possible, and indeed natural, through active involvement in shared experiences beyond the quotidian, binary domain of discursive rationality. With radical non-duality as the very ground and fruition of this boundary play, discursive intellect, even with all its limitations, is never rejected, but incorporated and refined, until it too is discovered to be the very expression of gnosis, interpenetrated with body and substance along a continuum of materiality and meaning.

To further explore how this orientation more directly relates to Sog bzlog pa's ritual world, I shall turn now to the object-oriented ritual liturgies and ritual commentaries that Sog bzlog pa composed and performed. An examination of the principles of efficacy at work in his object-oriented rituals will shed important new light on how the distribution and flow of efficacious power between persons, things, and other entities is rooted in the ritual sphere, and also extends beyond it to inform a general orientation to action, or "ritual ethos," as I shall call it.

CHAPTER FOUR
THINGS IN ACTION AND THE ACTIONS OF THINGS—
A DYNAMIC ONTOLOGY OF
RITUAL OBJECTS

Introduction

This chapter extends Chapter Three’s discussion of the efficacy of power objects that “liberate” to focus squarely upon the ritual actions in which Sog bzlog pa utilized this and other kinds of objects that function as powerful agents of change. In Chapter Three, I examined Sog bzlog pa’s theoretical arguments about the roles of sensory and physical contact relative cultivation, personal karma, and intentionality in the efficacy of a range of sensory experiences, materials, and artifacts that promise liberation through sensory contact. That discussion centered on how Sog bzlog pa valorized the intrinsic power of objects in his polemical wrangles with an opponent who argued instead for the primacy of the cognitive, symbolic dimension of efficacy over the power of things in and of themselves. It also showed how Sog bzlog pa’s considerations were not at all a unilateral defense of material power, but expressed the diverse ways in which cultivation, habit, instinct, intentionality, semiotics, and physiology can all work in conjunction with physical contact and sensory experience to shape sensibilities and enact powerful transformations in world and person alike.

I suggested more fundamentally in Chapter Three that in arguing his case, Sog bzlog pa exhibited a deep concern with boundaries, in both their uniting and separating functions. I proposed that this “boundary play” assumed the form of incremental strategies, through which Sog bzlog pa modeled how the dyads of symbol and substance, cognition and embodied action inter-animate one another throughout the domain of ritual

action. I concluded, with Asad's opposition between disciplinary and expressive action as backdrop, that the terms of Sog bzlog pa's "boundary play" significantly problematize the universal relevance of the entire spectrum of Cartesian dualisms that continue to animate the contemporary academic study of ritual. With this in mind, I tentatively suggested that underlying Sog bzlog pa's discussion of powerful objects is a governing "ritual ethos," by which I mean a dispositional tendency to create and operate within a specialized "third space" set apart, where the boundaries between the materiality of the object-world and the immateriality of the subject-world are blurred to enable a controlled fluidity of power between human and non-human elements.

Here I pursue this line of inquiry further, but from the alternate perspective of the diverse mechanisms by which objects and materials ostensibly become imbued with the capacity to act upon and impact others. I do so through an exploration of a series of Sog bzlog pa's object-oriented ritual texts and ritual commentaries, attending in particular to how Sog bzlog pa's theoretical distribution of efficacious power between sensory objects, sensate minds, and sensing bodies plays out in the ritual practices with which he was involved.

My broader goal is to examine how Sog bzlog pa's object-oriented ritual action enables power, and in turn charisma, to transition between the personal and the material spheres in large measure by means of the power substances and objects used in these ritual proceedings. As witnessed in Chapters One, Two, and Three, Sog bzlog pa's power objects are neither strictly objects, nor subjects, but fluid amalgams containing elements of both, which flow through diverse discursive and material terrains. And despite claims of intrinsic power, for such power objects to reach peak potency they must also pass through, or be "accomplished" in ritual settings. This "third space" of ritual

settings featuring potent objects calls for the master of ceremonies to blur and reconfigure the boundaries between the subjective and objective worlds through choreographing a dense array of sensory media, semiotic operations, and material transactions, all focused on the featured power object. The ritual treatment or production of power objects often ends up imbuing them with properties of animation, which enable them to act in diverse ways upon persons, places, and things inside and outside of ritual precincts.

It is my claim that the necessary role of the ritual specialist in this process makes for a dialectical and recursive movement: the dynamic interaction between objects and persons in sensory-saturated ritual environments ends up constructing and extending personal identity, power, and agency, even while the ritual actor's construction and/or augmentation of an object's power appears in practice to remain the central focus. When considering the subject-agent according to such a perspective, "the object is seen not just to facilitate the acts or point back to the actor, but to expand, or even bring into existence, the subject."⁷⁰⁵ This discussion is an examination of these dialectal processes of objectification and personification, which take place when objects of power are created in or pass through ritual settings. What concerns me most is how such mediations enable power to transition across subject/object, human/non-human divides, and what that might tell us about the movement of power and charisma between the personal and the material domains in Tibetan society at large.

SOG BZLOG PA'S MATTERS OF CONCERN

⁷⁰⁵ Webb Keane, "Subjects and Objects," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, eds. Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Kuechler-Fogden, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2006), 200.

Tibetan rituals all use, to varying degrees, a combination of contemplative exercises (*ting nge 'dzin*), linguistic formulas (*sngags*), and material substances (*rdzas*) as media through which the master of ceremonies can ostensibly make manipulations and transformations in himself, others, and the world. Material substance, as the most tangible component of this triad, often serves as the key locus in the processes of generating, concentrating, and directing the power felt necessary to bring about such changes. This is true whether a ritual's explicit aim is pragmatic, karmic, or soteriological in scope.

Sog bzlog pa had an ambivalent relationship with ritual substances and objects. In several instances, Sog bzlog pa vehemently insists upon the importance of material substances in ritual settings. Time and again in his ritual texts he dwells on the minutia of material specifications and criticizes others for their scant attention to these details. In yet other contexts, however, Sog bzlog pa criticizes his contemporaries for their overreliance on materials. In these cases, which typically involve “rituals of initiation” (*dbang chog*), he argues that meaning and referential signification ought to take precedence over the power of brute materiality, or the power materials accrue in ritual settings. Even in such situations, however, Sog bzlog pa nonetheless deems the use of materials as indispensable. It is rather the context-specific roles of certain substances that he takes issue with. In sum, Sog bzlog pa's equivocations revolve around to what extent power inheres within a particular substance's physicality, such that it can be transferred to others through direct sensory contact alone; and to what extent a particular substance should be made to function by way of representing, or signifying some other underlying value, or meaning.

Much like what we saw in Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections, his rituals call for the dialectical interplay between these polarities of intrinsic material power, on the

one hand, and discursive signification, on the other, through drawing, burring, and at times collapsing the boundaries between this and other dyads. In a similar vein as the theoretical “boundary play” explored in Chapter Three, Sog bzlog pa’s treatment of the power of substances at use in his rituals might be characterized in terms of ongoing oscillations between these two poles. At one extreme are certain special materials, such as Brahmin flesh pills, for instance. These are treated as extremely potent embodiments of power in and of themselves, whose ritual treatment only unleashes, or augments this power. They exert influence directly upon others and operate largely through physical proximity, touch, or ingestion. At the opposite extreme are other materials, usually, but not exclusively artifacts, which are used in initiation rituals primarily as iconic or symbolic props for the representation and communication of meanings. These kinds of objects function primarily through the combined sensory media of vision and speech, where verbal exegesis tends to play a particularly active role. A third category of material, the most prevalent variety, straddles these two categories. This type includes substances whose presumed intrinsic properties or the categories to which they belong mark them as somewhat efficacious, but which take on amplified powers through the mediations of complex ritual proceedings and interpretative operations. These items consist of all the usual ritual paraphernalia – the oblations, thread-cross structures, cairns, effigies, and deity images – that feature in most Tibetan rituals.

The following discussion examines these three categories of objects. It starts with reflections upon those objects deemed most powerful, in and of themselves. These are the flesh pills and ambrosia concoctions that we witnessed in Chapters One and Two as forming such a strong component in the identity of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu. I follow that up with reflections upon the widest category of objects. This includes objects with

less a priori power, and which therefore require more diverse means to create or augment power in ritual settings. Although these items consist of all the usual ritual paraphernalia that appear in Tibetan rituals, my analysis will focus specifically on those objects as they are enlisted to repel enemies. I have chosen this emphasis because the flow of power at work in violent object-oriented rites is more easily discernible, and also because of Sog bzlog pa's own deep involvement with this category of objects during his 32-year Mongol-repelling campaign. In addition to the aforementioned items that feature in most Tibetan rites, "enemy repelling objects," we may recall from Chapter Two, also include *stūpas*, temples, sounds of publicly resounded scriptures, and other items, large and small, believed to have the capacity to repel, or even kill human and non-human enemies. Finally, as a point of comparison, I will briefly explore the uses of initiation substances and props, objects treated largely as devoid of intrinsic power, and used primarily to condense meanings and communicate those discursively to initiates. With this last category of object, I specifically interrogate controversies surrounding the sensory media deemed most appropriate to engage them through.

Identifying across a wide swath of rituals their materials, the properties of those materials, and the diverse processes by which they are formed into objects and rendered powerful is an important step toward discerning what makes a ritual effective in Sog bzlog pa's world. Analysis of these three specific categories of objects shows that discursive signification and intrinsic material power operate in a sense as ideal types, situated along a continuum of materiality and meaning, where one or another mode is emphasized without negating the other, but incorporating it. In practice, this means that the intrinsic power of objects never severs objects from their symbolic associations and meanings, while symbolic objects can also transmit power through physical contact. In

other words, the roles of objects as symbol or as substance are not only commensurable, but mutually interact to ensure the efficacy of rites with real material impact in the world.

Whatever else these object-oriented rites may do, they are explicitly executed to “liberate” beings, “repel” enemies, or “initiate” students, respectively. The principles of efficacy at work in each these rituals, even while emphasizing the ideal types of intrinsic material power or symbolic signification, also include a full spectrum of other mechanisms that run the gamut between these poles. These principles range from incorporation, ingestion, and contiguity, to mimesis, category inclusion, resemblance, aesthetics, discursive knowledge, exegesis, and others. Often several principles overlap, or are compounded in a single ritual episode or object. This condensation of principles of efficacy in the vicinity of objects – regardless of whether physical contact or discursive signification is emphasized in each case – is a key factor that ensures that these object-oriented rites can meet their intended aims. Tracing the ways these principles of efficacy work, alone and in combination, throughout this spectrum of rituals, provides us with a lens into the way in which Sog bzlog pa’s “ritual ethos” operates in action. And as we shall see in the discussion ahead, this examination illustrates foremost how the boundary play characteristic of this ethos enables power and charisma to flow between persons, objects, and other non-human entities.

I. Incorporation, Contact, and Ingestion in Pill Practices

A. Brahmin Flesh: Discourse, Performance, and Consumption

One important way in which power objects figure in Sog bzlog pa’s rituals is as materializations of the altruistic awakened intentions of buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities, and past masters. I begin this discussion where I left off in Chapter Three, with Sog

bzlog pa’s evolving position on how and to what extent Brahmin flesh and other potent edibles have sufficient efficacy to bring about changes in the subjective condition of consumers. We may recall from that discussion that Brahmin flesh pills confront us with a rather complex set of formulations that highlights both the power of certain types of substance, in and of themselves, and the necessity of mediating ritual procedures in unleashing, augmenting, and directing that power. This tension between the powers of substance qua substance vis-à-vis mediating ritual procedures invites speculation on the sources and nature of the power involved.

MEDIATED ORIGINS, HYBRID INGREDIENTS

In light of Sog bzlog pa’s formulations explored in Chapter Three about the efficacy of seven-times-born Brahmin flesh, let us briefly touch upon Sog bzlog pa’s Old School account of the general origins of the flesh before delving into the ingredients of his own concoction.⁷⁰⁶ Sog bzlog pa’s rendition of the Old School account describes the first seven-times born Brahmins in India as seven emanations of Avalokiteśvara,⁷⁰⁷ whose flesh, after their demise, was made, or “accomplished” (*sgrubs*) into “medicine” (*sman*)

⁷⁰⁶ Another prevalent charter myth for Treasure seven-times-born Brahmin flesh relates how Padmasambhava prophesizes to prince Mu khri btsan po that in future incarnations the prince’s flesh will become Treasure Brahmin flesh endowed with powerfully beneficial qualities. This account appears in several Treasure biographies of Padmasambhava, such as O rgyan gling pa, “Lha rje lung bstan cing skye bdun sha’i phan yon bstan pa’i le’u (*le’u* 102),” in *Pad+ma bka’ thang shel brag ma* (Rewalsar, distt. Mandi, H.P. India: Zigar Drukpa Kargyud Institute, 1985), 644 - 654; Sangs rgyas gling pa, “Lha rje la lung bstan cing skye bdun sha’i phan yon bstan pa’i le’u ste/ go dgu pa/,” in *bKa’ thang gser phreng* (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1985), 685 - 693; and Padma gling pa, “Yar rje o rgyan gling pa lung bstan zhing skye bdun sha’i phan yon bstan pa’i le’u ste/ go bdun pa/,” in *bKa’ thang mun sel sgron me*, vol. 2 (Thimphu, Bhutan: Drug Sherig Press, 1981), 298-306. For yet another charter myth, which details the flesh’s general Indian origins within three emanations of Avalokiteśvara, see Padma gling pa, *Dam rdzas skye bdun ril bu’i lo rgyus mthong ba don ldan*, in *Rig ’dzin padma glin pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che*, vol. 7 (Thimphu: Kunsang Tobgay, 1975-1976), 489- 492.

⁷⁰⁷ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 448.2-448.3. Sog bzlog pa lists these seven emanations as follows: Narakapālin (*mi’i thod pa can*), Śaṅkhākāra (*dung gi rnam cha can*), Kosali (*ko sa li*), Vimalagarbha (*dri med snying po*), Vimalaviśvavati (*dri me kun ldan*), and Prahasti (*pra ha ti*).

by Mañjuśrīmitra and the other eight *vidyādhara*s of Treasure tradition lore.⁷⁰⁸

Thereafter, Sog bzlog pa continues, Padmasambhava made this medicine into “liberation through eating” (*myong grol*) pills, and “established in liberation all the limitless beings in the nine great lands of India who could be tamed through substance (*rdzas*).”⁷⁰⁹ Later still, Sog bzlog pa goes on, while Padmasambhava was residing in Tibet, he invited from India four other seven-times born Brahmins.⁷¹⁰ The four died at the border, whereupon Padmasambhava brought their flesh and bones (*sha rus*) to bSam yas ’ching(=’chims) bu.⁷¹¹ There he combined it with the flesh pills formed from the previous seven emanations of Avalokiteśvara and mixed this with bodily relics – hair, blood, seminal fluids, finger and toe nails – from numerous previous masters and buddhas, along with an extensive list of other sacred substances, such as “earth and stones from the seven great lands, long-life water and ambrosia from the ocean and the land of gods, and all the medicinal elixirs from the lands of the various domains of gods, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *gandharvas*, *kumbhāṇḍas*, and humans.”⁷¹² In sum, Padmasambhava combined “all the *samaya* substance (*dam rdzas*) throughout *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.”⁷¹³ He then “increased” (*’phel*) the mass of the material exponentially through two “accomplishment rites” (*sgrubs pa*), first at bSam yas ’ching(=’chims) bu and later at Shel brag. Both rites featured skulls as ritual vessels for the concoction. Finally, the Master of Oḍiyāna

⁷⁰⁸ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 448.3.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid: 448.4. *rgya gar gyi yul chen po dgu ru rdzas kyi[=kyis] ’dul ba’i ’gro ba mtha’ yas pa rnam sgrub pa la bkod par bshad la/*

⁷¹⁰ Ibid: 448.6.

⁷¹¹ Ibid: 448.6-448.1.

⁷¹² Ibid: 449.1-449.5. *yul chen po bdun gyi sa rdo/ rgya mtsho dang lha yul gyi bdud rtsi/ tshe chu/ lha klu gnod sbyin dri za grul bum mi la sogs pa’i yul gyi rtsi bcud sman du gyur tshad dang/*

⁷¹³ Ibid: 449.5: *mdor na ’khor ’das kyi dam rdzas thams cad sbyar te/*

“concealed it, along with the extra Brahmin flesh, in Treasure locations throughout each and every region of Tibet, thus ensuring that it would continue to proliferate, without ever running out, until *samsāra* is void.”⁷¹⁴

By Sog bzlog pa’s account then there are no “raw materials” per se in the concoction of the Treasure variety of seven-times-born Brahmin flesh. The flesh arrives in Sog bzlog pa’s times already treated by four successive ritual events – two in India and two in Tibet. And even before ritual accomplishment, from the moment these figures died and their flesh became an item of value, the substance can already be characterized as a quasi-object/quasi-subject, a hybrid thing, neither fully material, nor personal, but a collective that fuses both. To complicate matters more, the flesh is mixed with numerous other ingredients, not from powerful beings, but from powerful locales.⁷¹⁵ While it also comes mediated by the Tibetan landscape – itself, densely populated with non-human spirit entities⁷¹⁶ – where it had lain for centuries until uncovered and reactivated by destined Treasure revealers. Treasure revealers then treated the rediscovered flesh in yet other accomplishment rites, before finally distributing it to disciples like Sog bzlog pa, who treated the substances yet again through accomplishment rites in the production of their own pills. And last but not least, mediating the reception of the flesh is the historical origin myth recounted by Sog bzlog pa. This historical account works in conjunction with narrative vignettes that depict the flesh’s miraculous powers to

⁷¹⁴ Ibid: 449.5-449.6. /*de nas re rnam dang bram ze’i sha lhag ma rnam yul so sor gter gnas rnam su sba nas ’khor ba ma stong kyi bar du mi zad par spel bar mdzad yin no/*

⁷¹⁵ Dan Martin (1994, 278) observes that such “relics of geography,” as he calls them, are also often included within Tibetan *stūpas*, or reliquaries.

⁷¹⁶ I refer here to the widespread Tibetan practice of propitiating local territorial deities. For more on such practices, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1998).

authenticate the substance in the eyes of potential detractors, recipients, and for posterity.⁷¹⁷

Sog bzlog pa's own concoction and ritual preparation of seven-times born Brahmin flesh pills is in large part a recapitulation of Padmasambhava's paradigmatic performances. The ingredients for Sog bzlog pa's pills, to which he refers collectively as "a sublime vehicle for blessings" (*byin brlabs kyi rta bzang ba*), include at least 138 different items.⁷¹⁸ Among them are the flesh, bones, blood, hair, teeth, nails, and clothing of past masters believed to be "seven-times born," mixed with previously revealed Treasure pills of seven-times-born flesh and other revealed Treasure bodily fragments from previous masters, Buddha relics, and even a few material "concentrates" said to embody all the sacred objects present at one or another locale.

Sog bzlog pa mentions in the prelude to this list of ingredients, "I concocted pills from precisely what, as fortune would have it, has fallen into my own hands."⁷¹⁹ Among the bodily fragments and Treasure substances listed, those of Sog bzlog pa's immediate masters – Zhig po gling pa, Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan, Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang grags pa, and Bla chen Chos kyi rgyal po – and their immediate masters – Padma gling pa, sPrul sku gdong dkar la kha ba, mChog ldan mgon po, and others – feature most prominently. Also included is "a thumb sized catalyst vehicle, which is a concentrate of the sacred receptacles (*rten 'dus*) present at sNang rtse."⁷²⁰ sNang rtse, the reader may

⁷¹⁷ Richard J. Parmentier ("The Pragmatic Semiotics of Culture," *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, vol. 116-1, 1997, 62) astutely remarks that authenticating histories and miracle tales are a prevalent feature of relic cults in general.

⁷¹⁸ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 450.2-454.3.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid: 450.2. ...*bdag gi lag tu skal ba dang mtshams par ji ltar babs pa rnam ril bu bsgril ba ni/*

⁷²⁰ Ibid: 453.3. *snang rtse'i rten 'dus phabs rta mthe bong tsam/*

recall, was the natal territory of Sog bzlog pa's master Zhig po gling pa. Moreover, despite the prominence of Old School figures on the ingredients list, there is also a markedly non-sectarian bent to Sog bzlog pa's pills. Several bodily fragments and "flesh pills" on the list of ingredients claim to originate from the bodies of Sa skya, bKa' brgyud, and bKa' gdams masters. If Dan Martin's observations about the sect-specific nature of *stūpa* relics is indeed accurate and can be extended to the composition of relic pills, then the non-sectarian bent of Sog bzlog pa's pill concoction appears to have been quite unique.⁷²¹

When we take a step back from this list and attempt to account for what presumably gives these items their power, the most conspicuous common feature is of course that nearly all the ingredients are claimed to originate from the body of one or another past master or buddha. Each item is presented as a material fragment of the physical existence of a human being who him or her self was held to embody blessings and power while living. As Sog bzlog pa argues in his polemical texts, the physical bodies of perfected persons are not simply conduits for their immaterial realization. Rather, they are the materializations of awakened compassionate intentionality. Recall Sog bzlog pa's argument: "like the power of transference belonging to substances such as magnets, and like the way treated mercury transforms base metals into gold, here also *the capacity of the substance* brings about the attainment of celestial realms." It follows, then, that the transformative powers of subjective qualities, or moral perfection, can take material form and be distributed throughout space and time via the fragments of their physical bodies to positively impact the bodies and minds of those who ingest them.

⁷²¹ Dan Martin (1994), 277.

Physical incorporation and contact is the operative principle at work here in how the agency of these ingredients is believed to have accrued. And as ingredients for the concoction of pills, incorporation through ingestion and other modes of physical contact is deemed the way in which the power of these pills is finally intended to reap effects on recipient consumers. Consequently, the ingredients can be described as particularly potent elements, which condense, embody, and direct, by way of physical and existential connection, the enduring presence of the figures within which they were once incorporated.

The nature of these ingredients presents a paradigmatic example of what the late British anthropologist Alfred Gell termed “distributed personhood:” the dynamic by which a person’s sense of being, or agency is regarded to extend beyond the body boundaries to animate other objects, places, or persons.⁷²² The concept of distributed, or extended personhood is particularly felicitous for understanding how this and other types of power substances and objects come to function as quasi-subjective agents of change. I will revisit this idea periodically in the discussion ahead, exploring the many shades of this dynamic as it plays out with the substances and objects under examination in this chapter.

⁷²² Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 96-154. Gell credits the notion of “distributed personhood” to anthropologists Marilyn Strathern (1988) and Roy Wagner (1991), who analyzed understandings of personhood in Melanesian societies. Gell notes the particular influence of Wagner’s concept of “Fractal Personhood,” which, he claims, Wagner “mobilized to overcome typically ‘Western’ oppositions between individual (ego) and society, parts and wholes, singular and plural (1998, 140). Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007, 28, fn. 12) cite Strathern’s notion of the ‘dividual’ (1988, 13, 15; 1991, 53) as an important contribution in this regard. They claim, moreover, that Strathern borrowed this term from McKim Marriot’s (1976,11) use of ‘dividual’ to describe the unbounded, or ‘divisible’ character of the person in South Asian contexts, in contrast to the assumption in much modern Western thought that persons are discrete, bound, individual units. For a recent study that utilizes Gell’s insights to explore the person-like agencies attributed to books in Tibetan cultural contexts, see Hildegard Diemberger, “Holy Books as Ritual Objects and Vessels of Teaching in the Era of the ‘Further Spread of the Doctrine’ (*bsTan pa yang dar*),” in *Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World*, ed. Katia Buffetrille (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 9-42.

Along with the principal “vehicle” (*rta*), a composite of all the ingredients listed above, Sog bzlog pa also includes in his flesh-pill concoction the five fleshes (Tib. *sha lnga*, Skt. *pañcamāṃsa*) and five ambrosias (Tib. *bdud rtsi lnga*, Skt. *pañcāmṛta*), substances that appear in late Indian Buddhist *tantras* as a standard feature of the ritual practices enjoined in those scriptures.⁷²³ In this context, these substances take on a character that is markedly unlike those that are usually implemented in Indian tantric rituals, which, according to Christian Wedemeyer, acquire power in association with strict Brahmanical codes prohibiting contact with and consumption of these polluting meats and fluids.⁷²⁴ The five fleshes and five ambrosias incorporated into Sog bzlog pa’s Brahmin flesh concoction are the flesh and bodily fluids of past masters and bodhisattva emanations, and are therefore regarded as powerful based on their purity, not their pollution. The horse flesh, for instance, is “from the steeds of Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho⁷²⁵ and Zhig po gling pa, because they both left hoof prints in stone;”⁷²⁶ while the dog flesh is “from the guard dog of rTsa ri,⁷²⁷ whose death brought the formation of a

⁷²³ Christian Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 106. Wedemeyer states that the five fleshes, or five meats, as he translates the term, typically include beef, dog, elephant, horse, and human flesh, whereas the five ambrosias tend to include human feces, urine, blood, semen, and marrow, or flesh.

⁷²⁴ This is the fundamental argument of Wedemeyer’s (2013) recent study.

⁷²⁵ Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506) was the 7th Karmapa in this incarnation series.

⁷²⁶ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 454.3-454.4. *rta’i sha ni karma pa chos grags rgya mtsho’i phyibs dang/ zhig po gling pa’i phyibs gnyis kyi rdo la rmig rjes bzhag pas de gnyis kyi sha dang/*

⁷²⁷ rTsa ri refers to a popular pilgrimage site in remote southwestern Tibet famous for its “Pure Crystal Mountain” (Dag pa shel ri), which is believed to be the snow-covered mountain abode of the tantric Buddhist deities Cakrasamvara and Vajravārāhī. This location forms the subject matter of Toni Huber’s pioneering study of Tibetan pilgrimage practices, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

rainbow; with a piece attached of the canine tooth of Bla ma Zhang’s guard dog,⁷²⁸ which was renowned to be an emanation of the protector himself.”⁷²⁹ Among the five ambrosias, moreover, are “the seminal fluids from the master of Oḍiyāṇa and consort, the urine and ambrosia of previous masters, a pill of mKhan chen Blo gros rab yangs pa’s brain,⁷³⁰ and an ambrosia pill formed from Ma gcig zha ma’s brain.”⁷³¹ Unable to procure elephant and cow flesh from the bodies of previous powerful beings, Sog bzlog pa included “ordinary” versions, cleansed with a ritual procedure from the Sa skya tradition intended to purify negative deeds. This demonstrates once again that the power of these substances is presumed to derive from their intrinsic purity, as materializations of past awakened beings, and not from a connotative semiosis of pollution rooted in Indian Brahmanical mores.

With the addition of these substances Sog bzlog pa incorporated in his pills versions of the five flesh and five ambrosias that are marked as particularly potent, and even on par with the main ingredients of his “vehicle.” Much like the other ingredients, these substances extend the power and blessings of past masters, buddhas, and now,

⁷²⁸ Bla ma Zhang is of course the famed Tshal pa bka’ brgyud master Bla ma Zhang brTson ’grus grags pa (1123/1121-1193). For a recent study of this figure and his role in Tibetan religion and politics, see Carl S. Yamamoto, *Vision and Violence: Lama Zhang and the Politics of Charisma in Twelfth-Century Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁷²⁹ Ibid: 454.3-454.5. *khyi’i sha ni rtsa ri’i mgon khyi shi ba la ’ja’ zug pa de’i sha dang/ bla ma zhang gi mgon khyi mgon po nyid kyi sprul par grags pa de’i mche ba’i dum bu btags la/*

⁷³⁰ While the precise dates of this figure, otherwise known as Chos rje Blo gros rab yangs pa, are unknown, we do know based on a written correspondence (*Chos rje blo gros rab yangs pa’i zhu lan, rGyal dbang rin chen phun tshogs kyi bka’ ’bum*, vol. *co*, in *’Bri gung bka’ brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, vol. 69 (*tu*), Lhasa: S.N., 2004: 227-230) that he was an associate of the ’Bri gung hierarch Rin chen phun tshogs chos kyi rgyal po (1509-1557) connected with the Sa skya *Path and Fruition (lam ’bras)* tradition.

⁷³¹ Ibid: 454.6-455.1. *u rgyan yab yum gyi byang sems dang/ bla ma gong ma’i gsang chab dang/ bdud rtsi dang/ mkhan chen blo gros rab yangs kyi dbu klad ril bu dang/ ma gcig zha ma’i dbu klad la bdud rtsi ril bu sgrubs...* Ma gcig zha ma (1062-1149) was an illustrious female master who studied under Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (b. 11th century), Vairocana (b. 11th century), and Rong zom chos bzang (1042-1136), among others, and was associated with the “Pacifying” (*zhi byed*) tradition.

animal bodhisattva emanations, through fragments of their bodies and remnants of their hair, nails, blood, and seminal fluids. The operative principle at work in the case of these five meats and five ambrosias is intrinsic power, not signification. That is to say that the use and consumption of these substances does not so much connote meanings extrinsic to them, such as non-dual gnosis, or other doctrinal notions. Rather, these items appear to be added for the intrinsic power of the substances themselves.

This emphasis on intrinsic power, however, does not negate the role of discursive understandings. As you may have noticed in Sog bzlog pa's descriptions of the ingredients – the Brahmin flesh and all the other substances – authenticating histories and miracle tales are a crucial component in mediating their reception. The transformative power of the pill's ingredients is, above all, a formulation constructed through authoritative claims regarding their miraculous power and efficacy, and narratives that establish the historical trajectory of the ingredients from their powerful sources to the hands of contemporary owners. Sog bzlog pa's descriptions of the flesh's origins and effects serve this authenticating function. These narrative passages mediate the reception and use of his ingredients, enmeshing the substances in a network of symbolic valences, even as they promote the power of their materiality. And yet, here entextualization is not just a legitimating discursive veneer layered atop a material substrate. Through inducting audiences into how they are to regard these substances, narrative writings about substance serve also to infuse it with the presence of the persons with whom it was once incorporated. And as we shall see next, the bringing into presence that is effectuated by writing about substance also becomes a principle behind the aesthetic ritual mediations through which the substance is subsequently treated.

The resultant concoction – the vehicle with the five fleshies and five ambrosias – is a dense amalgam of numerous bodily pieces and physical concentrates, each of which acts as an extension of one or another past Buddha, master, or bodhisattva, combined for maximum effect, and entextualized to ensure legitimacy and make present past masters and timeless buddhas and bodhisattvas.

MULTI-MEDIA RITUAL “ACCOMPLISHMENT”

With all the ingredients in place, Sog bzlog pa is ready to “accomplish” the pills through ritual. As we saw in Sog bzlog pa’s descriptions of the flesh’s origins, the ritual procedure by which a master accomplishes the concoction and forms it into pills is perhaps the signal most defining mediation that these substances undergo in their life trajectory from ingredients to “liberation-through-eating” pills. Although Sog bzlog pa provides few details of this process in his own texts, we know from other sources that this involves a dense array of multi-media operations, all centered on the pill concoction.⁷³²

Each Treasure seven-times-born pill often comes with its own specific ritual liturgy for “accomplishing” the pill. Despite superficial differences, their structure is more or less identical. As I mentioned in Chapter One, seven-times-born Brahmin pill accomplishment rites prescribe that the master of ceremonies convene an assembly of ritual participants for ten days, seven days,⁷³³ or sometimes fewer at a specially designated space and time, wherein they continually repeat in unison the associated

⁷³² I base this brief overview upon the work of Sog bzlog pa’s grand disciple, Lha btsun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med, *Dam rdzas skye bdun sman sgrub kyi cha lag yang gsang gnad sgrub zhag bdun ma*, in *Rig ’dzin srog sgrub* (Delhi: Chos spyod dpar skrun khang, 2000), 737 – 742. I augment this with my own fieldwork observations of a performance of this ritual during a Great Accomplishment rite held at bKra shis sdings, Sikkim, in December and January of 2010-2011.

⁷³³ Lha btsun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med’s practice text, for instance, is intended to be practiced for “seven days,” hence its title, “the seven day practice” (*zhag bdun ma*).

liturgy, often in sessions of four or more throughout each day. These liturgies invariably call for the repetition of specific mantras, the performance of gestures, and the imagination of corresponding contemplative visualizations, all with the pill concoction as their focal point. Like standard Old School great accomplishment rites, these rituals incorporate the use of other substances and objects, such as oblations, offerings, and ambrosia. But when Brahmin flesh (or medicinal ambrosia, as we shall see below) is involved, this occupies center stage. The ingredients are mixed together at some critical juncture after the rite commences and are then infused, or enchanted by the ritual proceedings, particularly through the continuous repetition of potent mantra formulas, in association with corresponding visualization exercises and the material transactions of offerings, oblations, and other sensory ritual props and paraphernalia. All the mantras and visualizations, moreover, typically feature Avalokiteśvara, or his Lotus Family *nirmāṇakāya* emanation, Padmasambhava.

Uninterrupted liturgical performance is crucial to ensuring the enchantment of the already potent substance. Often a rotating group of ritual participants is charged with the responsibility of maintaining the unbroken repetition of the ritual's core mantra even through the late night hours. Enchantment of the concoction is often effected and visibly demonstrated by a representative of the mantra-intoning group holding at his heart a *vajra* with a five-color string tied to its center. The string extends to a three dimensional *maṇḍala* where the mixed ingredients are held, typically inside human skull bowls. During recitation, contemplative visualizations feature the liturgy's presiding deities, mantra syllables, and their radiation and absorption of light rays, seminal fluids, syllables, or other imagined media of exchange that act as condensations and mediators of the central deity's presence. These sonic and cognitive media are believed to work in tandem

to infuse the substance with greater power, and to release its dormant potency. Moreover, as indicated by Padmasambhava's accomplishment rite referenced above, tangible signs (*rtags*) of ritual success, such as the physical increase of the sacred substance and other properties of animation are one of the ritual's primary explicit goals. These serve as proof that the substance has been properly accomplished for distribution, and can therefore also signal the culmination of the rite.

Before we examine Sog bzlog pa's specific references to sensory signs of ritual success and how he rolled and distributed the finished product, a brief digression into the logics of visualization and mantra will help make sense of how cognition and language are thought to ideally interact with substance in the accomplishment of powerful edibles.

DEITY YOGA IN THE CREATION OF SELF AND OTHER

Perhaps one of the most distinctive features of Buddhist tantric practice is the reconstruction of personal identity in the form and identity of the divine. This process of re-indexing personal identity takes the form of a radical shift of subjective center from the "I" that is the referent of our ordinary discourse-self to the divine trans-subjective "I" described and enjoined in tantric theoretical treatises and ritual manuals. This procedure formally occurs for the first time in the context of an initiation ceremony (*dīkṣā*, *abhiṣekha*). Through a series of carefully choreographed physical (*mudrā*), verbal (*mantra*), and cognitive (*samādhi*) movements intended to assimilate through mimicry the deity's awakened body, speech, and mind, a tantric master leads the adherent to gradually close the gap between him or herself and the divine "I" described in texts. Finally the all-powerful divine "I" completely absorbs, or displaces the ordinary "I" in a decisive event of total identification. Thereafter the adherent repeatedly reenacts this

identification process in the context of daily ritual worship (*sādhana*) to gradually stabilize this newfound sense of divine subjectivity and integrate the deity's qualities. Despite the many theoretical and practical variations on this process according to broad sectarian distinctions, as well as the prevailing dualist or monist emphases of the theoretical systems involved, this basic format is nonetheless strikingly consistent across the extant pan-Asian Buddhist tantric literature.

Buddhist traditions of *tantra* theoretically root the practice of reconfiguring personal identity in the Mahāyāna formulations of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*, Tib. *stong pa nyid*) and buddhanature (Skt. *tathāgatagarbha*, Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa 'i snying po*). Most generally, emptiness means that persons and phenomena lack any permanent, unitary, or independent essence; and, consequently, all phenomena exist as interdependent originations; i.e., they emerge in dependence upon and in relationship with other phenomena. Phrased the other way around, since all phenomena arise in dependence upon and in relationship to one another, all phenomena can be said to be empty of any unitary, permanent, or independent essence. And from yet another perspective, because nothing possesses a unitary, permanent, or independent nature, absolutely anything is possible, that is, once the requisite causes and conditions are brought together.

The notion of interdependence qua emptiness calls for de-centered and fluid understandings of both person and object, along with the ability to bring about specific transformations in self and world through knowledge of the proper causes and conditions. It stands to reason then that the term interdependent origination (*rten 'brel*) also came to gather the additional meaning in Tibetan of “auspicious connection,” or “coincidence.” An auspicious connection, or coincidence is something that can “come together” (*'grig*) non-

volitionally. And it is also something that can be volitionally “aligned” (*sgrig*) by powerful and knowledgeable persons in order to hasten a course of action that otherwise might not transpire.

Tantric techniques are often framed as particularly potent “auspicious connections” for the realization of not only emptiness qua interdependent origination, but also emptiness qua buddhanature. Along with emptiness in its negative formulation is the notion that underlying the multiple layers of contingent identity each sentient being is intrinsically endowed with the unconditioned essence of awakening, or buddhanature. Regardless of whether buddhanature is interpreted as actual or potential, it is categorically described as the luminous, uncompounded, ineffable ultimate reality, accessible only upon recognition of the conditioned and contingent nature of all relative phenomenal existence. Yet, in keeping with Buddhism’s middle way orientation, realization of the ultimate does not entail rejection of the relative. Rather, this ultimate ground and fruition of awakened identity is consistently phrased in terms of the unity of multiple sets of corresponding dyads. These include not only the unity of ultimate and relative truths, but also the unity of perceiver and perceived, emptiness and appearance, emptiness and compassion, emptiness and bliss, and emptiness and cognizance, to name but a few. We can see in these formulations that both the foundation and goal of Sog bzlog pa’s ritual practices is the resolution of tensions between the polarities, wrongly imagined, of difference and unity, presence and absence, materiality and immateriality, the contingent and the absolute. Consequently, Sog bzlog pa’s “boundary play” between these and other oppositions, a notion that I introduced in Chapter Three, can be seen as a

powerful way, rooted in a ritual ethos, of chipping away at the human tendency to reify the dyads that define and limit our experience and existence.⁷³⁴

Without getting too deep into the details of the stages of visualization, mantra, and gesture that constitute the often baroque process of what is called “deity yoga,” it suffices to remark that the notion of emptiness qua dependent origination and buddhanature forms its theoretical bedrock, even if only on the ideal level. Based on this set of formulations, the ritualist, as already always de-centered and absent of essential identity, can dissolve her ordinary identity into emptiness and emerge in the image and identity of a deity, enacting the performative embodiment of buddhanature as a method to experientially realize the fundamental nature of empty appearance. By the same token, the deity’s image, as a spontaneous crystallization of the deity’s fully developed altruistic intention to benefit beings throughout time and space “until *samsāra* is void,” also nonetheless lacks intrinsic nature. This insubstantiality, coupled with the presence of boundless compassion, entails that the deity alight whenever and wherever ritualists direct their attention toward it, so that ritualists can come to see themselves and all their actions as extensions of appearing yet empty divine agency. The practice of deity yoga, then, can ideally be construed as an especially potent “arrangement” of auspicious connections, a set of causes and conditions that facilitates direct experience of the non-dual union of emptiness and phenomenal presence, the ultimate goal of Mahāyāna

⁷³⁴ This supposition is reflected in the commonplace Tibetan Buddhist understanding of deity yoga as a technique to purify clinging to ordinary deluded appearance. For detailed traditional formulations about how this process of purification through deity yoga presumably works, specifically according to Tibet’s Old School, see Jigme Lingpa, Patrul Rinpoche, Getse Mahapandita and Dharmachakra Translation Committee, *Deity, Mantra, and Wisdom: Development Stage Meditation in Tibetan Buddhist Tantra* (Ithaca and Boulder: Snow Lion Publications, 2006); and more recently, Shechen Gyaltsap IV and Kunkyen Tenpe Nyima, trans. Dharmachakra Translation Committee, *Vajra Wisdom: Deity Practice in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2012).

Buddhist practice, while provoking an extension of that awakened awareness into all one's activities.

The practice of deity yoga in ritual contexts that feature substances often involves not just the recreation of oneself in the body, speech, and mind of the deity. It also stipulates the recreation of one's environment as the deity's palace and celestial realm, along with a profusion of mimetic deity images projected into the space in front of oneself (*mdun bskyed*) and into, or as the substances and objects transacted during the ritual (*rdzas lha*). These three distinct aspects of deity – self, front, and substance – are visualized to operate in tandem during ritual proceedings. Cognitively created deity images thus function as the self, others, and objects in interactions that occur within the frame of ritual settings.

And yet, despite the emphasis on cognition, emptiness, and other notions that appear to presuppose the non-existence of deities in and of themselves, the culminating moment in the process of “generating the deity” suggests quite the opposite. I am referring to the standard procedure in deity yoga rituals of invoking wisdom deities (Tib. *ye shes sems dpa'*, Skt. *jñānasattva*), or “actual” deities from their “natural” abode of *dharmadhātu*, “reality's expanse,” so that they inhabit for the duration of the ritual the “commitment deities” (Tib. *dam tshig sems dpa'*, Skt. *samayasattva*), those deities imagined by ritualists in contemplative visualization exercises. This fusion of real wisdom deity and imagined commitment deity, called the “descent of wisdom” (*ye shes dbab pa*), appears to be a crucial component in providing ritual actors the agency felt necessary to ensure the efficacy of the rite in question. The identification effected by this operation, which itself also incorporates gestures, mantras, and visualizations that all serve as indexes for the arrival and incorporation of “wisdom deities,” calls for ritualists

to adopt “divine pride” (*lha yi nga rgyal*): the unassailable conviction that one *is in fact* the deity, and that the deities as others and substances too are *actually* present. This set of conditions ostensibly enables the ritualist to extend the deity’s supernatural agency – through self-deity, front-deity, substance-deity, or more commonly, a combination thereof – in actions of body, speech, and mind directed toward other beings, objects, or locales.

Another key mediator, in addition to cognitive visualization, which figures in the ritual accomplishment of flesh pills and all deity yoga rituals for that matter is mantra. Mantras, as the awakened speech of the deity, are specialized linguistic formulas that constitute the quintessence of wisdom deities’ agency in the world. Mantras are therefore the premiere linguistic medium – used in close connection with the visualization of deities and their radiation and absorption of light rays, syllables, seminal fluids, and other cognitive media of exchange – that ritualists employ in their interactions as deities with other deities, persons, and objects. We may recall from Chapter Three that Mahāyāna theory often describes mantras, along with powerful substances and medicines, as the spontaneously arisen condensations of the compassionate intentionality of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In the context of tantric ritual, the deity’s mantra functions as the life force of its awakened mind (*thugs srog*), which can be invoked (*skul*) through oral repetition, and directed according to the will of the ritualist qua deity. Much like visualized imagery, mantras then function as extensions of the deity’s mind, which, owing to the Mahāyāna logic of emptiness, interdependent origination, and awakened compassion, can accrue to persons, places, and things throughout ritual proceedings, and exert influence well beyond the confines of ritual precincts.

This digression into the dynamics of deity yoga and mantra only hints at the full range of features present in a typical pill accomplishment rite that mediate the production and distribution of this substance. Without getting too deep into the details, it suffices to remark that the sounds and images of deity yoga do not represent divine agency; they materialize, or present it. These operations, moreover, occur in the context of all the other ritual props and framing strategies – the specialized venue, garb, music, aromas, materials, gestures, and other sensory media – that create the total aesthetic impact of such a ritual setting. In short, the pill concoction, which is already both intrinsically potent and a product of ritual virtuosity, becomes the focal point of a welter of multimedia attention. This work, or action (Tib. *las*, Skt. *karma*), as Tibetan Buddhists term ritual, enables the substance to accrue additional value, absorbing and concentrating in the form of “blessings” (*byin rlabs*) and “power” (*mthu*) the distributed personhood of ritual agents, past masters, and timeless buddhas. Pills are then poised to act in a variety of capacities on persons and environments, largely through direct physical contact, but in other less direct ways as well.

PILLS AS “CATALYSTS” AND “VEHICLES”

So far we have seen two interconnected sides of Brahmin flesh pills. On the one hand, they are materializations of awakened subjectivity that extend the altruistic agency of past masters, buddhas, and bodhisattvas. On the other hand, for the flesh to reach its full potency it must shift into object-patient position to be subjected to the actions of ritual agents who “accomplish” it. I turn now to some of the implications of the flesh’s dual role as subject-agent and object-patient, particularly as it relates to the flow of power between persons and things.

The first way in which flesh-pills “act” occurs while still within the ritual frame. Sog bzlog pa relates that after he rolled the concoction into fifteen pills, kneading it together with clean barley flour, medicine, and perfume to “perfectly accomplish them” (*tshul bzhin sgrubs*) through the rite, the pills “increased in number, spilled over, fragrant smoke wafted forth,” and he witnessed “virtuous portents and auspicious dreams.”⁷³⁵ In a revealing comment, Sog bzlog pa attributes these tangible signs of potency to the intercession of the ever-undeceiving compassion of buddhas, rather than to his own ritual power.⁷³⁶ This is because, states Sog bzlog pa, “such signs are not objects that appear to an old indentured servant incapable of Dharma like myself.”⁷³⁷ To take Sog bzlog pa’s comment at face value: since powerful flesh is, after all, a materialization of buddhas’ compassion, it stands to reason that experiential signs of its empowerment too would happen through the intercession of their altruistic agency.

And yet, the signs of ritual success noted by Sog bzlog pa are all prescribed by authoritative scriptural texts. This means that recognizing such signs is not just an exercise in taking account of particularly unusual sensory perceptions and dreams. A considerable degree of scriptural knowledge and contextual interpretative acumen are required before sensations and experiences can be accurately identified as meaningful indexes for the success of a ritual operation. Thus, despite Sog bzlog pa’s rhetoric of humility, the simple recognition of signs ends up locating him, the ritual master, at the very epicenter of a cluster of experiences and semiotic operations that are deemed essential for “liberation-through-eating” flesh pills to come into their own. Simply put,

⁷³⁵ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 457.5-457.6. /*tho phyir ’phur dang dri bzang du ba ’thul/ /dge ba’i bltas dang bza’ ba’i rmi lam mthong/*

⁷³⁶ Ibid: 457.6-458.1.

⁷³⁷ Ibid: 457.6. /*chos ma nus kyi nang zan rgad po la/ /’di ’dra’i rtags mtshan ’byung ba’i yul min kyang/*

the sensory signs of the agentive powers that the flesh pills acquire through ritual treatment must themselves undergo interpretation.

In the following few lines of the text, when Sog bzlog pa claims that this substance will “bring excellent fortune to all who encounter it,” he takes a slightly different tack.⁷³⁸ There he explicitly distributes the causes of the substance’s newly observable powers between the “excellent profound Treasure lineage as protection; the excellent catalyst continuum, which is the blessings of the former ones; the excellent intention devoid of self-interest; and the excellent fruition that is the retribution for positive deeds.”⁷³⁹ In this statement, it is a combination of Sog bzlog pa’s own altruism, the good karma of consumer recipients, the lineage of Treasure revealers, and the material catalyst continuum – the “vehicle” of the pill’s main ingredients – which together account for the power of the pill to bring positive effects to those who encounter it. Although Sog bzlog pa shares the credit with reference to his own altruistic intent, he once again shies away from directly crediting his own ritual prowess.

When describing the possible benefits (*phan yon*) of encountering the pill, Sog bzlog pa once again invokes the authority of tradition in the form of scriptural citations attributed to Padmasambhava.⁷⁴⁰ The list of benefits in these Padmasambhava citations ranges from the pragmatic material goals of personal and communal health, safety, abundance, and wellbeing, to the karmic aims of merit accrual and liberation from negative rebirths, all the way up to the final stage of liberation, termed there the

⁷³⁸ Ibid: 458.1-458.2: /rdzas 'di phrad tshad skal ba bzang bar sems/

⁷³⁹ Ibid: 458.1. /zab gter brgyud pa mgon du bzang ba dang/ /gong ma'i byin brlabs phabs rgyun bzang ba dang/ /rang 'dod med pa'i bsam pa bzang ba dang/ /las dkar smin pa'i 'bras bu bzang ba 'di/

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid: 455.3-456.6.

“*vidyādhara* of the spontaneously present seal” (*lhun grub phyag rgya’i rig ’dzin*). One can not help but notice in this section that the way in which benefits are felt is through physical contact with the substance, which is achieved primarily through consumption, although contact through touching, smelling, and seeing are also mentioned. The logic of sensory contact, moreover, can be indirect as well. Even encountering the feces or urine of one who has eaten it can bring many of the same benefits.

This principle of contiguity extends most powerfully in these passages to the specific locations, masters, and patrons instrumental in the substance’s “accomplishment.” The location of accomplishment becomes equivalent to the Vajra Seat (*Vajrāsana*) of Buddha’s awakening, or Cool Grove Charnel Ground (*Sītavana*), an important tantric pilgrimage site;⁷⁴¹ the region and country of accomplishment are promised peace, happiness, bountiful harvests and livestock, timely rainfall, and protection from enemies and epidemics;⁷⁴² the master of ceremonies is deemed to be Padmasambhava in person;⁷⁴³ and the sponsor is construed to be a manifestation of the eighth to ninth century Tibetan king *Khri srong lde’i btsan*.⁷⁴⁴ This set of identifications and promises brings into relief the importance of ritual mediation in not just securing the potency of flesh pills, but also in constructing the identities of the places and people involved. By extolling how the power of the flesh transforms or reveals the identities of locations and figures active in its accomplishment, the discussion integrates specific places and actors into a broader Tibetan discourse on the sources of Brahmin flesh’s

⁷⁴¹ Ibid: 456.2.

⁷⁴² Ibid: 456.3-456.4.

⁷⁴³ Ibid: 456.2.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid: 456.2-456.3.

power, in effect, inscribing those places and people with new, culturally potent values. This ends up extending the flesh's generalized power, via the invocation of its origins, into the particular people and places responsible for its performative accomplishment. The dynamic results in the emplacement of the flesh within the specific socio-historical context of its ritual production, distribution, and use.

This emphasis on ritual mediation contrasts with claims regarding the flesh's power, in and of itself, to reap effects. Sog bzlog pa concludes his discussion on “benefits” by confronting this problem of material power vis-à-vis ritual mediation head on with the following meta-discursive statement. Although I discuss this passage briefly in Chapter Three, allow us to consider it once again in greater depth. He writes:

Generally, if the flesh of the seven-born is obtained, then through eating that alone one will accomplish the celestial realms. Thus, one need not produce it via ritual proceedings (*cho ga*) and so forth. However, these days [the flesh of a seven-born] is difficult to find, so one should understand it to be a means that causes the attainment of liberation, as accomplished through rituals from *tantra* and scripture (*rgyud lung las byung ba'i chos gas sgrubs*), based on only the previously derived material collateral (*gta'*) and catalyst (*phabs*).⁷⁴⁵

As Sog bzlog pa mentions elsewhere, the previous “catalyst” (*phabs*), which he also at times calls a “vehicle,” constitutes all the primary ingredients of the pill concoction. Being a “catalyst,” a term that also denotes the starter yeast used to brew beer or ferment curd, it operates as the active agent ultimately responsible for the power of Sog bzlog pa's pills. Yet, at the same time, it is also a “vehicle,” which serves as the medium for the accrual of the blessings and power of the buddhas and past masters invoked through the visualizations, mantras, and other sensory media that figure in Sog bzlog pa's

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid: 456.6-457.1. */lar skye bdun gyi sha rnyed na ni de nyid kho na zos pas mkha' spyod 'grub pa yin la/ cho ga la sogs pas sgrub mi dgos kyang/ ding sang ni rnyed par dka' bas/ sngon byung ba'i gta' dang phabs tsam la rten te/ rgyud lung las byung ba'i cho gas sgrubs te/ grol ba thob par bya ba'i thabs yin par go bar bya'o/*

accomplishment rite. The “collateral” (*gta’=gta’ ma*), needless to say perhaps, is a general term used to denote an item of value that is temporarily forfeited to a lender as security in order to ensure the future repayment of a loan. This term signals, most generally, that Sog bzlog pa construes the power of flesh-pills to be contingent upon a relationship of reciprocity with the past masters and buddhas whose flesh and other bodily fragments and fluids make up the pills’ ingredients. Modeled upon a relationship of money lending, it would appear that the bodily fragments of past buddhas and masters function as “collateral” for the enduring promise of these figures. By this I mean their pact, rooted in boundless altruism, to beneficially intercede on the behalf of beings “until *saṃāra* is void.”

In the final analysis, then, despite the historical power of the flesh, in and of itself, to deliver beings to celestial realms, due to the vicissitudes of time we are left only with a material “catalyst,” largely dormant, which serves also as a promise. This promise, tied to the valuable collateral of the material flesh and bodily fragments of past buddhas and masters, enables ritual masters to call upon their infinite compassion during ritual proceedings to intercede on behalf of beings. This intercession, which is effected primarily through the deity visualizations, mantras, and other ritual elements stipulated in “*tantra* and scripture” shifts the “catalyst” from agent to patient position so that it can function as a “vehicle” for the accrual of further power. The vehicle, once animated through the ritual procedure, then shifts back into agent position. It emerges once again as an extension and distribution of the agency of buddhas in the world, acting most immediately to transform the figures and locations involved in its accomplishment.

Sog bzlog pa’s discussion of the flesh-pills and their ritual treatment thus ends up securing the power of seven-times born Brahmin flesh, while also ensuring a necessary

role for its ritual treatment and all that this entails in the way of ritual specialists, sponsors, venues, etc. To do that Sog bzlog pa displays considerable caution when touting the power of the flesh, lest the efficacy of the substance alone obviate any role for ritual specialists and their economic relationships with sponsors in its preparation and distribution. And yet, the above passage speaks not only to Sog bzlog pa's concern to reinforce his position as a ritual specialist in relationships of exchange with wealthy sponsors. It also expresses an acute awareness that power must be as visible as possible for it to gain momentum and take on credibility. As a ritual expert adept at using deed, word, and object to manifest, mediate, and extend, through his own will, the agency of past buddhas and masters, Sog bzlog pa was surely aware that power must be viscerally demonstrated and sensed for its effects to be fully felt.

One major effect of such sensible ritual demonstrations, I must reiterate, is the identification of Sog bzlog pa and his ritual setting with past powerful figures and charged locations. In this sense, Sog bzlog pa's efforts to stage a flesh accomplishment ritual can be interpreted in part as a performative reconfiguration of the identities of places and actors through the medium of flesh pills. In other words, at the same time that Sog bzlog pa unleashes the power of pills through ritual accomplishment, he also feeds off that very power in the construction of his own identity and those of his associates and ritual locations. In a circular movement, the power of pills flows from substances to persons and locales in large part by means of persons and locales claimed to have an active role in the "accomplishment" of pills' powers. The ritualized emplacement of entextualized pills thus succeeds in enshrining the actors and locations instrumental in the ritual performance by extending to them the pill's discourse of material power. What primarily allows for this dynamic are the shifts that the pills undergo between the roles of

subject-agent and object-patient. And this instability in turn stems from the tension between objective material power and human ritual mediation that runs throughout the process in which Brahmin flesh pills are produced.

This fluidity between subject-agent and object-patient and its consequent ebb and flow of power extend also to Sog bzlog pa's final distribution of the "accomplished" pills. Once the requisite signs had emerged in the context of the rite, narrates Sog bzlog pa, he deemed it most efficacious not to distribute the pills to people, but to pour the pill concoction into various bodies of water.⁷⁴⁶ On this note he seems to have been inspired by the following sentiment of Padmasambhava, which appears as part of a longer citation in the context of extolling the pill's many benefits:

Through just pouring, or merely scenting oceans, rivers, or streams with it,
None of the sentient beings dwelling in [those] waters will fall into negative
rebirths, and all will attain human bodies.⁷⁴⁷

Sog bzlog pa accordingly tossed three liters (*bre*) into the Brahmaputra (gTsang po) River, three liters into lakes, such as Lake Ya 'brog,⁷⁴⁸ and others, and appropriate amounts in the mountain streams of different locales,⁷⁴⁹ all with the following aspiration in mind:

May this bring joy to these powerful and weak forms, and, furthermore, may it be a source for giving what is most appropriate to give to miserable sentient beings, in whatever way is most suitable!⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid: 455.1.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid: 455.6-456.1. /rgya mtsho che dang chu bo chu bran la/ /blug gam dri ma tsam zhig song bas kyang/ /chu la gnas pa'i sems can tham cad kun/ /ngan 'gror mi ltung mi lus thob par 'gyur/

⁷⁴⁸ Lake Ya/Yar 'brog is, according to one legend, the "life force place" of the Tibetan state (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1998, 482).

⁷⁴⁹ *sKye bdun dkar chag*: 455.1-455.2.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid: 455.2-455.3. *sku grag[=drag] zhan 'di la dges tshor mdzad pa rnams dang/ nyams thag pa'i sems can sbyin par 'od pa dag la yang ji ltar rigs par rtsal ba'i khungs byas so/*

By thus acting upon the pills, through both physical distribution and vocal aspiration, Sog bzlog pa performs the extension of his own awakened altruistic intent (*bodhicitta*) to the powerful concoction. In so doing, he demonstrates his final command over the powerful material agency of pills and takes his place among past masters.

In summary, Brahmin flesh pills operate, by Sog bzlog pa's account, as both agents in their own right, and as objects of ritual action, interpretation, exegesis, and distribution. The master of ceremonies, by acting upon powerful pills, places these agentive items in object-patient position relative to himself. Through promoting in narratives the agentive powers of the pills, then treating them as object-patient to his own activities, the master of ceremonies extends to himself and his milieu the power of the flesh. Sog bzlog pa, recipient consumers, and locations then become object-patient to the pills' agentive transformational powers, even while Sog bzlog pa, the master of ceremonies, positions himself as subject-agent in their final distribution.

B. Ambrosia: Medicinal Concoction and Tantric Sacrament

As a point of comparison with Sog bzlog pa's Brahmin flesh pills, I turn now to examine Sog bzlog pa's understandings of the nature, concoction, and ritual preparation of another substance believed to bring a range of positive effects to those who consume it:

“ambrosia” (Tib. *bdud rtsi*, Skt. *amṛta*). “Ambrosia,” the reader may recall, was touched upon briefly in Chapter Two when introducing Sog bzlog pa's writing on that substance. Particularly powerful forms of the “five ambrosias,” moreover, featured as ingredients in the Brahmin flesh pills explained just above. Like the “five ambrosias” of Sog bzlog pa's Brahmin flesh concoction, the ambrosia that forms the subject matter of his short ritual treatise that will occupy us at present does not refer simply to the five ambrosias, which

together with the five meats, constitute the antinomian sacraments of Indian tantric ritual practice. Stripped of the semiotic context of Indian Brahmanical society, where these had been regarded as polluting substances, in Tibet the five ambrosias and five meats often became stock ingredients, along with a plethora of other animal, mineral, and vegetable ingredients, in the preparation of a particular type of “medicine” known most commonly among Tibetans as “accomplished medicine” (*sman sgrub*). That is to say, in Tibet, the Indian tantric practice of ingesting antinomian substances became wed early on to traditions of Tibetan medicine, in which the consumption of ambrosia was believed to contribute to health and longevity, in addition to more overtly tantric religious goals.⁷⁵¹ Unlike the ostensive raw ambrosia of Indian tantric ritual, Tibetan “accomplished medicine” typically contains no sensible traces of these repulsive ingredients. Moreover, even while it is “accomplished” and often used in ritual proceedings, ambrosia is also distributed outside ritual settings, in the encounters between Tibetan lamas and members of their congregation and wider community. In fact, today “accomplished medicine,” in the amount of a few small pieces or a tiny baggy, is perhaps the single most ubiquitous item that Tibetan lamas offer in their daily dealings with those who seek spiritual or mundane council.

Despite the very different context in Tibet for the ambrosia under discussion, according to Sog bzlog pa and his tradition this substance still theoretically includes the

⁷⁵¹ For more on the convergence of medicine and *tantra* in Tibetan ambrosia-related practices, see Francis Garrett, “The Alchemy of Accomplished Medicine (*sman sgrub*): Situating the *Yuthok Heart Essence* (*G.yu thog snying thig*) in Literature and History, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37 (2009): 207-230; and Francis Garrett, “Tapping the Body’s Nectar: Gastronomy and Incorporation in Tibetan Literature,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (February 2010): 300-326. While Garrett’s work does indeed demonstrate that Tibetan medicinal and tantric traditions both prescribe the practice of accomplished medicine, conclusions about this relationship await comprehensive findings of how Indian tantric traditions had themselves already incorporated medicinal knowledge and procedures prior to their importation to Tibet. A good starting point for this line of research is Paul Demiéville, *Buddhism and Healing: Demiéville’s Article ‘Byō’ from Hōbōgirin*, trans. Mark Tatz (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1985).

tantric ambrosias and meats, and promises a range of effects that extend from physical cures and longevity on the medical register, all the way up to the conferral of the mundane and supra-mundane *siddhis* of tantric parlance. We shall notice in the discussion ahead that this hybrid character of Tibetan medicinal ambrosia – at once medical and tantric – implies also hybrid roles for materiality vis-à-vis cognition and language in its preparation. Before we get ahead of ourselves, however, a brief general comparison with Brahmin flesh pills is in order.

EDIBLE CONCOCTIONS OF POWER: COMMON PATTERNS

The efficacy of ambrosia shares several features with Brahmin-flesh pills, but with some very significant differences as well. To start with, both substances are said to ultimately derive power from their presumed incorporation within, or contact with a past powerful being's physical body. Although the details are quite distinct, narrative histories of these relationships christen each substance with the legitimacy of tradition. Sog bzlog pa locates the origins of ambrosia in what he calls the “historical eight roots” (*sngon byung ba'i rtsa brgyad*).⁷⁵² These are the various parts of a particular sandal wood tree that purportedly grew in the ocean from where the bodily remains (*zag pa*) of the Demon Rudra fell when he was slain by the Bhagavan Great Glorious Heruka (Tib. dPal chen po, Skt. Mahāśrī).⁷⁵³ According to tradition, claims Sog bzlog pa, this miraculous tree incorporated a combination of eight medicinal substances: it had a trunk of brown sandal; roots of inula racemosa (Skt. *mūlapati manu*); limbs of cloves (Tib. *li shi*, Skt. *lavāṅga*); leaves of patchouli/basil (Tib. *gandha pa tra*, Skt. *gandha pattra*); flowers of saffron

⁷⁵² *bDud rtsi sgrub pa'i rim pa*: 424.3.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid*: 434.4.

(Tib. *gur kum*[=*gum*], Skt. *kunkuma*); fruits of jasmine (Tib. *dza ti*, Skt. *jāti*); pith of camphor (Tib. *ga pur*[=*bur*], Skt. *karpūra*); and bark of cinnamon (Tib. *shing rtsa*[=*tsha*], Skt. *tvaca*).⁷⁵⁴ It was precisely this combination of materials, he continues, which survive solely as the eight-root *samaya* substance (*dam rdzas*) associated with the Old School ritual cycle of the one hundred peaceful and wrathful buddhas and their retinue.⁷⁵⁵ Much like Brahmin flesh, moreover, Sog bzlog pa describes this *samaya* substance as a material that was retrieved from Tibetan soil as a Treasure substance “catalyst continuum” (*phabs rgyun*).⁷⁵⁶ Rooted in paradigmatic past events and figures, this is the primary active ingredient of Sog bzlog pa’s ambrosia concoction.

Broadly speaking, ambrosia also undergoes much the same ritual treatment as the flesh-pill concoction. Although terse on the specifics, after the ambrosia’s ingredients are arranged, Sog bzlog pa stipulates to “engage in accomplishment, according to the liturgy, performing the ritual procedure, free of impediment, in combination with identification with the wrathful deity, and recitation of *sumbhani* and so forth,⁷⁵⁷ until a sign is witnessed.”⁷⁵⁸ Signs of success, moreover, are quite similar. With ambrosia too, physical increase and other properties of animation are all telltale indicators that an accomplishment rite was successful.⁷⁵⁹ And much like the flesh concoction, ambrosia is

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid: 424.5-424.6.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid: 424.5.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid: 425.1-425.2.

⁷⁵⁷ *Sumbhani*, which derives from the verbal root *subh*, “to smother,” signals the commencement of mantras intended to impel wrathful deities to action.

⁷⁵⁸ *bDud rtsi sgrub pa’i rim pa*: 433.1-433.2. *’tshams dam du bcad la/ bgegs dang bral ba’i cho ga khro bo’i nga rgyal gyi suM bha ni la sogs pa’i bzlas pa dang bcas te ji srid mtshan ma mthong gi bar du byas la ’dod sgrub pa la gzhung bzhin ’jug go/*

to be primarily distributed outside the ritual precinct. Sog bzlog pa offers, with reference to rJe btsun chen po Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216),⁷⁶⁰ third among the five great patriarchs of the Sa skya tradition, precise directions for “how to rely” (*brten pa'i tshul*) on ambrosia.⁷⁶¹ He prescribes placing the substance inside a “fine vessel” (*snod bzang po*), such as “one’s own personal relic casket” (*so so rang rang gi za ma tog*), or the like.⁷⁶² He then stipulates that it is best to eat eight pieces a day, once at the beginning and once at the end of each of the four periods of the day, or alternatively, four, one at each period.⁷⁶³ Second best, by rJe btsun chen po’s account, is to eat one during two different periods.⁷⁶⁴ Finally, one should at least eat one during the first period of the day.⁷⁶⁵ If even that is impossible, he continues, it should be eaten once a month, once every six months, or once a year, on the first or fifteenth day of the middle spring month.⁷⁶⁶

The “benefits” of eating ambrosia also follow the same general pattern as those promised with Brahmin flesh pills. The effects from eating ambrosia range from the pragmatic register of eradication of illness and untimely death, and the removal of obstacles and demonic interferences, all the up to the soteriological level of purification of

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid: 435.5.

⁷⁶⁰ For details on rJe btsun chen po Grags pa rgyal mtshan’s place in the teaching and practice lineages of the Sa skya tradition, see Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, *Life, Transmissions, and Works of A-mes-zhabs Ngag-dbang kun-dga’-bsod-nams, The Great 17th Century Sa-skyapa Bibliophile*, Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Supplementband 38 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007).

⁷⁶¹ Ibid: 437.5.

⁷⁶² Ibid: 437.5.

⁷⁶³ Ibid: 437.5-437.6.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid: 437.6.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid: 437.6-438.1

samaya breaches, heightened clarity in deity yoga and meditative concentration, and even the realization of self-awareness as *dharmakāya*, another way of saying complete awakening.⁷⁶⁷ Much like Brahmin flesh, moreover, the potency of the ambrosia seeps into the location of its ritual accomplishment, rendering the site equivalent to Cool Grove Charnel Ground, where *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* will assemble.⁷⁶⁸ The surrounding region, likewise, is promised sufficient rainfall, abundant harvests, and healthy livestock.⁷⁶⁹ Effects even extend to all the residents of the ritual location, granting them meditative experiences while alive and attainment of the *vidyādhara* levels upon death, “regardless of gender, or moral character” (*pho mo bzang ngan med pa ru...*).⁷⁷⁰

In spite of these commonalities, deeper analysis reveals that for ambrosia to be potent another set of principles is at work, in addition to physical contact, incorporation, entextualization, “ritual accomplishment” and the other dynamics that figure in the creation of Brahmin flesh pills. For Sog bzlog pa, the making of effective ambrosia involves the principles of category and pattern awareness, homology, and knowledge of aesthetic criteria, features much less pronounced in his discussion of Brahmin pills. These principles work in conjunction with the underlying rationale of distributed personhood, expanding it in new directions to more forcefully enlist practical knowledge and sensory perceptions as further mediators in the production of potent substance.

THE EFFICACY OF AMBROSIA INGREDIENTS: CATEGORIES AND HOMOLOGIES

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid: 436.1-436.6.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid: 436.6.

⁷⁶⁹ 436.6-437.1.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid: 437.1-437.2.

The most conspicuous distinguishing feature of Sog bzlog pa’s ambrosia practice is his invocation of a dizzying array of cultural categories and rubrics, and the presence of properties thought to pertain across multiple levels of structurally homologous categories. For instance, before describing the “eight roots for implementing an accomplishment rite,” Sog bzlog pa correlates the historical eight roots with an outer dimension – the eight medicinal substances as they ordinarily grow in nature; an inner dimension – eight general human anatomical features patterned after the imagery of the paradigmatic miraculous tree;⁷⁷¹ and a secret dimension – eight aspects of male and female reproductive anatomy.^{772 773} In the same vein, when describing the “eight roots for implementing an accomplishment” rite, all the material ingredients necessary for concocting ambrosia in a ritual setting, Sog bzlog pa delineates eight corresponding sets of five items each.⁷⁷⁴ These include “five primary things, five hearts, five fruits, five qualities, five concoctions, five tamers, five aims, and five necessities.”⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷¹ According to Sog bzlog pa (*bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 425.2-425.3), the “root” is the navel, the root of the formation of existence; the “trunk” is the flesh and bones, which lend the body its mass; the “branches” are the four limbs; the “leaves” are the fingers, toes, hair, nails, and body hairs; the “flowers” are the five sense faculties; the fruits are the five internal organs and the heart; the “pith” is the marrow, pith, brain, spinal nerve; and the “bark” is the skin.

⁷⁷² Sog bzlog pa (*bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 425.3-425.6) continues this exercise in correlating homologous spheres by describing the “secret eight roots” in terms of “four causes from the father” and “four conditions from the mother,” which combine during sexual intercourse to bring about the conception of offspring. The father’s four causes include the brain, because the male seminal fluid resides there in the form of the syllable *ham*; the spinal nerve through which seminal fluid circulates; the testicles where seminal fluid collects; and the shaft of the penis through which seminal fluid is emitted. The four conditions of the mother include the uterus, the “palace” of vaginal blood; the womb, the container for the child; the opening of the vagina, the spot that receives [the penis]; and the anthers, the vaginal passage.

⁷⁷³ *bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 425.2-426.1.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid: 426.1. /*sgrub pa lag tu blang ba’i rtsa ba brgyad*...

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid: 426.1-426.2. *gtso bo lnga/ snying po lnga/ ’bras bu lnga/ yon tan lnga/ bsdud pa lnga/ dul ba lnga/ dgos don lnga/ dgos ches lnga’o/*

When tracing the nature of and interactions between these eight sets of fives a number of features come to fore. First, the list of ingredients is so inclusive that we gain the impression that ambrosia pertains to the entire phenomenal universe – “all of appearance and existence” – categorized in homologous sets of fives. The first three sets of five include the bodily fluids and flesh of humans, the sensory organs of humans, and the flesh of various other animals, respectively. To start with, the five primary things are listed as the five standard tantric ambrosias of feces, urine, semen, blood, and human flesh, while the five hearts include the five human sense organs.⁷⁷⁶ These must all stem, insists Sog bzlog pa, from the human body, but not just any human body. The ideal feces and urine must come from either a lama or a sublime person; seminal fluid must either come from a pure Brahmin boy, or oneself; the blood must ideally be the vaginal blood from a virgin’s first menstruation; and the human flesh must be “pure” (*dangs ma*).⁷⁷⁷ Likewise, the five hearts, or human sense organs, must also originate with a “pure corpse” (*bam gtsang ma*).⁷⁷⁸ Sog bzlog pa does not stipulate exactly what purity implies in either context. The five fruits, which Sog bzlog pa interprets as the standard tantric five fleshes, also clearly hail from living beings. These ideally include flesh of cow, dog, horse, elephant, and human, although human flesh, Sog bzlog pa remarks, can be excluded from these since it is included in the previous categories.⁷⁷⁹ Unlike the five ambrosias, and unlike the five fleshes used in Brahmin flesh pills, Sog bzlog pa does not stipulate here that the five fleshes must derive from particularly powerful or pure animals.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid: 426.2.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid: 428.1-428.2.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid: 426.2.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid: 426.2-426.3.

The next three sets of five are primarily herbal, vegetable, and mineral substances that originate outside animal organisms, although there is some overlap in the category of “five compounds.” The “five qualities” are the natural ingredients of bamboo silica (Tib. *cu gang*), red lead (Tib. *sin dhu ra*, Skt. *sindūra*), yellow myrobalan (Tib. *a ru ra*, Skt. *harītakī*), “great incense” (Tib. *spos chen*)⁷⁸⁰ and mica (Tib. *lhang tsher*).⁷⁸¹ The “five tamers” include the natural substances of black aloes wood (Tib. *a ga ru*, Skt. *agaru*), *Euphorbia fischeriana* Steud (Tib. *du ru ka*⁷⁸²), *Cyperus rotundus/Calosanthus indica* (Tib. *li ga dur*, Skt. *kuṭannaṭa*), *Gymnadenia orchidis* Lindl (Tib. *dbang lag*), and cardamom (Tib. *sug smel*).⁷⁸³ The “five compounds,” on the other hand, are the ambrosia catalyst, camphor, saffron, jasmine, and sandal; or alternatively, the addition of the ambrosia catalyst continuum to equal parts of the previous four categories of substance, thus combining ambrosia, or its “catalyst continuum,” with natural vegetative ingredients, and possibly all other ingredients that originate within the bodies of beings.⁷⁸⁴ In this connection, we may recall that ambrosia and its “catalyst continuum” originated with the sandal wood tree that grew from the bodily discharge of the slain Rudra, resulting in the “historical ambrosia” of camphor, saffron, jasmine, and sandal, among other substances that would be important in the field of Tibetan medicine. Moreover, the various parts of this “historical” sandalwood tree, which also constitutes the “external level” of ambrosia’s constitutive “eight roots,” are linked in homologous structures by Sog bzlog

⁷⁸⁰ It is not clear to me to which substance this term refers.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid: 426.3-426.4.

⁷⁸² Dr. Pasang Yonten Arya (Dictionary of Tibetan Materia Medica: 99) states that *du ru ka* is a synonym for *dur byid*, *thar nu*, or a type of *a ga ru*.

⁷⁸³ *bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 426.5.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid: 426.4-426.5.

pa and his tradition with the basic anatomical features of humans on the “inner level” and their reproductive anatomy on the “secret level.”

In this way, Sog bzlog pa is quite explicit about the flow of power involved in the ingredients and composition of ambrosia. As “catalyst continuum,” the “historical eight roots” are the core, organizing source of divine agency, as it acts upon the ambrosia compound, and through it to recipient consumers. The catalyst, furthermore, has its origin in the Heruka’s murder of Rudra, and more specifically, in a tree that sprung from the slain demon’s bodily remains. As an amalgam of the eight powerful medicinal herbs formed from that decisive event, it acts as an already potent hybrid, the material fruition of a chain of associations that connect divine violence with demonic corporeality and medicinal potency. As a continuum, moreover, this hybrid catalyst acts through both time and space, mediating divine agency diachronically via the historical lineage of lamas, and extending it synchronically by direct physical contact and homology to other materials and beings.

By way of contrast, the other ingredients derive their presumed efficacy from a matrix of cultural associations rooted in the overlapping spheres of Indian *tantra* and Tibetan medicine. For instance, we witnessed that many of the human and vegetative items gather within themselves through homologies with the ambrosia of the catalyst continuum something of the power of the “historical eight roots,” whose source resides ultimately in the slaying action of Heruka that first produced those eight important medicinal substances. The Indian tantric provenance of using human and animal products, on the other hand, is made explicit when Sog bzlog pa addresses the difficulty of procuring these items, and permits, with reference to Indian scriptural sources and past

Tibetan masters, that cognitive visualizations can replace these when needed.⁷⁸⁵ That the antinomian sacraments of Indian *tantra* are replaceable by visualizations suggests that at times these fleshies play connotative semiotic roles in tantric ritual contexts, even in Tibet. The physical, material qualities of these items are clearly not strictly required to ensure the efficacy of the concoction, this despite the physical, medical overtones of much of Sog bzlog pa's account, and the use of fleshies for their intrinsic material power in his Brahmin flesh pills. In contrast, no mention of substitutions is made with respect to vegetable and mineral ingredients. While the catalyst continuum is clearly indispensable.

When we examine how these six categories of ingredients interact with the final two sets of five – the five aims and the five necessities – another dynamic becomes visible: the interactions between the ambrosia ingredients and the human ritual actors and their ritual implements. The five aims are the ritual actors of *vajra* master, *vajra* representative, *karma ging pa*,⁷⁸⁶ functionary, and consort;⁷⁸⁷ while the five necessities are the ritual props of *maṇḍala*, offerings, substances, utensils, and skull cups.⁷⁸⁸ Ritual actors are to first divide all the ingredients between five different skull vessels based on the organizational principle of a five-section *maṇḍala*, each section of which corresponds to one or another of the five Buddha families, five wisdoms, and five emotional afflictions.⁷⁸⁹ While the color and direction of the Buddha families appears to be the

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid: 428.5-429.3.

⁷⁸⁶ I am unsure what role the *karma ging pa* performs.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid: 427.1. /*dgos don lnga ni/ rdo rje slob dpon/ rdo rje rgyal thebs/ karma ging pa/ las byed pa/ yul bzung ma dang lng'o/*

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid: 427.1-427.2. /*dgos ched lnga ni/ dkyil 'khor dang/ mchod pa dang/ rdzas dang/ yo byad dang/ ka pA la mtshan ldan dang lnga'o/*

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid: 429.4-432.1.

dominant principle of classification here, the properties of ingredients – their taste, shape, function, and provenance – also plays a strong role.

Ritual actors then perform the accomplishment, which stipulates that they combine the performance of liturgy with the visualization of a wrathful deity and the recitation of his mantra “until signs emerge.”⁷⁹⁰ Once again, the focal point of ritualists’ mediating gestures, words, and cognitive exercises is the substances, as arranged within the five skull cups located in a *maṇḍala*. The “signs,” moreover – specifically, the physical increase of the substance – are indications that the divine agency extended by ritualists through their performative embodiments has animated the material substance of the ambrosia mixture, literally adding physical volume to the compound. The final stage of ritual preparation, before the ambrosia concoction can be distributed to recipients for consumption, is the physical act of ritual actors combining the contents of the five skull vessels into a single mass and breaking it into pills, or powder; along with their assessment of the aesthetic qualities of the final concoction.

All told, the emphasis throughout the procedure for making ambrosia rests squarely upon on aggregating processes by which a medicinal concoction can be imbued with power. Part of this process entails the use of powerful ingredients – the catalyst continuum, whose power is brought into presence through narrating its mythic origins – and part hinges upon concentrating substances that derive subsidiary power by categorical association or homology with that organizing source. Ritual accomplishment too, with its concentration of cognitive, sonic, and physical acts, works by virtue of imbuing the substance with further power, whereupon it acquires properties of animation

⁷⁹⁰ For more details on the ritual practice of “accomplishing” ambrosia, see Francis Garrett (2010): 305-306; and more recently, Francis Garret, Andrew Erlich, Nicholas Field, Barbara Hazelton, and Matthew King, “Narratives of Hospitality and Feeding in Tibetan Ritual,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 81, no. 2 (June, 2013): 491-515.

and acts upon ritual participants, even as they act in turn upon it in their formation of the concoction into the proper consistency. In short, much like Brahmin flesh, but with greater elaboration and a wider invocation of conceptual and material categories and homologies, the emphasis of ambrosia production remains the intrinsic power of certain special materials, whereupon ritual treatment, rather than create that power anew, simply unleashes, augments, and directs what was present already.

THE ORTHOPRAXY OF AESTHETIC CRITERIA

Notwithstanding the admission of cognitive substitutes for flesh, throughout his discussion of ingredients Sog bzlog pa is particularly insistent on the orthopraxy of materials and their strict inclusion within proper categorical boundaries. He makes numerous attempts to critically review different traditional accounts of the topic before weighing in with his own opinions. Textual citations abound in these passages, as Sog bzlog pa attempts to position his interpretations vis-à-vis those of past masters and authoritative scriptures. More often than not these critical comments concern the sensible aesthetic properties of the ambrosia concoction – its look, smell, taste, consistency – in accurately assessing whether it has been properly accomplished. For instance, Sog bzlog pa lists a series of prohibitions that involve the aesthetic and culinary/gustatory dimensions of the finished product. He begins with the statement, “In this context, although generally the full range of medicines and elixirs in appearance and existence are to be used, the various poisons and ‘wolves’ must be avoided.”⁷⁹¹ Leaving aside an explanation of poisons, Sog bzlog pa elaborates instead upon the “wolf of scent,” “wolf

⁷⁹¹ *bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 432.2-432.3. /'dir spyir na snang zhing srid pa'i sman dang bcud du gyur tshad gtongs yin kyang/ dug sna tshogs dang/ sbyang ki rnams spangs dgos te/

of flesh,” “wolf of flowers,” “wolf of flavor,” and “wolf of color,” phrases that signify, he maintains, the wrongful inclusion of substances that can steal away, like wolves, the ambrosia mixture’s ideal odor, taste, and color. After providing a list of the prohibited substances, he states, “It is unsuitable to use those items, and generally, to use any kind of flesh, blood, or medicine that is decayed, rotten, or old.”⁷⁹² For scriptural support of this notion Sog bzlog pa enlists a citation from Bla ma mkhas pa sNyags *lotsāwa* Jñānakumāra, who, the reader may recall, was the famous imperial period figure whose reincarnation Sog bzlog pa was identified as by his master Zhig po gling pa. The citation appears as follows:

The scholar Bla ma gNyags Jñānakumāra has said:

Those with muddled intellect, unaware of how to distinguish the types of medicine, mix together all the outer and inner *gaṇacakra* materials as though it were fast food noodles (*long thug*). Their odor, taste, and color are carried away by wolves. What a shame for the master to take hold of these [substances], once [these features] are explicitly chased away!⁷⁹³

Although this citation addresses this issue specifically in relation to food substances used in *gaṇacakra* rites,⁷⁹⁴ Sog bzlog pa sees fit to apply it to medicinal ambrosia concoctions. The emphatic tone of this chide indicates, by relief, that proper sensory features are a crucial component of the substance’s efficacy.

Indeed, Sog bzlog pa also presents “criteria of an excellent concoction” (*sbyor ba legs pa’i tshad*), once again with reference to gNyags Jñānakumāra’s opinion on the

⁷⁹² Ibid: 432.5-432.6. *spyir yang sha dang khrag dang sman gyi rigs thams cad kyang bam pa dang rul ba dang rnyings pa rnams btang du mi rung ngo/*

⁷⁹³ Ibid: 432.6-433.1. */de ltar yang bla ma mkhas pa snyags lo tsA ba dznyA na ku mA ras/ she rab snyogs ma can gyi sman gyi rigs ’byed mi shes par/ long thug bzhin du phyi nang tshogs tshad gcig tu bsres/ /dri dang ro dang mdog kyang spyang ki dag gis khyer/ /gnyer gyi brdas nas slob dpon sa ’dzin snying re rje/*

⁷⁹⁴ For a general discussion of the *gaṇacakra* rite and the deleterious impact of the “wolves” on its efficacy, see Shechen Gyaltap IV and Kunkyen Tenpe Nyima (2012).

issue.⁷⁹⁵ The ideal ambrosia mixture should have a fine color, which is impossible to identify; a fragrant odor, which is difficult to identify; and a delicious flavor, which is impossible to describe and cannot be diluted by other foods.”⁷⁹⁶ This theme of wonderment before the sensory attributes of ambrosia provides clues, I believe, into the aesthetic mechanisms that cause recipient consumers to attribute agency to the substance. This theme invites comparison with Alfred Gell’s notion of the role of “captivation” in the arrogation of agency to objects. Gell argues that the attribution of power or agency to artifacts can transpire based on the cognitive indecipherability that recipients experience before a particularly masterful or intricate artifact.⁷⁹⁷ Artifacts that embody daunting technical mastery can therefore “subvert the sense of self-possession” of spectator recipients.⁷⁹⁸ In the case of ambrosia, the inscrutable gustatory features of the substance works with the overall performative context, including the physical preparations and the display of signs, to create an experience of sensory saturation that overwhelms and confounds. The “benefits” section of *Sog bzlog pa*’s text, which describes how the power of ambrosia inheres within the location of its production, and spreads to and through whoever comes into contact with it, provides ample testimony to the contagious power exerted in interactions with this substance.

⁷⁹⁵ *bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 435.3-435.4.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid: 435.4. ...*mdog bzang la brtag tu mi btub pa/ dri bzang la ngos bzung dka' ba/ ro zhim la smra ru mi btub pa zos nas kha zas gzhan gyis kyang sman gyi ngad zhim po khar mi yal ba rnams...*

⁷⁹⁷ Alfred Gell (1998). “Captivation” appears as a theme throughout Gell’s essay, where he extends this notion, albeit without much further elaboration, to any expressive form that can “tantalize our capacity to deal with wholes and parts, continuity and discontinuity, synchrony and succession.”

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid: 95.

The extent to which the efficacy of the finished ambrosia product hinges on its physical specifications cannot be overstated. Sog bzlog pa even stipulates the size of the ambrosia mixture’s pieces, when he argues, “the formation of small pieces must be properly enacted; if not, then the medicines cannot be blessed.”⁷⁹⁹ He supports this opinion with a telling scriptural citation:

As it is said:

If blessings will not enter into ritual proceedings
When they are only slightly convoluted,
How can blessings enter into ritual proceedings
When they are completely convoluted?⁸⁰⁰

Although Sog bzlog pa declines to name his textual source, this statement appears to originate from the writings of Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (1182-1251).⁸⁰¹ This reference to the famed thirteenth century scholar, the very epitome of renaissance learning who promoted expertise not only in Buddhist theory and practice, but also in medicine and the arts, among other fields of knowledge, highlights just how important knowledge was for Sog bzlog pa as a criterion of ritual efficacy.⁸⁰² And to be clear, it is not general scriptural knowledge to which Sog bzlog pa is referring here, but pragmatic

⁷⁹⁹ *bDud rtsi sgrub rim*: 434.1. /de nas khrol bu’i sgrub pa tshul bzhin du bya te/ de ma byas na sman de dag byin gyis brlob mi nus pa’i phyir dang/

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid: 434.1-434.2. ji skad du/ cho ga cung zhig ’chugs pa la/ /byin brlabs ’jug pa mi ’gyur na/ /cho ga thams cad ’khrugs pa la/ /byin brlabs ’jug par ga la ’gyur/

⁸⁰¹ As I discuss below, Sog bzlog pa repeats this citation elsewhere and names Sa skya Paṇḍita as its source. The citation appears to be a loose adaptation of a verse from Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshe, *A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes (sDom gsum rab dbye)*, trans. Jared Douglas Rhoton (Albany: SUNY, 2002), 295. It reads there as follows: /cho ga cung cas nyams pa la’ang/ /cho ga ’chags par ma gsungs na/ /cho ga phal cher nyams pa la/ /cho ga ’chags par ’gyur re skan/ Rhoton (97) renders it into English as follows: “If even a slightly defective rite is not deemed/ /to be a binding rite, it is hardly likely that one/ /that is entirely defective will be.”

⁸⁰² For more on Sa skya Paṇḍita and his influence on Tibetan religion and culture, see David Jackson, *The Entrance Gate for the Wise (Section III): Sa-skya Paṇḍita on Indian and Tibetan Traditions of Pramāṇa and Philosophical Debate*, vol. 1 (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Studien Universität Wien, 1987); and Jonathon Gold, *The Dharma’s Gatekeepers: Sakya Pandita on Buddhist Scholarship in Tibet* (Albany: SUNY, 2007). For an excellent example of Sa paṇ’s polemical style, see Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshe (2002).

expertise in the material procedures of properly treating the physical medicinal concoction.

KNOWLEDGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In sum, when comparing Sog bzlog pa's literary treatment of ambrosia with his similar treatment of Brahmin flesh, one gains the impression that the efficacy of ambrosia for Sog bzlog pa has more to do with knowledge of orthopraxy with respect to the categories to which substances belong, knowledge of how these categories correspond to one another across homologous spheres, and knowledge of the traditional aesthetic criteria for what constitutes a ripe and ready ambrosia mixture. What is required, in short, is practical expertise in ambrosia's pharmacological traditions, including the many categories and valances of meanings – both tantric and medical – that pertain to the ingredients and the procedural forms necessary for their concoction. This is to say that the production of ambrosia, as an important nexus where medicine and *tantra* merge, requires considerable pragmatic acumen and traditional training in the material dimensions of the healing and ritual arts.

Sog bzlog pa's repeated references to gNyags might therefore be read as an attempt to leverage authority in the domain of ambrosia production by appealing to a particular logic of distributed personhood. On the most explicit temporal level, Sog bzlog pa, as a recognized reincarnation of gNyags, can trade in this imperial-period figure's persona of scholastic acumen and ritual power to bolster his own repute in those domains. Second, that Sog bzlog pa cites his previous incarnation with particular reference to the orthopraxy of substance is also significant. Proper knowledge of the ritual protocol surrounding ingredients is clearly instrumental in the production of

efficacious ambrosia. The extension of such knowledge, moreover, from gNyags to Sog bzlog pa, runs parallel to the life of the catalyst continuum, the material substance, which hails ultimately from the act of Heruka's slaying of Rudra, and which extends likewise from the distance past, through gNyags and the Tibetan soil, into Sog bzlog pa's own hands. And lest we forget, the "catalyst" is none other than the exuviae of Rudra, sprung anew into a medicine-yielding tree by the Heruka's act of slaying him.

We end up then with two interlaced notions of distributed personhood, and by extension, agency and efficacy. One is primarily spatial in orientation and involves the extension of efficacy from Heruka, through Rudra and his physical remains, into medicinal substances in the form of a "catalyst continuum." This catalyst then becomes the primary active ingredient in the ambrosia concoction, which transmits its blessings and power synchronically through physical contact and proximity to whoever and whatever comes into contact with it. The other principle signals a movement through time, as persons – gNyags, Sog bzlog pa and others in the lineage – inherit (or remember) the ingredients and knowledge for their concoction and ritual treatment, then pass them on to later ritualists, with whom they may share affinities, or even identities from past lives.

Finally, the fact that knowledge or ignorance of materials, implies Sog bzlog pa, especially impacts the aesthetic and culinary dimensions of the resultant ambrosia, signals that while material substance and related practical knowhow – the spatial and temporal aspects of the ambrosia tradition – must extend in tandem through ritualists to ensure the efficacy of ambrosia, evaluations of orthopraxy nonetheless hinge in large part on the context-specific sensual percepts of the smell, taste, and look of the finished product. With few traditional guidelines other than the concoction's indefinable and

inscrutable physical features, much interpretative work hinges on the knowledge and authority of the master of ceremonies.

In the final analysis, this heightened emphasis on traditional learning and practical knowledge serves to more centrally locate ritual participants, and especially the master of ceremonies, as the agents responsible for ambrosia's power, even as this power, newly augmented by ritual accomplishment, seeps into its surrounding environment and transforms it and its human milieu. Thus, the dialectical interplay between intrinsic material power and human interventions – both ritual and narrative – follows the same basic pattern as Sog bzlog pa's account of Brahmin flesh. However, presumably because ambrosia's ingredients are deemed to have less intrinsic power than those of Brahmin flesh pills, ambrosia's preparation requires more attention to the details of material protocol. Knowledge of such details implies traditional knowledge in the medical and ritual arts, and the associated pragmatic empirical knowledge to assess an ambrosia compound's proper aesthetic, culinary attributes. The result is a substance that is both material and discursive, mediating and mediated by the persons, places, deities, and things with which it comes into contact.

II. Artifacts of Violence, Substances of Danger

We shift our attention now from the first category of objects, powerful edibles, which trade primarily in their intrinsic substantive power, while nonetheless incorporating discursive, symbolic aspects to undergird and/or augment that power. By contrast, the second, and by far the widest category of materials at use in Sog bzlog pa's rituals consists of those which have markedly less intrinsic material power, but accrue power through their formation into objects, and the associations these objects garner, as well as

the actions they are subjected to in the course of ritual proceedings. Such objects include the effigies (*ling+ga/ling ga*), figurines (*ngar mi*), oblations (*gtor ma*), thread-crosses (*mdos*), cairns (*tho*), burnt offerings (*sbyin bsreg*) and other constructed material artifacts or displays, which feature centrally in a number of different rituals performed for a broad range of mundane and soteriological aims.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Sog bzlog pa was steeped in this variety of practices. Although Sog bzlog pa undoubtedly performed these kinds of rites for a full range of effects, he gained particular renown for his expertise in enlisting them toward the end of repelling invading Mongol armies and other unwanted entities from Tibet. Since Sog bzlog pa built his identity of ritual prowess through association with violent rites, I limit the following discussion primarily to these. Another reason to focus on Sog bzlog pa's violent rites is because they are ostensibly performed to achieve real tangible effects on human and non-human victims. Thus, the chains of associations constitutive of the persons, agencies, and objects involved in violent rites provide a particularly vivid glimpse into the sources, channels, and distribution of efficacious power between persons and things, or, to phrase it more broadly, between humans and non-humans.

The artifacts that feature centrally in these rites can all be classified to function as offensive weapons, defensive shields, or surrogate victims. Sog bzlog pa most often prescribes the deployment of more than one of these three types, combining them, one acting upon another for greater effect. These objects, moreover, are given a considerable variety of forms, ranging from iconic human effigy and deity figurines, to fortress-like protective stone cairns, and egg-sized ball compounds, to highlight just a few. Enemy-oriented objects, as I shall henceforth call them, also include a whole range of usual Tibetan ritual paraphernalia, such as oblations, thread-crosses, and so forth, charged with

specifically martial tasks. As the reader may recall from Chapter Two, moreover, the public resounding of scripture and the construction or restoration of reliquaries and temples also feature as “objects” thought capable of repelling unwanted visitors.

THE CONTAGION OF DANGER AND DEATH

An examination of how these objects are formed and deployed in Sog bzlog pa’s ritual texts reveals that their efficacy is rooted in something other than catalyst power substances. Without the material catalyst continuum to condense and direct the blessings of past masters, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, objects require other sources of power to enable rituals to reach their intended effects. In lieu of a catalyzing agent and its legitimizing narratives, then, efficacy becomes contingent upon a far wider spectrum of objects, figures, and operations. For instance, since these rites are largely intended to impact enemies from afar, direct physical contact between powerful objects and their intended targets/recipients recedes as the primary mechanism of efficacy. Greater emphasis is placed instead upon the mimetic reproduction of enemy-oriented images and objects – whether these are construed as weapons, shields, or surrogate enemies. Heightened attention is also placed upon the mediations of ritual performances focused on these enemy-oriented objects, rather than on the *a priori* power of any one substance in particular.

Nonetheless, despite the spatial distance of enemy-oriented objects from their intended targets and the absence of “catalyst continua,” many of the objects under consideration here still have as basic ingredients substances that are described as deriving power primarily through physical contact, proximity, or categorical association with dangerously potent things. These include substances, animals, locales, deities, and

sometimes socially powerful, polluting, or liminal people. For instance, the “averting an army through the *ram tum* substance”⁸⁰³ rite from the *Twenty-five Means* prescribes ritual actors to sculpt a ball the size of a pigeon-egg using, among other ingredients, the soil and water from the sacred places of local wrathful spirits, mixed with animal meats and hearts, and local woods and grains.⁸⁰⁴ The “averting rite based on a statue,”⁸⁰⁵ also among the *Twenty-five Means*, stipulates to use an iron blade to fashion a figurine of the wrathful deity Vajrapāṇi from the flesh, blood, and bone of all the wild animals that can be found – particularly, fang of tiger, heart of brown bear, paw of yellow bear, and blood of wolf – all mixed with clay. In its right hand, moreover, should be placed a knife that was used to murder a person, dabbed and smeared with blood. The “uncommon teaching of crumpling a paper effigy of a general,”⁸⁰⁶ from the same Treasure cycle, stipulates that the effigy should be drawn on “poisonous paper.”⁸⁰⁷ The paper effigy is then to be inserted within an oblation made of dog feces, along with the form of the Hawk-headed Lord (Tib. *dbang phyug*, Skt. *īśvara*) sculpted from dog, wolf, and weasel feces. In a more direct appeal to the dangers of contact with death and the dead, Sog bzlog pa’s directions for constructing the burial pit in his King Kang Yamāntaka effigy burial rite stipulate that the earth come from underneath a corpse, a charnel ground, where a human

⁸⁰³ *Ram tum rdzas kyis bzlog pa*, in *sPyi ru bzlog thabs kyi rim pa sde tshan du byas pa*, *dMag bzlog nyi shu rtsa lnga*, *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. phi (71) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980), 59.4-60.5. Henceforth, I shall refer to this collection of rituals as *sPyi ru bzlog thabs*.

⁸⁰⁴ *sPyi ru bzlog thabs*: 59.5-59.6.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid: 64.1-66.1. *sku gzugs la brten nas bzlog pa*

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid: 69.4-71.6. *dMag dpon yig gcu pa'i gdams pa thun mongs ma yin pa*

⁸⁰⁷ “Poisonous paper” (*dug zhog*) refers to a type of paper made from *re lcag* bark, which is poisonous not to humans, but to moths that otherwise devour paper.

was murdered, or where a battle was lost.⁸⁰⁸ The outside of the pit should be smeared with ash from a cremated human corpse, the inside dabbed with poison and blood, and the lower level studded with thorns.⁸⁰⁹

In many of the above cases, ingredients are potent through their previous contact with or incorporation within dangerous or polluting deities, animals, substances, or locales. Such ingredients mediate contagious power, concentrating, extending and transforming the violent agency of their milieu by inclusion in the formation of ritual artifacts poised to act as weapons of attack, shields of protection, or surrogate enemies.

The mediation of power and agency through materials can flow in the opposite direction as well. Sog bzlog pa states on several occasions that effigies, as surrogate enemies, ought to ideally incorporate the enemy's feces and fragments of his clothes.⁸¹⁰ An effigy can also be inscribed with the enemy's clan name and astrological chart.⁸¹¹ Such linkages deploy the dynamics of mimetic representation and contagion in tandem to gain some purchase on the enemy's vitality, so as to facilitate the transfer of ritual actions from effigy to enemy.

We can see in these examples that despite the absence of power objects that impact victims through direct physical contact, the principle of extended personhood is nonetheless still operative, but takes on a slightly different character. Since enemy-

⁸⁰⁸ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed king kang nag po'i dgra brub kyi lag len gsal byed las kyi rlung dmar*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. yi (84) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980), 392.2-392.3. Henceforth, I refer to this text as *Las kyi rlung dmar*.

⁸⁰⁹ *Las kyi rlung dmar*: 392.3.

⁸¹⁰ See for example Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *gSang sngags spyi 'i sbyin bsregs kyi rnam bzhag rgyud sde'i dgongs don gsal* (Thimphu, Bhutan: National Library of Bhutan, 1984), 111. Henceforth, I refer to this title as *sByin bsreg rnam bzhag*.

⁸¹¹ See for example *Las kyi rlung dmar*: 392.4-392.5.

oriented objects are intended to affect their targets by remote, the mimetic reproduction of surrogate enemies, weapons, and/or shields takes precedence. The principle of contiguity then becomes an important way to aggregate violent and destructive power into surrogate weapons through the incorporation of substances that transmit and direct the dangerous, violent, or polluting power of the settings they were a part. Contiguity, moreover, is also the underlying principle behind incorporating into the surrogate enemy the physical waste, clothing, name, astrological chart, or other personal information linked with the enemy.

THE ORTHOPRAXY OF VIOLENCE

Some of the above examples illustrate that in addition to direct physical incorporation or contact with dangerous elements, many substances and items are selected based on their possession of traits that reflect the violent aim of the rite. Like the formation of ambrosia, the identification of such “violent” substances often hinges on the possession of considerable practical knowledge of the categories to which substances belong and the associations they carry with homologous spheres. This knowledge, moreover, is also rooted in expertise concerning Indian and Tibetan pharmacological and tantric textual traditions, which, as we noticed in his ambrosia accomplishment text, Sog bzlog pa was particularly concerned with demonstrating.

Unlike the ambrosia concoction, however, the categorization of phenomena in this class of rituals is driven more by concerns of ritual efficacy than medicinal potency. The workings of this particular principle of categorical consistency are especially pronounced

in Sog bzlog pa's explication of the burnt offering rite (Tib. *sbyin bsregs*, Skt. *homa*).⁸¹² Sog bzlog pa insists that all the material specifications of a burnt offering rite – its time, location, hearth, fire, offerings, kindling, materials to be burned, seating position, down to even the gestures which with the ritual ladles are handled – must accord with the aim of one or another of the four main categories of tantric activity (Tib. *las bzhi*, Skt. *catur-karma*).⁸¹³ The four activities include pacifying (Tib. *zhi ba*, Skt. *śānti*),⁸¹⁴ which entails the curing of illnesses, the removal of obstacles, demonic interferences, arguments, and fights, all the up to the quelling of emotional and cognitive afflictions; enriching (Tib. *rgyas pa*, Skt. *puṣṭi*),⁸¹⁵ which ranges from increasing wealth, possessions and merit, and prolonging lifespan, to developing valued subjective qualities such as intelligence; enthralling (Tib. *dbang ba*, Skt. *vaśa*),⁸¹⁶ which involves attracting disciples or overpowering leaders, and which includes as a subset the activity of summoning consorts for use in sexual yoga; and finally, destroying (Tib. *drag po*, Skt. *marāya*),⁸¹⁷ which aside

⁸¹² For an English translation of a Tibetan burnt offering liturgy, see Sherpa Tulku and Michael Perrott, trans. and eds., *A Manual of Ritual Fire Offerings* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1987). For more details on the history of burnt offering rites in India and Tibet, see Yael Bendor, "Interiorized Fire Rituals in India and in Tibet," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 120, no. 4 (2000): 594-613. There, Bendor discusses the interiorization of the burnt offering rite in the forms of subtle body yogic practices, sacralized eating and drinking, and cognitive visualization exercises, with a special focus on Tibetan instantiations of this phenomenon. Although she references Sog bzlog pa's burnt offering presentation in this connection, his treatment of the topic is almost entirely devoted to the "external" forms of the burnt offering rite. For a discussion of burnt offering rites according to Tibet's Treasure traditions, see Tadeusz Skorupski, "Tibetan Homa Rites According to the Gter ma Tradition," *The Tibet Journal*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1995): 2-46. For a historical discussion of burnt offering rites in East Asia, see Michel Strickmann, "Homa in East Asia," In *Agni, The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, ed. Frits Staal, vol. 2 (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1983), 418-455.

⁸¹³ *sByin bsreg rnam bzhag*: 50.5-136.2. The majority of this text is devoted to explicating the specifications for each of the four activities and their subsets.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid: 50.5-94.3.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid: 94.3-100.3.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid: 100.3-107.5.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid: 107.5-136.2.

from killing includes as subsets the aggressive acts of exiling, burying, paralyzing, stupefying, and dividing. Shows of prowess in these four ritual activities abound in the biographical and autobiographical literature, indicating that such demonstrations were deemed an important element in Tibet for acquiring a reputation as a powerful and authoritative ritual master.

Somewhat similar to the ambrosia accomplishment rite's groupings of five, tantric traditions categorize a staggering range of phenomena – directions, colors, materials, times, mantras, gestures, attitudes, and much else – according to which of the four activities they presumably facilitate.⁸¹⁸ Locating himself as an authoritative expert in this tradition, Sog bzlog pa is adamant that ritual protocol and orthopraxy, specifically with respect to substances, is an indispensable component of ritual efficacy. For this reason, Sog bzlog pa remarks, “it is a terrible mistake to depart from the tradition of learned lamas.”⁸¹⁹ Elsewhere he urges:

Do not follow the bad tradition of wrongly thinking to be correct an incorrect rite which mixes everything together like a vegetable soup. For Sa skya paṇḍita said:
 If it was not taught that blessings will enter into ritual proceedings
 When they are only slightly convoluted,
 How can blessings enter into ritual proceedings
 When they are completely convoluted?⁸²⁰

Sog bzlog pa was clearly concerned that lack of knowledge would result in “mixing together” ritual elements that ought to be kept separate according to activity. In other

⁸¹⁸ Each of the four activities is subdivided according to this range of items.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid: 129.2-129.3. *bla ma mkhas pa'i ring lugs dang bral ba ni skyon shin tu che/*

⁸²⁰ Ibid: 132.3-132.5. *...lo thug bzhin du thams cad bsres pa'i cho ga ma dag pa la dag par rlom pa'i lugs ngan rnams kyi rjes su 'jug par mi bya ste/ sa skya paNDi tas cho ga cung tsam 'chugs pa la/ byin rlabs 'jug par ma gsungs na/ cho ga thams cad 'phyugs pa la/ byin rlabs 'byung bar ga la 'gyur/ zhes gsungs pa yin no/* See fn. 795 above for the location and precise phrasing of this citation in Sa skya Paṇḍita's *sDom gsum rab dbye*.

words, the properties of the substances burned must accord with the goal of the particular action concerned. Otherwise, claims Sog bzlog pa, the rite will not work.

“Kindling (*bud shing*) and firewood (*yam shing*),” “substances to be burned” (*bsreg rdzas*), and effigy-related substances therefore receive particularly detailed treatment in Sog bzlog pa’s general discussion of the burnt offering rite. In these contexts, Sog bzlog pa prescribes the trees, plants, and other materials most appropriate for use with each activity’s burnt offering, as well as each activity’s details concerning the material and ritual preparations of the wood, including even its measurements, shapes, and handling procedures. He dwells in particular on the orthopraxy of different types of wood and the substances appropriate to combine with these. In the process he takes issue with a number of alternate opinions on the topic. Here too, Sog bzlog pa’s arguments consistently hinge on the assumption that all substances, woods, and other materials at use in a burnt offering must conform in nature with the character of the specific activity that the rite aims to effect. At work is a schematic typology of plants, minerals, woods, and other substances, in which all items are categorized based on properties thought to hasten particular courses of action. Sog bzlog pa also meticulously specifies acceptable material substitutions with appeals to the principles of resemblance and category inclusion. We end up with a veritable *materia medica* of ritual efficacy, based primarily on Indian tantric scriptural sources, but as these filtered through the material contingencies of Tibet’s specialized natural environment.⁸²¹

In a burnt offering rite intended to exact violence upon a foe, for instance, kindling should have sharp points and derive from the root of a tree that has thorns and

⁸²¹ These features are prevalent throughout Sog bzlog pa’s presentation of burnt offerings done specifically for one or another of the “four activities.”

black flowers, among other specifications.⁸²² Likewise, accompanying offerings and materials should include poisonous flowers, black flowers, thorny plants, coarsely textured and malodorous vegetables, rancid foods, and other materials that conjure associations with death, decay, and danger.⁸²³ Meanwhile, constructing an effigy for use in violent burnt offerings calls for the use of sea salt, salty vegetables, different types of poisonous substances, and different kinds of blood, such as the blood from someone who is terminally ill, who died from poisoning, or was murdered.⁸²⁴ In this final example of effigy construction we witness the principle of category inclusion operate in tandem with contiguity and mimesis in the production of a single item.⁸²⁵

Beyond just listing material specifications, a recurring theme throughout Sog bzlog pa's discussion of burnt offering rites is his insistence upon the orthopraxy of materials specifically as it relates to the performance of violent rites. This emphasis on the pragmatic materiality of ritual violence surfaces most visibly when Sog bzlog pa voices critical remarks about the positions of past and contemporary masters. More often than not, Sog bzlog pa levels his critiques against the fifteenth century Sa skya scholar sTag tshang *lotsāwa* Shes rab rin chen (b. 1405). Among other critiques of this master, Sog bzlog pa takes particular issue with his interpretations of the proper sitting

⁸²² *sByin bsreg rnam bzhag*: 110.2-110.3.

⁸²³ *Ibid*: 109.2-110.2.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid*: 110.5-111.5.

⁸²⁵ For a brief description of another, similar violent burnt offering rite from the *Susiddhikāra-tantra*, see Jacob Dalton, *Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 30-31.

position,⁸²⁶ hearth measurements and specifications,⁸²⁷ and substances to be burned,⁸²⁸ especially as they relate to the “destroying” variety of burnt offering rite.

On several occasions, moreover, Sog bzlog pa reserves criticisms for unnamed contemporaries in general, or more specifically, those from his own Old School tradition. These criticisms too revolve around material specifications and physical protocol, and often occur in the context of discussing violent burnt offering rites in particular. For instance, after presenting all the specifications for burnt offerings aimed at the activity subsets of killing, Sog bzlog pa laments:

In this and other contexts, certain Old School adherents indeed appear to be performing burnt offerings during great accomplishment rites without the proper butter/oil or burnt offering substances, let alone the precise hearth, fire wood, kindling and so forth. But this is inappropriate.⁸²⁹

Sog bzlog pa even extends the charge of ignorance with respect to orthopraxy in violent rites to his contemporaries more broadly. He goes so far as to urge his peers to study his own treatise, since, he alleges, the violent burnt offering activity subsets of dividing, summoning, exiling, paralyzing, burying, and the rest, are clearly no longer performed to standard in Tibet.⁸³⁰

Such jibes are a recurring theme throughout his burnt offering treatise, and to reiterate, most often involve the pragmatics of substances and materials as these bear on the performance of violent burnt offerings. Moreover, we can see from the details of

⁸²⁶ Ibid: 17.2-17.3.

⁸²⁷ Ibid: 18.5-19.5.

⁸²⁸ Ibid: 24.2-26.5.

⁸²⁹ Ibid: 124.5-126.3. *'di la sogs pa 'i skabs rnams su rnying ma ba kha gcig ni/ sgrub chen gyi skabs su/ thab dang yam shing 'bud shing la sogs pa tshad dang ldan pa ni lta zhog /mar dang bsregs rdzas ji bzhin par med par sbyin bsregs byed par snang mod/ 'di ni mi rung ste/*

⁸³⁰ Ibid: 20.5-21.2.

these passages that Sog bzlog pa is particularly concerned with ensuring that the proper substances are used, that they are arranged and handled in the proper way, and that they not get mixed together, but are kept properly categorized according to the activity under consideration. To this end, urges Sog bzlog pa repeatedly throughout the treatise, it is necessary for ritual specialists to acquire knowledge of the *tantras*, Indian and Tibetan commentaries, and the tradition of oral explanations. Discursive knowledge, specifically about the practical details surrounding substances and how to handle them in ritual contexts, is therefore a mandatory component, by Sog bzlog pa's account, in performing fully efficacious burnt offering rites. The urgency with which Sog bzlog pa requests contemporary masters to devote more attention to this facet of the ritual arts stems from his sense that during his time "the practice of authentic burnt offering rites seems to be vanishing."⁸³¹ And this is all the more true, according to Sog bzlog pa, when it comes to burnt offerings intended for violent activity and its subsets.

MATERIALIZING AND MASTERING UNSEEN FORCES

When we pan back out to once again consider this group of enemy-object oriented rituals as a whole, another typical feature is a stronger emphasis on the mediating roles of deity yoga techniques. In their mimetic production of artifacts, all of these rites appear to amplify the general tantric pattern of enmeshing things within a choreographed series of visual, sonic, and physical interactions, through which diverse agencies – human and non-human – are mediated and directed into and through material objects. For instance, in "averting with oblation weapons,"⁸³² from the *Twenty-five Means*, ritual actors are to

⁸³¹ Ibid: 133.2. *sbyin bsregs rnam par dag pa'i phyag len ni nub pa lta bur yang snang bas/*

imagine that oblations connected with their own tutelary deity turn into weapons, and that a sacrificial pit emerges in front of the enemy’s tutelary deity. Ritual actors are then to hurl the oblations into the imaginary sacrificial pit, and imagine that this act destroys the enemy’s power entirely. Ritual actors are then to imagine that “all the non-humans on one’s own side,”⁸³³ meaning the violent local deities connected with their own territory, consume the flesh, drink the blood, and devour the hearts of the enemy army. Here ritual actors are dealing only with an ordinary dough oblation. The principle of efficacy at work is supernatural agency, as mediated through the series of mimetic cognitive and physical interactions with that oblation.

Another explicit material mediation of supernatural agency can also be witnessed in the “averting rite based on White Dhṛtarāṣṭra,”⁸³⁴ also included within the *Twenty-five Means*. This method stipulates that a victory banner be erected in the center of the area to be protected. On the four sides of the banner the root mantra of Dhṛtarāṣṭra⁸³⁵ along with the mantra of the “supreme protector” (*mchog tu srung ba*) are to be written out and five-color silk banners are to be affixed to its point. Then, a statue of “the great king” (*rgyal po chen po*) Dhṛtarāṣṭra is to be fashioned and positioned at the highest peak in the direction from which the invading army is advancing. Next, four cairns are to be erected in town or in the four directions surrounding the area and “invested with the power of the

⁸³² *gtor zor gyis zlog pa*, in *sPyi ru zlog thabs*: 62.1-62.6.

⁸³³ *sPyi ru bzlog thabs*: 62.3. *rang phyogs kyi mi ma yin thams cad*

⁸³⁴ *Ibid*: 66.6-69.5. *yul 'khor srung dkar po la brten nas zlog pa*

⁸³⁵ Dhṛtarāṣṭra (Yul 'khor srung ba), which literally means “protector (*dhṛta*) of the kingdom (*rāṣṭra*),” was introduced in Chapter One of this study as one of the four great mundane guardians, or great kings, who each preside over one of the four cardinal directions and exercise dominion over a particular class of spirit. Dhṛtarāṣṭra presides as lord of the gandharvas in the east, the general direction from which Mongol armies entered Tibet during this period. Recall, moreover, that when Zhig po gling po entrusted to Sog bzlog pa the task of repelling Mongol armies from Tibet through rituals, the Treasure revealer stipulated that Sog bzlog pa should focus specifically upon practices related to this figure.

four kings.”⁸³⁶ Finally, four piles of oblations are to be cast into the four directions.

Through this rite, the text promises, “spirits will protect the country.”⁸³⁷

While mantra is invariable a major component in all these rites, it appears that written mantra formulas are particularly emphasized. As discussed earlier, since mantras are potent condensations of divine power and agency, physical contact with them charges things with divine agency, thus allowing ritual actors to extend supernatural agency via the deployment of transactional objects. Perhaps in the absence of a physical catalyst continuum, the physicality of mantra in its written formats partially fulfills the role of communally visible material crystallizations of divine agency. The material use of written mantras is particularly apparent in a rite from the *Twenty-five Means* that instructs how to build a “wand of invisibility” (*sgrib shing*) over an entire area based on a stone cairn.⁸³⁸ In this rite, ritual actors are to sequentially write three different mantras on three separate pieces of paper or birch bark, roll within them the “power substances” (*thun*) of mustard seeds, powdered iron, and powdered stone, respectively, and then place all three scrolls within a stone cairn. The cairn is then to be decorated with a drawing of a wheel with four spokes, on which four different mantras are to be written. This cairn becomes the focal point of a series of further gestural, sonic, and cognitive operations. In other rituals, the preparation of effigy images also features written mantra formulas, or seed syllables written at the vital points of the body of the effigy drawing or figurine.⁸³⁹ These

⁸³⁶ *sPyi ru zlog thabs*: 67.5. *rgyal chen bzhi por mnga' yang gsol*

⁸³⁷ *Ibid*: 67.6. *dre ni yul khams srung ba yin/*

⁸³⁸ *Ibid*: 63.6-65.1.

⁸³⁹ See for instance the effigy preparations prescribed in *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 392.5-393.2.

are often accompanied by curses and images, such as snakes or scorpions, which conjure associations with danger and death.⁸⁴⁰

The preparation of effigy images additionally calls for the active presence of not only supernatural agency, but also the attenuated presence of the victim, who becomes captured, if you will, within the effigy image. Only then can ritual actors use effigies as sites through which to direct supernatural agency in confrontations with enemies. Effigy rites, Sog bzlog pa insists, thus require that the victim's personal life force, or *bla*⁸⁴¹ be "summoned" (*bla 'gugs*) into an enemy image before its violent ritual treatment can begin.⁸⁴² The action of summoning requires also that the enemy be "separated from his gods" (*lha dang dbye*).⁸⁴³ This operation stipulates that ritual actors burn incense composed of bdellium (Tib. *gu gul*, Skt. *guggula*) while striking together the bones of a crow and an owl, which are considered natural enemies. Meanwhile, ritual actors are to

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid: 392.5-393.2. For a more detailed presentation and analysis of effigy drawings, see Bryan Cuevas, "Illustrations of Human Effigies in Tibetan Ritual Texts: With Remarks on Specific Anatomical Figures and their Possible Iconographic Source," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (Third Series), vol. 21, issue 01 (Jan. 2011): 73-97.

⁸⁴¹ The Tibetan notion of "personal life force" (*bla*), according to Martin Mills (*Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 161) "means not simply 'life-essence,' but the source of one's active and authoritative engagement in the world, both as a living person and as a religious practitioner." Personal life force is fundamentally distributive in nature. Each personal life force is both rooted in the person's body and in a correlating external "place of life force" (*bla gnas*) located nearby. That place can be a stone, tree, mountain, animal, or some other object or locale. Life force, moreover, is also often believed to be possessed by a family, community, or an entire territory or state. For more on the Tibetan notion of life force, or *bla*, see R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), 202-212. For further details on "life force" and "place of life force" (*bla gnas*), and their roles in destructive magic, see René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (1998), 481-483.

⁸⁴² The rite of "summoning the life force" (*bla 'gug*) is a ritual type more commonly performed by clergy to restore the health and mental stability to persons by calling back to them their personal life force, which is believed to become estranged from the body due to one of many possible circumstances. For a discussion of a Bon po version of this ritual type, see Samten Karmay, "The Soul and the Turquoise: a Ritual for Recalling the bla," in *Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 310-338. For description of a Mongolian Buddhist version of this rite, see C. R. Bawden, "Calling the Soul: A Mongolian Litany," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, vol. 25, no. 1-2 (1962): 81-103.

⁸⁴³ *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 401.2-401.5.

recite a liturgy, while they imagine that the enemy’s gods and protectors scatter like crows driven off by a stone, concluding with mantra recitation. The liturgical verses tap into a specific rationale underlying the composition of the person and his or her relationship with the non-human realm by calling for the severance from the enemy of all natal deities. The model presented in the liturgy is one in which personhood is distributed throughout the body between a pantheon of forces that were all inherited from various kinship relations.⁸⁴⁴ The “separation from deities” thus enacts a particularly Tibetan way of removing a victim from the network of kinship ties that give definition to his fragmented personhood and provide protection from external attack.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid. The liturgical verses read as follows:

Hūṃ

Mighty Kha kha mu kha,
Great dark blue one with a crow’s head!
Mighty Hu lu mu kha,
Great dark yellow one with an owl’s head!
You two course throughout day and night,
Unconsciously devouring flesh as food.

Come and separate the enemy from his warrior deity!
Come and separate him from kith and kin!
Come and separate him from older and younger brothers!
Separate his male deity (*pho lha*) from his right shoulder!
Separate his female deity (*mo lha*) from his left shoulder!
Separate his warrior deity (*dgra lha*) from the crown of his head!
Separate his vitality deity (*srog lha*) from the center of his heart!
Separate his maternal uncle deity (*zhang lha*) from the center of his navel!
Separate his maternal deity (*ma lha*) from his secret place!
Separate his treasury deity (*bang lha*) from the family treasury!
Mama trag ru trag māraya separate! separate!

(hUM/ kha kha mu kha mthu no che/ mthing nag chen mo bya rog mgo/ hu lu mu kha mthu mo che/ ser nag chen mo ’ug pa’i mgo/ rtog med zas su sha sa zing/ khyed gnyid nyin mtshan med par rgyu/ dgra dang dgra lha phrol la shog/ gnyen dang nye ba phrol la shog/ pho bo nu bo phrol la shog/ pho lha phrag pa g.yas nas phrol/ mo lha phrag pa g.yon nas phrol/ dgra lha spyi bo’i gtsug nas phrol/ srog lha snying gi dkyil nas phrol/ zhang lha lte ba’i dkyil nas phrol/ ma lha gsang ba’i gnas nas phrol/ bang lha mdzod tshang nang nas phrol/ ma ma trag ru trag mA ra ya phyas phyas/)

**VIOLENT OUTBURSTS, THE CALL TO COLLECTIVE ACTION, AND OTHER PUBLICLY
OBSERVABLE ASPECTS OF EFFICACY**

In addition to summoning and materializing unseen entities with recourse to images and objects, most of these rites also stipulate that participants mete out observable, violent treatment upon their featured enemy-objects. Once formed, the deployment of such artifacts often calls for ritual actors to make direct physical contact with them, usually by striking, pelting, or whipping them with “power substances” (*thun*), or artifacts of power, or hurling them aggressively in the direction of would be victims. We witnessed above the whipping action that the pigeon-sized ball undergoes at the head of the valley during the rite “averting an army through the *ram tum* substance.”⁸⁴⁵ In the *Twenty-five Means*’ “averting with thread-cross,”⁸⁴⁶ a thread-cross structure is filled with paper effigies of an entire army before being “pelted” (*brab*) with undefined “power substances” (*thun*) and thrown in the direction from which the army is presumed to be advancing. In his King Kang Yamāntaka burial rite, moreover, Sog bzlog pa prescribes ritual actors to “incant white mustard seeds, salt, Sichuanese pepper corns (*g.yer ma*), mountain avalanche shards, and gravel [with the mantra] during the sessions, then hurl them as power substances at the effigy while reciting the curse.”⁸⁴⁷

Sog bzlog pa directly addresses the relationships between the physical, sonic, and cognitive treatments of the enemy-object only when visualizations become particularly elaborate. Sog bzlog pa’s more extensive rites, such as his King Kang Yamāntaka burial rite and his burnt offering rite, feature a profusion of visualized imagery, where multiple

⁸⁴⁵ *sPyi ru zlog thabs*: 59.6-60.2.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid: 61.2-61.4. *mdos kyis zlog pa*

⁸⁴⁷ *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 413.3. /*de nas thun mtshams su nyuns kar/ lan tshwa/ g.yer ma/ ri chen po'i rbab/ rdo'i dum bu rnam la bsngags shing/ ling ga la thun 'phangs te...*

deity images interact together as the selves, substances, and others involved in the process of constructing artifacts of power and deploying these to eliminate enemies. These more elaborate rituals are made up of smaller ritual episodes, or modules,⁸⁴⁸ each of which also features a rather baroque layering of contemplative imagery, in which deities as self and others work in tandem upon an enemy. The intricacy and dynamism of the imagery involved led Sog bzlog pa to introduce a distinction among ritual actors between the “superior person” (*gang zag rab*), who can imagine all operations simultaneously, and those who cannot and must visualize in sequence.⁸⁴⁹ And yet, despite this division of meditative aptitudes, for Sog bzlog pa the action of pelting the effigy with substances still takes precedence over cognitive operations, even when it comes to the “superior” type. Sog bzlog pa is explicit on this note when he stipulates: “While striking [the effigy] with power substances, it is permitted not to meditate.”⁸⁵⁰ It would seem then that the material index of substance, and its use in ritual actors’ highly visible act of exerting physical violence against the effigy, is deemed more effective than visualization as a technique to mediate the agency of deities and ritual actors in tandem.

This emphasis on observable physical contact meshes well with communal interest in threats from “enemies and obstructers,” and the high visibility of the rite, with all its unusual materials, pageantry, and drama. In this sense, the “recipients” of this event also include the communities it aims to protect, not just the enemies it aims to repel. In order to repel the enemy, the enemy must be collectively produced, literally,

⁸⁴⁸ For more details about a modular approach to the analysis of rituals, see Cabezón, “Introduction” (2010). See also Garrett, et al. (2013), who test this approach, and its emphasis upon ritual as narrative, in their analysis of an “accomplishing medicine” ritual.

⁸⁴⁹ *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 415.5.

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid*: 415.5. *thun rteg dus su mi bsgom pa gnang yin no/*

then publicly beaten and driven away. Despite a heightened attention to the cognitive and sonic facets of the procedure, enemy removal nonetheless calls for concerted, full-contact treatment.

This emphasis on publically observable action is most likely associated with the communal interest of these rites. Most of these rituals express a rationale of communal morale experience, or collective karma, which enables collective action to have a strong influence in ritual efficacy. For instance, to protect a valley from military incursion, the pigeon sized ball that features in “averting an army through the *ram tum* substance” must undergo concerted communal action. Ritual actors must twine braided whips using the hair of socially powerful and liminal members of the community – widows, murder victims, Buddhists and Bonpos whose family lines have ceased, and monks and tantric laymen with breached ethical commitments – and then have other socially powerful and liminal members convene at the head of the valley to repeatedly strike the ball with the hair whips.⁸⁵¹ The rite also prescribes a ban on fishing and hunting in the region during ritual proceedings.⁸⁵² In a slightly similar vein, the rite of “averting through ransom materials” (*zang zing yas kyis zlog pa*) in the *Twenty-five Means* is premised on the notion that it is the combination of resentments from local deities, the lapsed morality of the local clerical and tantric communities, and the persistence of local feuds that are ultimately responsible for foreign military invasions. In this case, local-level social, moral, and architectural restoration is required to stave off encroaching armies.⁸⁵³ Even in the rite “averting [an army] through resounding the sacred scripture” (*gsung rab*

⁸⁵¹ *sPyi ru zlog thabs*: 59.6-60.2.

⁸⁵² *Ibid*: 60.4.

⁸⁵³ *Ibid*: 60.5-61.2.

bsgrags nas zlog pa), also in the *Twenty-five Means*, the act of directing the power and blessings of Buddha to protect a locale via public annunciation of scripture requires that ritual participants include a microcosm of the community's (all male) religious and political members. This group should ideally include 11 monks (*bande*) with ethical discipline, seven monks without ethical discipline, 11 mantrins with tantric commitments, and seven mantrins without tantric commitments.⁸⁵⁴ The rows should be headed by the "current ruler, whose dominion has not yet declined" (*btsad po mnga' thang ma nyams pa gcig*).⁸⁵⁵ And presiding over the whole assembly should be a pure, fully ordained monk.⁸⁵⁶ The text stipulates that they should face the direction from which the army is coming while they chant in unison.⁸⁵⁷

All of these examples illustrate that another way in which power is meant to flow, or better, overflow through these rites is by mobilizing and consolidating groups of ritual performers, inclusive of a community's religious and political leaders, who are most concerned with "purging" their community of the harmful influences of moral degeneracy, pollution, foreign military aggression, or a combination thereof. Associated with the efficacy of such social mobilization to action is that circumstances and contingencies that impact an entire community are often interpreted as part of that community's collective level of karma, this despite the general individualist emphasis of standard karmic cause and effect theory. Collective karma also implies collective responsibility, especially when the survival of the community may be at stake. And there

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid: 63.2-63.3.

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid: 63.3.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid: 63.3-63.4.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid: 63.4.

is no better way to show support than to participate in publically observable displays of solidarity.

“SIGNS” OF SUCCESS AND THEIR SIGNIFIED OUTCOMES

Given the communal scope of many of these rites, the appearance and interpretation of “signs” of ritual success is another element that often galvanizes collective attention. The most extensive mention of signs in Sog bzlog pa’s ritual texts appears in the King Kang Yamāntaka burial rite, where he briefly lists all the various events that should be construed as signaling the success of ritual proceedings. Here, “signs that the enemy is defeated” include “a citadel being captured, wearing helmet and armor, holding an excellent weapon, the raising of a standard, the blowing of a conch shell, the killing or capturing of a yak, the capturing of a bird in a snare, the cracking of an egg, one’s victory in dice, cards, riddles and such, one’s victory in a fight, capturing an animal in a pen or stable, the breaking of an arrow, or whatever corresponds with positive signs as these are generally conceived.”⁸⁵⁸ “Signs that the enemy has been killed,” moreover, include “signs that resemble general wrathful mantra signs, such as a tree falling, a rock splitting, animals like deer and such being killed, being given a head, heart, flesh or blood, and the stench of a corpse, or rotten meat wafting throughout the ritual space.”⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁸ *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 417.3-417.5. *rdzong bzung ba/ /go khrab gyon pa/ /mtshon cha bzung po thogs pa/ dar phyar ba/ dud 'bud pa/ g.yag bsad pa'am bcings pa/ bya snyi la bzung ba/ sgong nga bcag pa/ sho dang cho lo dang mig mang rtse ba la sogs pa rang rgyal ba/ 'thab pas bdag nyid rgyal ba/ dud 'gro ra ba dang/ lhas su bcug pa btson bzung ba/ gzhu chag pa rnams ni dgra thub pa'i rtags so/ /gzhan yang bzung rtags phal cher spyi dang mthun no/*

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid*: 417.5-417.6. */bsad pa'i rtags ni/ shing chen bskyel ba/ brag bshig pa/ ri dwags la sogs pa'i sems can bsad pa/ mgo snying dang sha khrag ster ba/ sgrub khang du gshin dri dang sha rul gyi dri ma nam pa sogs la drag sngags spyi dang 'dra ba 'byung ngo/*

This list, which combines events that can occur in the context of dreams or waking life, public or private, illustrates above all that events that take place in the vicinity of rituals often function as indexes for their presumed success or failure. That liturgies stipulate “signs of success” just as they stipulate other ritual procedures shows, moreover, that signs are heavily mediated not just by the public observations and private experiences of ritual participants, but more fundamentally by the cultural texts that prescribe ritual actions and their signs of success in the first place. In practice, this means that experiences and observations must be checked against culturally authoritative textual prescriptions before events can be deemed “signs of success.” This is a process that requires considerable knowledge and interpretive work. We can describe the workings of signs of success then as consisting of layers of mediation, connecting textuality, experience, and public consensus in a complex network of referentiality, all of which is mediated in turn by the interpretative acumen of the master of ceremonies. This dynamic ends up locating the ritual master at the epicenter of authority, even as he draws from the authority of previous ritual masters and their interpretations, appropriating their agency through the mediations of authoritative texts and his place in their lineage. And yet, this modality of authority has proven unstable time and again. Contention over the proper interpretations of signs is a theme that Sog bzlog pa touches upon often in his *History*.

The most compelling proof of ritual success are the actual, physical repulsion of enemies, the outcomes signified by “signs” of success. With signified outcomes of enemy-object oriented rituals, the master of ceremony’s interpretative acumen is also important, but only as it supports, connects, or conforms to publicly observable events of communal import and the prophecies that ostensibly foretold these. I remind the reader that Sog bzlog pa’s *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back*, which I explored in

some depth in Chapter Two, is Sog bzlog pa's memoir of such associations. In the *History*, you may recall, Sog bzlog pa connects prophecies, ritual performances, signs of ritual success, and geopolitical events to present himself and his rituals as the primary agent behind many of the most significant geopolitical events that transpired in Tibet during his lifetime. By Sog bzlog pa's account in the *History*, the outcomes of his violent object-oriented rites included the death of invading Mongol armies through illness, natural disaster, or some other condition; divisive fighting among Mongol military factions; unexplainable retreat of Mongol troops from Tibetan territories; and failures of Mongol military expeditions to secure footing or even cause casualties in Tibet. Moreover, in addition to exerting direct influence upon Mongol military forces, ritual outcomes in Sog bzlog pa's account also included the political unification of gTsang, the consolidation of Tibet's borders, the expansion of gTsang pa sde srid power, and the increased authority and wealth of Sog bzlog pa and his colleagues. To represent these diverse geopolitical events as outcomes of his rituals, Sog bzlog pa retrospectively connects them to their ostensive rituals, signs of success, and prophecies. In so doing, Sog bzlog pa sometimes shares the credit for these outcomes with the growing might of the gTsang polity, in light of its diverse political and military strategies to contain the Mongol threat. The result is an interweaving of personal, subjective and public, objective elements of efficacy and outcomes, which serves above all to authorize Sog bzlog pa and his gTsang pa sde srid patrons in a single stroke.

CREATING THE SELF THROUGH KILLING THE OTHER

This brings us to the final factor of efficacy I would like to consider with respect to this category of objects: the master of ceremonies, the lama, who serves as both

choreographer and lead actor in these ritual performances. As illustrated by the legitimating function of Sog bzlog pa's autobiographical *History*, the primary means by which the Sog bzlog pa is authorized as a master of ceremonies capable of bringing his rituals to fruition is through key self-reflexive and meta-discursive moments peppered through his ritual texts.

Perhaps the most conspicuous way in which Sog bzlog pa constructs his identity through his ritual texts is by locating himself within a lineage of previous masters during the course of ritual proceedings. For instance, the “invoking the pledge” (*thugs dam bskul*) and “entrusting activity” (*phrin las bcol*) sections of Sog bzlog pa's King Kang Yamāntaka burial rite assumes the form of plea bargains with lineage deities by appealing to the lineage of previous practitioners whom they served, and the plethora of gifts that those persons have given to ensure continued loyalty. First, “invoking the pledge” consists of verses cast as reminders to the Dharma protectors that they have sworn before previous masters to safeguard all who practice and promote the Buddhadharma.⁸⁶⁰ These verses appeal to the logic of reciprocity: ritual actors supplicate deities to act on their behalf by reminding them of all the material and imagined offerings that they have presented to them in that and previous rites. This invocation begins by citing the lineage of previous masters who have practiced the deities and on whose behalf they have interceded. Sog bzlog pa recounts the lineage of this particular form of Yamāntaka as extending from Mañjuśrīmitra, through Zhig po gling pa, and on to himself. The list is also posthumously extended by subsequent generations to include

⁸⁶⁰ *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 410.1-411.4.

Sog bzlog pa's student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, Gong ra ba's student Nam mkha' rdo rje, "our own root master, and so forth."⁸⁶¹

This section is followed with verses whose explicit intent is to "entrust activity."⁸⁶² Here, the tone shifts to one of more forceful appeals to the logic of reciprocity and pleas for the deity to accomplish a range of effects, thus offering further glimpses into the assumptions of exchange underlying the rite's efficacy. This sequence has a concluding emphasis on mantra and its enchantment of substances, which operates based on the assumption that deities, once urged to action, will act on the enemy via the mediation of their mantra, as extended by ritual actors through substance.⁸⁶³ And yet, according to this segment, mantra, when mediated by power substances, must in turn be mediated by the highly visible, violent pelting action that ritual actors exert upon the effigy. The authority of such ritual action derives in turn from the position of the master of ceremonies within the lineage that the particular deities invoked are under pledge to serve. This chain, or circle of agency, especially in light of its distribution of authority between deities and the master of ceremonies' lineage of masters via their historical exchange of goods for services, tilts the balance of power toward the master of ceremonies vis-à-vis past human masters. In other words, it is the historical relationship of reciprocity pledged to pertain between human practitioners and protective deities that

⁸⁶¹ Ibid: 410.1-410.5. The entire lineage is listed as follows: "Destroyer of Yama Mañjuśrīmitra, gTsong lag dpal dge and Bal po nor 'dzin, Sangs rgyas ye shes and Yon tan rgya mtsho, Padma dbang rgyal and Jo sras 'jam dpal, Yum mchog so gang and Lha rje ye shes gzung, Dar rje jo dar and Chos rgyal rgya hor, dBang gzhon chos seng and Lha rje bkra shis dar, Chos seng seng dar and Ye shes rgya mtsho, Sangs rgyas rdo rje and Kun dga' bsod nams dpal, mTsho skyes phun tshogs and Bla ma rtsa bryad pa, Bla chen chos dpal and bkra shis bzang mthu stobs rgyan, Blo gros bzang po and Padma dbang gi rgyal, Ngag dbang rig 'dzin and Gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal, Blo gros rgyal mtshan and gZhan phan rdo rje, Nam mkha' rdo rje, our own root master, and so on."

⁸⁶² Ibid: 411.4-412.5.

⁸⁶³ Ibid: 412.5-413.3.

enables the master of ceremonies to utilize cognitive, sonic, and material mediators of supernatural power to extend that relationship into ever new contexts. In this way, Sog bzlog pa, author and master of ceremonies, forges his identity through association with a specific chain of past human masters and the relationship they collectively share with Yamāntaka and his entourage of protectors.

Sog bzlog pa further personalizes this relationship of reciprocity with Yamāntaka in his colophon to the burial rite. Sog bzlog pa appends to his liturgy a Yamāntaka *gaṇacakra* ritual,⁸⁶⁴ which ends with the following colophon:

The night when I thought that this standard liturgy required a gloss, there appeared a figure that requested one, who I thought was Karmayama in person. Based on that, I, the monk from gDong, Blo gros rgya mtsho (=rgyal mtshan) dpal bzang po, arranged this in sMyug la tshal. Since the request for this came from what I consider to be the voice of Karmayama himself, do not distribute it willy-nilly.⁸⁶⁵

Thus, Sog bzlog pa's authority to act upon enemies by appropriating the power of Yamāntaka, among other items, gains legitimacy in part through the liturgical text's "wrapping," its colophon, which references the appearance and voice of this deity, in the form of Karmayama, "the killer of death,"⁸⁶⁶ as both patron and prototype of the technique his text unfolds. By rooting the ultimate source of this object-oriented ritual in the supernatural agency of Yamāntaka, who came to Sog bzlog pa in person to request it, the colophon extends the deity's powerful agency, legitimating the authority of this author and his object-oriented rite in a single gesture.

⁸⁶⁴ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i tshogs mchod, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*. vol. 84 (yi) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980), 433-442.

⁸⁶⁵ *gShin rje'i tshogs mchod*: 441.6-442.1.

⁸⁶⁶ Martin Boord, *The Deity Vajrakīla: According to the Texts of the Northern Treasure Tradition of Tibet (Byang-gter phur-ba)*, Buddhica Britannica Series Continua IV (Tring, U. K.: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1993), 204-205. Boord notes that Karmayama, or the black Yama of karma, was originally an epithet for Yama, the lord of death, and gradually came to denote the enemy, or "ender of death," in the form of the Buddhist deity Vajrabhairava, a wrathful manifestation of Mañjuśrī, as it does in the present case.

In the case of the *Twenty-five Means*, it is a combination of prophecy texts and colophons that help to serve this authorizing function. We may recall that the *Twenty-five Means* was not authored by Sog bzlog pa, but inherited from his master Zhig po gling pa, based on this master's interpretations of Treasure prophecies attributed to Padmasambhava stipulating the figures, dates, locations, and methods deemed most efficacious for the expulsion of Mongol armies in Sog bzlog pa's time. The *Sequenced Classification of Means for Averting a General Regiment, from the Twenty-five Ways of Averting Armies*,⁸⁶⁷ which serves as our main source for these practices, inflects this defining role of prophecy in the logic of the Treasure tradition. This short text moves back and forth between prophecy, ritual prescription, explanation, and bibliography, among other registers, and shifts temporally between the time of its original annunciation, the time of its subsequent revelation, and the time of its later codification and use. Such stylistic and temporal complexity has the effect of connecting figures, separated by centuries, within a common spiritual lineage, often by appeal to identity across successive incarnations. Through so doing, later figures can extend to themselves the power of Padmasambhava and his milieu in the creation of their own personas of ritual prowess.

In addition to Treasure prophecies, Treasure colophons also sometimes forge key associations with previous incarnations. The way in which this dynamic works is illustrated with particular clarity in “the wand of invisibility [covering] an area based on a cairn, and the averting rite based on a statue,” within the *Twenty-five Means*.⁸⁶⁸ At the

⁸⁶⁷ *dMag zlog nyi shu rtsa lnga las spyi ru zlog thabs kyi rim pa sde tshan du byas pa Rin chen gter mdzod*, (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976-1980), vol. 71 (Phi), 57-72. I refer to this short text as *sPyi ru zlog thabs* throughout this chapter.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid: 63.6-64.1. *dMag zlog nyi shu rtsa lnga las/ tho la brten nas yul gyi sgrib shing dang/ sku gzugs la brten nas zlog pa*

conclusion of this section comes a series of promises about the rite's power, followed by a colophon that directly links Sog bzlog pa, as Zhig po gling pa's scribe for this section, with gNyags Jñānakumāra, who allegedly transcribed the original Treasure teaching on behalf of Padmasambhava.⁸⁶⁹

In these ways, the text's self-referential moments, specifically when these prophesize the identities of revealers and enactors, or record the names of revealers and scribes, effectively directs the power and authority of Padmasambhava through the text and into the identities of recipients, who then emerge as agents in charge of ritual proceedings and equipped with the requisite public reputation for prowess in the ritual arts. As discussed in Chapter Two, however, prophecy interpretation for Sog bzlog pa was an arena of considerable controversy. The reverberations of these controversies after Sog bzlog pa's death in the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama will be touched upon in the following chapter of this thesis.

It should be kept in mind that the role of prophecy texts in prescribing the specifications of enemy expulsion also has a temporal dimension, which can sometimes operate in dynamic tension with prophecy's role in constructing personal charismatic authority. Owing to the urgency of timely ritual responses to foreign military intrusion, prophecies emphasize timing as a crucial ingredient of ritual efficacy. I described in Chapter Two that when Zhig po gling pa charged Sog bzlog pa with the duty of repelling Mongol armies through the *Twenty-five Means*, he also imparted to his student copious oral instructions, often in the form of prophecy interpretations, for how to most effectively implement this set of rites. In those passages, Zhig po gling pa tells Sog bzlog

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid: 66.4-66.5. *ces bka' rtags kyi yi ge shog ser la gnyags dznyA na ku mA ras bkod nas mahA gu ru nyid kyis gter du sbas so/ sa ma ya/ rgya rgya rgya/ gter rgya/ sbas rgya/ bka' rgya/ dam rgya/ gsang rgya'o/ bdag 'dra gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal gyis shog ser ngos nas dag par phab pa/ yi ge pa ni lha rje blo gros bzang pos bgyis pa'o/*. This colophon refers to Sog bzlog pa by the name Lha rje Blo gros bzang po.

pa that since “times are surely getting worse,” Sog bzlog pa will be unable to accomplish all the rites.⁸⁷⁰ Zhig po gling pa advises instead to “emphasize the easier ones, and the practice of Black and White Dhṛtarāṣṭra.”⁸⁷¹ He also encourages Sog bzlog pa to focus specifically on the rites prophecised for the Earth-Female-Hen year (*sa mo bya lo*, 1609) and the Iron-Male-Dog year (*lcags pho khyi*, 1610).⁸⁷² Since performances executed during those years “will suffice,” Zhig po gling pa assures, “not even much of a charismatic attitude will be required” (*sems brjid chen po rang yang mi dgos*) to ensure success.⁸⁷³ Here, it would seem that personal charisma and power, even when created and augmented by authoritative prophecies and identifications with past masters, is sometimes deemed less decisive for ritual success than simply observing prophecised temporal windows of heightened efficacy.

In yet a further mediation of personal charisma and ritual prowess, these temporal windows of efficacy are often wed to broader understandings of what constitutes an “enemy.” This opens up these windows of opportunity further to enable enemy/army repelling rites framed for specifically prophesized performers, times, and would be victims to become institutionalized within the ritual calendars of locales. For this to happen, rituals must deploy enemy-object constructions that aggregate, or shift easily between humans and non-humans, specific foreign armies and general demon hordes. In other words, the targets stipulated in liturgies and associated prophecies must strike the right balance between specificity and generality to enable a significant degree of

⁸⁷⁰ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 216.1. *da dus 'di ngan du 'gro ba thams cad mi thub/*

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid*: 216.1-216.2. *las sla ba 'di tsho dang/ yul 'khor bsrung dkar nag gi sgrub pa 'di la gtso bor thon/*

⁸⁷² *Ibid*: 216.2.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid*: 216.2.

ambiguity. The *Twenty-five Means* accomplishes this by repeatedly analogizing demon hordes to human armies, while the King Kang Yamāntaka burial rite does so through incorporating slightly different procedural variations depending on whether the proposed victim is human or non-human. The burial rite also construes the enemy in the form of dangerous contagion, and not just specific figures. Hexes to be written on the effigy include, “Bury the enemy that spreads during the year and month!” (*lo dang zla ba la dgra dar ba nan*); and “Bury the enemy that spreads during the day and meal!” (*zhag dang za ma la dgra dar ba nan*).⁸⁷⁴ Such boundary blurring between human and non-human domains enables enemy and army averting rites to be easily integrated into New Year purification rituals, or other regular annual ceremonies intended to purge a community of “the enemy.” In the particular case of Sog bzlog pa, this dynamic is in part what enabled him to institutionalize his army averting rites as head ritual master of a clerical assembly in ’U yug, northern gTsang. This ambiguity also helped his King Kang Yamāntaka burial rite become an important event in Sikkim’s ritual calendar. This ritual can still be observed at bKra shis sdings monastery in western Sikkim, where it is performed annually as part of the locale’s communal New Year purification ceremonies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON ENEMY-ORIENTED RITES

All told, Sog bzlog pa’s enemy-object oriented rites, even while they do not include “catalyst continua,” still operate based on many of the same principles of efficacy that we witnessed in his rites featuring edible compounds of power. However, since the ritual deployment of such objects is intended to reap effects upon victims from a safe distance, these principles take on slightly different textures. The most fundamental distinction in

⁸⁷⁴ *Las kyi dmar rlung*: 413.3-413.4.

this regard is that contiguity becomes subordinate to similarity as the governing principle of efficacy. All enemy-oriented rites require ritual specialists to construct mimetic reproductions of enemies, weapons, and/or shields, and use these to dramatize in ritual settings the idealized defeat of the enemy. Extending ritualized battles to actual enemies requires in turn that these reproductions incorporate physical fragments once in contact with the enemy, and/or substances derived from, or categorically associated with dangerous, polluting, or violent persons, places, or things. In lieu of any single ingredient thought to possess the requisite power to infuse these artifacts with enough violent power to repel the enemy, the orthopraxy of substances, in terms of their proper categorical associations, comes to the fore as paramount for efficacy. However, unlike Sog bzlog pa's ambrosia concoction, which emphasizes medicinal potency, in this context orthopraxy centers upon which substances can aid in the efficacy of the tantric activity of destroying (among the four activities) and its subsets. Knowledge of these material criteria and practical expertise in their implementation is therefore deemed essential, as is a greater density of deity-yoga operations focused on these enemy-oriented artifacts. Special emphases on mantra formulas in their written formats, and on operations intended to summon the life-force of the enemy and capture it within the effigy also come to the fore in this regard.

And yet, despite an intensified role for deity-yoga techniques, knowledge, and other subjective, quasi-unobservable facets of efficacy, since idealized ritual battles confront enemies that provoke communal anxiety, observable, collective dramatization and involvement, beyond simply the clerical sphere, also becomes a crucial component of efficacy. We have witnessed how tangible shows of physical violence, in the form of aggressively pelting, striking, hurling, burying, or otherwise acting upon mimetic images

is a signature element of enemy-oriented rites. Such ritual proceedings also frequently require communal participation and appeal to a collective moral sensibility, or shared karma in order to galvanize communal attention.

“Signs” of success and signified outcomes in turn straddle the divide between these communally observable ritual dramatizations and their ostensible effects – the defeat of the enemy – effectively placing the master of ceremonies in a position of interpretive authority over the cluster of experiences and operations that occur in and around ritual proceedings. Key moments within liturgical texts extend the authority of the master of ceremonies further by appealing to associations with past masters, previous incarnations, and timeless deities. And yet, even as these self-referential moments help construct an image of ritual authority and prowess, the ambiguities of prophecy texts, when coupled with liturgical ambiguities over what, precisely, constitutes an enemy, allow rituals deemed for specific persons, times, and places to become anchored to the regular, annual ritual calendars of locations.

We are left with an image of the sources of efficacious power as dynamically distributed among material ingredients and mimetic images that incorporate them, immaterial deities invoked through deity-yoga techniques, and observable and collective dramatizations enacted by ritual actors. All of this is in turn mediated by the master of ceremonies, whose knowledge of material protocol ensures for orthopraxy, and whose interpretative acumen determines the correlations between performance, signs of success and signified outcomes. His authority, moreover, is built in part from self-referential moments in liturgies that extend to him the authority of past masters and timeless deities. In sum, the more or less balanced, dialectical interaction between objective and personal sources of efficacious power that Sog bzlog pa struck in his writings upon powerful

edibles tips here toward the person of the master of the ceremonies. He is the final arbiter of ritual efficacy, even as his authority must be convincingly demonstrated by his associations with deities and past masters, and his mastery of tangible substances, artifacts, and procedures; and repeatedly confirmed by communal participation in his rites, signs of ritual success, and corresponding geopolitical events.

III. Vision, Exegesis, and Touch in the Use of Initiation Substances and Introduction Props

We will now turn away from the enemy-oriented objects of category two to briefly consider another group of items, one in which discursive principles of efficacy and the role of the master of ceremonies figure more than they did in the two categories considered thus far. We have already witnessed how the enemy-oriented objects of category two foreground more than the edible compounds of category one the authority and knowledge of the master of ceremonies, even as they also incorporate the principles of contiguity and mimesis, and thereby trade in intrinsic material power and the power of mimetic reproductions as extensions of the powerful places, persons, deities, and things they embody or mimic. The third and final category of objects we will consider in this chapter emphasizes discursive elements even further, and consequently, also reduces the role for objects' substantive material powers. This category of objects consists of the materials and artifacts used in initiation rituals, which Sog bzlog pa regards primarily as props for the communication or representation of underlying meanings.

Generally speaking, initiation rituals utilize a broad range of artifacts, substances, and images, which are not generally presumed to have any intrinsic power beyond the ability to facilitate the condensation of meanings in the process of the master of

ceremonies communicating these values to recipient initiates. And yet, as we shall see, these things too are never regarded to be utterly devoid of substantive power. Despite their discursive emphasis, they are often treated in initiation ritual settings as though direct physical contact with them still imparts something crucial.

Emphasis upon physical touch versus symbolic communication was a point of controversy for Sog bzlog pa. His misgivings, as we shall see, hinge not on the use of materials per se, but on what he perceives to be an overreliance upon the sense of touch in their ritual use. Without rejecting physical contact altogether, Sog bzlog pa argues that participants ought to instead focus more on seeing the objects, hearing about their meanings, and/or reflecting upon the implications of those significations.

A. Materiality and Meaning in the Nine-Vehicle Initiation Ritual

We begin this discussion with an exploration of the relationship between practice and theory in Sog bzlog pa's treatment of substances and objects in the Old School initiation ritual of the *Sūtra of the Fused Intent (mDo dgongs 'dus)*.⁸⁷⁵ This initiation ritual encapsulates in an elaborate ritual format a defining feature of the Old School: the classification of all extant spiritual traditions into nine “vehicles.” It should be stated at the outset that the term “vehicle” (Tib. *theg pa*, Skt. *yāna*) at use here denotes a system of practice and belief – often complete with its own view, meditation, conduct, and fruition – equipped to “carry” or “convey” one to a designated result. The tradition of enumerating nine such vehicles is a doxographical scheme particular to Sog bzlog pa's

⁸⁷⁵ For the only extended study of this important Old School ritual tradition, see Jacob P. Dalton, *The Uses of the dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo in the Development of the rNying-ma School of Tibetan Buddhism* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2002).

Old School.⁸⁷⁶ This nine-fold rubric systematically and hierarchically orders the plethora of spiritual techniques and views prevalent in the world, ranging from the “vehicles” of non-Buddhists and conventional morality, all the way up to the “vehicle” of the Great Perfection, the pinnacle of all spiritual techniques and viewpoints according to Old School tradition. The *Sūtra of the Fused Intent* is an important early source of this Old School doxographical scheme. Thus, the performance of the large-scale initiation ritual associated with this text, specifically in terms of the underlying structures it advances, became an important way for Old School adherents to continually produce anew a defining trait of their tradition.⁸⁷⁷

The two texts from which I draw this discussion emphasize the material and cognitive dimensions, respectively, of this important Old School initiation ritual. Sog bzlog pa conceived of the first of these texts, which I shall henceforth call the *Crystal Mirror*,⁸⁷⁸ as “a list for how to design the deity initiations, substance initiations and so forth,” for this elaborate ritual tradition.⁸⁷⁹ The text therefore consists of an extended outline of the arrangement of physical materials, deity images, and *maṇḍala* constructions at use in the initiation ceremony. The second of these two texts, which I shall refer to as *Exegesis*, provides explanation of the meanings behind each of the nine

⁸⁷⁶ For an excellent English translation of an early example of the Old School’s nine-fold doxographical system, see José Ignacio Cabezón, *The Buddha’s Doctrine of the Nine Vehicles: Rog Bande Sherab’s ‘Lamp of the Teachings’* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸⁷⁷ Jacob Dalton (2002): 258-262.

⁸⁷⁸ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *Dam pa’i chos lung a nu yo ga gtso bor ston pa ’dus pa’i mdo’i dbang bskur ba’i bca’ rab tu gsal ba shel gyi me long*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975): 311-383.

⁸⁷⁹ *Shel gyi me long*: 312.2. *lha dbang dang rdzas dbang la sogs pa ji ltar bri ba’i tho byang...*

vehicle initiations – specifically, the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition associated with each vehicle that constitutes the elaborate structure of this doxographical ritual.⁸⁸⁰

THE VISUAL AND TACTILE RECEPTION OF OBJECTS

I begin this discussion with an analysis of the pragmatics of objects and substances at use in this initiation ritual. In *Crystal Mirror*, Sog bzlog pa claims to follow the tradition of Zur thams cad mkhyen pa when he outlines all the details of the *maṇḍala* design, deity images, substances, and initiation cards for use in each one of 43 *maṇḍala* initiations, as these are grouped within the Sūtra’s overarching nine vehicle doxographical structure.⁸⁸¹ Sog bzlog pa further subdivides each initiation section of this text into “deity initiations” (*lha dbang*), “substance initiations” (*rdzas dbang*), and accompanying “initiation cards” (Tib. *tsa ka li*, Skt. *cakali*). Deity initiation passages appear first. Here, Sog bzlog pa identifies each deity by name, with descriptions of positions in the *maṇḍala*, colors, numbers of hands and faces, hand gestures and implements, leg positions, seats and/or mounts, garments and any other specifics necessary for the visual depiction of each figure when painting the various *maṇḍala* diagrams at use in the initiation.

In the accompanying substance initiation passages, Sog bzlog pa lists the various objects and materials that masters of ceremonies should ideally employ during each initiation within the larger ceremony. These materials, which differ depending on the initiation phase concerned, range from vases, letter images, and deity images, as in the

⁸⁸⁰ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *sNyan brgyud yang rdzong ma las theg dgu'i dbang gi rnam bshad*, in *Collected Writings of Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan*, vol. II (Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975): 385-419.

⁸⁸¹ *Shel gyi me long*: 312.2-312.3. Here Sog bzlog pa contrasts the “practice tradition of Zur thams cad mkhyen pa’s enumeration of 43 *maṇḍalas*” to “previous masters,” who “maintain there to be 57 *maṇḍalas*.”

Akṣobhya (Mi 'khrugs pa) eight-petal *maṇḍala*,⁸⁸² to the 62 initiation substances of the Yogatantra vehicle, which include substances such as mustard seed, *dūrvā* grass and gems, and artifacts like mirrors, bells, parasols and the like.⁸⁸³ Masters of ceremonies not only visually show initiates each one of these materials by holding them up in turn during the corresponding phases of the rite. They also bring them into physical contact with initiates, usually by means of ritual assistants, who carry the substances through the crowd and touch them directly to initiates' heads, hands, throats, or some other part of the body. Initiation cards, the details for which Sog bzlog pa presents next in the text, are also commonly part of this process of distributing substances, as ritual assistants often carry these throughout the crowd together with the substances, showing and touching initiates with the cards that the master of ceremonies had held up during the corresponding stages of the rite. The dual emphasis on visual and physical contact during the initiation, where the master of ceremonies holds up each object before sending it around to show up-close and make physical contact with each initiate in turn, suggests that initiation substances and cards perform some kind of action upon initiates above and beyond the communication of symbolic values relevant to each vehicle's particular viewpoint and spiritual technique.

THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCY OF THINGS

Before exploring this issue in greater detail, I will first briefly consider Sog bzlog pa's doctrinal treatment of the nine vehicles in *Exegesis*, which is intended to accompany the

⁸⁸² Ibid: 317.6. The Akṣobhya initiation is the final of 11 initiations into the "vehicle of gods and men" (*lha mi'i theg pa*), which constitutes the first of the nine vehicles.

⁸⁸³ Ibid: 335.3-336.1.

presentation of the corresponding initiation substances. Not only does this text purport to elucidate the meaning of the nine-vehicle initiation. More fundamentally, Sog bzlog pa states, this is “an essential exposition to employ in the context of the initiation into the nine vehicles.”⁸⁸⁴ Elsewhere in the opening gambit of this text Sog bzlog pa becomes even more explicit on this point when he enlists a scriptural citation from the *Kālācakra-tantra* to call for masters of ceremonies that confer initiations to know how to teach the three vehicles and to understand the meanings of the four initiations.⁸⁸⁵ With this citation as support, Sog bzlog pa concludes, “it is essential to definitely introduce the meaning of the initiations.”⁸⁸⁶ And for Sog bzlog pa, this is to happen within the ritual setting itself. The body of this short text consists of the doxographical exposition (*grub mtha'*) on the nine vehicles as understood by Tibet’s Old School in general, and Sog bzlog pa in particular.⁸⁸⁷

The primary factor that differentiates Sog bzlog pa’s doxographical treatment in *Exegesis* from other instances of the genre is that here doctrinal knowledge of the vehicles is to be imparted in the setting of an initiation ritual, rather than in a more standard pedagogical context. It would seem that by Sog bzlog pa’s estimation initiates should ideally hear explanations of the meanings of the nine vehicles in a ritual environment that features elaborate *maṇḍala* depictions of deities and their celestial palaces, combined with related objects and substances, including sensory immersion in

⁸⁸⁴ *dBang bshad*: 386.1. */theg pa rim dgu'i dbang gi skabs su bshad sbyar nye bar 'kho ba...*

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid*: 386.2-386.3.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 386.3-386.4. *de'i phyir dbang rnam ky'i don nges par 'phrod pa gal che'o/*

⁸⁸⁷ For a discussion of doxography as a Tibetan literary genre, see Jeffrey Hopkins, “The Tibetan World of Doxography: Structuring a World-View,” in *Tibetan Literature*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1996), 170-86.

the music, incense, and imagery of the Tibetan ritual universe, all of which culminates in direct physical contact with the “stuff” of each vehicle. What then, we might wonder, is the role in this initiation of imparting cognitive knowledge of the vehicles, when the pedagogical event is so overwhelmingly saturated with physical and sensory stimuli?

Sog bzlog pa touches upon this point only in the *Exegesis*'s closing verses:

I have not reached the completion of studies.
My faculties are dull, my intelligence meager,
So I lack the power to explain the tenets of the nine vehicles.
However, if the meaning of the initiations is not introduced,
Then the conferral words [may have been said] and the initiation substances may
have been placed on one's head hundreds or thousands of times,
But even conferred it will not take hold, and even received it will
not be attained.
Since introducing the meaning of the initiation is therefore definitely essential,
I have recorded it here with an exalted motivation.⁸⁸⁸

Clearly, then, for Sog bzlog pa the cognitive event of understanding the doctrinal meanings of the nine vehicles is not incidental but essential to “getting” the nine vehicles initiation. Participation in the rite, hearing its injunctions, and making contact with its substances does not suffice. The role of substances in this rite thus appears wholly different from those considered thus far, although the substances themselves are sometimes identical. If we are to take Sog bzlog pa at face value, then rather than trade in substances' intrinsic or acquired properties, they seem to be used in this context primarily to communicate or represent particular notions that initiates should ideally cognitively comprehend during the rite. In other words, the emphasis in the nine vehicles initiation rite is on what substances *say*, rather than what they *do*. This appears to signal a dramatic demotion of the power of substances, in and of themselves, to make changes in person and world, as it foregrounds more powerfully the exegetical role of the master

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid: 419.1-419.3. /bdag ni sbyangs ba mtha' ru ma son zhing/ /dbang po btul zhing blo gros shin tu dman/ /theq dgu'i grub mtha' 'chad pa'i 'thu med kyang/ /dbang don ji bzhin 'phrod par ma gyur na/ /bskur tshig dbang rdzas brgya stong mgor bzhag ste/ /bskur kyang mi 'chags zhush kyang mi thob pas/ /dbang don sprod pa nges par gal cha bas/ /de phyir lhag pa'i bsam pas yi ger bkod/

of ceremonies and his use of substances to explain meanings that are otherwise extrinsic to the substances themselves.

SUBSTANCE AND SIGN IN THE COMPLEX SEMIOTICS OF OBJECTS

But what then do we make of Sog bzlog pa's lopsided attention to the physical details of the *maṇḍalas* and substances involved? The *Crystal Mirror* takes up over twice the number of folios as the *Exegesis*, even while doxographical discussions can often be elaborate presentations.⁸⁸⁹ More significantly, Sog bzlog pa nowhere directly comments on how the ritual scene with its deity *maṇḍalas* and initiation substances might meaningfully refer to the vehicles with which they claim association. In fact, when we take stock of the objects and substances at use in the "substance initiation," we can see that many of these items do not signify in any transparent way at all to the view, meditation, conduct, or fruition of the respective nine vehicles. For instance, "substance initiations" for the *śrāvaka* vehicle initiation include monastic robes, an alms bowl, and a walking stick, which generally signify the early itinerant ascetic lifestyle, or conduct of Buddha Śākyamuni's *śrāvaka* followers.⁸⁹⁰ But this initiation also includes items such as honey, *dūrvā* grass, a *vajra*, and images of a chariot and horse, which have no obvious referents.⁸⁹¹ Later, in the *tantra* vehicle sections, substances begin to multiply until they max out with the 62 substance initiations of Yogatantra, before tapering down in the

⁸⁸⁹ For a particularly prolix example, see Jeffrey Hopkins, *Maps of the Profound: Jam-Yang-Shay-Ba's Great Exposition Of Buddhist And Non-Buddhist Views On The Nature Of Reality* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2003).

⁸⁹⁰ *Shel gyi me long*: 319.4-319.5.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*

higher vehicle initiations.⁸⁹² Yet, nowhere in either the *Crystal Mirror* or the *Exegesis* does Sog bzlog pa make explicit the connections between these objects and their referents. And then, moreover, there is the importance placed on direct visual and physical contact with these objects, yet another detail that complicates Sog bzlog pa's suggestion that such things are for symbolic communicative purposes alone. From the perspective of practice, the objects of the "substance initiations" clearly do appear to have functions that extend beyond the domain of symbolic communication. Although, as Sog bzlog pa suggests, objects should ideally be understood in terms of the symbolic associations obliquely related to the significance of each of the vehicles.

Perhaps Sog bzlog pa's *Exegesis* is intended to bridge that gap, to render the objects and the ritual scene more "referential" than these would be on their own. The *Exegesis*, according to this reading, might serve to distance objects from their referents in the process of increasing their symbolic valences. Such distancing between signifier and signified takes place because exposition on the "meanings" of initiations ends up "objectifying" objects, stripping them of the indirect agency which they accumulate and wield in rites that make little or no reference to their symbolic significance or meaning. In other words, attempts to explain the relationship between objects and meanings invariably de-materializes objects, stripping them of indexical functionality so that they can be re-branded as symbols instead. Yet, at the same time, since exegesis by Sog bzlog pa's account in this case remains unconcerned, by and large, with delineating the precise doctrinal valences of objects and substances, these things are still permitted to function as free-floating indexes with ambiguous and unstable connections to the world

⁸⁹² Ibid: 330.1-375.5.

of ideas. This position of objects, at once symbolic but not anchored to any particular referent, enables them to function as partially empty signifiers, ripe for the accumulation of alternative meanings, but also disconnected enough from referents to gather agency through the course of ritual proceedings and impact initiates through direct visual and physical contact alone. This possibility of objects trading at once in symbolic, conventional referentiality and the agency they accrue from immersion in sensory-saturated ritual settings is perhaps what allows substances to perform double duty as signifiers and actors. This may help explain why Sog bzlog pa discusses initiation substances as though they communicate meanings, but treats them as though they enact blessings. The distance between precept and practice on this note may have more to do with the shifting referential work of ritual objects, especially as these are employed in rites with greater discursive emphasis, than with any qualitative change in Sog bzlog pa's overall perspective on the issue. To consider this final possibility in greater detail, allow us to turn our attention next to another ritual, but one that employs objects with more specific symbolic valences.

B. In the Mirror of Mind: Sense and Semiosis in a Mind-nature Introduction Liturgy

As a final point of comparison, we turn our attention next to a consideration of Sog bzlog pa's liturgy commentary entitled *Clarifying the Symbolic Meaning: An Exposition on the Separately Concealed Meaning of the Supreme Initiation*.⁸⁹³ This short text provides commentary on the symbolic significance of objects used to confer the "supreme initiation" into the *Single Golden-Black Syllable, from the Great Perfection Yang ti*

⁸⁹³ *dBang gong ma gud du sbas pa'i don bshad pa brda don gsal ba*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod che mo*, vol. 91 (hi) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980), 143-163.

Tradition (rDzogs chen yang ti nag po gser gyi 'bru gcig) – a Great Perfection Treasure revelation of Dung tsho ras pa associated with the practice of inducing the visionary experiences of “crossing over” in the context of short, isolated dark retreats. The “supreme initiation,” in this context, constitutes “introduction” (*ngo sprod*) to non-dual gnosis, i.e., the realization that the ultimate nature of perfectly awakened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities is no different from the pure, gnostic dimension of every sentient being’s intrinsic awareness as this is reflected in phenomenal perceptual experience.

The initiation proceeds in much the same way as the nine vehicles initiation. Objects are held up and distributed for visual and direct physical contact in turn, while the master of ceremonies recites associated liturgical verses and gives exegesis on the significance of each stage of the rite. Here, however, rather than only loosely relate initiation substances with their referents, exegesis takes the form of direct statements about the iconic significance of the objects and their specific relationships with referents, which are all rooted in the mind-body-gnosis continuum of beings. The goal is initiation, but more precisely, initiation into non-dual gnosis itself. This means foremost that objects are utilized by masters of ceremonies in exegetical settings with the explicit goal of temporarily collapsing for initiates the distinction between subject and object by imparting recognition of intrinsic non-dual gnosis. In other words, objects are used to signify the ultimate non-existence of all subject-object dualities, including even the very distinction between signifying objects and their signified subject matter.

There are two interrelated features of this ritual liturgical which I would like to highlight: the valorization of the phenomenal sphere of experience as rooted in ultimate

awakened gnosis, and the ambivalent role of materiality in the use of objects as iconic props to communicate this concept.

MATERIALITY AND MEANING IN THE USE OF INITIATION SUBSTANCE

This initiation rite unfolds according to a sequence of eight objects that masters of ceremonies are to present in turn. Each of the rite's eight object-focused sections opens with injunctions for the master of ceremonies to show initiates an object – a crystal, drum, bell, lamp, mirror, fan... – and perform the action associated with that object – wave the fan, sound the bell, etcetera. Terse directives are followed by verse citations from the basic initiation liturgy, which the master of ceremonies should recite in conjunction with each object and action. Sog bzlog pa's contribution comes in the form of commentary in prose, which follows each direction and verse citation. Sog bzlog pa's commentarial segments include exposition on the verses themselves, explanation of the symbolic values of the objects and actions, and further instructions on how to meditate during each phase. Throughout, Sog bzlog pa enlists an arsenal of scriptural citations from *sūtras* and New and Old School *tantras* alike.

After the fifth sequence of the ritual, which rounds out the traditional set of awakened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities, Sog bzlog pa offers a statement akin to a colophon that separates this familiar pentad from the topics that follow. Here we see Sog bzlog pa authorize his text by naming the scriptural sources of the exegesis thus far, and at the same time, decry what seems to him the improper use of objects. He states:

These explanations here were taught by the great master of Oḍiyāṇa, and pañchen Vimalamitra in his rDzogs chen snyan brgyud āḥ hūm ma. These days even great lamas just place the crystal, bell, and the rest on the head, and do not perform the introduction.

Thus, because introducing the meaning of initiation is very important, I have described it in some detail.⁸⁹⁴

Similar to what we saw in the context of the nine-vehicle initiation rite, Sog bzlog pa voices criticism about what he perceives to be a lopsided reliance upon the principle of physical contact at the expense of the communication of meanings. In this context, however, Sog bzlog pa becomes more strident, as he calls out “even great lamas” for their overreliance upon touch and their scant attention to exegesis, even as he extends to himself and his exegesis the authority of the past masters Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra. Sog bzlog pa reasserts his commitment to exegesis in the final colophon of the liturgy, where he attributes the impetus behind his composition to the unbearable paucity during his times of “those who perfectly teach the meaning of the initiation.”⁸⁹⁵

Despite Sog bzlog pa’s insistent emphasis upon exegesis and meaning, and his consequent rejection of initiation objects’ substantive power, it is nonetheless the material attributes of these items that permit them to function as iconic signifiers at all. The final three “introductions” – showing a mirror, showing a face reflected in a mirror, and placing a crystal on a mirror – are cast as techniques for inducing progressively greater experiential awareness of the unity of awareness qua insubstantiality and awareness qua phenomenal experience.⁸⁹⁶ These culminate with introductions to refined phenomenal experiences of intrinsic gnosis in the forms of Buddha bodies, rainbow lights, colorful pixels, and their coalescence into pure realms – in other words, the “stuff” of the visionary experiences of “crossing over” discussed in Chapter Three. Sog bzlog pa

⁸⁹⁴ *brDa don gsal ba: 156.4-156.5. /'di dag ni 'dir o rgyan chen pos gsungs pa dang/ rdzogs chen snyan brgyud AH hUM mar paN chen bi ma las gsungs pa las/ deng sang bla ma chen po rnam's kyang shel dang dril bu sogs mgo thog tu 'jog pa tsam las ngo sprod mi mdzad pa 'dug pas/ dbang gi don ngo 'phrod pa gal che ba'i phyir cung zad sprod nas smras pa yin no/*

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid: 162.4. */dbang don tshul bzhin ston pa ches nyung bas/*

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid: 156.5-160.4.

concludes these “introductions,” which are punctuated with meditation instructions and scriptural citations, as follows:

From within the state of non-originating *dharmakāya*, which is the unfabricated mind as such, arises the unobstructed dynamism of experience in the form of variegated self-effulgence – the *sambhogakāya* forms, *nirmānakāya* forms, rainbows, light, pixels, pure lands, and the rest. And yet, within the state of that *dharmakāya* of great bliss they are one.

Since it is unobstructable, indestructible, and immutable
Emptiness is called ‘*vajra*.’

Thus, as unobstructable, indestructible, and immutable, this *vajra* body of all buddhas, which is emptiness endowed with the supreme of all characteristics, is forever without change. Know it to be such!⁸⁹⁷

This citation powerfully illustrates, above all, that objects such as mirrors are used by masters of ceremonies in this initiation to signify the dynamic unity of insubstantial awareness and phenomenal appearance, phrased here as “emptiness endowed with the supreme of all characteristics.” The mirror, and specifically its ability to reflect on its lucid surface whatever comes into contact with it, functions as an iconic signifier for the insubstantial mind’s capacity to do the same, and for the enduring presence of the phenomenal sphere of experience, even at the most refined levels of awakened awareness. It is the material attributes of the mirror itself, and not some conventionally attributed meaning, that enable it to serve this signifying purpose. Materiality is still front and center in the way these objects signify, even if intrinsic substantive power should not be the governing principle of efficacy by Sog bzlog pa’s estimation.

ARTIFACTS IN THE RAPPROCHEMENT OF SUBJECT-OBJECT DUALITY

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid: 160.2-160.4. ...*sems nyid ma bcos pa chos kyi sku skye ba med pa'i ngang las 'gag med kyi rtsal snang long spyod rdzogs pa'i sku dang/ sprul pa'i sku dang/ 'ja' dang 'od dang thig le dang zhing kham la sogs pa rang mdangs sna tshogs su shar yang bde ba chen po chos kyi sku de'i ngang du gcig go/ /mi chod mi shigs mi 'gyur bas/ /stong pa nyid la rdo rjer bshad/ /ces pa ltar/ mi chod pa mi shigs pa 'gyur ba med pa rnam pa thams cad kyi mchog dang ldan pa'i stong pa nyid sangs rgyas thams cad kyi rdo rje'i sku 'di la 'gyur ba nam du yang med do/ /de ltar shes par gyis shig/*

The overarching function of this liturgy is to serve as a template for masters of ceremonies to communicate, based on a set of specifically chosen object-action-master associations, the ultimate ontological relationship between conscious and aware subjects and their phenomenal object world. Sog bzlog pa sets the tone at the beginning of the commentary by casting the first introduction in the language of the Mahāyāna *prajñāpāramitā* literature’s discussion of the link between emptiness and form: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is also form. Emptiness is no other than form; neither is form no other than emptiness.”⁸⁹⁸ As illustrated just above, Sog bzlog pa carries this theme through the conclusion of the text with his explication of the indestructibility of phenomenal experience even at the most refined levels of awakened awareness.

Consistent with the debates discussed in Chapter Three, Sog bzlog pa maintains the position that the sphere of phenomenal experience, while empty, is nonetheless an enduring and ever-present factor intrinsic to awareness. As “emptiness endowed with the supreme of all characteristics,” the profusion of experience is rooted in the cognizant, phenomenal, and experiential dimension of consciousness itself. Since this “unity” of awareness and phenomenal experience, the ultimate ontological ground and goal of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna practice, threatens to erode every duality present throughout human experience, Sog bzlog pa was compelled to address how the initiation’s objects can meaningfully signify meanings extrinsic to them. To elucidate this point, Sog bzlog pa goes beyond explicating the meanings of the objects presented to also offer meta-statements that lend insights into the logic of signification, the interpretative work involved in the process of “introduction.” In the third initiation, for instance, where the

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid: 144.4-144.5: *shes phyin las kyang/ gzugs stong pa 'o/ /stong pa nyis kyang gzugs so/ /gzugs las kyang stong pa nyid gzhan ma yin no/ /stong pa nyid las kyang gzugs gzhan ma yin no/*

master of ceremonies introduces the nature of mind based on the example of a butter lamp, Sog bzlog pa combines explanation of the relation between the signifier – the butter lamp; and the signified – the mind, while also presenting reflections on the nature of the signification process entailed. He begins with a description of the relationship between signifier and signified:

The mind of all *sugatas* is lucid and cognizant, but free of conceptuality. Through having cracked open the casing of ignorance, the self-effulgence of gnosis, which has been present from the beginning in its self-illuminating state, shines forth, and is free of conceptuality, like the example of a butter lamp. Understand the meaning of this!⁸⁹⁹ ...

Like a butter lamp unmoved by wind, the gnosis of awareness neither brightens nor dims. This intrinsically present self-effulgence of wisdom, the indivisibility of awareness and emptiness, is the gnosis of the pristine mind of all Conquerors, called “the mind of awakening.”⁹⁰⁰ ...

In this way, the support for the initiation, this butter lamp, which is luminous, yet free of conceptuality, is demonstrated to be an illustration (*mtshon dpe*) for mind.⁹⁰¹

Sog bzlog pa follows up with a reflection upon the process of signification, which he begins with a citation from an unnamed source:

That which the example gnosis illustrates
Is the unerring, non-conceptual gnosis of one’s own intrinsic awareness.
Like a reflection in a mirror when looking at your face,
It is not the actual gnosis, but it is similar to the actual.

In this way, meaning is introduced based on example. This is unlike the delusional talk of some, who say, “There is a tiger in the middle of the jungle, because there exists such a thing as that.” Rather, since it can be directly shown right now, it is superior to the rest, in that the “introduction of the triad of example, actual, and sign” is a special feature of the Great Perfection.⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid: 150.6-151.1. ...*bde bar gshegs pa thams cad kyi thugs dwangs shing gsal la rtog pa dang bral ba/ ma rig pa'i sbubs bcom pas ye shes kyi rang 'od ye nas rang gsal du gnas pa gsal la rtog pa med pa dpe mar me lta bu yin pas 'di'i don khong du chud par gyis shig/*

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid: 151.3-151. *rig pa'i ye shes gsal 'grib med pa mar me rlung gis ma bskyod pa lta bu ye shes kyi rang 'od rang chas su gnas pa 'di ni rig stong dbyer med byang chub kyi sems zhes bya ba rgyal ba thams cad kyi thugs yang dag pa'i ye shes yin no/*

⁹⁰¹ Ibid: 152.1. */de ltar dbang rten mar me 'di gsal la rtog pa med pa sems kyi mtshon dper ston pa yin te/*

⁹⁰² Ibid: 152.3-152.6. *gang de mtshon byed dpe'i ye shes te/ /rang rig ye shes rtog bral ma 'khrol ba/ /byad bzhin blta la me long gzugs brnyan bzhin/ /don gyi ye shes min kyang don dang 'dra/ /zhes pas dpe la brten nas don ngo sprod pa lags te/ kha cig gi ltar nags gseb na stag yod/ de de 'dra zhig yod pa 'dug zer rmongs gtam smra ba dang mi mtshungs par da lta nyid du mngon sum du ston nus pas gzhan las khyad par 'phags te/ /dpe don rtags gsum gyi ngo sprod ces pa rdzogs pa chen po'i khyad chos zhig lags so/*

It would appear, then, that because the ultimate nature of mind shares basic features with butter lamps, mirrors, fans, and crystals – i.e., luminosity, reflectability, motility, insubstantiality, non-conceptuality... – those objects can meaningfully refer to these specific qualities as present within the mind-body-gnosis continua of recipients. In this way, it is the physical, material attributes of these objects that form the basis for their capacity to function as iconic signifiers for the properties of non-dual gnosis. The notion of “example gnosis” signals this iconic role. Through the given iconic examples, gnosis is “directly shown.” Yet, at the same time, what it reveals is not real gnosis. More closely related to its signified meaning than a conventionally attributed “sign,” but not quite the “actual” thing, the “example” gnosis straddles material and discursive domains to signify gnosis in a way that is neither arbitrary related, nor identical to it.

ICONICITY AND EXEGESIS IN THE SEMIOSIS OF PROPS

Despite the fact that material properties of initiation props are the basis of signification, owing to their ambiguous relationships with non-dual gnosis, comprehending these connections appears to rest largely upon the explanation of the master of ceremonies. The way this works is that the master of ceremonies couches initiation objects in oral commentary that appeals to the principle of resemblance to trigger an experience, a particular form of reflexive knowledge, through which recipients can become newly introduced to the nature of their own subjectivity. This means that objects do not act primarily as embodiments or repositories of blessings and power, which can act through direct contact or by remote, as they do in the first and second categories of object-oriented rites considered thus far. Rather, here objects act mainly as iconic signifiers,

which serve as props for explanation. And the capacities of objects to serve this function are rooted in their physical, material characteristics.

The overarching model then is one of communication, not action; initiation props are used to convey meanings largely extrinsic to them, and not to impact initiates directly through sensory contact. The governing principle at work is quality-quality resemblances, as mediated by exegesis that connects objects with their referents through explaining the iconic properties they share. And yet, despite Sog bzlog pa's insistence on a governing role for discursive exegesis in their reception, the iconic function of these objects means that their amenability as props for the communication of values is rooted in the material features of those items and the presumed resemblance of their physical features with the rarefied qualities of personal subjectivity. Perhaps this central role of specific material attributes offers a clue into why, as Sog bzlog pa critically remarks, "these days even great lamas just place the crystal, bell, and the rest on the head, and do not perform the introduction." With the emphasis on the material at center stage, these "great lamas" can treat initiation props as though they still concentrate and mediate, simply through their materiality, the power of the ritualist and his lineage, thus making physical contact more efficacious than discursive understanding. This suggests that even despite the fact that these objects are so densely mediated by language and convention, something of ritual agents, past masters, and timeless buddhas is still believed to be transmitted through them to recipients, eliciting within them a major cognitive shift. For Sog bzlog pa, such a transformation is rather induced primarily by the master's explanation, which elicits discursive interpretations of objects and words that bear on the ultimate nature of consciousness and objects. Contrary to the practice of the "great lamas" of his time, Sog bzlog pa would rather have objects, in the idiosyncratic setting of

introducing students to the nature of their mind, serve as didactic props for engendering reflexive understanding and experience. Mere contact, he objects, will just not do.

Sog bzlog pa's emphasis upon exegesis and cognitive understanding thus shifts the governing principle of efficacy squarely into the discursive domain of language and signification, even as the ritual setting itself, with its invocation of the iconic, material attributes of objects as the basis of signification, continues to enable the slippage of agency and power into objects, and through physical contact, into initiates as well. This ambiguous role of illustrative initiation props is exaggerated further in this ritual because these objects are intended to signify non-dual gnosis itself, which theoretically also signals the collapse of the duality of signifying objects and their signified referents. The ambivalent role of initiation props as iconic examples, which are neither arbitrarily related, nor identical to their signified referents, stands out as a playful appeal to the inherent tensions between the distance and duality necessary for signification to take place, and the collapse of duality ideally brought on by signification's success. In the case of this mind-introduction rite, the unstable and fluctuating distance between signifying objects and their signified meanings is exacerbated by the rite's contrasting emphases upon both exegesis and direct physical contact. The result is a rite that plays with the dynamic interaction between substance and sense, materiality and meaning in ordinary dualistic sensibilities to expose these and all other dualities as fluid and contingent concepts, whose reification falsely bifurcates experience and constrains participation in non-dual gnosis qua the unity of awareness and emptiness. The successful signification of this reality, when understood and stabilized, theoretically ends up swallowing the distance between subjects and objects from which emerged the desire and need for signification in the first place.

Final Reflections on Sog bzlog pa's Ritual Ethos

A broader goal of this thesis is to show how in Tibet charisma transitions between the personal and institutional spheres in large part through certain materials that mediate power and agency. My aim in this chapter has been to illustrate that fundamental features of this dynamic can be observed in the specialized arenas of Tibetan Buddhist ritual settings, with the writings on ritual composed by Sog bzlog pa offering a lens into this process. To this end I have attempted to tap into the principles of efficacy that animate Sog bzlog pa's ritual world based on analysis of the dynamics of his object-oriented rituals and his theoretical remarks upon them.

What we find, then, is that when writing about object-oriented rituals, Sog bzlog pa demonstrates considerable command over the semiotic field of how things do what they do and mean what they mean. We have seen how Sog bzlog pa carves out the rite-specific functions of objects and materials with particular sensitivity to their ingredients, properties, ritual treatments, and the primary senses through which to properly engage them. In so doing, Sog bzlog pa invokes a wide scope of efficacious principles, ranging from incorporation, ingestion, contiguity, and mimesis, to category inclusion, aesthetics, discursive knowledge, and exegesis. The rich trajectories of objects in Sog bzlog pa's rites illustrates, above all, that the networks of human and non-human associations cannot be neatly summarized by the facile dichotomies of person and object, symbol and substance, thought and action, mind and body. Rather, interactions between humans and non-humans are characterized foremost by a profusion of hybrid forms at every turn, which emerge in the interstices as power and influence flow across porous boundaries. We have learned that in Sog bzlog pa's ritual universe, knowledge, power, and agency

can take on material forms, while the representation of meanings does not necessarily obviate a role for materiality, but often presupposes or enhances it.

At the crux of objects' multiple roles is their oscillation between agents of change in their own right, and objects, or instruments of persons who deploy them in rituals for a range of other ends. Unlike received interpretation, the emphasis upon the agentive capacities of objects themselves does not recede as aims become more soteriological in scope. Instead, we have seen that it is objects that "liberate" which trade most powerfully in their material power and aggregate the full range of Buddhist aims in the process. But to reach peak power, these items must still pass through human ritual mediation, where they are subjected to a dense array of discursive and physical operations. On the opposite extreme are initiation substances, objects that function largely as props for the communication of meanings. These too, however, trade in their formal, material features, since it is their iconic properties that become the basis for exegesis. With discursive meanings ambiguously rooted to their material properties, they are treated in practice as agents whose touch can impart salvific powers, even as they ideally constitute instrumental props for the expression of extrinsic values. Between these two types are enemy-objects, which are by and large treated as instruments in "repelling" rites, but which also take on properties of agents in practice and trade in the powers accrued from both their material composition and their subsequent ritual treatments. All of these three types of objects thus operate upon a continuum of materiality and meaning, in which an emphasis upon one extreme does not entail a rejection of the other, but its incorporation.

The technical complexity of many of these objects, which incorporate a diversity of rare and unusual ingredients, and require considerable formal training in literacy, medicine, and ritual arts, appears to be a significant factor behind how objects mediate

agency. Sog bzlog pa's technical mastery in the logics and efficacies of things, moreover, covers not only the substances and objects handled in traditional tantric and medical fields of knowledge. It extends also to the pragmatics of how to stage multimedia ritual events, which are based on these bodies of knowledge and tailored to specific settings, actors, and aims. The technical complexity of objects is compounded by the formal features of ritual settings, in which objects become a locus of a spectrum of physical practices, semiotic operations, and sensory experiences. Alfred Gell's notion of "captivation," in the dual sense of fascination and captivity before a particularly masterful artifact, comes to mind in this connection, especially when we extend this concept to include not just substances and artifacts, but also the multimedia ritual settings through which these are produced, acted upon, and christened as actors in their own right.⁹⁰³ The high visibility of many of these rites, coupled with the communal interest and participation required to stage them, surely resulted in a spectacle-like atmosphere. In the context of enemy-averting rites, for instance, such aesthetic factors were clearly intended to impress the communities they aimed to protect, and thus serve to "captivate" a larger audience than simply foreign armies and other "enemies."

The broader aim of all Sog bzlog pa's rites is invariably to make key transformations, of one kind or another, in persons, things, locales, or states of affairs. As we have witnessed, the specific technologies of transformation enlisted in Sog bzlog pa's rituals feature a wide spectrum of operations. All of these dynamics of efficacy work by forging associations between human and non-human elements in ways that encourage or enable the mediation of agency and power between them. Undergirding these linkages is the notion of distributed personhood and objecthood, where the

⁹⁰³ Alfred Gell (1998), 68-72.

identities and agencies of deities, persons, and power objects can extend beyond corporate boundaries into the locales, objects, texts, and social others – past, present, and future – with which they are thought to share structural similarities, direct resemblances, adjacent boundaries, or physical incorporation. It is the “third space” of ritual settings, reflected in and by a governing “ritual ethos,” which creates the felicitous circumstances encouraging this ebb and flow of efficacious power across human and non-human divides.

Following the movements of power across the boundaries between humans and non-humans has also brought to light some of the ways in which the mediations of object-oriented rites allow for the diverse agencies of past masters and timeless buddhas to contribute to the formation of Sog bzlog pa’s image of ritual expertise and prowess. We saw that often it was key literary devices and references present within liturgical texts that mediate traditional authority and render the agency of its past masters and awakened figures present and active within an infinitely renewable network of effects. Most conspicuously, prophecies, colophons and other self-referential moments within Sog bzlog pa’s liturgies linked him by incarnation and lineage to past masters and buddhas. Such bonds served to appropriate for Sog bzlog pa something of the prestige of these figures in the construction of his own public persona. On a deeper level, Sog bzlog pa’s ritual treatments of potent Treasure substances and objects, especially in light of his ritual world’s tendency to reiteratively create, blur, and collapse boundaries between persons, objects, and other non-human entities, enabled Sog bzlog pa to assimilate the powers of these objects, even as his augmentation and unleashing of this power remained the explicit focus. What all these crossings show, most fundamentally, is that the movement of power between persons and non-persons in ritual settings is fundamental not just in the

formation of powerful objects, but also in the creation of the powerful ritual specialist, the premier arbiter and crosser of dangerous boundaries in the Tibetan cultural sphere. And conversely, it is in this role of ritual specialist, specifically in terms of mastery in technologies that command and direct the potent forces active within the material and non-human worlds, which accounts in large part for his defining influence in the arena of Tibetan politics.

The ritualized formation of human/non-human combinations has far-reaching implications in the social history of Tibetan religion. When we continue to follow the chains of human/non-human associations as these are made visible within the texts of *Sog bzlog pa* and contemporaneous Tibetan authors, we are led again and again to the threshold of what undergirds the exercise of power in many contexts: the mastery of potent technologies that extend a promise of human control over the volatility of the material world. The technologies of ritual performance, which, as we have seen, overlap considerably with those of medicine and military science, constituted in Tibet a specialized field of prestige and competition. This is largely because ritual, like military and medical technologies, purports to offer human beings some purchase over the wild vicissitudes of their material environments. *Sog bzlog pa*'s identity of expertise in this set of domains thus translates in many ways into a claim of authority over a range of particularly potent and dangerous human-technology-environment interfaces that impact the fate of all Tibetans. It is precisely here, in the struggles and contentions over who possesses the rights and responsibilities to mobilize populations in the implementation of such technologies, where political aims and aspirations begin to surface more visibly.

In Tibetan cultural settings, the political implications of prowess in powerful ritual technologies and their objects are most conspicuously expressed through writings

that deal with controversies surrounding issues of authority. Chapter Five, the next and final chapter of this thesis, will explore the ripples of this dynamic in Sog bzlog pa's posthumously reception by the Fifth Dalai Lama and the founding masters of the state of Sikkim. Indeed, through the legacy of his writings and reputation, the person of Sog bzlog pa extended well beyond his physical demise. He would become the basis of new contentions and traditions, as his being, fragmented through the rejection or distribution of his writings, crossed borders, becoming a flashpoint for controversies and a wellspring of tradition in disparate contexts long after his death.

PART III
AFTEREFFECTS

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTINUITIES AND CONTENTIONS OVER THINGS—THE LEGACY OF SOG BZLOG PA AND THE MATERIAL LINKS OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Introduction

Sog bzlog pa died in 1624, during the brief heyday of Western Tibet's gTsang pa sde srid rule over Tibet. His reincarnation was not identified, or at least not openly publicized, despite prayers for his swift rebirth.⁹⁰⁴ By the year 1642, Sog bzlog pa's main patrons – the gTsang royal family and its circle of clerical and lay alliances – would be vanquished by the Fifth Dalai Lama's benefactor, the Mongol general Gushri Khan, to usher in the dGa' ldan pho brang government newly based in Lhasa, Central Tibet (dBus). The dGa' ldan pho brang government, nominally headed by the reincarnation line of the successive Dalai Lamas, starting with the Great Fifth Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682), would end up ruling Tibet until the Chinese invasion of 1950, thus making it the longest continuously active governmental structure in Tibet's recorded history.

Meanwhile, just across the southern passes from Central Tibet, another Tibetan Buddhist polity was taking shape. This was the state of Sikkim ('Bras ljongs), whose founding figures included clerics with gTsang loyalties that fled south to the "hidden land" (*sbas yul*) of Sikkim in part to escape the persecution that may have awaited them in the wake of gTsang collapse. The two most important founding figures of Sikkim – mNga' bdag Sems dpa' chen po Phun tshogs rig 'dzin (1592-1656) and Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597-1650) – were religious masters who claimed to hold the religious

⁹⁰⁴ I am referring to *mKhas grub blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i skyes rabs rnam par thar pa'i gsol 'debs* (AT 125/4: Ramshapath, National Archives of Nepal), a prayer for Sog bzlog pa's swift rebirth presumably composed on the occasion of his death.

lineage of Sog bzlog pa and his master Zhig po gling pa. The descendents and incarnations of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin and Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, many of whom ranked among the successive preceptors of Sikkim, have since promoted the textual and ritual traditions associated with Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa until the present.⁹⁰⁵

In Central Tibet, Sog bzlog pa's legacy met with quite a different fate. As the new leader of Tibet, the Fifth Dalai Lama openly pronounced his disapproval for Sog bzlog pa, his closest master Zhig po gling pa, and his closest student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje. The Great Fifth's displeasure for these three figures was such a prevalent theme throughout his writings that he combined them into a single moniker – sNang Sog Gong gsum – meaning, “the triad of sNang rtse ba (Zhig po gling pa), Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje. The Fifth Dalai Lama's pejorative coinage – which condenses these three figures into a single lexical item – became a stock phrase throughout the subsequent historical and biographical literature. The Great Fifth and his regent bSod nams chos 'phel/bSod nams rab brtan also banned the practice and study of their revelations, rites, and writings. After the death in 1654 of Sog bzlog pa's student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent installed a dGa' ldan pho brang loyalist to serve as hierarch for Gong ra ba's monastery Nges gsang rdo rje gling. On that occasion a new monastic constitution and a new ritual regimen were also

⁹⁰⁵ Sikkimese Buddhist traditions of course underwent many changes in the interim which must be left out of the present study. The most immediately pertinent transformation concerns the direct introduction into Sikkim of the sMin grol gling tradition when in 1719 the wife and daughters of gTer bdag gling pa sought refuge in Sikkim from the Dzungar Mongol armies that invaded Central Tibet and wreaked havoc on the Old School monastery. For more on the impact of this visit on the tradition of Sikkimese Buddhism, see Franz-Karl Ehrhard, “‘Turning the Wheel of the Dharma in Zhing sa va lung’: The dPal ri sPrul skus (17th to 20th centuries,” *Bulletin of Tibetology*, vol. 44, no. 1 and 2 (2008): 5-30.

imposed, thereby transforming forever what had been the chief institutional preserve of the sNang Sog Gong tradition up to that time.

The Fifth Dalai Lama's literary efforts to defame these three figures appears to be connected to his wider efforts to secure the legitimate authority to rule Tibet in the face of unstable direct political and military control over the territory and its populace.⁹⁰⁶ The architects of the dGa' ldan pho brang government were in large part the Fifth Dalai Lama's consecutive "regents" (*de srid*)⁹⁰⁷ bSod nams chos 'phel/bSod nams rab brtan (1595-1658) and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705).⁹⁰⁸ It was these two executive leaders who were primarily responsible for garnering Mongol military support to overthrow gTsang rule, and for later drafting and implementing a law code and other institutional administrative features that became hallmarks of the Dalai Lama polity.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁶ There has been considerable debate over the course of the short life of Tibetan studies in the western academy about the precise nature of political rule in Tibet, specifically the range and nature of the dGa' ldan pho brang government's political control over its territories (Cassinelli and Ekvall, 1969; Goldstein, 1971a; Samuel, 1982 and 1993; Scott, 2009; Shneiderman, 2010). This study partially adopts Saul Mullard's (*Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*, Leiden: Brill 2011, 19-27) approach of acknowledging the fragmentary and undulating character of traditional Tibetan Buddhist state control, which, in the absence of pure despotism, or democracy, forces such states to garner the requisite ideological legitimacy to exercise power, control, and authority over their populace *en potentiate*. Discussing the ideological underpinnings of Tibetan Buddhist states and kingship, Mullard cites Charles Ramble in particular to argue that Tibetan Buddhist political theory operates based on a combination of social contract and Buddhist divine kingship notions. Mullard concludes, "state and kingship in Tibetan society needs to be understood as a system of political organization, which emerges from the legitimacy of a ruler, not only as a *cakravartin* or *dharmarāja*, but also through a social contract between ruler and ruled" (p. 27). The long history of popular revolts in Tibet, along with the contractual nature of Tibet's leader-minister relations, should be enough evidence to indicate that the principle of social contract was a factor. Meanwhile, as Mullard astutely notes, the patron-priest (*mchod yon*) relationship, when institutionalized in such formations as the "dual code" (*lugs gnyis*), expressing the complementarity of religion and politics in legitimate Tibetan Buddhist governance, signals that rightful rule must also be based upon governance in accord with *dharma*, as in the Buddhist *cakravartin* and *dharmarāja* models.

⁹⁰⁷ With the rise of the Great Fifth, the title *sde srid*, which during the previous gTsang rule, had been reserved for the supreme "ruler" of the gTsang polity, was newly used to designate the Dalai Lamas' administrative "regents."

⁹⁰⁸ Luciano Petech, *China and Tibet in the Early 18th Century: History of the Establishment of Chinese Protectorate in Tibet* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1950): 8-9.

⁹⁰⁹ Luciano Petech, "The Dalai-Lamas and regents of Tibet: a chronological study," in *Selected Papers on Asian History*, Serie Orientale Roma Vol. LX (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente,

However, like many pre-modern states the dGa' ldan pho brang government often lacked the centralized might necessary to exercise direct control over Tibet.⁹¹⁰ This meant that political authority often took the form of a ritualized display of legitimacy rather than a concrete actuality. In lieu of direct and constant physical control, it was the figures of the Dalai Lamas, and more specifically, the office of the Dalai Lama and its powerful symbolic cache, which was responsible for securing the widespread allegiance of the populace and its power brokers, and thus ensuring the ideological legitimacy of the Tibetan state until the present period.

As the first Dalai Lama to occupy the position of head of the dGa' ldan pho brang state, the religious and political career of the Fifth Dalai Lama was focused in large part upon fusing within his persona the constellation of elements thought essential for the legitimacy of a Tibetan Buddhist ruler and his polity.⁹¹¹ Architecture, art, ritual, and literature provided the sensory forms that would bind these elements together and impress their authenticity and power upon the Tibetan populace.⁹¹² A similar formula of state

1988): 133. Petech states that from the rise of dGa' ldan pho brang power in 1642 to the death of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho in 1705, the regent "was the head of the civil and political (but not of the military) administration, and exercised the temporal rights which belong the Dalai-Lama, but could not be wielded personally by him. At first he was appointed by the Qośot Khan, but soon the choice fell practically in the hands of the 5th Dalai-Lama." Petech (133-135) observes that although there were three interim regents between bSod nams rab brtan and Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, these two figures were clearly the most influential during this period.

⁹¹⁰ Petech's (1950) study clearly demonstrates the unstable and undulating nature of dGa' ldan pho brang political power throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁹¹¹ For a detailed account of the Fifth Dalai Lama's life and literary works, see Kurtis R. Schaeffer, "The Fifth Dalai Lama," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2005): 64-91.

⁹¹² For a general discussion of the role in this process of rituals, narratives, and architectural forms associated with Avalokiteśvara and the Tibetan dynastic period, see Derek F. Maher, "The Dalai Lamas and State Power," *Religion Compass* 1/2 (2007): 266-267. The function of rituals and festivals centering upon the Fifth Dalai Lama in the dGa' ldan pho brang government's efforts to legitimate Dalai Lama rule over Tibet is explored by Yumiko Ishihama, "On the dissemination of the belief in the Dalai Lama as a Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara," in *The History of Tibet: The Medieval Period*, ed. Alex McKay (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 538-553; and Kurtis Schaeffer, "Ritual, Festival, and Authority

creation also played out in Sikkim, as founding figures created compelling narratives, temples, reliquaries, statues, murals, performances and other images and objects that could connect people with one another under a rubric of values that would define the new state and its relationship with the territory and populace.⁹¹³

This chapter focuses on the role of powerful objects in this process, particularly how writings and rituals that feature powerful objects became a core feature of the projections of legitimate rule for both the Fifth Dalai Lama and the founding figures of Sikkim. I argue that in both cases this discourse of powerful materiality centered upon the kinds of objects and rites that centrally occupied Sog bzlog pa and his milieu, but for very different reasons. The Fifth Dalai Lama explicitly vilified Sog bzlog pa and his milieu, but in so doing, he invoked many elements of a common object-power discourse and wove these into the fabric of his own image of political legitimacy. The founding masters of Sikkim, on the other hand, claimed direct lineal descent from Sog bzlog pa and used his and his master's powerful rites and objects as a defining feature of the new kingdom's ritualized politico-religious identity.

The primary aim of this discussion is to illustrate how the powerful objects and object-oriented rites with which Sog bzlog pa was involved during his lifetime directly and indirectly played a role after his death in the constructing of these two Tibetan Buddhist polities. In so doing, this chapter attempts to show more broadly how overtly

under the Fifth Dalai Lama," In *Power, Politics and the Reinvention of Tradition in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Tibet: Proceedings of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Xth Seminar, Oxford University, 2003*, eds. Kurtis R. Schaeffer and Bryan J. Cuevas (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2006): 187-202. For a discussion focused on the role of monumental architecture in this process, particularly the Potala Palace of Lhasa, see Anne Chayet, "The Potala, Symbol of the Power of the Dalai Lamas," in *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: The Capital of the Dalai Lamas*, ed. Francoise Pommaret (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 39-52.

⁹¹³ Mullard (2011) relates copious details about how commissioning monumental sacred architecture and establishing regular ritual performances throughout Sikkim formed a major part of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin's efforts to create a Tibetan Buddhist kingdom.

political dimensions of powerful objects are rooted in their ability to mediate, relate, or fuse a variety of disparate human and non-human elements and domains. We witnessed in Chapter One and Two how literary passages that feature Sog bzlog pa and his milieu's powerful objects and rites often narrate these materializations to function as vortexes of sorts for the social, economic, political, and religious forces and dynamics occurring in their vicinity. The diverse links mediated by these powerful objects and rites indicated that they condense and translate values across domains, resisting containment within any specific discursive or material territory. Chapter Three was devoted to analysis of Sog bzlog pa's theoretical philosophical reflections upon how such powerful objects work vis-à-vis the people who use or encounter them, while Chapter Four constituted an attempt to discern how Sog bzlog pa's theoretical boundary play between persons and things is reflected in the boundary play of his object-oriented ritual settings, particularly as these contexts encourage the passage of power between persons, objects, places, past masters, and timeless buddhas. Here we continue to trace these connections, this time focusing on the literary references to power objects, object-oriented rites, and other material aspects of power and authority as these appear in posthumous, third person references to Sog bzlog pa and his milieu in later biographies, histories, and other literary sources related to persons instrumental in the construction of the dGa' ldan pho brang and Sikkimese states. Tracing these connections provides crucial insights into how a certain episteme of powerful objects and object-centered rites – an object-power discourse, as it were – became wed to the identities of these figures and continued to shape their legacy long after their deaths. This episteme encouraged the collapse of the identities of Sog bzlog pa, Zhig po gling pa, and Gong ra ba with one another, and together, with a certain, highly contentious relationship to the world of powerful objects and object-oriented rites.

This conflation also worked in turn to extend the personhood of these figures throughout time and space, enabling the objects and object-oriented rites associated with them to materialize their presence anew, wherever and whenever these items become focal points of critical attention and practice. This slippage of identity and authority between persons, places, and things, which occurs in the vicinity of power objects helps illustrate why, in the particular case of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu, power objects and their powerful human wielders were such a central concern and point of controversy for the architects of Tibetan Buddhist state legitimacy during the seventeenth century.

I begin this discussion with an investigation of the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama, analyzing in particular certain passages that feature Sog bzlog pa and his milieu in the vicinity of powerful objects and object-oriented rites. I focus on the specific features of the Fifth Dalai Lama's object-power discourse and relate these to his criticisms of Sog bzlog pa and the broader "sNang rtse faction" (*snang rtse phyogs*), which originated with Sog bzlog pa's master Zhig po gling pa, and continued through Sog bzlog pa's main student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje. I then trace the reception of Sog bzlog pa in particular through an analysis of his biographical treatment in subsequent Old School histories. Finally, I present key material elements in the foundation of Sikkim and enduring elements of Sikkimese Buddhist identity, paying special attention to the object-discourse there and its links with Sog bzlog pa and his milieu.

***I. The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and His Milieu in the Writings of the
Fifth Dalai Lama***

As indicated by the Fifth Dalai Lama's pejorative nomenclature, "the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong," the Tibetan leader's negative literary portrayal of Sog bzlog pa is inextricably linked with his master Zhig po gling pa and his student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje. Although Sog bzlog pa died when the Fifth Dalai Lama was only seven or eight years old, the Fifth Dalai Lama reveals throughout his writings a consistent effort to portray him as an opportunistic fraud, an ineffectual ritualist, and a poor scholar. The Great Fifth invariably connects these critiques of Sog bzlog pa to his close relationship with his master Zhig po gling pa, who the Great Fifth paints as a resolutely false Treasure revealer that fabricated and manipulated Treasure prophecies to catapult himself into the public limelight for a mixture of personal social, political, and economic ends. The Great Fifth also extends this critical spirit to Sog bzlog pa's main student Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, who inherited from Sog bzlog pa the Treasure revelations of Zhig po gling pa, and whose monastery, Nges gsang rdo rje gling, had traditional family and religious ties with Zhig po gling pa and his natal territory of sNang rtse.

The reader will recall from Chapter Two that as the principal heir of Zhig po gling pa's Treasure revelations, Sog bzlog pa was charged with implementing his revelatory ritual cycle *Twenty-five Means to Repel Armies*. This series of performances, moreover, forms the subject matter of Sog bzlog pa's *History of How the Mongols were Turned Back*, and accounts for the nickname "Mongol Repeller" (Sog bzlog pa) that he assumed in the process. We may also recall from Chapter One that in addition to his revelation of violent ritual cycles, Zhig po gling pa was a prolific revealer of a range of Treasure substances and objects, all of which claim to have the power to elicit radical transformations in persons and states of affairs. We saw in earlier chapters how Sog bzlog pa inherited from Zhig po gling pa many of these powerful items, most notably his

seven-times born Brahmin pills and other edible Treasure sacra. We also witnessed in those previous chapters how Sog bzlog pa developed a unique concern with powerful substances and objects more broadly, and made several attempts to reconcile their claims of power with mainstream Buddhist theories of awakened embodiment and materialization. Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, as the hierarch of Nges gsang rdo rje gling, nurtured the institutionalization of the Zhig po gling pa revelations by continuing to base the ritual calendar of his monastery upon them and by passing them on to his own disciples, who included some of the most illustrious Old School masters of the seventeenth century.

Central to the Great Fifth's criticisms of Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra ba is a rejection of the authenticity and efficacy of their involvements with this material, object-oriented dimension of religious life. In particular, the Great Fifth's critical remarks about these three figures call into question three elements that are deemed crucial for the reception of Treasure revelations: the prophecies that predict and accompany them, the ritual prowess of the persons involved in their implementation, and the material ritual protocol important for their efficacy. Before we delve into these critiques, however, allow me to provide some essential background on the Great Fifth's own involvement with Treasure traditions.

A Rift in the Old School: Treasure Substances and Rites in the Life and Lineage of the Fifth Dalai Lama

Despite his dismissive attitude toward these three figures, the Great Fifth in no way intended his remarks to cast dispersions on the revelatory dimension of Tibetan Buddhist

practice as a whole. He had his own deep commitments to the Old School Treasure traditions, which stemmed in large part from his relationship with his maternal uncle, the Northern Treasure scion Byang bdag Ngag gi dbang po (1580-1639).⁹¹⁴ The Great Fifth reports that in his infancy, during a prolonged stay by Ngag gi dbang po at the Great Fifth's family home in 'Phyongs rgyas, this master bestowed upon Tibet's future leader a set of initiations and protective rituals from the Northern Treasures, and offered much personal and political advice to his father about looming quarrels with pro-gTsang factions.⁹¹⁵ The Great Fifth also recounts how in 1642, just after seizing control of Tibet from the ousted gTsang leadership, he received the violent ritual cycle of Karma Guru, among others, in a visionary experience of Ngag gi dbang po's father, bKra shis stobs rgyal, and Ngag gi dbang po's previous incarnation, Legs ldan rje.⁹¹⁶ As the Great Fifth illustrates throughout his writings, these and other Treasure ritual cycles and powerful objects from the tradition of the Northern Treasures would prove crucial for him in

⁹¹⁴ See Karmay (1988b) for more details on these relationships. The Fifth Dalai Lama's affiliations with the Old School were multiple. For instance, the Great Fifth cites Treasure prophecies to lend legitimacy to himself and his colleagues throughout his compendious narrative literature. He also provides innumerable details throughout his writings of his personal relationships, in the capacity of student, teacher, and patron, with many of the most illustrious Old School figures of his day. For a list of all the many Treasure revealers, whose revelations were inherited by the Great Fifth from his Old School teachers, see Franz-Karl Ehrhard, "Flow of the River Gangā': The Gsan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Bla-ma and its Literary Sources," in *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya*, ed. Roberto Vitali, 79-98 (Kathmandu, Nepal: Vajra Publications, 2012).

⁹¹⁵ *Byang pa rig 'dzin chen po ngag gi dbang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung 'bum*, vol. 8 (*nya*) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?): 755.3-756.2. Henceforth, I refer to this text as *Byang pa'i rnam thar*.

⁹¹⁶ Dalai Lama V, *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, gSang ba'i rnam thar rgya can ma* (Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1972): 13.2-15.2. This episode relates the Great Fifth's first entry into gTsang in 1642 after Gushri Khan had defeated the gTsang pa sde srid. The Great Fifth recounts how he fell victim to sorcery during that visit and only recovered after his return to Lhasa, when he had a vision of the Northern Treasure figures Legs ldan rdo rje and bKra shis stobs rgyal, who bestowed upon him wrathful deity initiations, particularly the Karma Guru cycle.

crafting the ritual legitimacy of the Dalai Lama institution.⁹¹⁷ The personal long-life rituals and other rites deemed necessary for the survival of the Dalai Lama institution are still commissioned and presided over by the Northern Treasure hierarchs today, despite the successive Dalai Lamas' primary sectarian affiliation with the dGe lugs pa tradition.⁹¹⁸ Moreover, in addition to the Fifth Dalai Lama's family lineage, the Great Fifth also narrates in his writings that his previous incarnations – the Third Dalai Lama dSod nams rgya mtsho and the Second Dalai Lama dGe 'dun rgya mtsho – shared his enthusiasm for the Treasure traditions of the Old School.⁹¹⁹ What, then, caused him to single out with such derision the tradition of Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra ba if it was not about the legitimacy of Treasure revelations as a whole?

⁹¹⁷ This important aspect of the Fifth Dalai Lama's political legitimacy is discussed in some detail by Samten Karmay, "The Rituals and their Origins in the Visionary Accounts of the Fifth Dalai Lama," *Part II: The Fifth Dalai Lama and rNying ma pa Teachings*, in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, Volume II (Kathmandu: Mandala Publications, 2005), 73-94. There, Karmay traces several of the ritual cycles that originated with the Great Fifth's visionary experiences to his connection with the Northern Treasure lords. He concludes that these Northern Treasure ritual cycles "were instituted as state ceremonies that had the permanent effect of conferring on the Dalai Lama political legitimacy as the sovereign of Tibet" (88). For more details of the Fifth Dalai Lama's own involvement in violent object-oriented rites, see Jacob Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 136-142.

⁹¹⁸ I observed this connection during fieldwork in Dharamsala, India, where sTag lung rtse sprul bshad sgrub phrin las nyin byed bzang po (b. 1926), the current hierarch of the Northern Treasure tradition and incarnation of Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, typically presides over the public long-life ceremonies dedicated to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho.

⁹¹⁹ Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *bSod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung 'bum*, vol. 8 (*nya*) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?), 10.2-10.4. There the Great Fifth states, "The fact that I cited above many sources from Treasure is because the Omniscient Ones dGe 'dun rgya mtsho and bSod nams rgya mtsho both took them to be authentic teachings. Theirs are nothing at all like the life stories of some arrogant big lamas these days, who, while saying that 'all the teachings of the Old Translation School are inauthentic,' nonetheless cite these when proving how great and sublime they themselves are" (*de yang gong du bka' gter gyi lung khungs mang du 'dren pa ni/ thams cad mkhyen pa dge 'dun rgya mtsho dang/ thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho gnyis ka chos de dag tshad mar mdzad pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis bris pa yin gyi/ ding sang la la dag gsang sngags snga 'gyur gyi chos mtha' dag chos rnam dag min zhes smra bzhin du rang chen po dand dam par sgrub pa'i tshes de dag gi lung 'dren pa'i bla chen bsnyon ham can rnams kyi rnam thar dang mtshungs pa ni min no/*).

The close alliances these three figures maintained with gTsang's ruling house and gTsang loyalists scattered across the plateau during the decades leading up to the fall of the house of gTsang is surely a strong factor behind the Great Fifth's hatred. The first four decades of the seventeenth century saw pro-gTsang factions stage collective efforts to limit dGe lugs power in Central Tibet and rid Tibet of pro-dGe lugs Mongol forces. Sog bzlog pa's *History of How the Mongols were Turned Back* tells the story of Sog bzlog pa's own thirty-plus year collaboration with the gTsang pa sde srid and other gTsang allies in directing army-averting rites against dGe lugs-led Mongol troops. However, by the time the Great Fifth assumed power in 1642, Zhig po gling pa and Sog bzlog pa were dead and Gong ra ba's pro-gTsang bKa' brgyud and Jo nang allies were all exiled. What threat exactly could the legacy of these three figures have posed the dGa' ldan pho brang and its Mongol army during the years of the Great Fifth's reign?

While a full treatment of this question lies outside the scope of the present study, analysis of the passages involved strongly suggests that the contention revolves in no small measure around the social, political, and economic power and influence that these figures gained through their involvement with the violent object-oriented rites and powerful objects of Zhig po gling pa's Treasure revelations. Although these objects and practices outlived their original revealers and implementers as the institutional core of Gong ra ba's monastery, the combined distributive, material, and political rationale of Treasure traditions, which I discussed in Chapter One, ensured that these sensible forms could assimilate to new settings while nonetheless bringing with them the associations of their original aims. Thus still carrying the anti-dGe lugs pa, anti-Mongol sentiment of their original context, we may speculate that their continued practice and valorization was interpreted by the dGa' ldan pho brang government as an act of treason, in which case the

Great Fifth would have been compelled to treat it as a matter of national security to delegitimize for posterity the authority of these figures and their associated revelations.

One strategy that the Great Fifth adopted for this purpose was to emphasize in his narrative writings rivalry between his own Northern Treasure tradition and the tradition of the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong. It is perhaps unsurprising that the Great Fifth regarded the masters of his own Northern Treasure tradition to possess the greatest ritual prowess and the most potent techniques to confront the range of pragmatic concerns threatening Tibet throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What is remarkable, however, is that in episode after episode throughout the Great Fifth's writings, he is careful to depict the destiny, integrity, and power of his Northern Treasure masters just as he adjacently portrays, in direct opposition to these, the opportunism, fraudulence, and futility of Sog bzlog pa, Zhig po gling pa, and Gong ra ba. So recurrent is this juxtaposition of the Northern Treasure tradition's greatness with the Zhig gling tradition's fraudulence and futility that the figures of Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra ba appear as foils against which the Great Fifth could valorize and accentuate the greatness of his own Treasure tradition.

The Great Fifth insists that there was indeed a genuine contention between the Northern Treasure masters and the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong. He attributes this antipathy to the efforts of Zhig po gling pa and his wider sNang rtse faction to publicly defame the Northern Treasure masters and usurp their rightful role as the preeminent Treasure wielders of their day. According to the Fifth Dalai Lama, these efforts of public defamation were rooted more fundamentally in the close connections that Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra ba shared with the successive gTsang rulers and their family members and allies.

In his biography of Northern Treasure hierarchs, the Fifth Dalai Lama describes in some detail the exile of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?-1603) and his son Ngag gi dbang po (1580-1639) from their stronghold of Byang ngam ring in northwestern gTsang at the hands of the gTsang pa sde srid.⁹²⁰ Much of the subsequent narrative is focused on the travels of the father and son pair and their entourage as they wandered east through dBus and into Khams, eventually making their way to the Fifth Dalai Lama's own natal territory of 'Phyong rgyas in Lho kha, where they settled for a lengthy period before constructing nearby the new seat of the Northern Treasure tradition, rDo rje brag monastery. Throughout their journeys, bKra shis stobs rgyal and Ngag gi dbang po confront and overcome a number of obstacles posed by slander issuing from the "sNang rtse faction." In the context of such episodes the Great Fifth takes the opportunity to retaliate against Zhig po gling pa and Sog bzlog pa, criticizing them on several counts. These critical passages set the tone for the accusations that the Great Fifth levels at the sNang rtse faction throughout his writings.

Consider, for instance, a passage in which the Great Fifth relates the historical circumstances of past Mongol military interventions in Tibet, along with concomitant Tibetan efforts to drive away these invading Mongol armies through object-oriented army-averting rites.⁹²¹ The passage opens with a series of prophecy verses, which give voice to associations between foreign military invasion, environmental degradation, social fragmentation, civil war, and moral decay so characteristic of the Treasure tradition's combined material, political, and distributive rationale. These prophecies are followed by the historical details of Mongol military interventions in Tibetan internal

⁹²⁰ *Byang pa'i nam thar*: 711.2-711.5.

⁹²¹ *Ibid*: 774.3-775.2.

affairs, along with praises for the powerful Treasure revealers who confronted these threats via the intercession of violent, object-oriented Treasure rites. When the Great Fifth's brief history reaches his own period, he names his own Northern Treasure relatives bKra shis stobs rgyal and Ngag gi dbang po as the ritual experts prophesized to confront Mongol armies during these "later times," that is, until "many people of meager fortune" determined instead that "Blo gros rgyal mtshan, who went by the name Sog bzlog pa, and his lineage" were destined for this task.⁹²² According to the Great Fifth, the expectations placed upon Sog bzlog pa meant that the populace did not request the Northern Treasure father and son duo to "perform the methods for securing Tibet's wellbeing," which "created a breach in the auspicious circumstances" necessary for ritual success.⁹²³ However, continues the Great Fifth, once Ngag gi dbang po settled into the new Northern Treasure monastery of rDo rje brag during the final seven years of his life, he commenced the army-averting rites stipulated of him in prophecies to great effect.⁹²⁴ The implication of this final plug for the ritual prowess of Ngag gi dbang po is that his rites were a key factor for securing the precarious balance of power that the Great Fifth temporarily achieved in the face of Mongol military intervention.

Another related point of controversy for the Great Fifth was the manner in which Sog bzlog pa strategically presented Zhig po gling pa's prophesy texts to convince patrons to sponsor his large-scale army-averting rites. It is noteworthy that the practice

⁹²² Ibid: 775.2-775.3... *bka' babs ltar bod kyi bde thabs mang du mdzad pa'i dus tshod phyi ma tsho'i hor sog zlog pa'i bka' babs kyi lung bstan dpal bkris stobs rgyal yab sras la yod kyang/ skye bo skal dman mang pos sog bzlog pa'i ming can blo gros rgyal mtshan rgyud bcas kyis zlog tu re nas/*

⁹²³ Ibid: 775.3-775.4. *sngags 'chang yab sras rnams la bod bde thabs mdzad dgos par ma gsol bas rten 'brel 'phyugs par snang mod/*

⁹²⁴ Ibid: 775.4. *'on kyang rig 'dzin chen po nyid rdo rje brag tu gdan chags pa nas bzung lung bstan snga phyi rnams nas byung ba ltar bod kyi bde thabs kyi ched du sog zlog mang du mdzad/*

of gaining financial support from political leaders to stage Treasure rituals was itself not a problem for the Great Fifth. This was an endeavor expected of all Treasure revealers. Rather, it was the manipulative and dishonest use of prophecy texts in this process with which the Tibetan leader took issue. For instance, the Great Fifth describes in his biography of Ngag gi dbang po how through his healing and ritual powers this Northern Treasure leader received the devotion and patronage of the leader of Thob rgyal. Just after depicting Ngag gi dbang po “bless” this leader’s wife, and thereby cure her of an “astral pollutant” that had rendered her half paralyzed, he goes on to narrate Sog bzlog pa’s very different relationship with the region of Thob rgyal and its leadership.⁹²⁵ The Fifth Dalai Lama cites that “some in the Thob rgyal court with familiarity” (*thob rgyal ba’i drung ’khor rgyus can ’dras*) communicated to him how “a minister of the Thob rgyal people, who was the representative of the Khang bzang people called ‘leader sMon skyid pa’ sought out Sog bzlog pa as his main master.”⁹²⁶ sMon skyid pa, the reader may recall, features in Sog bzlog pa’s *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back* as one of his chief patrons. It was through this leader’s influence, as noted in Chapter Two, that Sog bzlog pa received from the gTsang pa sde srid the monastic estate and resources in ’U yug necessary to continue with his Mongol-averting ritual campaign.⁹²⁷ It was also through the influence of sMon skyid pa, so the Fifth Dalai Lama’s story goes, that Sog bzlog pa was able to present a “spurious” (*khul bu*) Zhig po gling pa Treasure prophecy to the Thob rgyal leader in an attempt to demonstrate to him that the “emanation of

⁹²⁵ Ibid: 760.2-760.3.

⁹²⁶ Ibid: 760.4....*thob rgyal ba’i blon po gangs bzang ba’i mi ngo dpon po smon skyid pa zer ba de bla ma sog bzlog par rtsa ba’i bla ma ’tshol bas/ skabs shig tu bla ma sog bzlog pa thog rgyal du byung ste/*

⁹²⁷ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 233.3-234.2.

Vajrapāṇi” stipulated therein as a destined patron of army-averting rites was none other than the Thob rgyal leader himself.⁹²⁸ As the Great Fifth reports, the leader was skeptical: he refused to identify himself in the prophecy and thus rejected Sog bzlog pa’s plea for patronage.⁹²⁹ Three years later, continues the Fifth Dalai Lama, Sog bzlog pa reversed his interpretation, proclaiming anew to others that the Thob rgyal leader was in fact a “demon” mentioned in Zhig po gling pa’s prophecy text.⁹³⁰ When the Thob rgyal leader heard word of Sog bzlog pa’s revised prophecy interpretation he was revolted. Sog bzlog pa’s opportunistic use of his master’s prophecy texts, claims the Great Fifth, ensured that among Old School groups the Thob rgyal leader “had great faith in only the lineage holders of the great *vidyādhara*”⁹³¹ Ngag gi dbang po, and not the tradition of Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa.⁹³²

Patronage from powerful political circles was not the only issue at stake in the alleged prophecy manipulations of Sog bzlog pa and his associates. The Fifth Dalai Lama was even more concerned about the opportunistic authorship of false Treasure prophecies and their surreptitious insertion into otherwise accepted prophecy texts, a charge which he repeatedly levels against Sog bzlog pa’s master Zhig po gling pa. Owing to the central role of Treasure prophecies in authenticating Treasure revelations and their revealers, these accusations of prophecy fraud implicated not only the authenticity of the prophecies, but more fundamentally, all the associated Treasure

⁹²⁸ *Byang pa’i rnam thar*: 760.4-760.5.

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

⁹³⁰ Ibid.

⁹³¹ Ibid. 760.3-760.4. *sde pa de spyir snying lugs la gus shing de’i nang nas kyang rig ’dzin chen po’i brgyud ’dzin kho na la dad pa che/*

⁹³² Ibid: 760.6. *...phyogs de la ma mos pa...*

teachings and substances of Zhig po gling pa, not to mention the authenticity of Zhig po gling pa himself. For Sog bzlog pa's part, such accusations, if accepted, would have meant that he was never destined to stage Zhig po gling pa's army-averting Treasure rites as the Treasure revealer had ordained, and that none of the substances and objects that he inherited from Zhig po gling pa, implemented in ritual settings, and wrote about in apologia were genuine Treasures with real power.

While much can be said about the Fifth Dalai Lama's frequent attacks on the authenticity and integrity of Zhig po gling pa, a consideration of the general tenor of these accusations underscores that potent objects and substances were centrally at issue. To provide some background, the Fifth Dalai Lama was vehemently insistent that Zhig po gling pa was a false Treasure revealer. By the Great Fifth's account, the leader of sNang rtse had wrongly assumed from the *Lotus Testament (Padma bka' thang*⁹³³) the Treasure revealer name Zhig po gling pa, which, claims the Great Fifth, was in fact an epithet for the famed Treasure revealer Ratna gling pa.⁹³⁴ The Great Fifth's sense that Zhig po gling pa had usurped an authentic Treasure revealer's identity, combined with the Great Fifth's charges of the Treasure revealer's narrowly focused political

⁹³³ The *Lotus Testament (Pad+ma bka' thang shel brag ma)*, itself a Treasure text revealed by O rgyan gling pa (c. 14th century), is one of the most authoritative early Treasure revelations that lists in the form of prophecies the names of all the Treasure revealers to appear in Tibet and its environs. Since these prophecies also include the "temporal signs" (*dus rtags*) for the destined emergence of these figures, would be Treasure revealers were in the practice of identifying themselves and their circumstances among these verses as part of their efforts to legitimate themselves and their revelations. For more on the *Lotus Testament*, see Matthew Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000): 170-177. For an analysis of the *Lotus Testament* prophecies in light of thirteenth to fourteenth century anxieties over Mongol military threats to Tibetan geopolitical integrity, see Jacob Dalton (2011), 129-132.

⁹³⁴ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, *Lha ldan sprul pa'i gtsug lag khang gi dkar chag shel dkar me long*, in *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho*, vol. 19 (*dza*) (Gangtok, Sikkim, India: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1991-1995): 264.1-264.2.

machinations no doubt accounts in part for why the Tibetan leader chose to refer to him pejoratively with his political title “sNang rtse leader.”⁹³⁵

The Great Fifth alleges that as a false Treasure revealer “the leader (*sde pa*) of sNang rtse ba fabricated negative prophecies about many masters and political leaders (*sde dpon*) that he himself did not like.”⁹³⁶ The targets of Zhig po gling pa’s negative prophecies included, by the Great Fifth’s account, none other than the founder of the dGe lugs pa tradition, Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419),⁹³⁷ and more frequently, the successive Northern Treasure lineage holders. In one particularly telling example, the Great Fifth relates how the “sNang rtse faction” newly applied to the Northern Treasure lord Legs ldan rje (Ngag gi dbang po’s previous incarnation, b. 1521) a negative prophecy, which centuries earlier had been circulated by the followers of Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396, Zhig po gling pa’s most distinguished former incarnation) about the Northern Treasure founder Rig ’dzin rgod ldem (1337-1408).⁹³⁸ Originally, the false prophecy passage in question had been inserted within another prophecy passage that

⁹³⁵ *Byang pa’i rnam thar*: 696 and *Lha ldan sprul pa’i gtsug lag khang gi dkar chag shel dkar me long*: 264.3-264.4. In this latter passage, the Great Fifth also attacks Zhig po gling pa’s status as an authentic Treasure revealer on several other fronts. Not only were prophecies that foretell Zhig po gling pa meant for Ratna gling pa. Additionally, charges the Great Fifth, his physical presence was neither that of a monk nor a white clad tantrika, but a black person with brocades. His conduct was to serve as general for the sde pa sKiyid shod pa. And his intelligence was laughable.

⁹³⁶ *Byang ba’i rnam thar*: 760.6-761.1...*sde pa snang rtse bas kho rang mi dga’ ba’i bla ma sde dpon mang por lung bstan ngan pa byas pas/*. See also the Fifth Dalai Lama’s biography of the Sa skya master ’Khon ston dpal ’byor lhun grub, *Khyab bdag ’khor lo’i dbang phyug dpal ’byor khun grub kyi rnam thar skal bzang dad pa’i shing rta*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung ’bum*, vol. 8 (*nya*) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?): 610.4. There, the Great Fifth states, “later, upon perusing several times his [Zhig gling’s] prophecies and such, he [’Khon ston] thought that they were extremely corrupted and put them aside in a state of indifference” (*dus physis lung bstan sogs mang du gzigs pas lhas che bar dgongs te gtang snyoms gnang ba ’dra yod...*).

⁹³⁷ This accusation of fabricating anti-dGe lugs prophecies appears most notably in the Great Fifth’s *Lha ldan sprul pa’i gtsug lag khang gi dkar chag shel dkar me long*: 256. This charge is echoed much later by the nineteenth century figure Blo bzang ’phrin las rnam rgyal, in his *rJe tsong kha pa’i rnam thar thub bstan mdzes pa’i rgyan gcig ngo mtshar nor bu’i phreng ba* (Sarnath, Varanasi, India: Mongolian Lama Guru Deva, 1967): 356.

⁹³⁸ *Byang pa’i rnam thar*: 684.5-686.1.

predicts Rig 'dzin rgod ldem's opening of the "hidden land" of Sikkim ('Bras ljongs), a revelatory act for which he is largely credited today. The negative addition to this prophecy states, with clear reference to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (Vidyādhara Vulture Feather), that the same "crazy yogi with vulture hair" to open Sikkim will ultimately have a destructive impact on the location through his involvement with the excavation from Has po ri of a "bone relic of dGe sbyong 'od zer mtha' yas, interred within a silver amulet, inside a box of catch tree wood."⁹³⁹ This alleged false prophecy relates how "four magically emanated yogi brothers" (*sprul pa'i rnal 'byor bzhi*) are instead the rightful revealers of this item. It also stipulates that they ritually treat it for maximum effect:

By melting it on the full moon of the first month of any season with fragrant wood, such as sandal wood and the like, at the center of Brag dkar bkra shis sdings, on the face of a rock a full cubit in area with a swastika design on it drawn in chalk, the entire region of 'Bras mo gshongs will naturally become tame, such that the gods and demons, wild animals, snakes and so forth will not do harm and there will be no obstacles whatsoever.⁹⁴⁰

Immediately on the heels of this passage appears an incongruous warning:

Since the collective merit of beings will be exhausted at the end of time, a demonic emanation donning my garb will come, saying that he will give a bone relic that he has from a seven-times born Brahmin. Gathering a crowd, he will distribute the bone relic of dGe sbyong 'od zer mtha' yas. It will bring everyone to ruin. The site of 'Bras mo gshongs will freeze, ruining one stage of what came before.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁹ Ibid: 685.2. ...*dge sbyong 'od zer mtha' yas kyi gdung dngul gyi ga'ur bcug nas seng ldeng gi sgrom du bzhugs/*

⁹⁴⁰ *Byang ba'i rnam thar*: 685.2-685.4 ...*brag dkar bkra shis sdings kyi dbus drang por rdo 'dom gang chu zheng gab pa'i ngos la rdo thal gyis bris pa'i g.yung drung ris yod pa'i steng du tsan dan la sogs pa'i dri bzang po'i shing gis rwa ba bzhi gang rung gi nya la bzhu bas 'bras mo gshongs kyi phyogs thams cad rang bzhin gyis dul nas lha 'dre dang gcan gzan dang dug sbrul la sogs pa'i 'tshé ba mi 'byung shing/ bar chad gang yang mi 'byung ste/*

⁹⁴¹ Ibid: 685.4-685. *de yang dus kyi mtha' la 'gro ba spyi mthun gyi bsod nams zad pas/ bdud kyi sprul pa nga'i cha byad du zhugs pa cig gis/ bram ze skye ba bdun pa'i gdung dang 'brel ngan song khebs pa zhig yod pa sbyin no zer zhing/ khrom chen po bsod nas dge sbyor 'od zer kyi gdung 'byin pa 'ong/ des thams cad phung bar byed/ 'bras mo gshongs kyi gnas rengs nas snga thog rim gcig phung bar byed cing/*

The gist of this Padmasambhava prophecy is that Rig 'dzin rgod ldem should be construed as a “demonic emanation,” whose wrongful and presumptuous involvement with and distribution of the bone relic from a seven-times born Brahmin will harm Sikkim and undo the positive effects gained through the revelatory “opening” of this hidden sacred land. The Fifth Dalai offers the opinion that Sangs rgyas gling pa's jealous followers had been aware that Rig 'dzin rgod ldem was planning to reveal this power object on his way to opening the site of Sikkim and inserted this negative passage to cast doubt upon his and his Treasure substance's authenticity.⁹⁴²

Centuries later, charges the Great Fifth, the sNang rtse faction publically promoted the notion that this negative prophecy refers not to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, but to Zhig po gling pa's contemporary, the Northern Treasure figure Legs ldan rje.⁹⁴³ This caused Zhig po gling pa's wider circle of associates to entertain a “variety of exaggerated and belittling claims,” specifically that Legs ldan rje had inappropriately handled powerful substances, “mixing the flesh of dGe slong 'od zer mtha' yas in with *samaya* substance.”⁹⁴⁴ Although it is unclear to me exactly what negative effect this mixing of substances was presumed to elicit, the Fifth Dalai Lama asserts that through the force of this public accusation of substance heteropraxy Legs ldan rje “was presented as grounds for doubt to many of meager fortune.”⁹⁴⁵

Just as the Great Fifth did with Sog bzlog pa, his multiple accusations of Zhig po gling pa's prophecy fraud often constitute the foil against which he constructs his image

⁹⁴² Ibid: 685.6-686.1.

⁹⁴³ Ibid: 700.5.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid: 700.4-700.5. *sgro skur sna tshogs byas...dam rdzas la dge slong 'od zer mtha' yas kyi sha 'dres...*

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid: 700.5. *...skal dman mang po the tshom gyi gzhir bkod...*

of Northern Treasure supremacy. Amidst a battery of accusations against Zhig po gling pa for prophecy fraud, the Great Fifth relates an episode in which the illustrious 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud master, Padma dkar po⁹⁴⁶ (1527-1592) brings to the attention of Legs ldan rje a negative prophecy about the Northern Treasure master which was presumably composed and inserted by "the one from sNang rtse."⁹⁴⁷ When Padma dkar po suggests that he compose a negative prophecy about Zhig po gling pa in retaliation and insert it within Legs ldan rje's Treasure teachings, the Northern Treasure master protests:

No matter what he says, I cannot insert positive or negative things based on my own likes and dislikes, things which are outside of whatever is in the precious Master from Oḍiyāna's Treasure teachings. This would break the command of the masters and *dākinīs* and bring on the anger of the protectors.⁹⁴⁸

The Great Fifth concludes that Legs ldan rdo rje's response put Padma dKar po to shame, and consequently, "all honest people praised Legs ldan rje."⁹⁴⁹ What we see here, then, is that the integrity of the Northern Treasure masters is promoted in the very same passages in which the fraudulence of Zhig po gling pa is exposed.

Such allegations of prophecy insertion implies primarily that Zhig po gling pa's Treasure revelations were all fraudulent, a charge that the Great Fifth and Zhig po gling pa's other detractors were careful to extend to his Treasure substances as much as to his Treasure teachings. There are several indications that controversies surrounding Zhig po gling pa's Treasure substances in particular erupted soon after their revelation and

⁹⁴⁶ For more on the life and times of the famed hierarch 'Brug pa sprul sku Padma dKar po (1527-1592) see E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 81-86.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid: 761.1-761.2.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid: 761.2-761.3. *khong rang ci gsung rung nga ni u rgyan rin po che'i gter chos su gang 'dug las rang gi dga' sdug la brten pa'i bzang ngan 'jug mi nus/ bla ma mkha' 'gro'i bka' chad dang srung ma'i 'tshub yong...*

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid: 761.4. *tshul des kyang legs ldan rje la gzur gnas kun gyis bsngags par byed do/*

distribution, long before the Great Fifth assumed power. The reader may recall from Chapter One how Zhig po gling pa's use of his Treasure substances in the public works projects of flood prevention and army abeyance provoked the suspicions of 'Bras spungs. Readers may recall, moreover, Chapter Three's discussion of how Sog bzlog pa responded to criticisms of Zhig po gling pa's Treasure substance called *Buddhahood Without Meditation*. These criticisms issued from New and Old School quarters and revolved around the authenticity of several of the more fabulous ingredients that this "pill" was said to incorporate. In that case, it seems that clerical circles of several sectarian persuasions had a hard time believing that material substance could form from the white and red seminal fluids of *dharmakāya* buddhas, or that bones of the seven generations of buddhas would still be materially extant, as Zhig po gling pa's Treasure substance claimed.

Some time later, the Fifth Dalai Lama picks up on this theme of substance fraud to narrate how one of his most important Old School masters, Zur chen chos dbyings rang grol (1604-1669), paid a visit to sNang rtse expressly to encounter "several Treasure substances of Gu ru jo rtse, the golden reliquary of the outer support of the leader (*sde pa*) Nam mkha' tshe brtan rgyal po,⁹⁵⁰ the clay statue of gTum drag me 'khor, and other sacred receptacles."⁹⁵¹ The Great Fifth makes sure to relate Zur chen's subsequent critical reflections, namely that the "clay statue of Drag dmar" supposedly revealed by Zhig po gling pa, "seemed exceedingly polished, as though it were crafted by a potter,

⁹⁵⁰ This is the name bestowed upon Zhig po gling pa when he received tantric vows at age five from Chos rje sman chu ba Nam mkha' rin chen (*Zhig gling rnam thar*: 36.4-36.5).

⁹⁵¹ *Zur thams cad mkhyen pa chos dbyings rang grol rnam thar theg mchog bstan pa'i shing rta*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung 'bum*, vol. 9 (*ta*) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?): 165.3. ...*gu ru jo tshe'i gter rdzas du ma dang sde pa nam mkha' tshe brtan rgyal po'i phyi rten gyi gser gdung/ gtum drag me 'khor kyi rdza sku sogs gnas gzigs mdzad/*

unlike the statues from authentic Treasure caches.”⁹⁵² Much like the earlier critique of *Buddhahood Without Meditation* considered in Chapter Three, here it is the physical, material constituency of Zhig po gling pa’s Treasure substance that is called into question. This time, however, rather than question the veracity of its ingredients, doubt is cast upon its polished, crafted appearance. This judgment implies that unlike “statues made by craftsmen,” a Treasure statue ought to perhaps be more crude, or naturalistic in form.

The trope of Zhig po gling pa’s fraudulent Treasure substances seems to have circulated so far and wide that it acquired something of a life of its own. Even the much later dGe lugs pa hierarch Thu’u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802), in his biography of his master lCang skya Rol pa’i rdo rje (1717-1786), invokes Zhig po gling pa when he critically comments upon “many exalted and lowly persons these days,” who, “lay out stuff as merchandise that they claim to be ambrosia pills.”⁹⁵³ Attempting to render his criticisms more salient with reference to examples familiar to his readership, Thu’u bkwan states, “with the exception of the ambrosia pills that come from bKra shis lhun po and Sa skya, when these are based on the blessings and power of *samaya* substance [like that used by lCang skya], the rest are just like the *samaya* substances of the leader of sNang rtse,” which the previous Rin spungs leader ’Jig rten dbang phyug

⁹⁵² Ibid: 165.5. *drag mar gyi rdza sku de...gter kha tshad ldan tsho’i sku dang mi ’dra’i ’jim bzo ba mkhas pa zhig gis bzos tshod nas byon shin tu gtsang bar snang/*

⁹⁵³ Thu’u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Khyab bdag rdo rje sems dpa’i ngo bo dpal ldan dam pa ye shes bstan pa’i sgron me dpal bzang po’i rnam par thar pa mdo tsam brjod pa dge ldan bstan pa’i mdzes rgyan (lCang skya rol rdor rnam thar)*, in *Collected Works of Thu’u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma* (Lhasa: Zhol Par khang Gsar pa, 2000): ff277b-278a. *deng sang mchog dman mang po zhig gis bdud rtsi ril bu yin zer nas zong du ’grem pa rnam ni/*

grags (1482/1542-1595?) “looked askance upon.”⁹⁵⁴ Thu’u bkwan offers a concluding citation, from an unnamed source, cast in the disapproving voice of the past Rin spungs leader:

As for both the pills of barley flower rolled with laberitum,⁹⁵⁵
And the powder of pulverized yellow myrobalan –
Since there are no avenues in this region through which to sell them,
I request that you [Zhig po gling pa] go the lands of Mon and Kong po.⁹⁵⁶

Here it is not only the fraudulence of Zhig po gling pa’s substances to which Thu’u bkwan calls attention. The dGe lugs pa hierarch more specifically refers to Zhig po gling pa’s alleged commodification of substances under the claim that they are powerful ambrosia pills. Above and beyond the particular features of this critique, just the fact that Thu’u bkwan cites Zhig po gling pa’s substances to illuminate a related contemporary concern illustrates to what extent the identity of Zhig po gling pa became wed to a broader discourse of substance fraud and deceit. And on an even more general level, the diverse terms of the many controversies that erupted in the vicinity of Zhig po gling pa’s Treasure substances highlights how during his period social issues of religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy, political ramifications of public works projects, and economic concerns over commodification and exchange all converged around powerful substances.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid: ff277b.6-278a.2. /dam rdzas ’di ’dra’i byin rlabs dang nus pa la ltos na bkras lhun dang/ sa skya nas thon pa’i bdud rtsi ril bu ma gtogs pa’i/...sde pa snang rtse ba’i dam rdzas la zur za byas pa dang mtshungs pa kho nar ’dug go/

⁹⁵⁵ *btsag*. Dr. Pasang Yonten Arya, *Dictionary of Tibetan Materia Medica* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, 96) defines this substance as follows: “a rock which is red in colour and found underground. It is used as a pigment and cures bone fever.” For more details on this substance, see *Krung dpe dri med shel gyi me long*, compiled by Cham mdo sa khul sman rtsis khang (Beijing. Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2007), 74. Alternatively, J.S. Negi, *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary* (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1993, vol. 11, 4699), includes an entry for *btsag* as a Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit term *gaurika*, “white mustard.”

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid: ff278a.1-2. *rin spungs ’jig rten dbang phyug grags pas/ bag phye ba [b]tsag gis dril ba’i ril bu dang/ /a ru gser mdog brdungs pa’i phye ma gnyis/ /sa phyogs ’di la brin sgo mi ’dug pas/ /mon dang kong po’i yul du gshegs pa zhu/ /zhes...*

The controversies surrounding the revelations of Zhig po gling pa and their implementation by Sog bzlog pa had drastic institutional consequences a few decades after the passing of these two figures. I am referring here to the Fifth Dalai Lama and his dGa' ldan pho brang government's forced "conversion" of Nges gsang rdo rje gling monastery, hitherto the venue of the Zhig po gling pa tradition, after the death in 1654 of its hierarch, Sog bzlog pa's main disciple Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje. The monastic assembly of Nges gsang rdo rje gling, located in Gong ra, gTsang, had been regularly practicing Zhig po gling pa's revelations ever since the time of its second hierarch Nyi zla grags pa, who was an associate of the Treasure revealer and an important proprietor of the teachings (*chos bdag*) for his revelations.⁹⁵⁷ It was this figure that first institutionalized Zhig po gling pa's treasure teachings and substances by basing the ritual calendar of this monastery upon them.⁹⁵⁸ Subsequently, an uncle-nephew lineage consisting of Nyi zla grags pa's nephew Lo chen Ngag gi dbang po, and his nephew, Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje, ensured that Nges gsang rdo rje gling continued to implement Zhig po gling pa's revelations until Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje's passing in 1654.⁹⁵⁹ Sometime prior to that year, moreover, Nges gsang rdo rje gling had established a printing house, which published Sog bzlog pa's famous biography of master Padmasambhava, *Dispelling Mental Darkness*, along with the two-page versified table of contents that accompanied it.⁹⁶⁰ Although sources are silent on the other publications

⁹⁵⁷ *gTer ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar*: f. 131r. This monastery was founded by Mang rong gter ston 'Jam dpal rdo rje, who the Great Fifth seems to have regarded as an authentic Treasure revealer.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid*: f. 131r.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid*: f. 131r.

⁹⁶⁰ E. Gene Smith, *Central Tibetan Printeries* (TBRC Green Books): 108.

produced by Nges gsang rdo rje gling, we can surmise that its printery was used for the production and dissemination of the writings and revelations of both Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa, not to mention the ritual and teaching collections compiled by Gong ra ba himself.⁹⁶¹

As the Fifth Dalai Lama narrates, he himself was instrumental in the conversion of Nges gsang rdo rje gling monastery from the tradition of the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong.⁹⁶² It was the Great Fifth who appointed the next hierarch, Nyang ston khra tshang ba Blo gros mchog gi rdo rje (1595-1671), from among his Old School loyalists.⁹⁶³ And it was the Great Fifth he who wrote the new monastic constitution (*bca' yig*), which unequivocally stipulates to “specifically discard not only the Treasure teachings and compositions of the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong, but also the teachings that exist in their lineage.”⁹⁶⁴ Quite predictably given the Great Fifth’s affinities, the Northern

⁹⁶¹ Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje is most famous for his redaction of a massive *Eight Pronouncement Deities* collection (*bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa'i skor*, 13 vols. Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup, 1979-1980), the most voluminous to date. He is also known for printing and distributing copies of the *Seventeen Tantras of the Mind Class* (*rGyud bcu bdun*, 4 vols. dKar mdzes bod rigs rang skyong khul, dPal yul rdzong, PRC: A 'dzom chos sgar, 2000?).

⁹⁶² The Fifth Dalai Lama is explicit on this point throughout his new constitution (*bca' yig*) for Gong ra nges gsang rdo rje gling entitled *Maṇḍala of Rṣīs* (*bCa' yig drang srong ri Shi'i dkyil 'khor*), in *'Phags bal bod dang bod chen rgya hor sog pos mtshon mchog dman bar ma mtha' dag gi spyi bye brag legs nyes 'byed pa'i bca' yig lam yig bsko 'ja' sogs bkod pa khirms gnyis gser shing phun tshogs 'dod 'jo*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung 'bum*, vol. 20 (*wa*) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?): pp. 78-93. (Sikkim: 80-95).

⁹⁶³ *Gong ra bca' yig*: 82.1-82.2. More specifically, the Great Fifth mentions here that he appointed this figure as hierarch in consultation with the “treasurer (*phyag mdzod*) dSod nams rab brtan.” The Great Fifth states in his biography of Khra tshang ba (*Nyang ston khra tshang ba blo gros mchog gi rdo rje'i rtogs brjod nyung ngu rnam gsal*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung 'bum*, vol. 9 (*ta*), Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?, 331), how this master, out of devotion for his teacher Gong ra ba and the wider Zhig gling tradition, had serious misgivings about the forced conversion of Nges gsang rdo rje gling, but was powerless to act otherwise.

⁹⁶⁴ *Gong ra bca' yig*: 92.2-92.3. *khyad par snang sog gong gsum gyi gter chos brtsams chos lta ci smos/ de dag brgyud par yod pa'i chos kyang spangs nas...*

Treasures would feature among the “new treasures” (*gter gsar*) to replace the Zhig gling revelations as the monastery’s calendrical rituals of choice.⁹⁶⁵

When relating the reasons for the conversion of Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje’s Nges gsang rdo rje gling monastery, the Great Fifth’s critical remarks once again revolve around the material dimension of Buddhist practice, indicating that his ill-regard for Gong ra ba was an extension of his problems with Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa. In the case of Gong ra ba, however, the Fifth Dalai Lama’s accusations are focused specifically upon aspects of material orthopraxy that relate to funerary arrangements, *vinaya* rules, large-scale monastic rites, and other institutional expressions of materiality. These critiques, moreover, consistently occur in connection with charges of anti-dGe lugs, and therefore, anti-government sentiments allegedly acquired by Gong ra ba through his close association with Sog bzlog pa and the gTsang court.

For instance, the Great Fifth narrates how at the funeral of Gong ra gZhan phan rdo rje in 1654, which was overseen and sponsored by the leader (*sde pa*) of Gong ra, this local leader, a staunch dGa’ ldan pho brang loyalist and patron of Nges gsang rdo rje gling, was particularly troubled to learn that Gong ra ba had been the main student of Sog bzlog pa.⁹⁶⁶ The Great Fifth reports, no doubt referring to Sog bzlog pa’s pro-gTsang army-repelling rituals, that the leader “was familiar from his time in the gTsang court with the fact that Sog bzlog pa had severe animosity toward the dGe lugs.”⁹⁶⁷ This local

⁹⁶⁵ On this note, the Great Fifth (*Gong ra bca’ yig*: 92.1-92.2) states more specifically: “If you are inclined to practice the new Treasures, practice only whichever Treasures are most suitable from among those of mNga’ ris pañ chen, ’Bri gung zur pa rin po che, ’Phrang ’go gter ston, and Byang bdag rig sngags ’chang ba chen po. Do not practice just anything that bears the name new Treasure” (*gter gsar byed par spro na mnga’ ris paN chen dang/ ’bri gung zur ba rin po che/ ’phrang ’go gter ston/ byang bdag rig sngags ’chang ba chen po rnam kyī gter kha gang ’os las gter gsar gyi ming thogs tshad mi bya zhing/*).

⁹⁶⁶ *Nyang ston rnam thar*: 329.6-330.1.

leader, by the Great Fifth's account, expressed his trepidation about this discovery by warning the monastic elders that if they, "the lineage holders of sNang rtse gter ston and Sog bzlog pa, continue to practice that tradition, it will create a major *samaya* breach (*dam sel*) with the dGe lugs pa, and detract from the ritual service of the government."⁹⁶⁸ His response to the situation was to vehemently order the elder clerics of the monastery to "disregard all the former practices," and instead practice "whatever the new master institutes from the old Treasure caches, such as those of Nyang [ral], Chos dbang, and the like" and additionally, "to obey whatever the new master says."⁹⁶⁹ After the local leader thus confirmed to local authorities the Great Fifth's appointment of rJe Khra tshang ba, the new hierarch was then able to orchestrate the material specifications of Gong ra ba's funerary arrangements: rJe Khra tshang ba "assumed responsibility for the iconometrics, design instructions, and even the consecration of the outer receptacle of Lo chen [gZhan phan rdo rje's] silver reliquary, the statues of the Great Perfection lineage masters, and the statues appropriate for the inner sanctum of the assembly hall."⁹⁷⁰

Taken as a whole, this episode highlights how intertwined political alliances, patronage, and ritual and material orthopraxy were in the controversies surrounding the object-oriented Treasure rites of Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa. Telling in this regard is that the Gong ra leader references the risk of incurring a "*samaya* breach," a

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid: 330.1. ...*sog bzlog pa dge lugs la shin tu gnag pa gtsang gi drung 'khor la bzhugs dus nas thugs rgyus yod...*

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid: 330.3. *khyed tsho snang rtse gter ston dang bla ma sog bzlog pa'i brgyud 'dzin yin 'dug pa chos lugs de bzhin byas na gde lugs dang dam sel ches pas gzhung gi sku rim pa mi yong 'dug/*

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid: 330.3-330.4. *da cha sngar byed mtha' dag bzhag nas nyang chos dbang sogs gter kha rnying pa'i ris kyi cho ga phyag len gyis mtshon skabs su gang babs bla mas 'dzugs pa dang/ khyed tshos kyang bla mas gang zer la nyan dgos...*

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid: 330.5. *lo chen gyi phyi rten la dngul gdung/ rdzogs chen bla brgyud/ gtsang khang du de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku rnams bzhengs pa'i thig rtsa zhal bkod rab gnas kyi bar thugs khur cher mdzad/*

breach of sacred bond, with the dGe lugs pa establishment based on the continued performance of rites that were once revealed and enacted by figures wishing to counteract the rising influence of the dGe lugs pa clerical/political apparatus. This powerfully demonstrates how the object-oriented rites of Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa and their milieu were still bound by *samaya* associations with their earlier context of revealers, performers, and aims. In this case, such rites, with the bonds and associations they carried, acted to extend the agency of the persons and things associated with them into a new setting. Thus, when these assemblages of sensory forms and persons collided with the opposing configuration of dGe lugs pa power, they threatened to erode this nascent religio-political assemblage, even after the original antagonistic propagators and practitioners of these rites had all passed.

In a similar vein, the Fifth Dalai Lama relates breaches of communal monastic conduct with the continued institutional performance of Zhig po gling pa's "false" Treasure revelations to explain in his new monastic law code for Nges gsang rdo rje gling pa monastery the rationale behind his appointment of Khra tshang ba as the monastery's new hierarch and his subsequent enforcement of a new monastic constitution. The Great Fifth first attributes his decision to install a new hierarch to the "tradition, hitherto observed by the older Gong ra residents, of vehemently prohibiting afternoon meals, and other things, wrongly thinking that they are ordained without even having taken a single vow."⁹⁷¹ He then links this institutional shortcoming with his own and the regent/treasurer bSod nams rab brtan's insistence that Zhig po gling pa's "faulty, self-styled Treasures, falsely fabricated based on context should be rejected, so that they do

⁹⁷¹ *Gong ra bca' yig*: 81.6. ...*sngon chad gong ra ba rnying pa ba rnams sdom pa sna gcig kyang ma blangs par rab tu byung bar rlom pa'i phyi dro'i kha zas sogs 'bas pas bkag pa'i srol yod 'dug pa...*

not create opposition to the doctrine and polity of the dGe lugs.⁹⁷² Moreover, adds the Great Fifth, despite the appointment of the dGa' ldan pho brang loyalist Khra tshang ba as the monastery's new hierarch, "since those previously attached to the bad tradition were not perfectly compliant, the persons and teachings contaminated by sectarianism were removed and a protocol of conduct [was established] for the community of Gong ra Nges gsang rdo rje gling, thus enabling it to be promoted anew in order to accomplish the welfare of the doctrine in general, the ritual service of the government in particular, and so forth."⁹⁷³ Somewhat similar to what we witnessed in the previous illustration, this passage demonstrates most broadly how rules of physical protocol around substance, this time afternoon meals and monastic rules, intersected with concerns of political and sectarian orthopraxy when it came to the Great Fifth's assessment of the sNang Sog Gong tradition. It seems that for the Great Fifth, the continued performance of rites rooted in persons who implemented them decades earlier to thwart the political and sectarian ambitions of the dGe lug pa still threatened to interfere with the flourishing of their polity and the doctrine as a whole. This confluence of persons and ritual actions, based as it is in the ritual sphere's fluidity of power between persons, places, and things, thus ends up working its way onto the institutional monastic and state registers.

In an even more direct attempt to draw attention to Gong ra ba's indiscretions around institutional material protocol, the Great Fifth accuses this master of not properly observing the material specifications for large-scale tantric rites. The Fifth Dalai Lama

⁹⁷² Ibid: 82.1-82.2. *skabs don rdzus gter rang bzo'i dri ma can rnamspangs te dge lugs bstan srid la log sgrub tu mi 'gro ba dgos tshul...*

⁹⁷³ Ibid: 82.3-82.4. *...sngar srol lugs ngan la zhen pa rnamskyis tshul bzhin ma byas par brten/ grub mthas bslad pa'i chos dang gang zag rnamdbyung ste bstan pa spyi rim dang sger gzhung gi rim gro sogs sgrub pa'i ched gсар du spel ba'i gong ra nges gsang rdo rje gling ki sde 'dir spang blang gi rim pa ni/*

criticizes Gong ra ba in particular for “not at all performing proper Accomplishment Offering rites,” an important ritual akin to the lengthier Great Accomplishment Rite, and for “not following any iconometric procedures with the *maṇḍala*, but just drawing whatever is easiest, like an ordinary thread-cross *maṇḍala*.”⁹⁷⁴ Elsewhere, the Great Fifth extends this allegation to Gong ra ba’s style of conferring initiation, stating that he “engages in the activity of initiation based upon a drawn *maṇḍala* without first doing any of the iconometric measurements or preparations at all.”⁹⁷⁵ The Great Fifth couches this charge within a broader concern that Gong ra ba and others of his milieu were in the practice of just visually showing the relevant initiation substances to initiates, forcing them to “construe each as objects” (*yul yul byed pa*), rather than make direct physical contact with them.⁹⁷⁶ Such infelicities around the treatment of substances and material protocol, charges the Great Fifth, “will become a basis for the extinction of all practices.”⁹⁷⁷ In the end the Great Fifth chalks up all of these indiscretions to Gong ra ba’s arrogant misconception that “he was coming from the expanse of the Great Perfection view,”⁹⁷⁸ through which he wrongly presumed to possess the requisite personal power to dispense with the material specifications that otherwise ensure ritual efficacy. The Great Fifth chimes in with his own opinion on this issue, casting doubts

⁹⁷⁴ *Nyang ston rnam thar*: 288.3. ...*sgrub mchod tshul ldan ye mi mdzad cing dkyil 'khor la'ang thig tshon gyi cho ga gang yang med par mdos dkyil dkyus ma ltar gang bder 'dri ba zhig yod snang/*

⁹⁷⁵ *Za hor gyi ban+de ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i 'di snang 'khrul pa'i rol rtsed rtogs brjod kyi tshul du bkod pa du kU la'i gos bzang (Dukūla)*, vol. 1, in *The Collected Works (gsung 'bum) of Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho*, vol. 5 (ca) (Gangtok, Sikkim, India: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1991-1995): 313.1. ...*thig tshon sta gon ci'ang ma byas par dkyil 'khor bris nas dbang gi bya ba la 'jug gin yod...* The Great Fifth extends this particular charge to the Sixth Zhwa dmar Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug (1584-1630).

⁹⁷⁶ *Dukūla, gsung 'bum*, vol. 5 (ca): 312.2-312.3.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid*: 312.3. ...*phyag len mtha' dag nub pa'i rtsa ba zhig tu 'gro bar gda'/'*

⁹⁷⁸ *Nyang ston rnam thar*: 288.3 ...*rdzogs pa chen po lta ba'i klong nas yong rgyu'i khul...*

upon the self-assessment of one's own possession of powerful subjective qualities in favor of the efficacy of material orthopraxy. Rather than posture as a ritual specialist of great personal power, the Great Fifth states: "I, being of meager intellect, follow the [tradition] in which an *ordinary vajra* master confers initiation upon *ordinary* students."⁹⁷⁹ On this note, adds the Great Fifth adds, he is simply following the "tradition of the unsullied scriptures of Abhayākara[gupta] and [Jagad]darpaṇa/Darpaṇ[ācārya],"⁹⁸⁰ two of the most authoritative Indian scholars to have commented upon the Buddhist *tantras*.

As a point of comparison, recall how in Chapter Four Sog bzlog pa criticized his contemporaries for simply distributing initiation substances for direct physical contact, without at the same time explaining their particular meanings. It seems that much like Sog bzlog pa, the Great Fifth was also concerned with striking just the right balance between objective materials and subjective qualities. However, whereas Sog bzlog pa argued for the importance of oral exegesis in the sensory reception of initiation substances, the Great Fifth was more fundamentally arguing for the efficacy of material specifications themselves, above and beyond whatever the master of ceremonies might or might not be capable of influencing through his realization and knowledge.

When taking stock of all the accusations against Gong ra ba, these serve to illustrate how the Great Fifth's problems with this figure follow the general pattern of his criticisms of Zhig po gling pa and Sog bzlog pa. The Great Fifth's accusations against all three figures often involve a concatenation of features – by degrees political, economic,

⁹⁷⁹ *Dukūla, gsung 'bum*, vol. 5 (ca): 313.3. *blo dman bdag gis so so skye bo'i rdo rje slob dpon zhig gis so so skye bo'i rdo rje slob ma la dbang bskur ba'i rjes su 'brangs te...*

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid*: 313.3. *...slob dpon 'jigs med 'byung gnas dang darp Na gnyis kyi gsung rab la chu bun ma byugs pa'i lugs tsam mo/*

social, or religious in texture – which fuse around material objects, substances, object-oriented rites, and institutional material protocol. In the case of Sog bzlog pa, his implementation of Zhig po gling pa’s object-oriented army-averting Treasure rites is centrally implicated, as the Great Fifth draws attention to the prophecy fraud, patron manipulation, ritual futility, and anti-dGe lugs sentiment that allegedly fueled his public ritual campaign. For Zhig po gling pa, the Great Fifth reserves stringent critiques of his authenticity as a Treasure revealer by referring to his false, “self-styled” Treasure substances and the many false prophecies, which he allegedly composed to cast dispersions upon the dGe lugs sectarian formation and the Northern Treasure tradition. Gong ra ba, as we have seen, was singled out by the Great Fifth for his inheritance of the anti-dGe lugs rites of his predecessors, and more specifically, for his breaches of institutional monastic and ritual material protocol. In each case, the Great Fifth’s critical remarks turn upon the deceptive, futile, and just plain wrong kinds of relationships that these three figures presumably had with the material dimension of Buddhist ritual life.

As we were able to witness on several occasions, moreover, the Great Fifth’s criticisms were not at all intended to cast doubts upon the power of substances and object-oriented rites in general. Recall that the criticisms of Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa, occurring as they do in the vicinity of praises for the Northern Treasure figures, sets these reviled figures up as foils of sorts against which the Great Fifth could project the prowess of his Old School Treasure tradition of choice. And the Northern Treasures was not the only Treasure tradition honored by the Great Fifth. Among other Treasure traditions with which the Tibetan leader was involved, the Great Fifth seems to have had particular fondness for the revelations of Padma gling pa (1450-1521), this despite Zhig po gling pa’s, Sog bzlog pa’s, and Gong ra ba’s close relationships with Padma gling pa’s

familial and religious descendents Thugs sras Zla ba rgyal mtshan (1499-1587) and gSung sprul Tshul khriims rdo rje (1598-1669).

The Great Fifth indirectly refers to the deleterious nature of their relationships when he blames the machinations of a “non-virtuous friend” specifically for dividing him from Padma gling pa’s Speech Incarnation Tshul khriims rdo rje.⁹⁸¹ The restoration of this breach, the Great Fifth emphasizes, occurred precisely through exchanges of powerful objects and substances belonging to Tshul khriims rdo rje’s Padma gling pa tradition. The Great Fifth reports how in 1650 Tshul khriims rdo rje first made contact with the Great Fifth by offering him a “power substance horn” (*thun ru*) fit as a vessel for “both dry and liquid power substances” (*skam thun dang rlon thun*) which had allegedly belonged to the illustrious Old School adept gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (b. 9th c.).⁹⁸² The Great Fifth responded in kind by initiating the Speech Incarnation into the *Sixteen Seminal Drops* (*Thig le bcu drug*) ritual cycle of bKa’ gdams fame.⁹⁸³

Years later, narrates the Great Fifth, he had another such exchange with the Speech Incarnation. On that occasion Tshul khriims rdo rje showed the Great Fifth a number of powerful Treasure substances and objects, including a few of Padma gling pa’s revealed Treasure statues of Padmasambhava that “liberate through seeing” (*pad+ma mthong grol*), among other statues.⁹⁸⁴ The Great Fifth recounts how he “took the four initiations directly from the statues” (*sku rnams la dbang bzhi blangs*) and gave

⁹⁸¹ Ibid: 304.5-304.6. ...*mi dge ba’i bshes kyis dbyen bcos...*

⁹⁸² Ibid: 304.5.

⁹⁸³ For more details on this ritual cycle, its importance in the bKa’ gdams tradition, and its role in conferring a particular vision of Tibet as part of Avalokiteśvara’s divine body, see Amy Miller, *Jeweled Dialogues: The Role of ‘The Book’ in the Formation of the Kadam Tradition within Tibet* (PhD diss., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 2004).

⁹⁸⁴ *Dukūla, gsung ’bum*, vol. 5 (*ca*): 621.3-622.1.

the Speech Incarnation in turn two “permission blessings” (*rjes gnang*).⁹⁸⁵ Such incidents underline, among other things, how power substances also functioned during this period in Tibet as sensory media of exchange, which bound together persons in direct relationships of reciprocity. This dynamic can be read as yet another extension of the power of such substances to act as vectors for connecting otherwise discrete domains.

II. The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and his Milieu Among Tibet’s

Old School Lineages

The Fifth Dalai Lama’s commitment to the traditions of the Old School interfered with his efforts to elide Sog bzlog pa and his milieu from Old School lineage records and histories. Despite the dGa’ ldan pho brang government’s official ban upon “not only the Treasure teachings and compositions of the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong, but also the teachings that exist in their lineage,” the Great Fifth’s own affiliation with the sMin grol gling tradition in particular compromised his efforts to implement this policy and eliminate this tradition once and for all. These obstacles stemmed in large measure from the integral role that Sog bzlog pa and his milieu played in the transmission of the Old School teachings during their time. The rituals and instructions that passed from Sog bzlog pa, through Gong ra ba, and on to Gong ra ba’s closest students were not limited to Zhig po gling pa’s Treasure revelations (*gter*), but included also the entire range of teachings in the “long lineage of Word” (*bka’*) common to all Old School Traditions, such as the ritual tradition of the *Sūtra of the Fused Intent*, the *Eight Pronouncements*

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid: 622.1 and 621.3.

(*bKa' brgyad*) from the *sādhana* class of the *Māyājāla-tantras*, and the Mind Class of the Great Perfection.⁹⁸⁶

Gong ra ba's most illustrious Old School students included gSung sprul Tshul khrims rdo rje, the Speech Incarnation of Padma gling pa,⁹⁸⁷ Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, a great Treasure revealer and one of the founding fathers of Sikkim; and gSang bdag 'Phrin las lhun grub (1611-1662), none other than the father and master of the Great Fifth's own master, the great Treasure revealer gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje (1646-1714).⁹⁸⁸ In spite of such lineal connections between the sNang rtse faction and the Great Fifth's own revered grand master, perceived tensions between the Zhig gling and Northern Treasure traditions, which were no doubt exacerbated by the rhetoric of the Great Fifth, continued to shape Old School affiliations throughout the middle and later decades of the seventeenth century. At the same time, however, the vast majority of ritual and teaching cycles which then characterized the identity of the Old School had passed through Sog bzlog pa, Gong ra ba, and in turn, his illustrious students. In light of the impossibility for Old School masters of eliminating this strand of their tradition while still ensuring the integrity and robustness of their lineages, we can witness in the Old

⁹⁸⁶ This three-fold combination was such a defining aspect of Old School identity that it was collapsed early on into a single moniker: The Triad of Sūtra, Māyā, and Mind (mDo rgyu sems gsum).

⁹⁸⁷ Kun bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma, *Pad gling 'khrungs rabs rtogs brjod gsung sprul brgyad pa'i gsung dad pa'i me tog*, in *Rig 'dzin padma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che*, vol. pha, 565 (Thimphu, Bhutan: Kunsang Tobgay, 1975-1976) offers several details of Tshul khrims rdo rje's tutelage under Gong ra ba.

⁹⁸⁸ gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje's biography of Gong ra ba, *Mahālotsawa gZhan phan rdo rje'i rnam thar bdud rtsi'i thig le*, in *'Gyur med rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol. 3 (ga) (Dehradun, India: D. G. Khochen Tulku, 1998, 89b), includes gSung sprul Tshul khrims rdo rje and gSang bdag 'Phrin las lhun grub alongside Sog bzlog pa in a list of Gong ra ba's teachers, but is careful to add that Gong ra ba's teachers were likewise students. Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, referred to there as Kong po rDzogs chen pa Kun bzang nram rgyal, is included only among Gong ra ba's students. Also in this list of Gong ra ba's students (90b) are Rong pa rdzogs chen pa Nam mkha' 'brug sgra, rDi tsha skrul sku 'Jig rten dbang phyug, Bres pa chos rgyal rdo rje sman lung pa blo mchog rdo rje, rTa nag srol ma sbug pa sku mched, sPo bo pa padma rig 'dzin, La stod mes ston pa, and Go 'jo bkra shis rin chen.

School biographical literature from this slightly later period a mounting ambivalence toward the sNang rtse faction. This ambivalence found partial expression in Old School literary attempts to draw attention to the deleterious impact of this schism, and to restore the reputation of Sog bzlog pa (and in turn Gong ra) by distancing him from the imbroglio through relegating the Zhig gling-Northern Treasure controversy to the time of Zhig po gling pa and Ngag gi dbang po's previous incarnation, Legs ldan rje.

It was not long after the dGa' ldan pho brang imposed its ban upon the sNang Sog Gong tradition that Old School figures began to draw critical attention to the corrosive impact of this intervention on the integrity of the Old School. Byang bdag Padma 'phrin las (1641-1717), the immediate reincarnation of the Great Fifth's Northern Treasure uncle, Ngag gi dbang po, laments in his autobiography how during his training as a youth lingering suspicions among the clerical residents of his Northern Treasure monastery of rDo rje brag e wam lcog sgar toward the tradition of sNang Sog Gong and their lineage holders, prevented the Northern Treasure scion from meeting and receiving teachings from the three most illustrious of Gong ra ba's Old School students: gSung sprul Tshul khriims rdo rje, Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, and gSang bdag 'Phrin las lhun grub.⁹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Lo chen dharmaśrī (1654-1717), in his *Inner Biography* of his older brother gTer bdag gling pa, opines how lasting enmity between these two traditions was in fact rooted in earlier animosities between Zhig po gling pa and Legs ldan rje. Their respective followers simply prolonged this earlier schism, claims Lo chen, making

⁹⁸⁹ Padma 'phrin las, *Padma 'phrin las rang nyid kyi rtogs pa brjod pa rab dkar shel gyi me long* (photocopy of a rare manuscript, TBRC Vol. 2828), 25-27.

caretakers of the Old School teachings more rare and their dissemination more limited in scope throughout the ensuing decades than they would have been otherwise.⁹⁹⁰

Despite his younger brother's efforts to relegate the conflict to the middle of the sixteenth century and thereby distance sMin grol gling from controversy, gTer bdag gling pa himself appears to have remained by and large unapologetic about the sMin grol gling tradition's lineal succession from Gong ra ba and his predecessors. gTer bdag gling pa composed based on his father 'Phrin las lhun grub's words a brief, but panegyric biography of Gong ra ba himself.⁹⁹¹ There gTer bdag gling pa makes sure to include the details of how his father received from Gong ra ba not only the *Māyājāla Eight Pronouncement Deities, Assembly of Sugatas, the Sūtra of the Fused Intent*, and other general Old School ritual cycles, but also the Mongol averting rites of Zhig po gling pa with their associated instructions.⁹⁹² The Treasure revealer gTer bdag gling pa goes on to narrate how he himself received the Zhig po gling pa revelations from his father in turn.⁹⁹³ As gTer bdag gling pa reports it, on that occasion 'Phrin las lhun grub also bestowed upon him the Treasure revelations of the Northern Treasure figure mNga' ris pañchen.⁹⁹⁴ This combination of initiations, transmissions, and practice instructions from both the Zhig gling and Northern Treasure traditions suggests an attempt at reconciling

⁹⁹⁰ Lo chen dharmasrī, *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo*, in *Dharma śrī'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 2 (*kha*) (Dehra Dun, India: D.G. Khochen Tulku, 1999): 193b.4-.5.

⁹⁹¹ 'Gyur med rdo rje, *Mahālotsawa gZhan phan rdo rje'i rnam thar bdud rtsi'i thig le*, in *'Gyur med rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol. 3 (*ga*) (Dehradun, India: D. G. Khochen Tulku, 1998).

⁹⁹² 'Gyur med rdo rje, *Phrin las lhun grub kyi rnam thar skal bzang gdung sel*, in *'Gyur med rdo rje gsung 'bum*, vol. 3 (*ga*) (Dehradun, India: D. G. Khochen Tulku, 1998): 113a.6-114.

⁹⁹³ Ibid: 123a.1.

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid.

these traditions. Whatever the underlying motivation may have been, gTer bdag gling pa himself is explicit that this was to ensure the successful construction of an enclosure for sacred statuary, thus highlighting once again the material *cum* political rationale of the Treasure tradition.⁹⁹⁵

So strong was the Zhig po gling pa-sMin grol gling connection that even Lo chen, in spite of his reservations, relates in the *Inner Biography* of gTer bdag gling pa how his older brother followed in the footsteps of their father to transmit the Zhig po gling pa revelations to his own students. Lo chen notes that in addition to the Treasure revelations, gTer bdag gling pa also bestowed scriptural reading transmissions of Zhig po gling pa's *Collected Works (bka' 'bum)*, along with Zhig po gling pa's biography and guru yoga practice, both of which were composed by Sog bzlog pa.⁹⁹⁶ It seems that the sNang Sog Gong tradition was so influential that on at least one occasion even the Great Fifth himself was asked to accept the ritual cycle of the *Eight Pronouncement Deities, Assembly of Sugatas*, from gTer bdag gling pa, which, the Treasure revealer was clear to warn, had "originated from sNang rtse."⁹⁹⁷ Since gTer bdag gling pa had no other lineage for this important Old School ritual cycle, the Fifth Dalai Lama ended up receiving the transmission, despite his official position on Zhig po gling pa and his lineage holders.

Several years earlier, in 1651, as the Great Fifth narrates, there was even some pressure from his Old School teacher Chos rje brag sna ba for him to receive Zhig po

⁹⁹⁵ Ibid: 122b.6.

⁹⁹⁶ *gTer chen chos rgyal nang gi rtogs brjod*: Ibid: 188a.5-188b.3.

⁹⁹⁷ Gu ru bkra shis, *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (Xining, Qinghai, PRC: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1998): 448. ...*snang rtse nas byung ba lags...*

gling pa's controversial *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies* Treasure cycle from Gong ra ba himself. Although, "due to the tradition of the sNang rste leader, it was obvious that Gong ra *lotsāwa* regarded the dGe lugs to be demonic," the Great Fifth reports that to appease his Old School teacher he feigned interest and went to Gong ra anyway.⁹⁹⁸ The Great Fifth cleverly arrived during the "evening tea of the new moon, just as they were about to bless the New Year oblation."⁹⁹⁹ "Pretending to be occupied by making the appropriate conversation during the tea assembly," he avoided actually receiving the contentious violent ritual cycle.¹⁰⁰⁰ These two episodes illustrate how the Great Fifth's completing dGe lugs and Old School loyalties, especially given the high profile nature of Zhig po gling pa and his lineage, interfered with his efforts to squelch this tradition.

Elsewhere, the Great Fifth expresses anxieties over his lineal ties with Gong ra ba by calling into question the records of teachings received (*gsan yig*) of his Old School masters most strongly linked with this controversial figure. The Great Fifth specifically calls out 'Phrin las lhun grub, gTer bdag gling pa's father, for incorporating verbatim Gong ra ba's record into his own document.¹⁰⁰¹ By the Fifth Dalai Lama's estimation, 'Phrin las lhun grub changed only the introduction and the lineage of masters to produce his personal record. The Great Fifth goes on to point out the many flaws in Gong ra ba's record, but one can not help but wonder if his real aim might not have been to cast doubt

⁹⁹⁸ *Dukūla*, in *gsung 'bum*, vol. 5 (ca) (Sikkim): 342.6-343.4. *gong ra lo tsA ba snang rtse sde pa'i rgyun gyis dge lugs 'di bdud lta bur mngon pa zhig...*

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid: 343.4-343.5. *...gnam gang gi dgongs ja'i lo gsar gyi gtor ma byin rlabs byed khar slebs byung/*

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid: 343.5. *ja sbyor sbrel gyi ring gleng mo 'os 'tsam byas pas khengs pa che mdog kha po zhig gda'/'*

¹⁰⁰¹ *Thob yig gang+gā'i chu rgyun*, in *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gsung 'bum*, vol. 4 (nga) (Beijing: Yellow Pagoda, 199?): 409.5-409.6.

upon the overwhelming similarities between these records and thereby distance his masters from their close lineal ties to Gong ra ba.

Notwithstanding gTer bdag gling pa's brazenly public involvement with the Zhig gling tradition, there were several indications that the early sMin grol gling hierarchs were sometimes hesitant about their lineal affiliations with these figures. There seems to have been an interest in restoring Sog bzlog pa's reputation in particular by distancing him in Old School narratives from his association with Zhig po gling pa's anti-Mongol, anti-dGe lugs army-repelling rites. Sog bzlog pa probably first appears in Old School histories within the *Sūtra of the Fused Intent (mDo dgongs 'dus)* initiation lineage history, *'Dus mdo dbang gi spyi don*, composed by Lo chen Dharmaśrī.¹⁰⁰² When comparing this brief biography of Sog bzlog pa to the one which appears in Kun bzang nges don klong yang's (b. 1814) later Old Tradition history *Nor bu do shal*,¹⁰⁰³ several variations surface which give voice to the trepidation that sMin grol gling may have felt regarding their lineal ties to the controversial "Mongol Repeller." One particularly stark difference is that Lo chen's account never once mentions the nickname Sog bzlog pa (Mongol Repeller), but calls him instead the emanation of gNyags Jñānakumāra mKhas grub Blo gros rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po. The account in *Nor bu do shal*, on the other hand, begins with the name Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan. Even more striking is that Lo chen refuses to make a single reference to Mongols, or Zhig po gling pa, in

¹⁰⁰² Lo chen Dharmaśrī, *Mdo dbang gi spyi don*, in *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas*, vol. *pha* (Kalimpong w.b.: Dupjung Lama, 1982-1987): 128.3-130.5. The colophon of *'Dus mdo dbang gi spyi don* records a date of iron-tiger, when Lo chen was 57 years old. This would have been 1710, nearly 85 years after Sog bzlog pa's death in 1624, and 28 years after the Fifth Dalai Lama's death in 1682. Lo chen's account is reproduced verbatim in dDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, *bDud 'joms chos 'byung* (Chengdu: Sichuan Minorities Publishing House, 1996), 390-392. For an English translation see Dudjom (1991), 722-723.

¹⁰⁰³ Kun bzang nges don klong yangs, *Bod du byung ba'i gsang sngags snga 'gyur gyi bstan 'dzin skyes mchog rim byon gyi rnam thar nor bu'i do shal* (Dalhousie, H.P.: Damchoe Sangpo, 1976), 296.1-297.3.

connection with Sog bzlog pa's public exorcism campaign. When describing Sog bzlog pa's success in dealing with the forces inimical to Tibet, Lo chen simply states, "Because he destroyed the violent spirits and border armies that would lay waste to Tibet, and signs emerged immediately that [Tibet] had been protected and [the demons and armies] had been turned back, he was universally renowned."¹⁰⁰⁴ This episode clearly refers to Sog bzlog pa's ritual aversion of Mongol forces from Tibet based on Zhig po gling pa's treasure cycle, *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies*. Yet, Lo chen patently refuses to refer to Mongols, Zhig po gling pa, or his violent ritual cycle in this connection. Compare this to the corresponding episode from *Nor bu do shal*:

In reliance upon the Treasure revealer Zhig po gling pa's *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies*, [Sog bzlog pa] destroyed the violent spirits and Hor and Mongol border armies that would lay waste to Tibet. Because signs emerged immediately that [Tibet] had been protected [and the demons and armies] had been turned back, he was universally renowned as rJe Sog bzlog pa (Venerable Repeller of Mongols).¹⁰⁰⁵

Aside from this latter episode's inclusion of the names Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, *Twenty-five Ways to Repel Armies*, Hor, and Mongol, these two passages are practically identical. Lo chen clearly felt compelled to include Sog bzlog pa in the lineage; he was, after all, the grand master of his own father. But to do so meant that he had to sanitize the image of Sog bzlog pa of his controversial anti-Mongol and anti-dGe lugs associations with Zhig po gling pa. By the nineteenth century, when *Nor bu'i do shal* was composed, these anxieties seem to have abated some. Nonetheless, the Great Fifth's public condemnation of Sog bzlog pa, Zhig po gling pa, Gong ra ba and their milieu had

¹⁰⁰⁴ *mDo dbang spyi don*: 129.6-130.1. *nus pas bod 'phung byed kyi 'byung po dang mtha' dmag gdug pa can rnams tshar gcod pa dang srung zhing bzlog pa'i riags 'phral du thon pas snyan grags kyis kun tu khyab/*

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Nor bu do shal*: 296.6-297.2. *zhig gling gi gter chos dmag bzlog nyer lnga la brten nas bod 'phung byed kyi 'gong po dang hor sog mtha' dmag gdug pa can rnams tshar gcod pa/ bsung bzlog gi riags 'phral du thon pas rje sogs[=sog] bzlog zhes snyan grags kyis kun tu khyab/*

cast a pall over their lineage, dimming considerably the posthumous influence of Sog bzlog pa throughout Tibet. Thus, despite the sMin grol gling brothers' various successes in permanently enshrining Sog bzlog pa, Gong ra ba, and Zhig po gling pa within Old School lineage histories, it seems that due to the repressive measures of the Great Fifth and his dGa' ldan pho brang government, Sog bzlog pa's texts and rituals did not continue to attract much serious attention in Tibet until the late-nineteenth century at the earliest.

III. The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and his Milieu in the "Hidden Land" of Sikkim

Meanwhile, just beyond Tibet's southern passes, Sog bzlog pa's reception assumed quite a different form. On the eve of the gTsang ruling house's collapse, two Old School masters with strong ties to the gTsang pa sde srid and the sNang Sog Gong tradition fled Tibet for the "hidden land" of Sikkim. These masters were mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin and Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med. Both were grand disciples of Sog bzlog pa, who inherited the revelations (*gter ma*) of Zhig po gling pa and many of the transmitted Word instructions (*bka' ma*) from Gong ra ba and other direct disciples of the Mongol Repeller. Both of these masters, moreover, were instrumental in the formation of the state of Sikkim in a variety of ways. Although conflicting narratives variously describe one or the other of these two figures as the principal religious specialist of Sikkim during this time, it was in all likelihood mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin who selected the state's first king, acted as royal preceptor in his coronation, and formed with him the

patron-priest (*mchod yon*) relationship that was necessary to stage the large-scale architectural projects and ritual programs of the new kingdom.¹⁰⁰⁶

Most relevant for the present study is how mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin enshrined the powerful material objects and object-oriented rites associated with Sog bzlog pa and his master Zhig po gling pa as a central defining feature of the new state's ritualized legitimacy. Sog bzlog pa's effigy-focused King Kang burial rite and Zhig po gling pa's Treasure vase-centered Accomplishment Offering rite, *Liberator from Saṃsāra* still feature today as the crowning calendrical rituals performed every New Year at Sikkim's bKra shis sdings, considered the very center of the kingdom's sacred landscape.¹⁰⁰⁷

As we witnessed above when discussing the writings of the Great Fifth and his associates, the legacy in Tibet of Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa revolved in no small measure around their controversial involvement with powerful objects and rites. Much of the contention surrounding these things stemmed from the pro-gTsang, anti-dGe lugs sentiment, which, according to the Great Fifth, motivated their revelation and implementation. mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin first came into contact with this tradition a few decades before the rise of the Great Fifth through his grandfather and

¹⁰⁰⁶ Saul Mullard (2011), 111-112 and 137. With the exception of the earliest traditional narrative, which details the dynastic history of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin's Lha family line as a continuation of the Tibetan Dynastic history recounted in bSod nams rgyal mtshan's (1312-1375) famous *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, traditional Sikkimese histories tend to rely on Treasure prophecies to narrate the combined efforts of "four yogi brothers" in the formation of the state of Sikkim. These four figures were the three Tibetan Old School figures mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin, Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, and Kaḥ thog pa mTshung med chos rje kun tu bzang po, and their selected Dharmarāja, the first Dharma King of Sikkim, Chos rgyal Phun tshogs rnam rgyal. Mullard's study constitutes in large part a critical assessment of this later narrative in light of the details of the earlier literary source, Sa skya bla ma dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan, *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long: The History of the Royal Lha Dynasty of Tibet, with an Account of the mNga' bdag Lineage and its Descendants in Sikkim*, Into-Tibetan Buddhist Literature Series, v. 132 (Rewalsar, Distt. Mandi, H.P, India: Zigar Drukpa Kargyud Institute, 1985).

¹⁰⁰⁷ For more details on the long and storied history of Tibetan lamas' involvements with bKra shis sdings, see Mélenie Vandenhelsken, "Tibetan Masters and the formation of the sacred site of Tashiding," *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 42, No. 1 and 2 (2006): 65-90.

master, mNga' bdag sTag sham can. According to the genealogy of this family, they belonged to the Lha dynastic line that descended from none other than the first Dharmarājas of Tibet.¹⁰⁰⁸ As part of this illustrious royal line, sTag sham can was born the prince of rDzong kha and ruled the territory for a few years during his youth before he relinquished the throne to his younger brother in order to pursue the religious vocation.¹⁰⁰⁹ sTag sham can's greatest claim to fame as a religious specialist was perhaps his close relationship with the Treasure revealer Zhig po gling pa.¹⁰¹⁰ Based upon the Treasure prophecies that Zhig po gling pa unearthed, the Treasure revealer identified sTag sham can as the propagator, or "proprietor of the teaching" (*chos bdag*) for two of his most important Treasure ritual cycles: the violent ritual cycle *Wrathful Caṇḍa* (*gTum po khro bo*) and the death-related ritual cycle *Liberator from Saṃsāra* (*'Khor ba las sgröl*), which features Zhig po gling pa's Treasure vase (*bum pa*).¹⁰¹¹

In his capacity of religious specialist, sTag sham can eventually made his way into the court of the gTsang pa sde srid, where he served as state exorcist and personal master to successive gTsang leaders and their closest family members and retainers.¹⁰¹² It was presumably this master's close relationship with both Zhig po gling pa and the gTsang court that enabled sTag sham can to first make the acquaintance of Sog bzlog pa. Although the precise relationship between sTag sham can and Sog bzlog pa remains

¹⁰⁰⁸ This is evinced by their inclusion in the Sikkimese version of the famous Lha dynastic history *rGyal rab gsal ba'i me long*.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Sikkimese version: 553.5-554.2.

¹⁰¹⁰ For more on life of mNga' bdag sTag sham can and his relationship with Zhig po gling pa, see Franz-Karl Ehrhard, "The mNga' bdag family and the tradition of Rig 'dzin zhig po gling pa (1524-1583) in Sikkim," *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol 41, No. 2 (2005): 11-30.

¹⁰¹¹ *Ibid*: 556.1-556.5.

¹⁰¹² *Ibid*: 559.3-.4 and 561.4-.5.

unknown, in Sog bzlog pa's *History* he rejoices in sTag sham can's collaborative efforts to turn back Mongol armies through violent rites.¹⁰¹³ This suggests that Sog bzlog pa considered sTag sham can an important colleague in this public ritual campaign, although sTag sham can's biography lists Sog bzlog pa as a student rather than a colleague.¹⁰¹⁴

Whatever the case may have been, it appears that sTag sham can nurtured his grandson mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin upon the revelations and inspiration of not only Zhig po gling pa, but Sog bzlog pa as well. In 1616, just after Sog bzlog pa receded from the limelight and entered the seclusion of retreat, mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin visited his grandfather at the gTsang pa sde srid political headquarters of bSam grub rtse to receive from him the complete Treasure cycles of Zhig po gling pa, among other teachings.¹⁰¹⁵ sTag sham can then invested his grandson with the authority of "regent" (*rgyal tshab*) of these teachings, in effect charging him with the dissemination of the Zhig po gling pa/Sog bzlog pa tradition.¹⁰¹⁶ This investiture found expression in mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin's appointment as hierarch of the newly constructed Byams pa gling gtsang grwa monastery, which was to serve as the institutional venue for his newly assigned role.¹⁰¹⁷ As part of this effort, he commissioned a series of gold-brass alloy statues, which clearly illustrates the affiliation of the new monastery and its hierarch. These images included lifelike statues of not only the usual Old School lineage figures of Samantabhadra, Vajrasattva, dGa' rab rdo rje, Guru Padmasambhava, Chos rgyal Khri

¹⁰¹³ *Sog bzlog lo rgyus*: 259.4. There Sog bzlog pa refers to him as Mnga' bdag lha'i btsun pa sTag sham can.

¹⁰¹⁴ *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Sikkimese version: 562.2.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Ibid*: 570.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid*: 571.4-571.5.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid*: 572.3.

srong lde'u btsan, and Ye shes mtsho rgyal, but also the more immediately related figures of Treasure revealer Zhig po gling pa, Chos rgyal sTag sham can, and Sog bzlog pa mKhas grub Blo gros rgyal mtshan.¹⁰¹⁸ In 1638, moreover, over two decades after Sog bzlog pa had ended his own involvement with violent Mongol-repelling rites, there are reports that mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin entered the fray himself with the public performance of army-averting rituals in Lhasa on behalf of the gTsang polity.¹⁰¹⁹

Despite mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin's best efforts to solidify the Zhig po gling pa/Sog bzlog pa lineage on Tibetan soil, in 1641, during the months leading up the overthrow of gTsang rule, he became increasingly aware through Padmasambhava prophecies and his own observations that tides would soon shift dramatically for the gTsang pa sde srid Karma bstan skyong dbang po, abruptly ending his reign and making him the last gTsang pa sde srid to rule Tibet.¹⁰²⁰ With such a state of affairs looming on the horizon mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin fled south to the hidden land of Sikkim.¹⁰²¹ There he set out to select a king and fashion a kingdom based upon the concatenation of elements deemed crucial for legitimate and righteous rule in accordance with Dharma. This endeavor involved among other things the creation of powerfully impactful sensory forms, such as sacred architecture, reliquaries, murals, sculpture, and most importantly for our discussion, the regular performance of object-oriented public rituals, through

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid: 572.3-573.1.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Byang pa'i rnam thar*: 778.5.

¹⁰²⁰ *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Sikkimese version: 574.4-575.3.

¹⁰²¹ Ibid: 575.2-576.3. This passage narrates mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin's dramatic departure from bSam grub rtse, despite not having received permission from the gTsang pa sde srid.

which the populace could be meaningfully bound to one another, and together to the state and its legitimating discourse.¹⁰²²

Vase Water that Liberates upon Tasting

The annual performance of the *Vase Water Accomplishment Offering rite of the Great Compassionate One which Liberates from Saṃsāra*, otherwise known as the *Vase Water which Liberates Upon Tasting (Myong grol bum chu)* seems to have been deemed by mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin to be an especially important component of the kingdom's enduring security and wellbeing. As the story goes, in 1563 Zhig po gling pa unearthed the vase and its supportive ritual liturgy as a Treasure revelation from a statue-throne within the Jo khang temple of Lhasa.¹⁰²³ In his capacity as “proprietor of the teaching” for this ritual cycle, gTag sham can inherited it from Zhig po gling pa, before he passed it on in turn to his grandson, the “regent” mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin. When mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin fled Tibet in 1642 for Sikkim, he brought the

¹⁰²² Ibid: 576-586. This constitutes the lion's share of the remainder of the biography, which is rich in detail concerning the artistic, ritual, and architectural achievements made by this figure throughout Sikkim. Many of these buildings and their spectacular murals can still be visited today.

¹⁰²³ *Zhig gling rnam thar*: 78.1-78.2. The revelation episode reads as follows: “Then, Ma gcig dpal lha [gave the treasure] prophesy. Therefore, [in accordance with it,] within the throne of the seven successive buddhas, at the western promontory/buttress of Lhasa's upper chamber, was an earthenware pot of the Master of Oḍiyāṇa's handiwork. It was as thin as an eggshell, had circular flower patterns with cinnabar enamel, and was of superior quality. Inside it were the scrolls of *The Great Compassionate One that Liberates from Saṃsāra* written in gold on blue paper. [Zhig gling] brought these forth from their Treasure site” (*de nas ma gcig dpal lhas lung bstan te/ lha sa'i steng khang glo 'bur nub ma'i sangs rgyas rab bdun gyi khri'i khong seng na/ mthing shog la gser gyis bris pa'i thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgrol gyi shog gril rnam o rgyan rin po che'i phyag bzo rdza bum sgong lkog ltar srab pa la/ me tog zlum tshigs yod pa la mtshal byug cing khyad par 'phags pa gcig gi nang na 'dug pa de gter nas bzhes/*). For more details about the purported origin of this vase and liturgy combination with Padmasambhava and his involvement with the Tibetan imperial court, see Rigzin N. Dokhampa, “Origins of the Bumchu (bum chu) of Drakar Tashiding (Brag dkar bKra shis sdings),” *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 39 No 1. (May, 2003): 25-30. This Treasure cycle is published today as Zhig po gling pa Gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal, *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgrol gyi chos skor* (Gangtok, Sikkim, India: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1976).

vase and its liturgy with him, eventually installing it at bKra shis sdings, the “navel” (*Ite ba*) of this hidden land’s sacred geography.¹⁰²⁴ As soon as the vase was settled there, it began to display extraordinary properties, indicating that it had reached its rightful location: “the water in the vase was not drying out or becoming rancid, and fragrant odors were wafting forth from it.”¹⁰²⁵

As Sikkimese historical accounts narrate, upon the death of mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin in 1656, the hierarch’s son Byams pa bstan ’dzin returned to Tibet and attempted to bring the vase with him.¹⁰²⁶ However, in whichever position he placed the vase upon his alter, its spout would turn of its accord to face bKra shis sdings, thus alerting the master of its rightful place in Sikkim. Byams pa bstan ’dzin responded by returning the vase to where his father had originally installed it. Several years later, in 1696, as the Sikkimese account narrates, Bhutan invaded Sikkim and stole the vase as part of its spoils.¹⁰²⁷ The vase’s presence in Bhutan, however, brought only pestilence and natural disasters there, once again reminding its wrongful guardians that it belonged in bKra shis sdings, Sikkim. Upon the advice of their hierarchs, the Bhutanese officials returned the vase to bKra shis sdings, where it continues to exert its powers today.

Just to give a rough idea of what is entailed in the contemporary performance of the vase-centered ceremony, every year, from the eighth day until the morning of the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the vase becomes the centerpiece of an

¹⁰²⁴ *rGyal rabs gsal ba’i me long*, Sikkimese version: 583.3. According to this narrative, mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin installed the vase in bKra shis sdings on the occasion of the fifth performance in Sikkim of the communal one million *mani* recitations ceremony (*ma Ni dung phyur*).

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid: 583.3. ... *bum chu mi bskams mi rul zhing dri bzang ’phro ba...*

¹⁰²⁶ Hissey Wongchuk Bhutia, “The Bum chu occasion at the Tashiding Monastery, West Sikkim,” unpublished paper presented at the XIII Proceedings of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) (Ulaan Batar, Mongolia: IATS-XIII, 2013): 4.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid: 4.

Accomplishment Offering rite (*sgrub mchod*), a slightly truncated version of the Great Accomplishment rite that had previously been practiced on that occasion.¹⁰²⁸ Much like the Brahmin flesh pill-focused Great Accomplishment rites examined in previous chapters, this Accomplishment Offering rite, which in this instance is drawn from Zhig po gling pa's Treasure cycle *The Great Compassion One that Liberated from Saṃsāra*, stipulates the baroque performance of physical, sonic, and cognitive gestures and elements, all associated with the Great Compassionate One Avalokiteśvara and focused on the substance of the vase and the water that it holds. The ritual culminates on the morning of the fifteenth day with the removal of the vase from its casket, the formal opening of the vase, the interpretation of its water level and quality, the partial distribution and consumption of its water, and the replacement of that distributed water.¹⁰²⁹

The interpretation of the vase's water level and quality is an especially important stage in the ceremony. The vase generally contains twenty-one cups of water, which, it is believed, varies depending upon the next year's fortune. When the water level increases and its appearance is clear, the following year will see peace, prosperity, bountiful harvest, and good health. When it remains the same, the vase predicts sufficient prosperity and wellbeing. And when the water level decreases and its appearance is cloudy, this is taken to mean that the next year will be turbulent and conflict-ridden.¹⁰³⁰ In this way, the physical quantity and quality of the water itself is believed to foreshadow with particular accuracy the fate of the environment and its populace for the coming year.

¹⁰²⁸ Ibid: 5.

¹⁰²⁹ Ibid: 5-6.

¹⁰³⁰ Ibid: 5.

The aesthetic experience of the vase water thus has the effect of binding participants to a shared future-oriented sensibility concerning their precarious relationships with the material forces that variously sustain or threaten survival.

The distribution, consumption, and replacement of the water bring this communal sensibility into sharper focus and particularize it somewhat. Once the overall fortune of Sikkim and its environs is predicted, three cups of water are distributed to three different classes of people: the Sikkimese royal family, the religious specialists present, and the remaining gathered masses.¹⁰³¹ The broader promise of the vase water is to confer “liberation upon tasting” (*myong grol*). The consumption of the water therefore tunes sensibilities into a shared expectation of personal transformational results. And yet, even while the shared consumption of this powerful water has the overall effect of binding these three groups together, at the same time, the distinctions enacted through its distribution also reinforces their stratified distribution within the social hierarchy of Sikkim. Further along these lines, the three distributed cups of water are replaced from the local Rathong and Riney rivers, an act which re-instantiates the abiding relationship between the predictive vase, the liberating powers of its waters, and the local sacred terrain of bKra shis sdings.¹⁰³² This set of relationships is strengthened further by the intermittent role of the Sikkimese kings and royal family members in overseeing and sponsoring certain stages of these communal public events.¹⁰³³ With the recent increase in global “spiritual tourism,” the localization of the vase and its ceremony has also worked inversely to thrust bKra shis sdings onto the international circuit of spiritual

¹⁰³¹ Ibid: 5.

¹⁰³² Ibid: 5.

¹⁰³³ Ibid: 6-8.

tourism destinations. In this capacity, the annual Vase Water ceremony draws tens of thousands of people, an audience which includes not only local Sikkimese and traditional Bhutanese devotees, but also an increasingly large number of Indian and international tourists.

That all of these factors, past and present, pertain to the vase and its annual ceremony illustrates with particular clarity how powerful substances encourage, by way of mediation, the intermingling of social, political, economic, and religious dynamics, which otherwise tend to be kept apart or related quite differently. The very notion that sensory experiences of the vase and its water have both communally predictive and personally liberating potencies highlights how the mediating property of powerful substance works to shape communal and personal sensibilities, fusing them around a shared, future-oriented vision of material power and its relationship to the state, the clergy, the territory, the populace, and more recently, the entire globe.

The Black King Kang Yamāntaka Effigy Burial Rite

The annual performance in bKra shis sdings of Sog bzlog pa's liturgy entitled *Red Winds of Karma: A Clarification of the Enemy Burial Practice of the Black King Kang Yamāntaka*,¹⁰³⁴ also functions to impress a particularly binding sensual form upon participants and spectators. Although it is unknown exactly when bKra shis sdings first began to perform this ritual, Sog bzlog pa's rites and writings appear to have been considered crucial by mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin in creating the foundational

¹⁰³⁴ Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, 'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed king kang nag po'i dgra brub kyi lag len gsal byed las kyi rung dmar, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 84 (yi) (Paro: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1976-1980), 389-431. Although this ritual liturgy is listed in the *Catalogue of Sog bzlog pa's Collected Works*, it appears to be available today only as part of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* collection.

elements of the new kingdom. Particularly telling in this regard is the contents of Great Sage Temple (Thub chen lha khang), constructed in 1656 at bKra shis sdings as a funerary offering to “fulfill the intention” of mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin, who died earlier that year. Among the “receptacles of awakened speech” (*gsung rten*) designed to occupy this temple was a newly copied version of Sog bzlog pa’s Collected Works (*bka’ ’bum*) in three volumes.¹⁰³⁵ Moreover, the new temple’s “receptacle of awakened mind” (*thugs rten*) was a *bodhistūpa* reliquary (*byang chub mchod rten*) constructed “exactly according to the dimensions explained in Nyi ma chen po,” a text which Sikkimese tradition maintains was composed by Sog bzlog pa himself. The primary role of Sog bzlog pa’s writings in “fulfilling the intention” of the deceased mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin underscores to what extent the legacy of Sog bzlog pa’s material, ritual ethos, accessible through his writings, was wed to the project of fashioning a Tibetan Buddhist state for the mNga’ bdag.

Perhaps nowhere is the legacy of Sog bzlog pa more viscerally felt than in the annual performance at bKra shis sdings of his enemy burial rite. Much like the Vase Water ceremony, this ritual is an object-oriented rite that displays many features of a public spectacle. Yet, unlike the Vase Water ceremony, the performance of Sog bzlog pa’s *Red Winds of Karma* is intended primarily as a purification ritual, and its sphere of influence is limited to bKra shis sdings and its immediate environment. According to locals, it is performed every year just prior to the New Year to rid its sponsor and the wider bKra shis sdings community of personal and communal “enemies” of all kinds, whether they be human or non-human in character, or social pollutants that accrue

¹⁰³⁵ According to Khenpo Lha tshering, principal of the Old School seminary in Gangtok and *vajra* master of bKra shis sdings temple complex, these are the volumes present at rNam rgyal lha rtse monastery today.

throughout the year. As I discussed in Chapter Four, the object that features in this burial rite is an effigy of the “enemy,” which, throughout the course of ritual proceedings that include a dense orchestration of physical, sonic, and cognitive gestures and exchanges, is believed to actually capture and imprison the enemy, so that it can be buried along with the effigy at the rite’s culmination and kept at bay for another year.

In Chapter Four I remarked with particular reference to Sog bzlog pa’s *Red Winds of Karma* enemy burial rite how ambiguities in the notion of what constitutes an “enemy” – whether it is a specific human or non-human, or general demonic hordes and social pollutants – often serves as a mechanism that enables rites penned for specific emergencies to become institutionalized within the ritual calendars of major clerical institutions. In fieldwork conducted during the 2011 performance of this burial rite in bKra shis sdings I was witness to this dynamic in action.

Although Sog bzlog pa’s *Red Winds of Karma* liturgy pays lip service to the non-human and social pollutant types of enemies, its emphasis throughout is on human enemies, and it even includes a section that specifically targets foreign armies. The imagery and language of the liturgy is correspondingly macabre, featuring formidable deities and weapons that exact severe violence upon victims. By contrast, the atmosphere at the 2011 performance of the *Red Winds of Karma* at bKra shis sdings was thoroughly positive and pacific in nature. Participants emphasized the reinforcement of communal social bonds, rather than the violent expulsion of unwanted intruders. For instance, although the culminating burial of the effigy enemy-object was conducted with the aggression and urgency stipulated by Sog bzlog pa in his liturgy, even this, the most public display of violence that features in the rite, resembled more a convivial community

gathering than a public scapegoating session or blood sacrifice. Adding to the general levity, the sponsors and part-time clergy of bKra shis sdings held a party on the evening of the rite's conclusion to which the entire village and its foreign guests were all invited. The party was an utterly unstructured event, with clergy and villagers – men and women in all stages of life – sharing large quantities of local beer, and dancing and singing Sikkimese folk songs until the wee hours of the next morning. At the most general level, it seemed that Sog bzlog pa's *Red Winds of Karma*, and more specifically, the effigy that constituted its centerpiece, had the overall effect of reinforcing village-level bonds between the local clergy, the village laity, and the locale, once again illustrating how powerful materials serve to bring elements together that are in other contexts kept apart, or related differently. In the case of this effigy rite, however, bonds were formed around an enemy-object produced for the occasion, rather than around a sublime materialization of awakened being revealed as Treasure substance, as in the Vase Water ceremony. It would appear in this instance that the ritualized creation and burial of the quintessential other – the “enemy” – primarily serves the purpose of forging the bonds that constitute the self-identity of bKra shis sdings community: creation of the “self” is effected through the creation, violent treatment, and burial of the “other.”

It is important to note, however, that the “clergy” of bKra shis sdings consists primarily of laymen, who don monks robes only during the New Year ritual season and then return to their lives as family-bearing householders immediately upon its conclusion. In other words, the purification and reintegration of the village calls for the temporary separation of the clergy from the laity, only so they can be reunited at the rite's conclusion. What we witness in this dynamic is a play of boundaries, first around the

village, and then within the village, between the classes of temporary vow holders and householders. Only after the enemy is constructed, invoked, beaten, and buried can the village resume its usual structure, collapsing the divisions formed in the course of the rite.

Performed just before the New Year, the *Red Winds of Karma* enemy burial rite is in many respects a purificatory preparation for the *Vase Water Accomplishment Offering* rite that follows during the first month of the New Year. Taken together, these two rites typify the twin concerns shared by all of Sog bzlog pa's object-oriented practices – protection and liberation in the face of volatile material circumstances. The *Red Winds of Karma* impresses participants and spectators with a past-oriented, local-level vision of communal purge and reintegration through the creation, abuse, and burial of any “enemies” that may have gathered in bKra shis sdings throughout the course of the year. The purification of the locale and its populace achieved through the enemy burial rite then enables the *Vase Water* rite to concentrate the liberating potencies of bKra shis sdings and its associated masters to predict the larger Sikkimese state's annual relationship with the material world and to extend the promise of freedom from its wild vicissitudes through the distribution and consumption of the vase's liberating waters. All told, this two-part New Year ritual program illustrates how in Sikkim's state rituals, power has been mediated between local and state levels in large part by the object-oriented rites of Sog bzlog pa and Zhig po gling pa, which variously draw, blur, and collapse the boundaries between persons, objects, and locales – past, present, and future. The boundary play of these rites functions to orient participants and spectators to a shared vision – in turns past, or future oriented – in which the material objects of effigies and

water vases, by enabling key confluences between persons and objects, promise some purchase on the wild vicissitudes of the unpredictable material world.

Contemporary Sikkimese Scholarship

In recent years the legacy of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu in Sikkim has become yoked to a broader project of securing the identity of Sikkim's Tibetanized Bhutia population in the face of rapid development. The Indian state's ongoing assimilation of Sikkim and its Bhutia population has provoked a recent surge of interest among the region's ecclesiastical elites in defining and safeguarding their Tibetan Buddhist heritage. This tendency has expressed itself most visibly in the formation and development of Sikkim's Namgyal Institute of Tibetology and its adjacent Old School seminary in Gangtok, where young Bhutia students are trained in either Tibetological research focused upon Sikkim, or alternatively, the scriptures and practices of Sikkim's Old School tradition. To share their tradition with the international scholarly community, the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology began to publish in 1964 the biannual *Bulletin of Tibetology*. The *Bulletin* thrives to this day as a respected venue for Bhutia and international scholars alike to publish their research on Sikkim and thereby promote the rich heritage of Sikkimese culture and religion.

Since according to traditional Sikkimese narratives Tibet's Old School played such a defining role in the formation of the Sikkimese state, much recent Sikkimese scholarship has been devoted to delineating precisely how Tibet's illustrious Old School masters have variously contributed to the formation of Sikkimese cultural and political identity. Khenpo Lha Tshering, the principal of Gangtok's Old School seminary and

master of ceremonies at bKra shis sdings temple complex in Western Sikkim, has been particularly prolific in the production of Tibetan language scholarly works concerned with defining the Old School heritage and identity of Sikkim. As I mentioned above, Sikkim inherited a Buddhist legacy that includes both the Northern Treasure tradition, whose founding Treasure revealer Rig 'dzin rgod ldem first “opened” the hidden land; and the sNang Sog Gong tradition, whose object-oriented rituals constitute Sikkim’s most celebrated New Year ceremonies. Over the last ten years, Lha Tshering’s research has become increasingly focused on reconciling these two traditions, especially in light of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s public condemnation of Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and Gong ra ba, and his equally public support for the Northern Treasure revelations, along with other Treasure traditions and their revealers.

In 2002 Lha Tshering published his first book, *A Saga of Sikkim’s Supremely Revered Four Pioneer Nyingmapa Reincarnates and Their Torchbearers*.¹⁰³⁶ This text constitutes a history of the formation of the state of Sikkim from the perspective of traditional Sikkimese narratives, which centrally feature Old School figures as the state’s main architects. Sog bzlog pa, Zhig po gling pa, and Gong ra ba figure in when the author seeks to delineate the Old School pedigree of the purported “four pioneer Nyingmapa reincarnates” that allegedly founded the kingdom in the middle of the seventeenth century. According to Sikkimese sources, these four were the three Tibetan Old School figures mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin, Lha btsun Nam mkha’ 'jigs med,

¹⁰³⁶ *mKha' spyod 'Bras mo ljongs kyi gtsug nor sprul pa'i rnam 'byor mched bzhi brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa blo gsar gzhon ni'i dga' ston* (Upper Shyari, Deorali, Gangtok, Sikkim, India: Khenpo L. Tshering, 2002), 263 pp. For a review and chapter summary of this work in English, see Françoise Pommaret, “Book Review: ‘A Saga of Sikkim’s supremely revered four pioneer Nyingmapa reincarnates and their torchbearers’ by Khenpo L. Tshering,” *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 39 No. 1 (2003): 87-90.

Kaḥ thog pa mTshung med chos rje kun tu bzang po, and their selected Dharmarāja, the first Dharma King of Sikkim, Chos rgyal Phun tshogs rnam rgyal.

Four years later, in 2006, Khenpo Lha Tshering published a voluminous monograph squarely focused upon the defining role of the sNang Sog Gong tradition in Sikkim. This text, entitled *The Expansion and Institutionalization of the Nang Sok Gong Sum Tradition in Sikkim and the Fifth Dalai Lama's Contribution to the Nyingma Order*,¹⁰³⁷ consists of an arrangement of relevant citations from 139 different classical Tibetan primary sources with little to nothing in the way of Lha Tshering's own original analysis. As its title suggests, this publication appears to have been motivated in large part by Lha Tshering's wish to defend the authenticity of the sNang Sog Gong tradition in the face of its vehement rejection by the Fifth Dalai Lama, especially in light of the Great Fifth's known patronage and support of many other of Tibet's Old School traditions. The ninth and penultimate chapter of the book is entitled "Analysis of the Intention Behind [the Great Fifth's] Criticisms of the Triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong, among others."¹⁰³⁸ Rather misleadingly, this chapter does not include the author's position on the topic, but only a pastiche of literary passages, which point toward political, rather than religious motives for the Great Fifth's disapproval.

¹⁰³⁷ *mKha' spyod 'bras mo gshongs gling yangs par snang sog gong gsum gyi brgyud 'dzin mched tshul dang kun gzigs lnga pa chen po blo bzang rgya mtsho'i sdes snga 'gyur rnying bstan la phyag rjes bka' drin che tshul 'thor ba btus pa'i ngo mtshar rtogs brjod skal bzang thar gling 'dren pa'i shing rta* (Upper Shyari, Deorali, Gangtok, Sikkim, India: Khenpo L. Tshering, 2002), 641 pp. For his own synopsis of this magisterial study, see Ven Khenpo L. Tshering, "The Garden of Liberation: a brief account of the manner in which, in the celestial realm of Sikkim, the sNang Sog Gong lineage spread and the 5th Dalai Lama left his mark on the rNying ma teachings (in Tibetan)," *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 42, No. 1 and 2 (2006): 9-30.

¹⁰³⁸ *le'u dgu pa snang sog gong gsum sogs la bka' bkyon mdzad pa'i dgongs gzhi la dpyad pa*: 553-606.

Taken as a whole, Khenpo Lha Tshering's scholarly output represents a sustained exploration of the foundations of Sikkimese identity in the face of Sikkim's assimilation within the Indian state and its relationship with the wider Tibetan Buddhist diaspora. With Sog bzlog pa's enemy burial rite and Zhig po gling pa's vase water rite already enshrined in Sikkim as the defining features of its religio-political establishment, Khenpo Lha Tshering's work can be interpreted in part as a means to justify to Sikkim's Bhutias and the wider community of diasporic Tibetans the enduring and prominent role of these controversial Tibetan figures in Sikkimese tradition, especially given Sikkim's status among Tibet's ecclesiastical elite as a peripheral Tibetan Buddhist region and the Fifth Dalai Lama's ban on these figures, which effectively occulted their influence within the central clerical institutions of Tibet, and now India. Underlying Lha Tshering's identity project, then, is the diametrically opposed receptions of the powerful objects and object-oriented rites of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu in Sikkim and Tibet, respectively, in light of new pressures placed upon Sikkim's clerical community to safeguard their tradition against Indian assimilation, on the one hand, and Tibetan critique, on the other. These items, their wielders, and the controversial and powerful associations that they carry serve in this case as a flashpoint for working out the contours of Sikkimese Buddhist identity.

Final Reflections

This chapter has sought to illustrate how certain features of the powerful objects and object-oriented rites that originated with Sog bzlog pa and his milieu, the specifics of which I discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, allowed this material dimension

of Tibetan Buddhist practice to become an important focal point in the construction during the mid-seventeenth century of the dGa' ldan pho brang and Sikkimese states. Adopting a chronological approach, I began by analyzing how the Fifth Dalai Lama's negative reception of Sog bzlog pa functioned by way of collapsing his persona with his primary master, Zhig po gling pa, and his primary student, Gong ra ba; and by conflating the entire "triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong" with a certain, highly contentious relationship with the world of violent object-oriented rites, power objects, and the general material ritual protocol typical of clerical institutions. I illustrated that the Great Fifth's critical attitude about this triad of figures and its associated objects and practices often served as a foil against which he championed his Northern Treasure tradition and its lead religious specialists as the premier force for confronting the foreign armies and other dangerous elements that threatened Tibet throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In light of the centrality of the Northern Treasure tradition for the Great Fifth in his and his polity's efforts to craft the defining features of the Dalai Lama institution, the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong, specifically the object-power discourse associated with them, became the backdrop against which the Great Fifth would forge his own authoritative relationship with the material aspects of religious practice. At the same time, however, the Fifth Dalai Lama's strategic use of the triad of sNang, Sog, and Gong only makes sense because these three figures share with the Great Fifth and his Northern Treasure tradition the rationale of the Treasure tradition, which, as I have emphasized throughout this study, is deeply material, has strong political overtones, and is premised on a sense of personal identity and agency that is distributed across generations and incarnations, and crosses the boundaries of persons, places, and things.

Turning next to the reception of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu among subsequent Old School traditions, I sought to trace how despite the Fifth Dalai Lama's public rejection of the sNang Sog Gong tradition, his Old School affiliations with the sMin grol gling tradition in particular compromised his efforts to eliminate this tradition once and for all. Although the Great Fifth's public condemnation worked to diminish the lasting influence of this three generations of teachers and students in Tibet, the sMin grol gling hierarch gTer bdag gling pa and his younger brother Lo chen Dharmasrī were nonetheless able to enshrine these figures in Old School lineage records. Lo chen accomplished this feat specifically for Sog bzlog pa by composing a brief biographer of the "Mongol Repeller" which elides any reference to Mongols, Zhig po gling pa, or his controversial ritual cycle in connection with Sog bzlog pa's persona of ritual prowess. Here we see once again that violent object-oriented rites are the flashpoint around which Sog bzlog pa's posthumous image revolves; Lo chen must sheer Sog bzlog pa's practices of their controversial elements in order to position him within a lineage of authentic masters.

Finally, by way of contrast with the Fifth Dalai Lama's critical reception of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu, I explored their overwhelmingly positive reception among the founding figures of the state of Sikkim and their descendants. I illustrated that they exerted a particularly strong influence upon the principal architect of the Sikkimese state, mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin. This figure, a grand disciple of Sog bzlog pa and "regent" in charge of the propagation of several key Zhig po gling pa revelations, installed at bKra shis sdings, the "navel" of the hidden land of Sikkim, the vase water rite of Zhig po gling po, and probably the enemy burial rite of Sog bzlog pa, as the crowning ceremonies of the kingdom's ritual calendar. Still performed today, this two-part ritual

program illustrates with particular clarity how such rites enable key confluences between objects, persons, deities, and places, which in turn help induct participants and spectators into a shared vision of their relationship with the material world. Conversely, the research of the contemporary Sikkimese scholar Lha Tshering appeals to the tradition of sNang, Sog, and Gong in efforts to reconcile Sikkim's peripheral Buddhist tradition with the authority of Tibet's Fifth Dalai Lama in light of the demands of Indian statehood in the context of the Tibetan Diaspora. In the case of Lha Tshering, the indissoluble link between Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and their powerful object-oriented rites means that safeguarding their authority and authenticity in the eyes of potential detractors is tantamount to securing the efficacy of the objects and rites they produced, revealed, or implemented, objects and rites that are now central to the identity of Sikkim's Tibetan Buddhist Bhutia population.

In sum, I have extended Chapter Three and Four's discussions of Sog bzlog pa's object-oriented ritual ethos and the confluences and crossings it encourages between persons, places, objects, deities, and more to revisit the theme developed in Chapters One and Two concerning the manner in which power objects also tend to cross, or fuse a wide spectrum of material and discursive terrains that are in turn social, political, religious, economic, or aesthetic in character. The implications of these observations for the political importance in seventeenth-century Tibet of power objects and object-oriented rites is that these items and the performances that center upon them encourage the transition, conversion, and articulation of power between the levels of objects, persons, communities, institutions, and states. On the state level, the role of power objects and object-oriented rites to variously embody, mediate, direct, and convert power between

persons, places, deities, and things makes these items crucial sensory media in the project of binding together the concatenation of elements deemed crucial for the authority of a Tibetan Buddhist kingdom and inducting the populace into a shared sensibility of the gifts the sacralized state can confer. Indeed, these items, foregrounding as they do protection and liberation in the face of adverse personal and communal circumstances, hold out the promise that through sensory participation in their material forms some purchase can be gained over the unpredictable and volatile material world of humanity and nature. The state, whose responsibilities overlap with the functions of power objects, can therefore feed off objects' power as it flows through porous boundaries, even as the state augments and instantiates that power anew through enshrining power objects at the very core of the state's ritualized authority.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This thesis has sought to trace the object-power discourse that appears throughout the narratives, philosophical debates, ritual liturgies, and ritual commentaries authored by Sog bzlog pa himself, and his wider circle of masters, critics, and acolytes. The aim of this focused investigation into powerful objects has been to explore what, precisely, such objects consist of, how they relate to Sog bzlog pa's ritual world, and what the relationships between the powers of objects and the actions of persons can illuminate about the flow of power between objective and personal elements in other domains of action, specifically as such transitions impact processes of identity formation and authority on the personal, communal, and state levels. These reflections upon the flow and distribution of power, agency, and identity across objects, persons, and other entities have also presented us with ways in which the richness of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse can challenge and even potentially contribute to how contemporary object and action theorists tend presently to characterize the relationships between objects, actions, persons, and meanings.

This exercise of fleshing out the features of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse as it appears throughout these different bodies of literature has shown how these genres are all related around powerful objects, each presenting them from a notably different perspective. That is to say, each of the genres treated in this study confronts us with a slightly different configuration of action and efficacy, which variously depicts power objects as embedded within networks that include a wide range of discursive and material items. These networks consist of sensory objects and materials, as well as persons, places, deities, language formulations, concepts, meanings, and other elements that coalesce around, or course through power objects as these variously mediate and are

mediated by one another in complex filiations and inflections of power, agency, and affect. Indeed, Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse shows how the force-field of potent objects includes and draws within its orbit a staggering scope of features – human and non-human. In this way, the present study has offered a rich case study of what is possible when applying to Sog bzlog pa's Tibetan Buddhist ritual world Bruno Latour's notion of actant and other useful heuristics that open the field of action and level the many items that interact to form and inform actors, events, and identities. Each part and chapter of this study is devoted to an examination of a different facet of these networks of power, as they alternately coalesce and fracture in the vicinity of power objects differently, depending in part upon the genre and focus of the literature under investigation.

Part I: Objects in Narrative, which includes Chapters One and Two, was an exploration of how Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse appears in the narrative literature composed by him and his closest masters and associates. Chapter One: "In the Vicinity of Things—Substance, Violence, and Power in the Milieu of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624)," investigated the role of powerful objects in the lives of the religious specialists of Sog bzlog pa's time, with a special focus on the object-power discourse of the narrative writings by and about three of Sog bzlog pa's closest masters. This chapter began with an exploration of the general concatenation of material socio-political and socio-religious circumstances in which Sog bzlog pa was born, with an eye toward the particular inflection of forces that may have given shape to his later involvements with power objects. I highlighted the intensification of Tibetan efforts to bring about geopolitical unification; Tibetan ambivalence about the involvements of foreign armies, and especially Mongol armies, in Tibetan internal affairs; and consequent

shifts in the roles of lamas, and especially Treasure revealers, on the burgeoning national political stage. That general discussion was followed by a more focused look at the object-power discourse of his closest masters and how the terms of that discourse may have helped inform Sog bzlog pa's own sensibility with respect to powerful objects.

Chapter One revealed foremost how the powerful objects and object-oriented rites of Treasure substances and rituals that promise either "liberation" (*grol*) from negative circumstances and suffering, or "abeyance" (*zlog*) of enemy armies, malignant forces, or natural disasters, were a particularly defining element of Sog bzlog pa's socio-religious milieu. Moreover, tracing throughout the life stories of these figures the relationships formed in the vicinity of such power objects presented a vision of these items as sensory media that bind a number of disparate items, figures, and domains. Either in isolation, or in connection with properties of animation acquired in the course of their ritual treatments, the power objects of Sog bzlog pa's milieu course through settings that are in turn social, political, religious, aesthetic, and economic in orientation. Power objects bind these domains of experience and accrue additional value in the process, thus contributing to the power and authority of the persons responsible for their revelation, production, distribution, and consumption. This flow of power between persons and objects, I tentatively suggested, is connected to deeper tensions over the sources of transformational power as being rooted in either power objects themselves, or their tangible ritual treatments, on the one hand; or in the persons instrumental in their production and use, on the other.

Having intoned the basic features of this friction between subjective and objective sources of power in Chapter One, I went on to develop this theme further through a detailed examination of Sog bzlog pa's own multiple involvements with the world of

powerful objects and materials. Chapter Two: “Prowess and Persona in the Wielding of Things—Exorcisms, Objects, and Insights in the Life and Literary Career of a Mongol-repelling Scholar-adept,” presented the major events of Sog bzlog pa’s life, and analyzed his corpus of writings and the rhetorical dimensions of his narrative self-construction. Throughout, I continued to highlight the tensions between objective, material and subjective, immaterial sources of power and the effects of these tensions upon Sog bzlog pa’s career and public persona. In interrogating further the features of Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse, I expanded upon the discussion of Chapter One to ask the question: To what degree does the ability to transform phenomenal reality stem from the mind and its cultivation of sublime qualities, and to what degree does this capacity reside in specialized actions, objects, technologies, socio-political influence, or other physically observable entities? When addressing this issue as it finds expression in Sog bzlog pa’s rhetorical self-narrative in particular, I suggested that the dialectical tensions between these and related polarities are perhaps rooted in two contrasting orientations to action – one that might be characterized as fundamentally “quotidian,” in nature, dwelling on the way things seem; and another that suspends such quotidian ways of thinking and perceiving in order to participate in the ritualized, sacred character of thing as they ultimately are. Throughout the narrative instantiations of Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse, I argued, he models a delicate balancing act between both approaches, deferring closure in favor of a playful juxtaposition of frictive poles and forces. I underlined this approach as indicative of a broader proclivity to play with the boundaries between other presumably opposing poles of action and efficacy, alerting readers that this dialectical orientation would assume different forms throughout Sog bzlog pa’s theoretical and ritual writings.

Part II: Objects in Theory and Practice, continued these explorations into the tensions between objective and subjective sources of efficacious power through careful readings of Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections upon objects that promise liberation through sensory contact alone, and through analysis of his ritual liturgies and ritual commentaries that feature those and other objects said to possess or acquire efficacious power. Chapter Three featured theory, while Chapter Four treated ritual practice. Their juxtaposition was intended to explore how theory and practice are related over the issue of the efficacy of sensory objects and their associated rites. Chapter Three: "Controversies Over Things—Drawing, Blurring, and Crossing the Boundaries," brought us face to face with Sog bzlog pa's considerations upon the efficacy of four sensory objects that promise to liberate whoever sees, hears, wears, or eats them. Sog bzlog pa's reflections upon this set of objects are posed as literary responses to a polemical critique which argues that those objects operate primarily upon the cognitive, symbolic, and subjective level, and not via the intrinsic powers of the objects themselves, as claimed by Sog bzlog pa and his Old School tradition. The thrust of Sog bzlog pa's apologetic response, I argued, is to frame these sensory objects as subject-object hybrids, items that are neither persons, nor objects, but combine elements of both. As subject-object hybrids, these sensory items emerge as fluid agent-patients, which exert their powers on a range of different levels, depending on circumstance, but are also subject to ritual and other human actions for their preparation and use. Sog bzlog pa's retorts are therefore not a unilateral defense of intrinsic objective power, but rather, present a vision of efficacy as distributed across sensory objects, sensate minds, and sensing bodies, proposing ever-shifting, contextual configurations of efficacy and action based on the qualities and attributes of the persons, objects, and other factors involved. In other

words, Sog bzlog pa's account paints these sensory objects as having intrinsic powers, but the scope of their efficacy depends also upon the subjective qualities of the persons who create, prepare, and encounter them, as well as the ritual treatments that these objects undergo during their creation and preparation.

In sum, these four "liberating" objects emerge through Sog bzlog pa's reflections as hybrid quasi-subjects/quasi-objects, things that straddle and fuse within themselves the various binaries of mind and body, symbol and substance, natural object and human artifact, person and thing, even as their naturalness and intrinsic power is emphasized in each case. The hybridity of these objects and how they function also breaks down the more provisional bifurcation of symbolic expression from disciplinary action, which Talal Asad, for one, has invoked as fundamental to understanding how ritual works in general. Simply stated, in the case of Sog bzlog pa's power objects, symbolic expression, cognitive and bodily cultivation, and intrinsic objective power work off of each other to produce creative tensions and transformational opportunities for the beings that encounter them. This complicates any characterization of objects and actions as operating unequivocally through one or another dynamic. By following Sog bzlog pa's lead, we have seen instead how tracing the associations between all the diverse items involved, without privileging either subjects or objects, humans or non-humans, has provided a far richer account of what, precisely, constitutes efficacious power in his world.

In light of the above observations, I suggested that the tendency throughout Sog bzlog pa's theoretical reflections to variously draw, blur, and sometimes collapse the boundaries between objective and subjective sources of power and efficacy might constitute a formal modeling of the content of his careful deliberations expressed throughout the debates. This line of reasoning implied in turn that Sog bzlog pa's

theoretical work, which threatens the stability and fixity of a number of binary distinctions through its repetitive movements back and forth, between and across the discursive boundaries of objects, subjects, bodies, minds and more may have developed in large part through his life-long involvement in ritual performances, whose formal features call for an analogous approach to boundaries. With this observation in mind, I revisited the idea broached in Chapter Two that Sog bzlog pa's careful negotiations between objective and subjective sources of power are a current that runs throughout his diverse activities and writings, his entire object-power discourse. I extended this concept further in this discussion to suggest that the proclivity to play with boundaries is perhaps informed by a governing "ritual ethos," that is, a sensibility formed from intensive immersion in specialized spaces, which combine discursive and material features to render the subject and object worlds permeable and enable the controlled flow of power between them.

Chapter Four: Chapter Four, "Things in Action and the Actions of Things—A Dynamic Ontology of Ritual Objects," turned squarely toward the object-oriented rituals with which Sog bzlog pa was involved, with the aim of exploring if and how his rites reflect the dynamics present in his theoretical discourse. I specifically interrogated the objects that feature in a series of object-oriented rites for the myriad ways in which they enable or inhibit the flow of efficacious power across person/object, human/non-human divides, and what the implications of these crossings might be for the efficacy of rituals, the power of objects, and the prowess of their human performers, wielders, and consumers.

That exercise, which focused in turn upon edible pills and concoctions of power, a range of enemy-objects, and initiation substances, yielded that all of these objects

similarly operate based upon key associations made between human and non-human elements, bonds which enable efficacious power to flow between persons, objects, deities, locations, and more. The confluences that gravitate around these objects, I also observed, are set in motion by the dynamic spaces of ritual settings, where performers direct toward objects a welter of cognitive, sonic, and physical activity. The human/non-human hybridity of ritual objects, heightened and activated by ritual action, allows them to function upon a continuum of materiality and meaning, where intrinsic material power and symbolic immaterial meaning work in tandem to reap effects upon persons and environments alike. One major effect of this dynamic boundary blurring between persons, objects, and meanings is that the persons who handle, prepare, and distribute power objects in ritual settings acquire efficacious power from objects through the very process of ensuring that those objects embody the requisite power to bring effects to other persons, places, and states of affairs. In a sense, then, ritual experts are formed precisely through their formation and distribution of powerful objects. We saw also how this dialectic of subject/object formation allows efficacious power to flow into and inform the identities of the locations, patrons, consumers, and all else that comes into contact with power objects and their ritual productions. My analysis of the principles of efficacy involved constituted an examination of the mechanisms of personification and objectification that variously enable these movements of power, agency, and authority. Sensory contacts, aesthetic judgments, and symbolic classification and communication converge in these accounts, illustrating how the ritual sphere constitutes a specialized zone that informs a sensibility toward power objects. The features of this sensibility helped us to understand, in turn, how power objects can function as fluid mediators that

flow through and connect a surprising range of discursive and material items, well beyond the confines of ritual precincts.

Part III: Aftereffects, continues to trace the associations between power objects and persons as these formed in the immediate wake of Sog bzlog pa's life and in his legacy up to the present. This section includes Chapter Five, as well as these Final Considerations. Chapter Five: "Continuities and Contentions over Things—The Legacy of Sog bzlog pa and the Material Links of Political Authority," followed the dynamic interplay of subjects and objects, persons and things that occurs in the vicinity of power objects and object-oriented rites, exploring how this dynamic plays out on the registers of institution, community, and state. This discussion constituted a focused exploration of how Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse, and the fluidity between persons and objects that it presupposes and enables, differently informed two related projects of Tibetan Buddhist state formation during the middle of the seventeenth century with ripples that extend to the present. First, I explored the writings by and about the Fifth Dalai Lama, the first leader of Tibet's dGa' ldan pho brang government, to illustrate how he also partook of the fluid and distributed logic of object-power discourse to conflate Sog bzlog pa with his master and student, and associate all three figures collectively with a controversial, and by the Great Fifth's account, incorrect relationship with the world of power objects, object-oriented rites, and material institutional and ritual protocol. I moved on to demonstrate how Sog bzlog pa's Old School tradition had to sheer him of these negative associations with his master and their shared object-oriented rites to enshrine him within Old School lineage records. The discussion then shifted gears to consider how, on the other hand, the power objects of Sog bzlog pa and his master were instrumental in the formation of the state of Sikkim, where they still feature today in

Sikkim's most cherished annual New Year ceremonies. The discussion closed with a consideration of how these objects and object-oriented rites are still operating today as a flashpoint for reinforcing the Tibetan Buddhist identity of Sikkim's Bhutia population as it struggles to position itself within the modern Indian state vis-à-vis the Tibetan diaspora. This chapter thus presented the "Aftereffects" of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse as it implicated the drawing, blurring, and collapsing of boundaries on the level of state and institution after Sog bzlog pa's death. That discussion implied that the confluences and crossings between persons and objects that we observed in earlier chapters also enabled the power objects and object-oriented rites of Sog bzlog pa and his milieu to extend beyond those persons to be adapted and assimilated to an ever-shifting series of contexts, exerting their powers anew in the formation, fortification, or collapse of boundaries on a number of different levels. The present Final Considerations constitute the "Aftereffects" of this study of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse upon my own reflections concerning the implications of this discourse for how the contemporary world of object and action theory tends at present to relate objects, actions, persons, and meanings.

Throughout these chapters I have treated object-power discourse from two main perspectives: at the level of the discourse itself and the relationships this discourse intones between the worlds of objects, persons, actions, meanings, and other items; and how this object-power discourse impacts the world beyond the text to inform sensibilities and galvanize persons into aesthetic formations on the personal, communal, and state registers. Both of these dimensions of object-power discourse are interconnected, primarily because both demand coming to terms with the relationships between objects, persons, actions, meanings, and a host of other items as these variously form within Sog

bzlog pa's writings and as they point beyond his writings into the contexts of their reception.

As for the first dimension of object-power discourse, leveling the field of agency by attempting to include as many items, or "actants," as possible within my considerations of Sog bzlog pa's writings has enabled me to provide a particularly rich account of his object-oriented ritual world. Instead of privileging beforehand either the "object" powers of objects, or the "person-like" powers of objects, I have sought to trace the associations between them and other items, and flesh out the contours of the networks and assemblages that these associations come to form. Chapters One and Two, which constitute considerations upon "Objects in Narrative," revealed that power objects have the marked tendency to become animated and flow through and connect a diversity of material and discursive items and territories. Power objects, it was discovered, also function to convert efficacious power between domains, such that their properties of animation extend beyond physical shows of power in rituals to connect persons in economic exchange, galvanize communal aesthetic formations, leverage political power and influence, and a number of other consequences. "Objects in Theory and Practice" revealed in turn that power objects are fundamentally hybrid in character, fusing particular subjective and objective elements in their very constitution, and that their ritual treatments accentuate and activate the dynamic processes of hybridization by encouraging the controlled flow of efficacious power between objects, persons, places, deities, and more. Chapter Three, more specifically, revealed that hybrid power objects call for a distributed, relational, and contextual understanding of efficacy, in which objects possess intrinsic power, but depend for efficacy also upon the persons that produce and encounter them, among other features. That discussion implicated not only

the nature of objects, but also the nature of subjects, implying a vision of personal karma, cultivation, and gnosis that crosses and sometimes collapses strict object/subject, mind/body divides. Chapter Four illustrated how this distributed logic and the dynamic tensions it intones between power objects and persons in accounting for efficacy is rooted more fundamentally in the ritual treatments of objects and the dialectical frictions these settings productively create between persons, objects, and other entities as they encourage the flow of power between them. Part III, “Aftereffects,” revisits narratives, but this time with the aim of exploring the implications of Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse, with its hybrid objects and the fluidity of power it intones, throughout the dynamics of state and community formation during the two to three decades after his death and into the present. In the final analysis, that examination revealed that the conflations and crossings between power objects, persons, places, and more encouraged the extension of Sog bzlog pa’s personhood through his writings, objects, and object-oriented rites, so that they could become touchstones of contention and founts of tradition in disparate contexts long after his physical demise. These constitute the networks of Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse as they took shape throughout his narratives, philosophical debates, and ritual texts, and as these were adapted and assimilated in different contexts after his death. An application of Latour’s object-oriented methodology to Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse has in this way provided a particularly rich account of how objects, persons, actions, and meanings are related in his world. More importantly, it has offered a vivid portrait of how power aggregates and transitions between entities, and what the implications of this flow of power across porous boundaries are for personal, institutional, and state charisma and authority. This inquiry has also shown how the very nature of power has changed in the process, from

the simple capacity of power objects to enact changes in persons and states of affairs, to the personal power of exercising mastery over power objects in the execution of such transformations, all the way up to the socio-political authority conferred by power objects to their institutional venues and state formations, where the possession and use of power objects can augment legitimacy under the auspices of righteous service and governance.

Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse, however, is not just an expression of the rich dynamics that occur in the vicinity of his powerful objects. It also helps mold those dynamics, facilitating the inculcation of a particular sensibility to be adopted and enacted with respect to power objects and object-oriented rites. This brings us to the second level of analysis, that is, how Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse, as discourse, relates to the material and discursive world in front of the texts concerned to inform human sensibilities and mobilize communal aesthetic formations. We have seen how the objects that feature in Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse are variously depicted as sensational forms that bind, on a number of different registers. We saw in Part I how power objects create bonds between people, places, things, deities and other entities that are in turns economic, social, political, religious, aesthetic, visionary, or prophetic in nature. Part II was devoted to explicating the bonds between body, language, mind, gnosis, deity, matter, and world that are formed when theorizing about objects and implementing objects in action. Part III, and more specifically, Chapter Five, was focused on the bonds that power objects form in the vicinity of the state, especially as the confluences and extensions that occur between objects and persons enable power to flow from the personal sphere to the objective sphere and back, impacting the identity and authority of larger communal formations. These binding properties of power objects, expressed succinctly by their dense hybridity, their uncontainable powers of animation,

and their consequent tendency to flow through and connect diverse terrains, implicates also, I believe, the audience of readers and listeners who are privy to object-power discourse. We witnessed in Chapter Five in particular how the subsequent reception of Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse became a focal point of contention and creativity for subsequent figures and movements actively seeking to deploy object-power discourse in their own bond-forming projects.

Closely related to the binding properties of the power objects described, these writings about power objects offer a hybridized and distributed vision of how power objects function vis-à-vis persons, one that is fraught with tensions between objective and subjective sources of power and efficacy. These tensions between objective and subjective sources of power, moreover, are never resolved in Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse. These frictions are instead accentuated, becoming productive of dynamic dialectical interactions that mirror in their formal literary features the movement and interplay between objects, persons, and other entities that object-power discourse denotes in content. On the most superficial level, the overall affect of this discourse on the sensibilities of audiences was perhaps to inculcate a similar orientation, one that respects and fears the intrinsic powers of objects, but does not do so at the expense of persons and the roles of personal karma, cultivation, and intentionality. Indeed, this particular orientation to action is reflected in the series of careful balancing acts, which Sog bzlog pa models throughout his writings, between hosts of dyads that are all ultimately rooted in the tensions between objective and subjective sources of power.

On a deeper level, Sog bzlog pa's dialectical play with the boundaries between objective and subjective sources of power relates to two contrasting orientations to action, whose juxtaposition animates his object-power discourse and informs its impact

upon sensibilities. One approach to action, as I noted above, can perhaps be characterized as essentially quotidian in nature, in which the immediately tangible, observable, and commonsensical takes precedence. The other approach, by contrast, puts aside quotidian, commonsensical notions to partake of the pristine, divine character of self and world as these ultimately are, and not how they seem to be according to present limited perceptions. These two orientations to action do not connect seamlessly with emphases upon either objective, or subjective sources of power, respectively, but refract and distribute these sets of polarities to mutually implicate them in complex affiliations. Roughly speaking, however, in Sog bzlog pa's ritual world the quotidian orientation links up with the representational world of ordinary perception, according to which power objects and their rites work by signifying some other value or meaning. The other, pristine, divine perspective, on the other hand, connects more with what ultimately is, the absolute dimension of intrinsic being and presence, according to which power objects and rites embody and enact their powers directly, independent of human language and cognition. It is the interanimation of these two orientations, or rather, the dialectical tension between them, which Sog bzlog pa's object-power discourse models most conspicuously. His object-power discourse thus functions, much like the objects it features, to bind together, without collapsing, two distinct orientations, whose frictive associations impact sensibilities in kind.

I have made the claim that by privileging neither subjective ideas, nor objective matter, but instead, tracing their formative moments and the relationships between them, we can better come to grips with the complexity of Sog bzlog pa's objects of power. The present study, however, examines language about objects, and not objects themselves. While this emphasis upon the discourse of power objects constitutes one of the

contributions of this study, it also confronts us with a conundrum over how to relate it to the material world outside of the texts concerned. In other words, does the textual study of objects not run the risk of surreptitiously assimilating materiality to the subjective realm of human discourse, thus losing sight of the leveling influence that I have sought to bring to this study, and which reflects the balancing act that Sog bzlog pa attempts to strike throughout his own writings?

One avenue through which to redress this seeming imbalance might be to ask how a discourse about powerful objects gestures toward the world of materiality in ways that resist assimilation by human discourse. “Materiality” itself, after all, is a term that has come to connote the “excess” of the material world in relation to the world of humans, particularly in terms of the volatility and unpredictability of its vicissitudes. Christopher Pinney, for instance, claims to offer a way out of the implicit assimilation of materiality to the human subject by first defining “materiality” along the same lines as Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of “figure,” that is, as the “excess, or supplementarity, which can never be encompassed by linguistic-philosophical closure.”¹⁰³⁹ The study of material objects and their relationships with humans then becomes for Pinney an inquiry into the ways in which things resist attempts to tidily account for them “by other means,” be it “contemporaneity,” “history,” “society,” “culture,” “language” and so on. Objects, including the Hindu images studied by Pinney, confound discursive closure because they are “densely compressed performances unfolding in unpredictable ways and characterized by what (from the perspective of an aspirant context) look like disjunctions.”¹⁰⁴⁰ And if we are to take seriously the effects that objects perform on their

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid. 266.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ibid: 269.

producers and consumers we must be sensitive to the possibility that they form “part of an aesthetic, figural domain that can constitute history” and may “exist in a temporality that is not necessarily coterminous with more conventional political temporalities.”¹⁰⁴¹ Stated differently, with Lyotard’s notion of “figure,” objects are not so much meanings to be interpreted, as they are intensities to be felt.¹⁰⁴² In this way, Pinney dethrones the human subject from its position as arbiter of objects’ meanings and relocates it within an audience subjected to, and thereby constituted by, objects’ unpredictable effects.

Somewhat akin to Pinney’s notion of materiality as excess, Coole and Frost define materiality as “always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable.”¹⁰⁴³ According to this formulation, inorganic phenomena “enjoy a certain efficacy,” or agency, “that defies human will.”¹⁰⁴⁴ And this modality of material efficacy is resolutely not confined to the principle of causation. Rather, it is multiple, fluid, and contingent. Acknowledging, in this way, the agency of non-humans has the effect of relocating the human “within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain agentic capacities and in which the domain of unintended and unanticipated effects is considerably broadened.”¹⁰⁴⁵

I agree with Pinney, and Coole and Frost that the workings of matter are contingent and unpredictable, and therefore cannot be reduced to human categories of

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid: 266.

¹⁰⁴² Ibid: 266.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid: 9.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid: 9.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid: 10.

language and thought. I must reiterate, however, that this study centers upon language about objects – Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse. Centered as it is upon textual formulations, this study must consider the ways in which human discourse about things also acts, imparting to readers a sense of the wonder and volatility of the material world of things, and offering hope that its dangerous and emancipatory potencies might be controlled, directed, or unleashed. In this vein, I question any characterization of human language and thought that would reduce Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse purely to the level of a static representation upon a more fundamental, ephemeral, or volatile material reality. I have seen it fit rather to follow Latour’s approach and level the field of agency to locate discourses about objects and the objects discussed as actants, each acting upon the other to open up worlds of meaning for those who consider them seriously, even if the objects concerned are only accessible through the discourse about them. Contrary to Pinney’s remarks about the essential “closure” of discourse, I therefore hold that the “world-making practice” of writing about things has its own unpredictable effects, where the struggles with a dangerous material world can be discerned “between the lines,” as it were, of a set of discourses whose explicit purpose is only in part to predict and regulate its wild vicissitudes. According to this perspective, discourse is more material and materiality is more discursive than either Pinney, or the new materialists care to acknowledge. It is through this re-materialization of textuality and its discourses that I envision this study to nudge the material turn into new directions. Although, to be precise, this does not signal so much new directions, but simply one suggestion for how material-cultural studies of religion might incorporate, or proceed based on the study of texts in ways that recognize the deep complicity, but mutual irreducibility of cultural discourses and materiality.

The object-power discourse of Sog bzlog pa, focused as it is upon objects that “liberate” and “repel,” acts first and foremost as a world-making practice by instilling a sense of awe concerning powerful objects that exhibit properties of animation and binding on a number of different levels. Moreover, since the discourse about these powerful objects extends the possibility that through them the potencies of the material world of humanity and nature might be controlled and directed, this discourse also surreptitiously expresses and instills a particular sensibility of unpredictability and trepidation with respect to the wider material world. In essence, Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse operates with a sensibility of materiality as wildly extending beyond the reach of human thought and language, but also as amenable, under the right circumstances, to certain degrees of human mastery. It inducts sensibilities into a future-oriented vision of the unpredictable excesses and dangers of the material world of nature and humanity, while it also offers some hope that through especially potent material objects and operations these volatile material forces might be channeled and controlled to achieve desirable human ends. Here again, on the level of discourse, we witness a dialectical tension between objective and subjective sources of power. This time, however, it is expressed in terms of the tensions between being an actor and being acted upon.

This dialectic, expressed in terms of the volatility of the material world and a consequent anxiety with controlling its capricious powers, animates Sog bzlog pa’s object-power discourse throughout. For instance, the prophecies that feature in this discourse give voice, if only by relief, to a sense of urgency and uncertainty in the face of unpredictable material circumstances. Prophecy use and interpretation, by encouraging a particular course of action in response to those specific circumstances, can then be read

as a compelling way to gain some purchase over such powerful and destructive forces for a range of ends. As a consequence, contentions over prophecy interpretation emerge as controversies over who, exactly, has the proper prowess and authority to vie with the material forces that threatened the security and survival of Tibet. Theoretical controversies over object interpretation also speak to this concern, as does fastidiousness in material orthopraxy in rites whose aim is to perform manipulations in the material world. The practice of theory and the theory of practice are each, in their own way, attempts to gain control over the contours of the world of powerful objects and the wider material world of which they partake, even while they also acknowledge that certain objects do indeed have the power, in and of themselves, to bring radical transformations to persons and states of affairs.

In sum, these combinations of discursive and material acts – present throughout nearly every domain of Sog bzlog pa’s writings – can be seen as myriad ways to negotiate the tenuous balance between acting in the material world and being subject to its dangerous, or nurturing uncertainties. In this light, Sog bzlog pa’s dialectical oscillations between the poles of substance and sense, materiality and meaning, throughout his object-power discourse begin to appear as reflections of a particular orientation to action, rooted in his ritual sensibility, through which he variously sought to strike this delicate balance and inspire it among others.

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