


## A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition\*

Jean-Luc Achard  
(CNRS, CRCAO)

 According to sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po (15<sup>th</sup> c.) and his *Explanation of the Revelation, known as the Lamp Clarifying its Diffusion and Development* (*bsTan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal sgron*), the Bon tradition describes its Treasure system (*gter ma*) under five headings: the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*), the Southern Treasures (*lho gter*), the Central Treasures (*dbus gter*), the Treasures from Khams (*kham s gter*), and the New Treasures (*gter gsar*).<sup>1</sup> In the present paper, I will briefly address the first category—the Northern Treasures—in a very cursory manner, as part of an ongoing project on Byang gter in general.<sup>2</sup> sPa ston's description of the Northern Treasures revolves around two main topics: the characteristics (*mtshan nyid*) of these Treasures and their actual designation (*btags*). However, he does not describe the specific features of this tradition but rather recalls its history and enumerates the texts that were found during the various revelations of what became the Northern Treasures.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The Lower Transmission (*smad brgyud*)

The Northern Treasures have their source in the 8<sup>th</sup> century figure of

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<sup>1</sup> sPa ston, *bsTan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal sgron*, in *Gangs ti se bon gzhung*, vol. 01, pp. 326-330. This work and sGa ston's *gTer gyi kha byang* are some of the main sources Shar rdza Rinpoche used in the compilation of his *Legs bshad mdzod*. According to Karmay (*A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, p. 117), the *bsTan pa'i rnam bshad* was: "(w)ritten at the behest of Kyi btsun Kro ta ver zhi and completed in the summer of the year wood-bird which is either 1285 or 1345 at gNas chen bde sgang, the seat of the sPa family in La stod, gTsang." This rather conflicts with Martin ("Unearthing Bon Treasures," p. 622) who dates it to 1477. On sPa ston, see also Blondeau, "Le 'Découvreur' du Mañi bka' 'bum était-il bonpo?," *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> This paper is a contribution to the study of the Byang gter system as part of the ANR research program co-directed with Stéphane Arguillère and entitled "For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures."

<sup>3</sup> The narration is very close, although not identical, to that of sGa ston's *gTer gyi kha byang* and that of Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod*.

Dran pa nam mkha' who is said to have formulated aspiration prayers (*smon lam*) so that Bon would flourish under better circumstances in the future.<sup>4</sup> According to Bon chronology and in the context of the *Byang gter* revelations, this "future" started with the rediscoveries made by three *atsaras* (*ācāryas*)<sup>5</sup> from Nepal (Lho bal). sPa ston does not name them in this context but according to Sha rdza Rin po che's *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, p. 118), these were: dKon mchog grags pa, Nya mo mGon po, and Sad ku Ratna.<sup>6</sup> The three yogis had previously heard that they could retrieve as much gold as they wished in Tibet. Therefore, they decided to travel to the Land of Snow and ended up in the La stod region. However, they were unable to discover any gold. One may imagine that they searched riverbanks or mines or dug the earth wherever they were told gold could be found but they actually did not find any.

While they were apparently still in La stod, they asked someone who told them that they could find a lot of gold in the Scarlet Rock (Brag dmar) in bSam yas monastery.<sup>7</sup> When they reached the place, they decided to circumambulate the sanctuary at night. Soon, they met the caretaker of the place who addressed them in the following manner: "You, people from Nepal, are indeed devoted, so you should continue with faith and respect!" He invited them into the storeroom (*dkor khang*) of the main temple and shut the door behind them, thus offering the three yogis a safe place for the night.<sup>8</sup>

In the main temple room, the three *atsaras* saw a chest sealed with a bronze seal: they tried to lift it and since it was very heavy, they entertained the thought that it might well be filled with gold. They decided to take the chest with them and fled right away. They ran the entire night and hid in a forest until the day broke.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This is a reference to what Bon pos style as the "second persecution of Bon" during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan (r. 755-797), the first having supposedly occurred under the mythical king Gri gum btsan po.

<sup>5</sup> In this context, one has to understand this expression as referring to wandering yogins and not specifically to *slob dpon* (*ācāryas*).

<sup>6</sup> The first two names are evidently of Tibetan origin or have been reconstructed back into Tibetan language. On Sad ku, see Gurung, "The Emergence of a Myth," p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> On bSam yas in general, see Chayet, "Le monastère de bSam yas : sources architecturales." Brag dmar was the birthplace of Khri song lde btsan and the place where his father had built a fort (called Brag dmar mgrin bzang).

<sup>8</sup> The irony is that the caretaker locked the door behind them in order to prevent thieves to enter the temple...

<sup>9</sup> In the sources available to me, there is no explanation as to how they got out of the temple since, as we have seen, they were locked in by the caretaker. They probably escaped through a window or after having picked the lock of the main entrance door.

Later, they eventually reached the valley of Ngan lam<sup>10</sup> and arrived at a place called Sri<sup>11</sup> where they broke the bronze seal and opened the chest, which contained three bags of Bon texts (*bon sgro gsum*), i.e., a tiger-skin bag, a leopard-skin bag, and a bear-skin bag. At that time, having completely run out of provisions, they decided that one of them should stay with the bags while the two others went in search of food.<sup>12</sup> Approaching a village, they heard a drum being beaten and upon inquiring who was playing it, they were told that someone named mTha' bzhi 'khrul (= 'phrul) gsas was performing a Bon ritual practice. Thus, they felt that they should meet with this man and went to his house. Introducing themselves to him, they said that they had Bon texts<sup>13</sup> and were willing to give them to him in exchange for food. mTha' bzhi was interested by the offer and gave them a lump of kneaded barley flour, as well as some *chang*, a measure of *rtsam pa* and a carcass of meat. Thus, the two *atsaras* returned to their companion together with mTha' bzhi. They showed him the bags but did not let him choose or pick (*bdam du mi 'jug*) texts after examining them. Instead they told him that he could take one volume (*po ti*) of whichever bag he wanted.<sup>14</sup> He said: "If I want a big (volume), the tiger-skin bag is big (so I should go for this one). If I want a nice (volume), then the leopard-skin bag looks beautiful. But I would like to get a Bon (volume) from the bear-skin bag."<sup>15</sup> Thus, he took one volume and upon looking at it, he found out that it contained:

— the root-text (*rtsa*) of the *Sādhana of the Black Furious Dagger* (*dBal Phur nag po'i sgrub thabs*), together with its commentary ('*grel*),<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ngan lam is also the name of a clan to which rGyal ba mchog dbyangs, one of the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava, belonged. I am not sure if the two must be identified since the Ngan lam clan might take its name from its place of origins, although it was later associated with the 'Phan yul valley. Ngan lam is also the clan name of the famed minister sTag ra klu gong (8<sup>th</sup> c.).

<sup>11</sup> Sri bya ba. It is called Sri ba in Karmay, p. 119, but the *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 393 indeed reads "sri bya bar...".

<sup>12</sup> This shows that these bags and the chest were probably not of small dimensions. If one of them has to guard the whole treasure chest, it implies that it could not be easily carried on oneself. In their flight from bSam yas, they must have carried the box all together.

<sup>13</sup> The narration does not say that they had opened the bags, but apparently they did.

<sup>14</sup> In all likelihood, mTha' bzhi was shown the bags as they were still closed and could not browse through the volumes and make a choice after examining the texts. He was supposed to pick up a volume at random from one of the bags. One may wonder what prompted the *atsaras* to impose this method of selection.

<sup>15</sup> This last statement suggests that all the volumes were not necessarily connected to the Bon tradition.

<sup>16</sup> In the *Legs bshad mdzod*, this is given as the *Three Black Tantras* (*Nag po rgyud gsum*), to which the *Black Furious Dagger* (*dPal phur nag po*) belongs.

- the practice of the *Twenty Mātṛkās* (*Ma mo nyi shu*),<sup>17</sup>
- the short practices (*sgrub chung*) of the Hawk (Khra) and Jackal (sPyang) Protectors,<sup>18</sup> and
- the short practices of the Lords of the Earth (*sa bdag gi sgrub chung*).<sup>19</sup>

It is reported that there was a small drawing of a maṇḍala on the wooden cover of the volume (*glegs shing*). There were also numerous magical teachings of Bon (*rdzu 'phrul gyi bon*) but no titles or further indications are given.<sup>20</sup>

Later, rGya ston Khro 'phen from 'O yug<sup>21</sup> asked mTha' bzhi for the transmission of these teachings. From rGya ston, it was transmitted to gZugs<sup>22</sup> Ra 'phen from Yar 'brog, who gave it to Ra ston Klu rgyal from Shang, who gave it to Lha rje Ra<sup>23</sup> sgom, who gave it to Bru chen Nam mkha' g.yung drung (994–1054),<sup>24</sup> an important master of the Great Perfection tradition. This lineage from mTha' bzhi 'phrul gzas is known as the “Lower Transmission” (*smad brgyud*).

## 2. The Upper Transmission (*stod brgyud*)

Thereafter, leaving mTha' bzhi and the Ngan lam valley, the three *atsaras* moved up from sTod lung and wandered through gNam gong<sup>25</sup>

<sup>17</sup> There are several lists of these deities but in general they are counted as twenty-seven. For the association between Ma mo and dBal mo, see for instance Blezer, “The ‘Bon’ dBal-mo Nyer-bdun(/brgyad),” p. 145 n. 13.

<sup>18</sup> These are secondary deities associated with the Phur pa cycle. On these, see Cantwell & Mayer, “The Winged and the Fanged,” *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Except for the root-*sādhana* of dBal phur nag po, it is not easy to sort out the titles that are implied by sPa ston since his wording is rather compact. He merely says: *ma mo nyi shu khra dang sa bdag gi sgrub chung rnams byung*. I wonder if *khra dang* should not be corrected to *khra spyang* or even to *khra spyang dang*. In *Sources for the History of Bön* (sPa ston, p. 710), the whole passage is articulated as follows: *dbal phur nag po'i sgrub thabs/ rtsa 'grel dang bcas pa/ ma mo nyi shu khra dang/ sa bdag gis (=gi) sgrub chung rnams byung/*.

<sup>20</sup> According to the '*Dus pa rin po che'i rgyud dri ma med pa rtsa ba'i mdo sangs rgyas kyi rnam thar rin chen 'phreng ba*, p. 122, these magical Bon teachings belong to the third Vehicle, the Vehicle of the gShen of Magical Wonders (*'phrul gshen theg pa*). On the practices and doctrinal contents of this Vehicle, see Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, pp. 98 *et seq.*

<sup>21</sup> Rendered as 'Ug in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 120). rGya ston's name is spelt rGya ston sgro phan in Klein & Wangyal, *Unbounded Wholeness* (p. 212), in which spelling mistakes are endemic.

<sup>22</sup> Spelt Zug in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 120).

<sup>23</sup> Spelt 'Bar in *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> He was also an important disciple of gShen chen Klu dga' (996–1035).

<sup>25</sup> Nam ra in *op. cit.*

in the north. They went further north, up to 'Dog stag ris<sup>26</sup> in La stod, where they met with 'Dar ban Śākya Mu ne, mChims Śākya pra ba, and 'O ma kha Byang chub sde<sup>27</sup> in Byang 'brog ru thog, as these three travelled with a heavily laden horse. That same night, as the party was resting in an isolated place, the *atsaras* asked the three Buddhists where they were going and those answered that they intended to travel down to bSam yas in order to retrieve Buddhist treasures (*chos gter*), informing also the *atsaras* that the load being carried by their horse was to be given to the caretaker of the monastery as a present.

The *atsaras* said: "We have unearthed Buddhist treasures! Let us take the load and we shall give you the treasure bags!" The three Buddhist discussed the proposal and upon looking at the scattered volumes in the bags, they noticed that they projected lights and sparks. Thinking that this must definitely be signs indicating the books were containing profound teachings (*chos zab mo*), they gave the three *atsaras* their goods from the horse load. After this discussion and exchange, the three Buddhists took the bags and went away. Sometime later in the day, they stopped and opened the bags, only to witness again numerous magical wonders. In a place called mDog gi sna nang in La stod,<sup>28</sup> they stayed in the house of one named gZe ban Shes rab rgyal mtshan,<sup>29</sup> who is said to have a nephew called gZe sgur who also came from Nepal.<sup>30</sup> At midnight, they did a *puja* together, making an offering of seven white grains of barley (*nas dkar mo 'bru bdun*),<sup>31</sup> reciting numerous prayers and offering divine prostrations before the bags after which they started to open them. Upon looking at the texts, they found out these were all Bon works, so two of the Buddhists proposed to burn them down in a fire, but magical displays occurred again. The third Buddhist, 'Dar ban, declared that they should rather give them to gZe sgur who was himself a Bon po, and they eventually gave him the three bags. Looking at the contents of the bags, gZe sgur saw that

<sup>26</sup> The rendering is tentative since 'dog stag ris is totally unknown to me. In the text, it comes with an ergative case ('dog stag ris *kyis*), suggesting it is the name of someone from La stod. In the *Blue Annals* (p. 997), it seems to be a toponym spelt lDog stag ris. In the *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 395), this line is spelt: *la stod kyi mdog sras rong nas* which means "from the valley of mDog sras in La stod."

<sup>27</sup> Spelt 'O ma Byang chub seng ge in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 120).

<sup>28</sup> It is spelt 'Dog gis snan snang in *Sources for a History of Bon*, p. 711.3, and mDog gi sman gong in *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 396, Karmay, p. 120) which is probably the correct spelling.

<sup>29</sup> He is called gZe bon in sPa ston's text, although this is certainly a mistake for gZe ban. gZe ban seems to definitely have been of a Buddhist lineage, but his nephew (see next note) was a follower of Bon.

<sup>30</sup> The *Legs bshad mdzod* styles this nephew as being Bon po (p. 396; Karmay, *ib.*). gZe sgur sounds like a nickname ("the crooked one from gZe"). He is named gZe bon sgur po lower in the text.

<sup>31</sup> So far, I have been unable to identify this ritual.

they indeed contained Bon works.<sup>32</sup>

In the tiger-skin bag were three categories of outer, inner and secret texts:

- among the outer ones were *The Six Treatises on Discipline* ('Dul ba rgyud drug),<sup>33</sup> *The Ten Clear Teachings* (Sa le lung bcu),<sup>34</sup> and *The Precepts regarding the Rule to Watch Over* (Man ngag lta khrims);<sup>35</sup> furthermore, in the same category were *The Bar ti ka Sūtra* (mDo bar ti ka),<sup>36</sup> *The Thirty Daily Prostrations* (Tshes phyag sum cu pa), *The Continuous Food Homages* (Za phyag nar ma);
- among the inner ones were *The Seven Tantras* (rGyud bdun),<sup>37</sup> and *The Five Integrations to the Path* (Lam khyer lnga);<sup>38</sup>
- among the secret ones where three “proclamations” (bsgrags pa), starting with the initial one containing *The Great Explanation of the Continuity of the Trichiliocosm, the Description of the Structure of the Tantras* [?] (rGyud kyi dpe'u tse stong gsum rgyud 'chad chen po); in the intermediate proclamation was *The Tantra Explaining Chalices and Elixirs* (sNod bcud bstan pa'i rgyud);<sup>39</sup> and in the last proclamation was *The Gathering of the Nine Tree Trunks* (sDong po dgu 'dus).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> In the brief description of the texts given in the next paragraphs, I have left some sections or titles untranslated in footnotes since it is sometimes difficult to figure out the real meaning of these titles without access to the actual texts themselves.

<sup>33</sup> On these texts, see Roesler, “The Vinaya of the Bon Tradition,” *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> The *Legs bshad mdzod* list this as “the Ten Teachings such as the Clear Lamp of the Citadels (gSas mkhar sa le sgron ma la sogs pa'i lung bcu), etc.”

<sup>35</sup> These evidently represent a coherent set of teachings organized according to the traditional scheme of rgyud, lung, and man ngag.

<sup>36</sup> A sūtra which is apparently the source from which several dhāraṇīs have been extracted.

<sup>37</sup> The *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 397) lists one of these Tantras as being the Ye sangs rang 'dul gyi rgyud (not yet identified).

<sup>38</sup> Given as *The Integration of the Five Poisons to the Path* (Dug lnga lam khyer) in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (*ib.*). There are numerous texts with a similar title. In particular, since the one referred to here is supposed to be a sūtra, it should not be confounded with the eponymous work from the rDzogs chen bsgrags pa skor gsum (despite the mentions of “proclamations” [bsgrags pa] in the secret category of texts to be listed in the next paragraph).

<sup>39</sup> Chalices (snod) are universes or worlds, and Elixirs (bcud) are the sentient beings living in these worlds. The usual “Containers and contents” is really an uninspired rendering of snod bcud.

<sup>40</sup> This is a canonical Father Tantra (pha rgyud) that has also been discovered by rMa lCam me, as well as by gShen chen Klu dga'. It is included under the title sDong po dgu 'dus lta ba'i rgyud chen zhes bya ba in *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, vol. 216, pp. 1-100. This is the version discovered by 'Ol (var. 'Od/'Or) sgom phug pa. The Father Tantras are explained in the corpus known as the “Five Supreme Citadels” (gSas mkhar mchog lnga), on which see Ch. Ramble, “Le culte de la divinité Bonpo gTo mchog mkha' 'gying”, p. 476/

In the leopard-skin bag were the outer, inner, and secret categories of the *Myriads* ('Bum):

- among the outer *Myriads* were *The Myriads Defining the Eight Elements, in Eight Parts* (*Khams brgyad gtan la phab pa'i 'bum dum pa brgyad*), and *The Nine Series of the Great Root-Texts and Commentary* (*rTsa 'grel chen mo sde dgu*);
- among the inner *Myriads* were *The Four Series of the Myriads of the Devas* (*Lha 'bum sde bzhi*); *The Four Series of Divine Myriads* (*gSas 'bum sde bzhi*), and *The Two Fragments of the Commentary on the Myriads* ('Bum 'grel dum bu gnyis) which in all makes ten works;
- among the secret *Myriads* were ten works<sup>41</sup> plus one commentary,<sup>42</sup> as well as *The White and Black Myriads of the Nāgas* (*Klu 'bum dkar nag*) in four parts.<sup>43</sup>

As to the texts included in the bear-skin bag, there is some confusion in terms of their classification in four categories comprising outer, inner and secret tantric teachings and a special category for Dzogchen. However, there are clearly only three categories: outer tantras, inner tantras, and secret Dzogchen teachings. As will be seen below, the inner category seems to include Dzogchen works, although they are apparently tantric works associated with Dzogchen and not *actual* Dzogchen texts:<sup>44</sup>

- the outer, general category contains three series of works, described as “outer teachings on funerary rituals” (*phyi 'dur bon*),<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Due to the spelling variants in between sPa ston's work and Shar rdza's, I will refrain from attempting at translating their titles. In sPa ston's, these texts are: 1. *Lha mo dbyings 'bum*, 2. *rMa 'bum dkar chad*, 3. *gTsug 'bum 'bar ba*, 4. *Theg pa gser 'bum*, 5. *Nyi ma 'od 'bum*, 6. *Rin chen spungs 'bum*, 7. *Nyi khri chu 'bum*, 8. *Thugs rje rgyun 'bum*, 9. *g.Yung drung sems kyi gter 'bum*, and *rDzogs pa lha 'bum dkar po*. In Shar rdza's, they are listed as: 1. *Lha mo dbyings 'bum*, 2. *rMa 'bum gar chad*, 3. *gTsug 'bum 'bar ba*, 4. *Theg pa gser 'bum*, 5. *Nyi ma 'od 'bum*, 6. *Rin chen spungs 'bum*, 7. *Nyi khri chig 'bum*, 8. *Thugs rje rgyun 'bum*, 9. *g.Yung drung ye 'bum*, and *rDzogs pa lha 'bum dkar po*.

<sup>42</sup> The commentary is entitled *gTo sgrom 'bum tig*.

<sup>43</sup> sPa ston and Shar rdza count a total of thirty-four works associated with the *Myriads* while counting carefully the number of texts enumerated above, I found forty-two (8+9+10+10+1+4). They must have a special system of counting these works which eludes me.

<sup>44</sup> These are styled as “the series of Secret Mantras [associated] with Dzogchen” (*rdzogs chen gsang sngags kyi sde*).

<sup>45</sup> This first series counts six works dedicated to: 1. *gri 'dur* (funerary rite for the killed), 2. *bitsan 'dur* (funerary rite for a lord or king), 3. *bkra 'dur* (funerary rite aimed at re-installing good auspices after a death), 4. *g.ya' 'dur* (maybe

- “inner rituals for the living” (*nang gson bon*),<sup>46</sup> and “riddles of the mountain crown” (*gtsug ri lde*);<sup>47</sup>
- the inner category contains *The Five Perfect Series* (*rDzogs pa sde lnga*),<sup>48</sup> each of these having a tantra; *The Three Tantras of the Black Ones* (*Nag po rgyud gsum*);<sup>49</sup> *The Dark Red Sharp Dagger* (*gZe phur dmar nag*), *The Black and White Ge khod* (*Ge khod dkar nag*), *The This 'Phen ritual of Zhang zhung Me ri* (*Zhang zhung this 'phen*), *The Distillation Practice of the Golden Arrow* (*gSer mda' tso sgrub*), *The Teaching of the Four Methods* (*Lung thabs bzhi*), *The Great and Small Root-text and Commentary* (*rTsa 'grel che chung*), *The Magical Key of the Seals* (*Phyag rgya 'phrul gyi lde mig*), the root-text and commentary of *The Explanation of the Aggregates* (*Phung po ti ka'i rtsa 'grel*);<sup>50</sup>

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corresponding to the *gab 'dur* mentioned in the *Kun 'bum*, 5. *lhe'u 'dur* (maybe for *lde'u 'dur*), and 6. *sman 'dur* (a funerary rite with medical purpose?). I am unsure of the meaning of these rites and how to translate their title correctly. This should be investigated in more details.

<sup>46</sup> There are five works in this category: 1. *lha snyegs*, 2. *'khon 'don*, 3. *gsas bzhi le brgyad*, 4. *thar glud*, and 5. *tshan bon*.

<sup>47</sup> There are eleven works (*sPa ston* and *Shar rdza* enumerate only ten) in this last category: 1. *gTsug ri gling grags che chung*, 2. *Na rag gting sbyong*, 3. *Kun rig lha ma srin sde brgyad kyi dkyil 'khor*, 4. *lCug le sgres po'i spur sbyong*, 5. *lCug le tsha tsha*, 6. *gNam gshen gyi me mchod*, 7. *g.Yung drung klong rgyas kyi sbyin sreg*, 8. *Cha gsum che chung bzhi*, 9. *gto bu lag ngan gyi pang skong*, 10. *Phyi nang gsang ba'i dbang mi 'dra ba dgu*, and 11. *dBang gi ye khrid chen mo*. The last one should not be confounded with the *Ye dbang chen mo* which is one of the two empowerment rituals of the *bKa' rgyud skor bzhi*.

<sup>48</sup> *Shar rdza* lists (p. 398) six texts under this heading: 1. *The Perfect Ambrosial Medicine* (*bDud rtsi sman rdzogs*), 2. *The Perfection Empowerment of the Sky* (*Lha rtse dbang rdzogs*, *lha rtse* being apparently a synonym for “sky”), 3. *The Profound Perfection of Miracles* (*rDzu 'phrul gting rdzogs*), 4. *The Wrathful Eternal Perfection* (*g.Yung drung khro rdzogs*), 5. *The Abyssal Perfection of the Mātṛkāś* (*Ma mo klong rdzogs*), and 6. *The Perfection of Body, Speech, and Mind* (*sKu gsung thugs rdzogs*).

<sup>49</sup> Listed by *sPa ston* as *Re nag*, *Char nag*, and *Dhi nag*. In *Shar rdza's*, they are enumerated as: *Re nag*, *Phyar nag*, and *lTeng nag*.

<sup>50</sup> In this same category were also five purses (*khug ma lnga*) with numerous other works, listed as follows in *sPa ston's*: *khug ma lnga la khug sman bcu/ de la rgyud sde chen po gsum/ srid pa des chad kyi rgyud la/ des chad bcu'o/ rnam par ye 'brel gyi rgyud la gnas 'brel bdun no/ bse khog chen mo'i rgyud la/ phyi nang gsang gsum gyi bse khog bco lnga'o/ kun 'dus rin chen rtsa rgyud la/ 'brel ba che chung gsum/ gzhan yang rdo la gser zhun/ yi ge 'bru 'joms/ lha mo dgu/ phreng bsgril rnam gsum/*. In *Shar rdza's*, the list is as follows: *khug ma lnga la khug sde bcu/ de la rgyud chen po gsum/ srid pa das chad kyi rgyud la das chad dgu/ srid pa ye 'grol gyi rgyud la gnas 'grel bdun/ bse khog chen mo'i rgyud la phyi nang gsang ba'i bse khog bco lnga/ kun 'dus rin chen rtsa rgyud la 'grel pa che chung gsum/ gzhan yang mang ngo/*. The two lists are rather close to one another but still there are some significant differences. Maybe some works were difficult to identify, explaining why *Shar rdza* skipped them, starting with the *rDo la gser zhun* (*Refining Gold on a Stone*) which has probably nothing to do with the text



- the secret category of the Supreme Peak (*yang rtse*) or Dzogchen deals with the three series of Tantras belonging to the Mind Class (*Sems phyogs*); this contains *The Great Ultimate Stage of the Mind* (*Sems kyi mtha' rim chen mo*); the series of Treatises associated with the *Cycle of the Nine Arcana* (*Gab pa dgu skor gyi rgyud sde*), including nine other works, starting with *The Pure Treasury of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' byang mdzod*); *The Inner Teaching on Mind* (*Sems kyi khog lung*); *The Tantra of the Eternal Ultimate Cycle* (*g.Yung drung mtha' skor gyi rgyud*), including *The Celestial Peak of the Citadel* (*gSas mkhar dbyings kyi rtse mo*); thirteen ultimate cycles (*mtha' skor bcu gsum*); *The Great Primordial Emptiness of the Mind* (*Sems kyi ye stong chen mo*); *The Primordial Eternal Pervading* (*g.Yung drung ye khyab*), including fourteen minor works on Mind (*sems smad bcu bzhi*).<sup>51</sup>

There were no texts in the bear-skin bag which contained seven grains of white barley (*nas dkar mo 'bru bdun*).<sup>52</sup>

gZe bon<sup>53</sup> had four disciples known as the four great pillars (*ka ba chen mo bzhi*), plus a secret one (*gsang ba bo*), making a total of five main disciples. The four pillars were : 1. Sa stong 'brug lha, 2. sNyel byed ne gu, 3. gTsang ba, and 4. Na ro.<sup>54</sup> The identity of the secret disciple is unclear in sPa ston's narration but according to Shar rdza (*Legs bshad mdzod* p. 400), it was sNyel byed himself.<sup>55</sup> The latter requested

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of the same title authored by Mañjuśrīmitra and included in the *Sems sde* series of works in the rNying ma tradition.

<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, except for the *Gab pa dgu skor* and the *g.Yung drung ye khyab*, nearly all works belonging to this category do not seem to have survived. On the *Gab pa*, see gShen chen Klu dga', *Byang chub sems gab pa dgu skor*, in *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, vol. 216, pp. 19-192; see also Kapstein, "The Commentaries of the Four Clever Men." On the *g.Yung drung ye khyab*, see Khu tsha zla 'od, *gSas mkhar g.yung drung ye khyabs (=khyab) lta ba'i rgyud*, in *ib.*, pp. 101-194. As can be seen, these texts have individual paginations in vol. 216.

<sup>52</sup> This is maybe a reference to an offering rite since we have seen this expression above when the three Buddhists arrived in gZe ban Shes rab rgyal mtshan's house at night. We should also remember that it is from this bear-skin bag that mTha' bzhi 'phrul gsas took a volume on the practice of dBal phur nag po. One could venture to say that the bag was empty because mTha' bzhi had already taken its contents.

<sup>53</sup> Erroneously named gZi ban in sPa ston's (p. 329).

<sup>54</sup> Their names are different in Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 400): 1. Sa ston 'brug lha, 2. sTong 'byams dgra bla skyabs, 3. dBang, and 4. sNa ro.

<sup>55</sup> gShen rNel byid gur in Shar rdza. sNyel byed was supposed to be no. 2 among the four pillars. Therefore, the list provided by sPa ston does not sound correct. The narration is even shorter in sGa ston's *gTer gyi kha byang* (p. 80) which does not list any of the four pillars.

numerous teachings from gZe bon<sup>56</sup> and made donations to him, in particular to receive instructions on the practice of Phur pa. sNyel byed thought that since his master was Buddhist,<sup>57</sup> he would probably not need the Bon texts. Therefore, he invited gZe sgur, had him drink *chang* in such a quantity that the latter became completely intoxicated. Taking advantage of the situation, he took gZe sgur's walking stick and *mālā* and showing them to gZe's wife, said: "Give me the treasure bags."<sup>58</sup> The unsuspecting wife brought the bags and handed them to him. Then, sNyel byed made a large offering to gZe sgur and asked to be given all these Bon texts but the master declared: "If you want to copy them, do so and verify your own copy, but I cannot let you keep the original texts." However, unwilling to follow gZe sgur's order, sNyel byed did not return the originals, which greatly displeased the master. This was a bad sign and a negative action in consequence of which sNyel byed was soon stricken with leprosy. However, before he died, he was able to give the transmission to Zhal blo sGom pa ring mo<sup>59</sup> who then gave it to rMe rig dpa' bo.<sup>60</sup> The latter gave it to his son, the famed Gur zhog pa Lha ri gNyan po (1024–1091).<sup>61</sup>

Another line of transmission went through Sa stong 'Brug lha who gave the teachings to Khu Dro ra bon po.<sup>62</sup> The latter gave it to dBang ldan Zhu g.yas legs po (b.1002), the famed disciple of gShen chen Klu dga' (996–1035). He gave the transmission to Zug Ra 'phen,<sup>63</sup> and this

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<sup>56</sup> sPa ston reads "Sa stong" (the first of the four pillars) but I follow Shar rdza who corrected this reading to gZe bon (i.e., gZe sgur), which actually makes more sense.

<sup>57</sup> This reflection is surprising since gZe sgur is always presented as being a bon po. There is something unclear in the narrative as it has reached us.

<sup>58</sup> Showing the master's walking stick and his *mālā* is intended to show that he has the authorization of the master and can therefore ask for the treasure bags.

<sup>59</sup> Zhang blon sGom ring mo in Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 400.

<sup>60</sup> rMe'u rog dbal po in *id.*, p. 400.

<sup>61</sup> In the colophon to the *Kun 'dus rin chen rtsa rgyud kyi 'grel pa* (which is included in the *gter mas* handed over to gZe sgur, see *supra* note 50), the line of transmission is given as follows (p. 570): 1. a tsa ra mi gsum, 2. ban dhe mi gsum, 3. gZe bon sgur po, 4. rNel byed ne gu (sNyel byed is consistently spelt rNel byed/byid in other sources such as the present text, and the *Legs bshad mdzod*), 5. Zhang mo sgom pa rong mo, 6. rMeng rog dbal po, 7. rje Lha ri gnyen po, 8. Shang pa jo gzhon (Jo bo/sras gzhon nu), 9. gTsang pa dPal shes (dPal ldan shes rab), 10. g.Yo ston Nam mkha' rin chen, 11. Zhang ston Sher gzhon (Shes rab gzhon nu), 12. gTso bon shes rab, and 13. gTso btsun sMon lam blo gros. Zhang ston (Shes rab gzhon nu) also gave the transmission to gShen btsun Ye shes blo gros who was a master of gTso btsun sMon lam blo gros (no. 13). A similar (but not identical) line of transmission is given in the colophon of another version of the same text included in vol. 191 of the *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>62</sup> Zhu Drang ra bon po in *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 401.

<sup>63</sup> Zug Ra 'phan in *id.*, p. 401. Shar rdza also notes that Zhu g.yas gave the transmission of the Treasures to sKyid po and sKye se. These two are lineage holders of the Bon po Dzogchen tradition.

constitutes the Upper Lineage (*stod kyi brgyud pa*). As we have seen above Zug/gZugs Ra 'phen also received the Lower Lineage, so that both Upper and Lower lines of transmission merged in him. Zug is also celebrated as an expert in the Phur pa practice.<sup>64</sup>

### 3. The origin of the designation "Northern Treasures"

Since the three *atsaras* took the Treasure texts from the main storeroom in bSam yas and wandered in the north, diffusing them in northern La stod, this system has become known as the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*). Before that, there were no treasure collections associated with that name. It is reported by both sPa ston and Shar rdza that whoever engages in the practice of these Northern Treasures will encounter only good auspices and become very powerful.

### 4. Additional Revelations associated with the Northern Treasures

sPa ston explains that there are several other sets of Treasure discoveries associated with the Byang gter system.

[1]. The first among these concerns Nga 'phrang lha'i dbang phyug (d.u.) and his discovery of Treasure texts in Kailash (Gangs Ti se). Among his revelations were:

- *The Ten Perfections of the Nine Excellent Speeches* (gSung rab dgu rdzogs dang bcu),<sup>65</sup> together with *The Commentary on the Myriads* ('Bum tig);
- texts associated with the Zo bo dbu dgu deity (guardian of the eastern gate in the Phur pa maṇḍalas), starting with *The Spontaneous Perfection of the Primordial Empowerment* (Ye dbang lhun rdzogs), *The Infinite Stream* (Chu bo rab 'byams), and so forth;
- *The Great Cow of the Mother Tantras* (Ma rgyud ba mo che);
- *The One Thousand-Fold Offering of the Five Kinds of Offerings* (mChod pa rnam lnga'i stong mchod);
- *The Gathering of the Nine Trunks* (sDong po dgu 'dus);<sup>66</sup>
- *The Universal Swirling Lotus* (Pad ma spyi 'khyil);

<sup>64</sup> At this point of the narrative, both sPa ston (p. 330) and Shar rdza (p. 401) recount that the Phur pa system has its own Treasure Protectors (*gter srung*) and does not depend on mundane Treasure Protectors ('jig rten gyi gter srung).

<sup>65</sup> Shar rdza (*Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 404) gives this title as gSung rab srid pa'i 'bum dgu rdzogs dang bcu, which is a text centered upon *mdos* rituals that was also discovered by Ra lcag mon skyid (see sPrul sku Khyung rgod rtsal, *Khod spungs dran pa nam mkha'i lung bstan lde mig chung ba*, p. 331).

<sup>66</sup> This is the famed Father Tantra (*pha rgyud*) that had already been found among the texts included in the tiger-skin bag (as seen above).

- the explanation (*bshad*), commentary (*'grel*) and ritual (*cho ga*) concerning the offering of butter-lamps for long life (*tshe'i mar me*), as well as numerous other Bon texts, all belonging to the Northern Treasures.<sup>67</sup>

[2]. Fierce Mantra texts (*drag sngags*) were found in Shel gyi drag ra, in sPu rang.<sup>68</sup>

[3]. In Brag rgya bo,<sup>69</sup> *The Variegated Myriads of the Nāgas* (*Klu 'bum khra'o [=khra bo]*) was discovered by a hunter (*khyi ra ba*).

[4]. Numerous teachings belonging to the Bon of Cause (*rgyu'i bon*)<sup>70</sup> such as *The Public Reversal* (*Khrom*<sup>71</sup> *bzlog*), and so forth, were discovered in gSer thang sha ba, in the north.

[5]. In Pha bong g.Yu ris can, numerous texts were found, such as *The Sādhana of the Lord of the gNyan* (*gNyan rje sgrub thabs*), etc., all belonging to the Northern Treasures.

[6]. In Tsha thog ting ding mo, Khro tshang 'Brug lha discovered *The Myriads Discourses of the Loving Compassionate Mother* (*Thugs rje byams ma'i mdo 'bum*), together with its cycle of practice (*sgrub skor*), as well as numerous magical teachings of Bon. He transmitted his revelations to his sister Khro chung ma, after whom the lineage passed through Bla ma gzhon nu, and so on.

[7]. A collection of texts was hidden in La stod gtsang po. According to the history of their revelation, in early times, in order to protect the Revelation of Bon, sTon pa gshen rab taught the cycle of teachings known as *Zhang zhung this*, i.e., tantric teachings and rituals associated with the country of Zhang zhung. These teachings are said to have been transmitted through a lineage of ninety-two masters, starting with Khyung lha dgra 'dul, a Bon po hailing from Zhang zhung. The texts were placed in a copper chest and hidden on the top of Mount Kailash. Later, a *gter ston* named Zhang zhung U gu dgra 'dul is said to have recovered them.<sup>72</sup> Then the lineage passed through sixty masters down to another Bon po of Zhang zhung, named Lha ro dkar po, who was able to bind gods and demons into servitude. He is said to have hidden the texts in La stod gtsang po.

Centuries later, when the Buddhist master gZe ston sPu gu rgyal mtshan was thirty, one night he dreamt of three individuals dressed in

<sup>67</sup> Not listed.

<sup>68</sup> No list is given (p. 330).

<sup>69</sup> Often associated with the northern direction in the expression *byang phyogs brag rgya bo*. This is a famed Treasure site (*gter gnas*) associated with several *gter ston*, including Khro tshang 'brug lha (956–1077).

<sup>70</sup> The text erroneously reads *rgyud bon*.

<sup>71</sup> Wrongly spelled *khram*.

<sup>72</sup> U gu might derive from g.Yung drung.

Bon po attires who told him:

— Ācārya! Wake up! There is a *siddhi* for you!<sup>73</sup>

— What *siddhi* do you have for me? he asked.

— To the east of this place, there is a rock shaped as a yak. If you dig at its base, you will find numerous texts dealing with killing (*bsad*), curing (*gso*), summoning (*dbab*), and reversing (*bzlog*). Take them!

gZe ston borrowed a pickaxe from his lay donor rNgon<sup>74</sup> Byang chub rdo rje and having started digging, he first found a human skull. Digging further, he found a copper chest which he opened and took out the texts of the *Zhang zhung this* corpus. There were four categories of works:

- four Tantras (*rgyud*) centered upon curing, associated with the *This dkar* teachings;
- three Tantras centered upon reversing, associated with the *This dmar*;
- two Tantras on killing, associated with the *This nag*; and
- ten works (on summoning?)<sup>75</sup> associated with the '*Dzab this*.<sup>76</sup>

rNgon Byang chub told gZe ston: "Ācārya! Give us a method of protection against hail!" gZe ston taught him the '*Dzab this* and gave him back the pickaxe. Thereafter, gZe ston travelled to Ba gor<sup>77</sup> dBen sa kha, showed the texts to Bru sha rJe btsun and eventually gave them to him but he also cleverly asked Zhang grags to make a copy of them. Then, he gave the transmission to Do ri<sup>78</sup> rgya bon in the form of two small volumes.<sup>79</sup>

[8]. Other collections of texts associated with the Northern Treasures are the revelations made by Go lde 'phags pa under a rock in g.Yung drung seng mchong. These texts were:

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<sup>73</sup> In the revealed literature, Treasures (*gter ma*) are often presented as *siddhis* (*dnagos grub*) indicating that the one destined to retrieve a Treasure is a fortunate one who has reached accomplishments (*siddhis*).

<sup>74</sup> Wrongly spelt *rdeg* in sPa ston's work. It is clear that the editor of sPa ston's text used an original in *dbu med* and that he had obvious difficulties in transcribing it back correctly into *dbu chen*.

<sup>75</sup> There is no explicit indication about the nature of these works but given the list of four topics that were prophesized to be included in the chest, it seems logical to attribute the teachings about summoning to the fourth kind of *This* teachings.

<sup>76</sup> sPa ston text gives the reading *mdzub this*, but Shar rdza (Karmay, p. 149) reads it correctly as '*dzab this*.

<sup>77</sup> Bar go in Shar rdza (*op. cit.*).

<sup>78</sup> Dod ci in Shar rdza (*ib.*).

<sup>79</sup> Presumably those made by Zhang grags (named Zhang grags bon po in the *Legs bshad mdzod*).

- *The Treatise on the Method of Realization leading to the Unsurpassable State* (*Bla med go 'phang sgrub thabs kyi mdo rgyud*),
- *The Extensive Eternal Expanse* (g.Yung drung klong rgyas) in twenty-eight chapters;
- funerary ritual texts on *Kun rig*, as well as instructions on the austerities performed by gShen practitioners, and so forth.

He also received an oral transmission (*snyan brgyud*) which he codified in numerous works, such as *The Golden Instructions of Dran pa about the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen dran pa gser gdams*), etc.<sup>80</sup> He gave the transmission of his revelations to Khyung po Nang chen grags pa, the latter's nephew, and both of them gave the transmission to Khyung po bSod rgyal.

[9]. Eventually, the revelations made by Mar pa 'phen bzang in sPu rangs also belong to the Northern Treasures. Mar pa found wooden boxes in Shel mtsho mu le had and sold them to the master Shu bon dge bsnyen. The contents of the boxes consisted in numerous scrolls (*shog dril*) containing Bon texts including:

- *The White, Black, and Variegated Myriads of Nāgas* (*Klu 'bum dkar nag khra gsum*) in three volumes, and
- *The Myriads Entrusted to Nāgas, gNyan, and Lords of the Earth* (*Klu gnyan sa bdag gtod kyi 'bum*), in four volumes, together with their complementary works.

### 5. The dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal Revelations

In his *Biographies of a Hundred Treasure Revealers* (gTer ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar, p. 434), Kong sprul suggests several identifications of Bon and rNying ma gter ston, among whom he considers dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal (b. 1175)<sup>81</sup> and Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408) to be one and the same person.<sup>82</sup> It is possible that the existence of the word *rgod* (vulture) and the fact that both *gter ston* have discovered works in Zang zang lha brag prompted Kong sprul to suggest their identification. However, their dates are not compatible,<sup>83</sup> nor are their revelations. For instance, given the gigantic importance of the

<sup>80</sup> On the *rDzogs chen dran pa gser gdams*, see Clemente, *Visionary Encounters*.

<sup>81</sup> See Roberto Vitali's paper in the present issue for another birth date of Khyung rgod rtsal.

<sup>82</sup> The very same identification is made by the 11<sup>th</sup> Si tu pa (Padma dBang mchog rgyal po) in his *Rin chen gter gyi chos mdzod chen mo'i rtogs brjod ngo mtshar bdud rtsi'i byung gnas*, p. 541.

<sup>83</sup> Khyung rgod rtsal's date of birth (1175) fits relatively well with the dates of one of his disciples, 'A zha Blo gros rgyal mtshan, who lived from 1198 to 1263.

*dGongs pa zang thal* among rGod ldem's treasure revelations,<sup>84</sup> if both masters were one and the same person, a mention of this cycle should appear one way or another in the narratives associated with Khyung rgod rtsal. This is not the case.

In general, the discovery of Treasure texts by Khyung rgod rtsal is classified under the heading of the *dPon gsas ma* and not under the Northern Treasures, although he revealed texts in Zang zang lha brag, one of the most important locations for the Bon and rNying ma systems Byang gter, together with Ri bo bkra bzang. His revelation in Zang zang lha brag took place in \*1208 (*sa pho 'brug*) when, in the Vermillion Cavern (Brag phug mtshal kha ma) he found the following collections of texts:

- *The Utterly Secret Refutation of Objections* (*Yang gsang rtsod bzlog*),<sup>85</sup>
- *The Six Rituals of the Oral Transmission* (*sNyan brgyud chog drug*),<sup>86</sup>
- *The Secret Dhāraṇīs* (*gSang gzungs*),<sup>87</sup>
- *The Dhāraṇī of Long Life* (*Tshe gzungs*),<sup>88</sup>
- *The Miraculous Birth of Drenpa* (*Dran pa brdzus skyes*),<sup>89</sup>
- *The Zhang zhung Cycle of Tsewang Rigdzin* (*Tshe dbang zhang zhung ma*),<sup>90</sup>
- *The Great Primordial Empowerment* (*Ye dbang chen mo*),<sup>91</sup> as well as
- *The Offering Methods and The Correcting Methods of the Powerful Divine Lord of Treasures* (*gTer bdag lha btsan gyi bcos thabs*)

<sup>84</sup> On this collection, see Turpeinen, *Visions of Samantabhadra*, *passim*. On the vast corpus of exegetical works associated with this cycle, see Arguillère, "A History of the *dGongs pa zang thal* practice manuals", *passim*.

<sup>85</sup> On this text, see Karmay, *Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, p. 42, where it is stated that the text—provided it is identical to the one listed here—was discovered in a Tiger year which is given as 1218.

<sup>86</sup> An unusual rdzogs chen cycle centered upon Dran pa nam mkha', as well as the various practices of gShen lha 'od dkar. The cycle is also known as *The Six Rituals of Drenpa* (*Dran pa chog drug*). It is included in vol. 268 of the *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*.

<sup>87</sup> There is a *gSang gzungs* text included in the *sNyan brgyud chog drug*, pp. 469-507. It is presented as a revelation made by Khyung rgod rtsal in Zang zang lha brag, therefore the identification of the text should be correct.

<sup>88</sup> Not identified yet. Possibly a text similar to the *Tshe dbang bya ri ma*, on which see Achard, "Une *dhāraṇī* Bon po de Longue Vie Associée au Cycle du *Tshe dbang bya ri ma*, selon la tradition de Khod spungs Blo gros thogs med (1280–1337)", *passim*.

<sup>89</sup> Not identified yet.

<sup>90</sup> On which see Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>91</sup> Not identified yet but see no. 47 *supra*.

*mchod thabs*).<sup>92</sup>

Among his own “Buddhist” (*chos*) *gter ma* revelations, Khyung rgod rtsal is said in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 331) to have excavated the following works:

- *The Manifest Realization of Vajrasattva* (*rDo rje sems dpa'i mngon rtogs*),
- *The Practice of Vajrapāṇi* (*Phyag rdor gyi sgrub pa*),
- *The Methods for Curing Leprosy* (*Bro nad gso thabs*), and
- *The Practice of Guru Drakpo* (*Gu ru drag sgrub*).<sup>93</sup>

It is clear that these revelations do not show up in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *gter ma* and that the latter's numerous *gter ma* cycles do not appear among the collections revealed by dPon gsa Khyung rgod rtsal. Therefore, Kong sprul's identification of both masters cannot not be regarded as valid.

### Conclusion

It is interesting to note that the expression *Byang gter* applies both in Bon and the rNying ma tradition to a large group of individual texts and collections of texts actually revealed in several places. Therefore, in both lineages, it never refers to a single set of revelations but rather covers various textual corpuses and includes multiple Treasure revealers. It might also be noteworthy to highlight the fact that despite being associated with the Northern direction, the Treasures belonging to this system were actually not recovered in the “north” such as in “north of Lhasa” as is sometimes imagined: rather, they were in a large part actually discovered in sTod (i.e., La stod) which is actually west from g'Tsang.<sup>94</sup>

Another common trait between the Bon and the rNying ma *Byang gter* systems is the endemic presence of the *yi dam* Phur pa. It is true that in both traditions the practice of Phur pa has become quite predominant in several lineages (for instance the Shar rdza lineage in Bon and the bDud 'joms lineage among the Nyingmapas) but probably not as widely as in the Northern Treasures.

One notable element of difference between Bon and rNying ma *Byang gter* traditions is, compared to the central role of the *dGongs pa*

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<sup>92</sup> Not identified yet.

<sup>93</sup> I have not been able to identify any of these works so far.

<sup>94</sup> See Valentine, “Introduction to and Translation of *The Garland of Light*,” p. 133 and 135.



*zang thal* in the rGod ldem revelations, the relatively limited presence of rDzogs chen texts in the Bon po Northern Treasures. This impression might be suggested by the fact that, as we have seen above, most of the Great Perfection textual corpus in the latter has apparently been lost.

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