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# Magical Recipes from the *Grimoire* of a Tibetan Bonpo Priest

**Abstract:** The Tibetan *grimoire* is a genre of writing linked to the profession of Tibetan lamas, and one that, until now, has attracted little attention from scholars. One of the main difficulties with undertaking further research on such works has remained the proprietary aspect of closely guarded trade secrets of occult lore. A few samples of Tibetan Buddhist manuals of spells have been published, but no such collection has come down to us from the Bon tradition until now. This contribution analyses the content of such a collection of miscellaneous spells that once belonged to a late anonymous Bonpo master from eastern Tibet. The article seeks to discern the main concerns of the patrons in search of help from these religious practitioners, who offered magical solutions to problems of everyday life.

## 1 Introduction

Priests or lamas of the Tibetan Bon religion are above all else ritual specialists. Their trade is one which requires the performance, in a group or alone, of rites for a relatively well-defined range of desirable outcome determined by their sponsors and patrons. These aims are numerous but mostly gravitate around the needs for health, wealth, good fortune, the exorcism of noxious influences and against bad luck.

In order to cater to their clients' needs, Bonpos, throughout their history, have had to come up with rites that would satisfy them. These rites are vast in number and constitute the bulk of the Bon repertoire of ritual activities. These are subsumed under the category of *To* (*gto*). *To* rites are one of the four main practices of Bon, the others being divination (*mo*), astrological calculation (*rtsis*) and diagnosis of spiritual causes of illness or trouble (*dpyad*). It is not surprising to see many of these various practices disseminated widely in the Bon literature.<sup>1</sup> One wonders, too, if Bon rituals are not mostly *To* ritual in nature since the majority involve the propitiation and control of spiritual beings, with the end results clearly stated.

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<sup>1</sup> Karmay 2010, 54.

The term *To* remains sufficiently complex due to the type of rituals that may be ascribed to it. Epstein, for example, understands *To Jü* (*gto bcos*) as being a ‘pragmatic’ form of magic which does not need spiritual agencies such as those that Buddhism (or Bon for that matter) would provide.<sup>2</sup> These rituals do not need the special spiritual aid that religion would bring, but work by themselves. He appears to understand the concept as a form of ‘natural’ magic, which works by bringing different elements together which will naturally provoke the desired response. He sees it as a mechanical process whereby if one would use a white stone to retrace the path taken by a black cat, for example, the bad luck would thus be removed without the help of any other agencies such as those offered by religion (*chos* or *bon*).<sup>3</sup>

For Tucci, the *To* rite is first a rite of exorcism where a personification of negative energies in the form of a human corpse (either drawn or moulded in roasted barley dough, a *torma* (*gtor ma*) or sacrificial cake) is symbolically killed and dismembered at the conclusion of the *To chen* (*gto chen*), the great *To* dance before the Tibetan New Year.<sup>4</sup> He further distinguished four main rites which have the goal of saving oneself and the community from negative influences. Hence, he differentiates the four rites of the Cross-threads (*mdos*), Ransom (*glud*), Offerings to the gods above (*mdos yas*) and *To*.<sup>5</sup> Although Tucci concedes that the first three rites are often all involved with the use of the Cross-thread structure, an artifice made of woven coloured threads strung between wooden sticks, he still distinguishes the *To* rite as being essentially a ritual for driving away evil using the throwing of *tormas* (*gtor bzlog*).<sup>6</sup> In fact, all the above-mentioned rites have the same aims and what seems to make the *To* different for Tucci is its fierce (*drag po*) character that involves the agency of wrathful tutelary deities. It uses magical weapons, especially prepared sacrificial cakes, that are thrown in the direction determined (through divination and other means) to repel the harm. It is an offensive, an attack rite, whereas the others are defensive.<sup>7</sup>

Karmay (2010) and Norbu’s (1995) treatments follow a more traditional understanding of the genre. Karmay ascribes the *To* to rites that have mythical antecedents (*smrang* and *rabs*).<sup>8</sup> That is, each rite first refers for its legitimacy and power to an account (however brief) which involved the very first performance

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<sup>2</sup> Epstein 1977, 19 n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Epstein 1977, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Tucci 1980, 155.

<sup>5</sup> Tucci 1980, 176.

<sup>6</sup> Tucci 1980, 177–180.

<sup>7</sup> Tucci 1980, 180.

<sup>8</sup> Karmay 2010, 55.

of the ritual. Norbu stipulates that the *To* rites are part of the Twelve Lore of Bon<sup>9</sup> and that to each lore are attributed various myths such as the ‘*To* (Rites), Lore of the Proclamation (of the Origin)’ or ‘He Who Performs the *To* (Rites), Who Knows How to Proclaim (the Origin)’ (*smrang shes gto dgu*).<sup>10</sup>

The basis of the *To* is a myth which describes the origin of the world, existence, gods, demons and humans.<sup>11</sup> This involves some account of the first use of the rite, its motive and the details of its performances, the latter varying according to the types of spirits involved and the aims.

The lore of *To* comprises a wide variety of rites which propitiate and interact with the spiritual denizens of the heavens, the sky spirits, demons bound by oaths and spirits of the land, the underground and roaming spirits.<sup>12</sup> Humans’ activities affect a myriad of beings who demand payment for being disturbed. Thus, the *To* category was created to propitiate, to remove curses, maledictions and negativities coming from all kinds of non-humans and humans.<sup>13</sup>

(One can) perform the ‘*To* of the *mang* to drive away the nine Dre’ (*dre dgu bskyal ba’i smrang gto*), the ‘*To* for the Si, to suppress the ten Si’ (*sri bcu gnon pa’i sri gto*), the ‘*To* for dangers, to repel periodic misfortunes’ (*kag nyen bzlog pa’i nyen gto*) and the ‘astrological *To*, to harmonise the interdependence of existence’ (*rten ‘brel srid pa’i rtsis gto*). From among these four methods of *To* rites one must discern which is most suitable to subjugate (the negative entities).<sup>14</sup>

The expression ‘the nine *To* (*gto dgu*)’ is a generic expression which means ‘all rites.’ The number nine specifies multiplicity, not a number,<sup>15</sup> although some sources claim that there are 360 different kinds of *To* rites,<sup>16</sup> and that each of the latter requires a ‘proclamation’ (*smrang*) in order to open communication with the beings involved.<sup>17</sup> Thus, ‘proclamation’ of the mythical account is an indispensable part of the *To*, despite hardly being recited in its entirety and usually just hinted at. This is a characteristic of Bon rites. But is it? The collection of miscellaneous rites which is addressed here contains many parts of *To* rites but is

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<sup>9</sup> Norbu 1995, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Norbu 1995, 49.

<sup>11</sup> Norbu 1995, 164.

<sup>12</sup> Norbu 1995, 47–48.

<sup>13</sup> Norbu 1995, 125.

<sup>14</sup> *Gzi brjid* cited in Norbu 1995, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Norbu 1995, 164.

<sup>16</sup> Norbu 1995, 172.

<sup>17</sup> Norbu 1995, 241–242 n. 76.

almost entirely devoid of any reference to myths and other narratives with the few exceptions found in titles (see for example fol. 150b).<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that many Bonpo lamas have collected methods and techniques of practical magic, which include medicinal concoctions, charms and amulets, spells and other characteristic methods. Many are appended to standard ritual cycles such as Wasé (*Dbal gsas*), Takla Mebar (*Stag la me 'bar*), Tamdrim (*Rta mgrin*) and others, while some are individual compositions which collect techniques and 'secrets' from various sources. Some are also transmitted from one generation to another and are to be found in family collections. This is not a unique trait among Bonpos since there are known collections of these recipe books penned by famous Buddhist hierarchs such as Bari Lotsawa (Ba ri lo tsā ba, 1040–1111), Mipam (Mi pham rnam rgyal, 1846–1912), and others. These are catalogued under the designation of Be'u bum (*be'u 'bum*; lit. *Calf Nipple*).<sup>19</sup>

The manuscript under consideration here belongs to a category known as 'beneficial speech' (*man ngag*). This literary class constitutes practical ritual instructions as opposed to *gdams ngag* (Skt. *upadeśa*) which consists in practical instructions for meditation, insight or yogic endeavour. Both kinds of treatise, Man ngag and Dam ngag, are geared towards individual teaching directly from master to disciple. Hence, these are often referred to as esoteric, oral or pith instructions and are typically not shared widely.<sup>20</sup>

I have not encountered the descriptive term *be'u bum* in Bon sources. Man ngag is what is the most found and each booklet is attached to a ritual cycle. The Commentarial Canon (Bka' brten) of Bon contains roughly 218 Man ngag. A few examples will demonstrate the multiplicity of topics of these *précis* and the malleability of this genre.

Among these works we find the 'Three Part Instructions on the Severance rite' from the cycle of the *Very Seminal Tantra of the Heart of Kuntu Zangpo* (*Kun bzang thugs kyi yang thig rgyud las/ gsang gcod man ngag rnam gsum*),<sup>21</sup> written by Jiangchub Dorje Tsal (Byang chub rdo rje rtsal, b. 1705).<sup>22</sup> It consists in practical directions on the Outer, Inner and Secret practices relating to the body, considerations (*rtog*) on spirits (*'byung po*) and the modes of gods and demons (*lha 'dre*) during the performance of the rite of Severance.<sup>23</sup> This rite is used extensively in

<sup>18</sup> Fol. refers to the folio number of our manuscript. See below.

<sup>19</sup> Cuevas 2009, 165–168.

<sup>20</sup> Kapstein 1996, 275–277; 284 n.1.

<sup>21</sup> KT 145-13, 451–465.

<sup>22</sup> Achard 2008, 53 n.196.

<sup>23</sup> KT 145-13, 452. Note that in all references to KT, the first figure refers to the volume, the second (after the hyphen) to the number of the work within the volume, and the last (after the comma) to the page numbers.

Tibet and consists in the offering of one's own body, speech and mind to gods and demons in order to conquer evils and personal propensities, annihilate karmic debts and other things. One remarkable feature of the Severance cycles in Bon is that they contain extensive ancillary rites which enable the practitioner to extend the ritual performance from self-development to rites for the mundane benefit of his/her patrons. Thus, there is the *Profound Rite of Severance of Kyema, the heart essence of the sky-goers, profound and secret* (*Zab gsang mkha' 'gro'i snying thig kyi kye ma'i zab gcod*, KT 037) of Sang nga ling pa (Gsang sngags gling pa, b. 1864). Besides its main ritual practice of Severance, it contains miscellanea for a Long Life ritual (KT 037-8, 167–176), protection (KT 037-7, 151–165), wealth increasing (KT 037-9, 177–191), war magic (KT 037-11, 199–205), fire offerings (KT 037-14, 245–253) and other rites.

A *Man ngag* which is self-explanatory is the *Instructions on rain making for universal benefit* (*Kun la phan pa'i char 'beb man ngag*).<sup>24</sup> This is an ancillary rite associated with another Severance cycle, that of the *Tantra on the Severance rite of the Secret Sky-goers* (*Mkha' 'gro gsang ba'i gcod rgyud*). It is an anonymous work which is tied to the Severance rites of Shardza Trashig Gyaltsen (Shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan, 1859–1934) and may have been either written by him or could possibly represent oral instructions from him. The two volumes of the *Tantra on the Severance rite of the Secret Sky-goers* (KT 064–065) is another perfect illustration of the Severance corpus which mirrors in more expansive ways the various rituals with many added functions. It is illustrated with diagrams of charms and amulets which parallel the grimoire which we will be examining shortly.

Furthermore, there is the *Instructions on the methods of the all illuminating Loving Mother that protects from disease, prevents and causes rain to fall* (*Kun gsal byams ma'i nad srung char bkag char 'beb chu sgrub bcas kyi man ngag*).<sup>25</sup> It is a common protection rite involving the intervention of the Bon goddess Chamma (Byams ma), the Loving Mother, with the recitation of three different spells (*sngags*). The first<sup>26</sup> is to receive the protection of various feminine goddesses (*lha mo*), Manmo (*sman mo*) and Sky-goers and is recited using consecrated water from a vase for aspersion (*bkrus*). The second<sup>27</sup> controls gods and Sinpo demons (*lha dang srin*) using the fire Khyung (somewhat corresponding to the Indian garuda) and the fire element. The third<sup>28</sup> focuses on the chthonic

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<sup>24</sup> KT 065-39, 691–697.

<sup>25</sup> KT 248-20, 529–536.

<sup>26</sup> KT 248-20, 531–532.

<sup>27</sup> KT 248-20, 533–534.

<sup>28</sup> KT 248-20, 534.

snake deities, the *klu* (corresponding to the Indian *nāga*). Thus, the three-tiered world (heaven, earth and underworld) is brought under one's control to avert calamities and sicknesses.

## 2 The grimoire of Nyima Gyaltsen

### 2.1 Description

In 2007 while conducting fieldwork research at the Bonpo monastery of Yeshé in Western Sichuan, I was able to photograph the photocopy of a manuscript which consists of a collection of magical recipes. Because the text in question was available to me only in its photocopied version, it is difficult to speculate on the physical characteristics of the original. Its size was roughly 19 cm wide by 9 cm, and it appears to have been similar to almanacs (*lo tho*) or other personalized books of spells that are meant to be carried on one's person. It is impossible to speculate on the type of paper (local production or commercially made paper). However, I suspect the original to have been written on locally made Tibetan paper for the simple fact that the Chinese paper that was current in Western China prior to 2000 was a very thin product easily susceptible to wear and tear. There are no evident signs of damage that I have witnessed. The format is also typically Tibetan as opposed to the traditional Chinese format that bound paper 'accordion' style.

This text has a hand-drawn seal with the name of Nyima Gyaltsen (Nyi margyal mtshan) (Figs 1–2, fols 149b, 217b), a common Tibetan name which was sported by several important lamas. Its exact identification remains problematic but need not detain us for now. The actual manuscript apparently no longer exists, having been destroyed by the author or compiler (who was also the scribe).<sup>29</sup> The reason I was given for this was that this particular text contained 'unethical' rites such as ritual killing (*bsad pa*), subjugation spells, control over elemental spirits and others. The owner thought that it was not a good thing to keep and he was now more interested in ontological salvation rather than the practice of magic. The present owner of this copy, who has asked to remain anonymous, was able to borrow the manuscript for one night only to consult it.

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<sup>29</sup> It is not certain that Nyima Gyaltsen, alias Namkyap (Gnam skyabs), is the actual author of the grimoire or just the compiler. The exact provenance of the disparate elements composing this text points to either the spells have been taken from other collections of *To*, from different tantric cycles, or the recording of oral traditions.

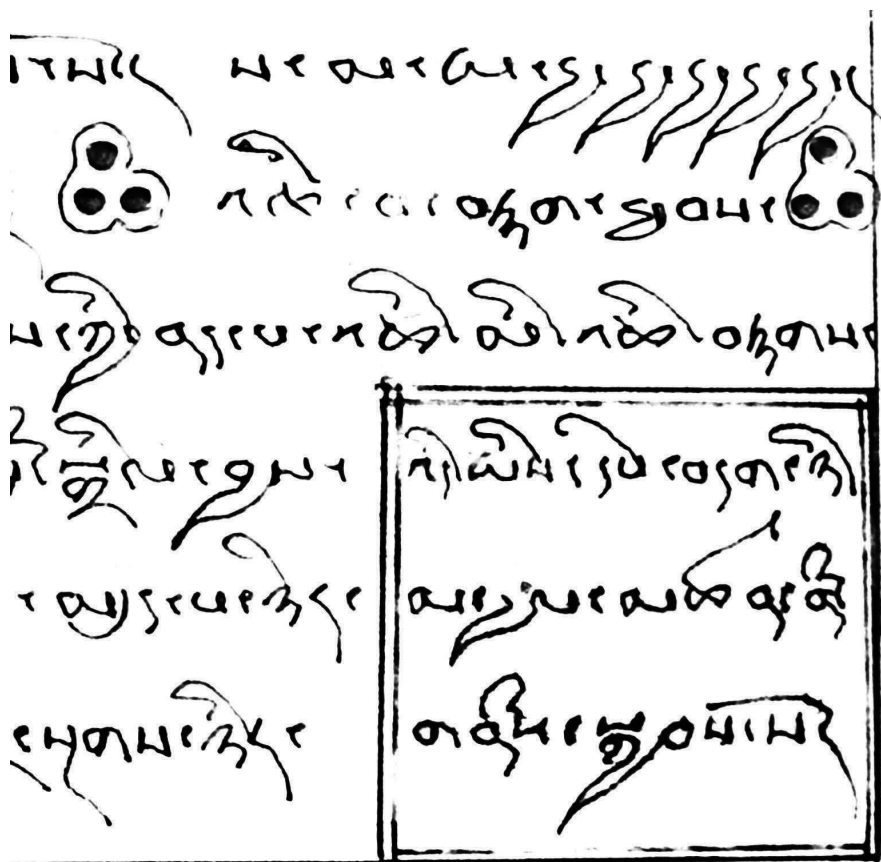


Fig. 1: Fol. 149b, inscription by the owner/compiler, 'This is my book Nyima Gyaltzen'.

It was then that he was able to make a photocopy of the work. The only sections missing are those specifically dealing with ritual killing which were taken out by the original owner before lending it.

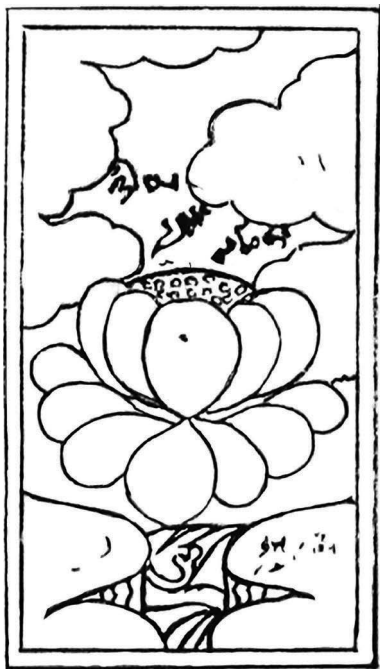


Fig. 2: Fol. 217b, seal of Nyima Gyaltzen.

The compilation is entitled *The burning razor of pith instructions, secret instructions for precipitous dispatch (under) the seal of pledge, (under) the seal (of secrecy) (Man ngag spu gri gyi 'bar ba bka' rgya mas rdzongs (rdzong) 'phrang sa ma ya rgya rgya)*. It definitely suggests that this material was restricted in its usage and transmission and required secrecy, empowerments and training. It also points out to a usage by clerics or lamas for professional reasons. This is not unlike the suggestion that the compilers of magical recipes books were priests by trade in other parts of the world and in antiquity.<sup>30</sup>

This collection consists of numbered 251 folios with fifteen missing (fols 28–43). The latter is due to the owner of the manuscript choosing not to share the ritual methods contained as stated above. There are 302 recipes covering a wide range of topics. Explanations on the manner of using these are not consistently addressed, suggesting that prior knowledge is required for the use of most of the recipes. This is consistent with the Buddhist *be'u bum* genre where prior knowl-

<sup>30</sup> Ritner 1993, 220–233.



edge of ritual methods, astrological calculation, divination and other activities is required.<sup>31</sup>

Each section is separated by a three-dot symbol (Fig. 3 below).



Fig. 3: Fol. 9b, A *Tha* and three-dot symbol.

The information contents under each range extends from the mere script of a mantra (fols 74, 98, 213) to more elaborate description of rites using a few folios. Other symbols are used such as stars with varying number of ‘arms’ as well as ornamental stacks representing the term *ithi* (Fig. 3, fol. 9b; Fig. 4, fol. 168), which is used in certain Bonpo texts to separate sections.



Fig. 4: Fol. 168, star figures with mantra.

Various drawings and representations of talismans that serve the rite’s functions are dispersed through the relevant text. Its internal organisation is haphazard, with the exception of the section on medicinal formulas which are grouped together (fols 116–132). The latter suggests that the section was ‘lifted’ together from one source or informant, but until we can produce further evidence, this has to remain a hypothesis.

<sup>31</sup> Lin 2005, 111; Cuevas 2010, 167.

## 2.2 Function and nature of *grimoire* composition

Ritual *précis* such as the above-mentioned are traditionally transmitted from one generation of master to the next. However, many are just written or compiled from various sources. Rarely are the sources of the compilation mentioned. In the past, I have seen mention of ‘after the manner of Shes rab rgyal mtshan’ which indicates a ritual tradition ascribed to the figure who founded Menri (sman ri) monastery, in Central Tibet, in 1405.<sup>32</sup> No sources are mentioned in this particular collection. This particular piece has been written by the same hand, as the handwriting demonstrates, and possibly over a good period of time raging from a year to much more. This indicates a personal copy for the purpose of gathering disparate material for ready consultation and compiled over a long period of time. The vast amount of material gathered points to fulfilling a great many different objectives. What makes this compilation particularly interesting is its subject matter, which illustrates the concerns of the clients of the lamas.

The fact that the author’s hand-drawn seal is found in two different places in the manuscript suggests that the author came to a halt at some point in its compilation and added further material later. Names of authors are typically inserted at the very end of composition, sometimes accompanied with the reasons for the compilation as well as the time and location. Hence, fol. 149b (Fig. 1) finishes with a square *ex libris* which is inscribed with: ‘dis (‘di’i) dpe bdag nyi ma rgyal mtshan nam gnams (gnam) skyabs so/ ‘The owner of this book is Nyi ma rgyal mtshan or (also called) Gnam skyabs’.<sup>33</sup>

The second mention of the owner and compiler is on fol. 217b (Fig. 2), which closes a section of the book with his name and a drawing of a lotus flower, without any other comments. The compilation nevertheless continues with the last folio I numbered at 252b.

As previously stated, with the exception of the section for medicinal compounds, the topics of the recipes do not bear any systematic order throughout. Many alternatives exist for any topic and this is what points to a compilation of methods carried out over time. In surveying the subject of the various formulas and rites, I have organised the 302 recipes into fifteen categories. Although I have tried to arrange these from categories which receive the greatest number of entries to the least, there are many spells, formulas and rites which are still difficult to identify or that cross categories. The main topics are therefore: health; medici-

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<sup>32</sup> des Jardins 2012, 190.

<sup>33</sup> Many thanks to Samten Karmay for his help in sorting out the script correctly and for this translation.

nal preparations; eradication of poisons; against thieves and robbers; weather control; wealth and worldly success; propitiating or controlling gods, demons, and so forth.

### 3 Categories in the *grimoire* of Nyima Gyaltsen

Here are the categories devised with some formulas illustrative of the concerns and practical methods offered.

#### 3.1 Health

We find methods for long life and fortune (fols 2, 12) recurring as a constant concern in Tibetan ritual. The rite of praying for ‘firm feet’ (*zhabs brtan*), that is, to request a spiritual master to remain among us for the benefit of all, became a genre in liturgical texts. It consists of poetic formulas requesting the master to continue to work for the welfare of others by remaining in his present incarnation, thus living long among us. Its narrative presupposes or takes into account that the master is sufficiently spiritually elevated as to be able to lengthen his life span by his mere spiritual abilities. As such, it has become a staple of Tibetan rituals and is embedded within shorter liturgical services as part of the Seven Limbs Prayer or as an independent text to be added in the appropriate section of a ritual or just to be repeated as a prayer for spiritual communion with one’s preceptor.<sup>34</sup> Long Life (*tshe ring*) rituals are almost universally included within Bonpo rituals. Such cycles as those mentioned above of the Severance practice or main Tantric cycles such as *Ma rgyud* or *Phur nag* contain individual sections dedicated to the Long Life ritual. These, as well as the very concise one in this Man ngag (fols 2–2b), use a vase in which the presence of deities is invoked with the use of petitions, visualisation and mantras. Presumably, the performer of such a rite will know what to do with it, as directions in more standard Long Life rites belonging to ritual cycles abound.

Another method relating to this topic is for strengthening the body (*lus kyī stobs rgyas thabs*, fol. 2b) which again involves the chanting of a special mantra with the ingestion of medicinal pills containing ingredients similar to what will be found in the later section on medicinal preparations.

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<sup>34</sup> Cabezon 1996, 344–357.

Among common ailments treated with spells and medicinal ingredients we find recipes for enhancing memory (fol. 3), eyesight (fol. 4), against choking (fol. 6), mountain sickness (fol. 9b), preventing burns from hot metal (fol. 10), overcoming long sickness (fol. 14), sickness due to evil spirits (fol. 13), toothache (fol. 18), epilepsy (fol. 91), to destroy a tumour (fol. 140), against insomnia (fol. 19), breast sickness (fol. 22), to increase appetite (fol. 24), to stop bleeding (fol. 25), against the flu (fol. 25), cataracts and eye inflammation (fol. 25), against poisons (fol. 50), to activate lactation (fol. 24), against lice (fol. 50), to pacify children crying at night (fol. 62), against foot and mouth sores (fol. 62), deafness (fol. 65), and so forth.

### 3.2 Alchemical and medicinal preparations

A whole section of this Man ngag is focused on tables with names of herbs and minerals to be used as medicine or alchemy. Fols 118 to 132b are all filled with circles and diagrams with names of ingredients, many difficult to identify at this point. Thus most, for now, remain unidentified and the directions for their use are somewhat mysterious. Hence, we have a medicinal pill for mountain ascetics which recommend applications of hot and cold arura (*Terminalia chebula*). (fol. 116)

Many of the directions in this section are accompanied by diagrams and some magic squares (Fig. 5, fol. 119b) which may indicate two different things: one might have to do with indicating the relative proportions of each ingredient in relation to each other; and the other with prognostics, by identifying with the source of the sickness (according to the law of correspondences with the directions of the compass).

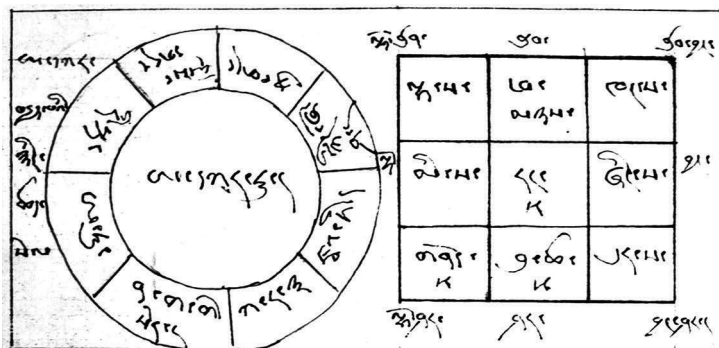


Fig. 5: Fol. 119b, medicinal ingredient chart.

However, at this point, without prior familiarity with Tibetan traditional medicine principle, its ingredients as well as the Tantric medicinal principles as expounded in its treatises, it is too soon to be able to positively identify the methods referred to in these cryptic directions. We find aloe (*Aquilaria allagocha*, *a dkar ru* [fol. 119] or *a ka ru* [fol. 122]), camphor (*khabur*, *gabur*, *ka bur*, fols 120, 121, 121b), *chirata* (a type of gentian, *Swertia chirata*, *tig ta*) and bamboo lime (*cu gang*) as the most common.

### 3.3 For wealth and success

Various methods for worldly success (fols 6b, 7, 7b, 8, 8b, 12, 13, 16), wealth (fols 13, 51, 192, etc.), and the accumulation of food (fol. 13), clothing and ornaments are exposed briefly. There is a method of the ‘*atsara*’<sup>35</sup> (*ācārya* or ritual master) to draw the circle for moving goods to the market place (fol. 92).

### 3.4 Against thieves and brigands

Thieves and robbers have always been a source for great concern on the desolate plains and circuitous mountain passes of Tibet. They were the sources of great distress not only to the Tibetan and Chinese traders but also to foreign travellers, such as the French explorers Jules-Léon Dutreuil de Rhins (d. 1894) and later, Louis Liotard (d. 1940), who were both killed by Golok (mGo log) bandits.<sup>36</sup> Recipes in this category reflect the need for a general protection against bandits, robbers and thieves (fols 3b, 14, 89). Some associate the wandering Tsan (*btsan*) demons with thievery (fol. 90). Binding (fols 5, 17, 87b) thieves and finding them through visions, divination (fol. 88b) and the intervention of spirits are regular

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<sup>35</sup> The word *atsara* is used in Tibet for a variety of characters, sometimes benign and at other times mischievous. It is usually understood as a Tibetan rendering of *ācārya* which refers to a ‘tantric master’ who can confer empowerments and train in Tantric teachings and practices. Karma Phuntsho in an article published in 2016 briefly hinted at the various portrayals of *atsara* in play, sacred dances and other cultural settings. However in Bon, there were three *atsara* who went travelling through Tibet searching for gold. In Bsam yas, they stole a heavy box they thought contained gold. Upon opening it while running away, they found Bon texts which they traded for food with a Bonpo called Mtha’ bzhi ‘phrul gas. Karmay 1972, 118–119.

<sup>36</sup> For the accounts see Grenard 1896, *passim*; Guibaut 1947, *passim*. See Shakya 2015 for a socio-political study of banditry in Tibet.

entries in this *grimoire*. Tutelary deities and protectors are invoked against raiders of one's livestock (fol. 14).

### 3.5 Food and enjoyment

Several entries focus on mantra for various food and beverage items such as mantras for beer (*chang*, fol. 18), yoghurt (fol. 18), protection against poisoned meat (fol. 200), for milk (fols 19, 22) and a *dhāraṇī* (a form of mantra) 'to avoid being deprived of daily pleasant meat' (fol. 20).

### 3.6 Oracles and divination

Methods are offered for making statues talk (fol. 10), for divination through visions (fol. 49), for lucid dreaming (fols 51, 89) and for general understanding and all-knowing wisdom (fols 167, 204).

### 3.7 Supernatural powers

Several entries refer to the power of swift-footedness (*rkang mgyogs*)<sup>37</sup> (fols 46b, 47, 48). It is a power which enables one to travel by foot at great speed and is traditionally ascribed to the eight common accomplishments (*thun mong gi dngos grub brgyad*) as opposed to uncommon accomplishments (*mchog gi dngos grub*) which are those of legendary saints. Hagiographies do mention this power (Snellgrove 2013, 174) and both Alexandra David-Néel and Anagarika Govinda claim to have witnessed this when travelling in Tibet.<sup>38</sup>

Other powers which this *précis* offers to realise are those of being able to paralyse someone or something (fol. 61), power over the world in general (fols 86b, 87), the method for clairvoyance on sickness of the Lord of the cliff (Jo bo brag, also Jo bo A jo brag mtshan rgyal po, an unknown sage) (fols 251, 251b).

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<sup>37</sup> Karmay 2007, 25; Achard 1999, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Govinda 1970, 80–83.

### 3.8 Protection

Here is a sample of spells and mantras with the overall protection against different types of dangers:

- fol. 10b: To tame wolf
- fol. 16b: *Dhāraṇī* for the overpowering of gods, demons and humans
- fol. 17: *Dhāraṇī* for the reversal of the misfortunes from frost and hail
- fol. 20: Mantra against injury (*'bugs pa*) by a dog
- fol. 20b: For protecting against diseases from the *klu*
- fol. 21: *Dhāraṇī* for liberation from the Intermediate State (*bar do*, between death and rebirth)
- fol. 21: *Dhāraṇī* for disempowering demonic spirits (*'dre gdon*) and devouring demons (*za 'dre*)
- fol. 21b: Method (*thab* for *thabs*) for the protection against harm from wild animals (*bcan zan* for *gcan gzan*)
- fol. 22b: *Dhāraṇī* for sentient beings to be free from the threat (*sdid* for *sdigs*) of heavy burdens
- fol. 24: To be written on the door lintel
- fol. 25: Mantra for protection against lightning
- fol. 50b: To get rid (*sgrub shigs*) of dogs
- fols 70 and 91: To destroy obstructions which cannot be perceived by humans

### 3.9 Drums

Drums are, with the flat bell (*gshang*), the ritual instrument *par excellence* of the Bonpo lamas. The legendary battle of Milarepa against the magic powers of the Bonpo priest who was able to fly sitting on his drum<sup>39</sup> is but an eloquent reminder of the inseparability of Bonpo priest and their central ritual instrument. This Man ngag therefore offers dedicated spells for their protection and the power of their sound. Besides the general protection of drums (fols 24, 25), there are spells for preventing them from burning (fol. 24) as well as several rites just for drums and their magical accomplishments (fol. 198).

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<sup>39</sup> Tsangnyön Heruka 2010, 173.

### 3.10 Rites involving spiritual beings

The following share much with other sections but are dedicated to control or influence over spiritual beings. Hence, the main protectress of Bon, the goddess Sipa Gyalmo (Srid pa rgyal mo), is daily invoked by Bonpos for general protection but also for retaliation or the realisation of mundane objectives. Her mantra figures prominently on fol. 25, immediately followed protection against the Tsan (fol. 25b). The presence of these troublesome spirits recurs most often. They are roaming earthly spirits that are sometimes associated with bandit activities (fols 26, 90), and mantras for their control (fol. 25b), with other ritual supplements and alternative spells that are very much part of long and complex rites to subdue them (fol. 26). This is accompanied with reversal spells (fol. 27b) and protection of the body, speech and mind against their activities (fol. 49b) and against their 'graspings' (fol. 50). Other spirits that appear and among those inimical to humanity are the sons of the *Sin* (*srin*) demons who eat the body, and one is required to wear a protective amulet (Fig. 6) against them (fol. 54b). The *Sin* are conceived differently in Traditional Tibetan Medicine, but the overall consensus is that they eat the body or damage it, either from internal imbalance or external influence.<sup>40</sup>

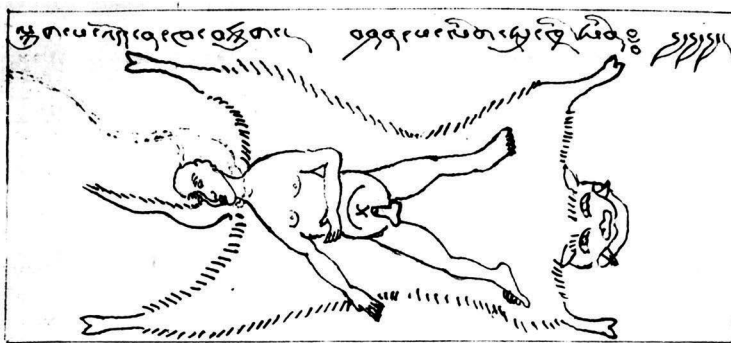


Fig. 6: Fol. 54b, talisman against *Sin* spirits.

The most ancient of hostile entities are the Masang (*ma sangs*), which were the first inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau. They were considered as resembling humans but different and old records mention the Nine Masang brothers ruling over Tibet. The perspective on antiquity is that the country was governed succes-

<sup>40</sup> Prost 2007, 45–52.



sively by different kinds of beings. First to rule were the black Nödjín (*gnod sbyin*), assimilated sometimes to the Indian *yakṣa*. These were then followed by the Dū (*bdud*), then the Sin (*srin*), the gods (*lha*), the *lu* (*klu*, seen above), the demons (*'dre*), and finally the Masang, to be supplanted again by the *lu* (*klu*) and eventually the humans.<sup>41</sup> These Masang can be subdued as was the case of the protector bound by oaths (*dam can*) Dorje Legpa (Rdo rje legs pa), who was won over by the legendary tantrist Padmasambhava sometime during the eighth century.<sup>42</sup> These Masang, however, could be friendly to humans and succour them in times of need, provided offerings and other entreaties were made properly. Fol. 94 is dedicated to instructions for seeking protection through the help of the whirling Masang against hail. Fols 115 and 115b (Figs 7 and 8) are magical drawings and spells to control the Masang.

Besides these old gods, there are the omnipresent Sky-goers (*mkha' 'gro ma*) which may have been introduced to Tibet through the importations of Buddhist Tantras. Fol. 60 gives instruction on how to seek assistance from them.

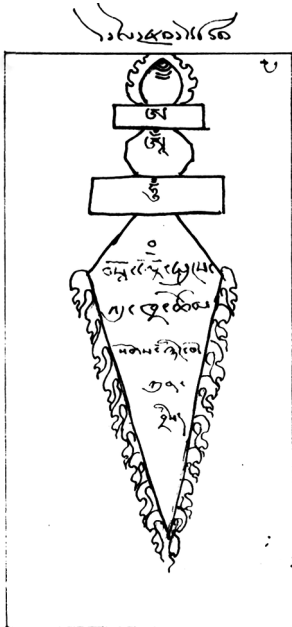


Fig. 7: Fol. 115, drawing to control the Masang.

<sup>41</sup> Norbu 2009, 17–19.

<sup>42</sup> Nebesky-Wojokowitz 1956, 154–159.

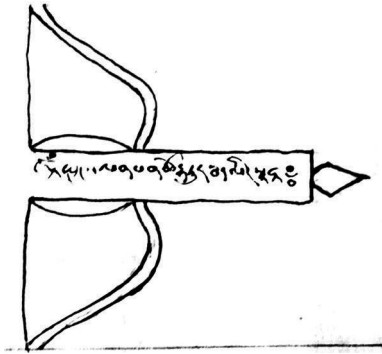


Fig. 8: Fol. 115b, drawing with mantra to control the Masang.

### 3.11 Love and influence

The following samples will illustrate eloquently this section:

- fol. 10b: Method to control males and females
- fol. 11: Mantras to be obeyed by all humans
- fol. 11b: Mantra for being loved by all
- fol. 12b: For one who wishes to be victorious generally (*phal lci (spyi) rgyal bar 'dod pa*)
- fol. 19b: A *dhāraṇī* whereby whatever one says goes directly to the [other's] heart (*gtam rmas tshad rnying po ru 'gro ba'i le gzungs*)
- fol. 43b: For deception (*mgo 'khor*)
- fol. 49b: Method for body transformation (*lus bsgyur*)
- fol. 51b: Method to have friends fulfilling one's desires
- fol. 52: For universal love from all humans
- fol. 52b: Method to meet pleasant friends and have them stay over (*gang du sdod kyang grogs yi 'ong 'phrad thabs*)
- fol. 64: Method to unite male and female
- fol. 64: Method to bring a lotus under one's power (*pad ma dbang du sdu thabs*) (Presumably, controlling women for sex)
- fol. 65: The unfabricated (*mi byed pa*) mantra for making sentient beings not to flee (*mi bros*)
- fol. 68b: Method to conceive (*chags*) children

### 3.12 For spiritual benefits

In this section, the goal of the practices is beyond the mundane realm and seeks to purify one's negative karma, defilements and broken vows (fols 13, 13b, 16b). Other spells are for wisdom (*shes rab*) and Pristine Awareness (*ye shes*), an experiential form of knowledge. Furthermore, there is one recipe for the preparation of medicinal pills which will help for the transference of consciousness (*'pho ba*). The latter is a method to either guide a departed principle of consciousness (*bla*) through the Intermediate State (*bar do*) between death and rebirth or to have one's consciousness leave the body to visit other realms (fol. 244).

### 3.13 Killing and 'liberation'

As stated above, fols 28–43 are missing due to the original owner of the manuscript who did not want to show the rites for killing, otherwise referred to as rites for 'liberation' (*sgrol ba*). It is a polite euphemism which does not offend Buddhist sensibilities but is nevertheless found in Buddhist tantric rituals. Despite this section having been expunged, there are at least four rites which appear to have been devised just for that purpose. Fol. 46 has the simple expletive title 'for killing' (*gsod par byed*). Fol. 238b is a rite for thorough destruction. Fol. 53b contains two works 'for ensuring the death of one's enemies, without any doubt, by means of the instructions of the *atsara* (mendicant monk, *sadhu*, or *ācārya* for 'tantric master')' (*A tsa ra yis [yis] man sngags dgra bo 'chi bar the tsom [tshom] med*). It is actually a simple method using metal hooks and ritual pegs (*phur bu*) to kill someone.

### 3.14 Weather control

Weather control by the use of magic rites is a trademark of the Tantrists (*sngags pa*) in Tibet. There are entire communities of Tantrists in Reb gong and other parts of Amdo who specialize in this lore and have clients among the farmers to protect their crops from hail and drought.<sup>43</sup> Many of the spells, rites and drawings of this section have to do with the control of hail (*ser lam*, fols 17, 22, 94, 133, 135, 138, 206, 210, 218, 226, 234, 236b, 241b) (Fig. 9, fol. 236b).

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43 Yü 2015, 62–63.

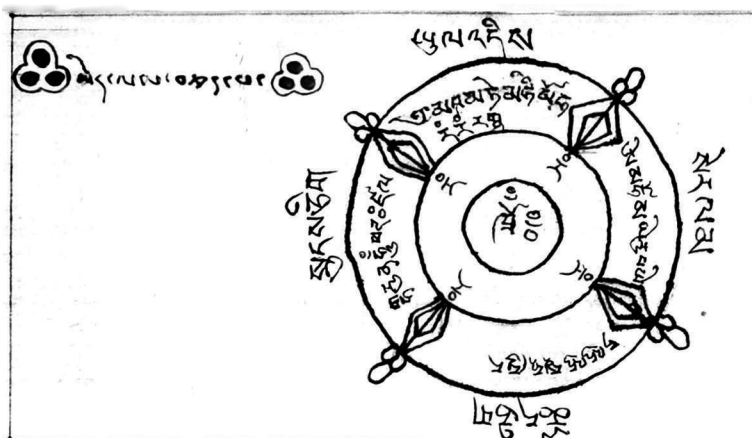


Fig. 9: Fol. 236b, magic circle to stop hail.

Besides this overt concern, bringing in timely rain is also well represented in this *précis*. (fols 66b, 67, 133b) Control of the Wind God (Fig. 10) and snow has several methods (fols 22, 117, 118, 194); the elimination of vermin believed to be carried by winds and the weather are related in the method on fol. 134b.



Fig. 10: Fol. 118, the Wind god carrying wind bag and sword.

### 3.15 Miscellanea

Lastly, ritual strategies that are difficult to place in prior categories have been provisionally entered in this section.

- fol. 3: Mantra for sentient beings to go like birds on water (?) (*chu la bya ltar du 'gro ba'i sngags*) consists in using a vase and recitation of a mantra
- fol. 5b: To prevent (*'chang*) a hunting dog from barking
- fol. 9b: Method for inscribing metal (?) (*lcags la ri mo bya*)
- fol. 11b: Mantra to illuminate at night
- fol. 18b: To cause a woman or animal no longer to yield milk (*bzhon mi ster*)
- fol. 19: Mantra for the hearth
- fol. 22b: *Dhāraṇī* to obtain a male body and avoid a bad reincarnation (*ngan song du mi skye ba'i pho lus thob pa'i thob pa*)
- fol. 23: *Dhāraṇī* to remedy a broken secret vow
- fol. 23: *Dhāraṇī* to purify hundreds of separate wrongdoings
- fol. 23: *Dhāraṇī* for all the excellent places of the three worlds
- fol. 23b: To immobilise time in all the three worlds
- fol. 23b: Mantra to alleviate the pain of expiation for the time of transmigration
- fol. 92: Method of the *atsara* (*ācārya* 'tantric master') to draw the circle of moving goods to the market place

All the above examples from all categories represent samples from the 302 methods offered in this collection.

## 4 The manner of performance of the *To* rites

The performance of most of these formulas requires prior knowledge of the ritual traditions of Bon. As mentioned above, for example, the practice of Long Life ritual is a very common one. Most Tantric cycles or ritual compendia contain directions for this and the procedure does not need to be restated in a personal recipe book. It is a standard rite practised regularly and as such is part of the basic training for lamas.

Bon possesses at least two main strands of rites: the first, the more ancient and notoriously Tibetan, are those requiring exchanges of substances or requiring sacrifices. The second is the more common, having become prevalent with the reformulations of Bon under the influence of Buddhism. It involves the use of a tutelary deity (*yi dam*), which is a characteristic mark of Tantrism.

Methods that involve the sacrifice of living victims such as birds, sheep, yaks, horses and so forth are nowadays found in the periphery of the Tibetan world. In the areas of Nepal, Mongolia and some parts of Yunnan and Sichuan can be found instances of the practices of Le'u or other non-canonical rituals.<sup>44</sup> Imperial Tibet (sixth to mid-ninth centuries) had Bon and Shen (*gshen*) priests who officiated at large sacrificial rites involving herds of the abovementioned animals.<sup>45</sup> Older Bon texts deal with sacrificial practices involving foxes, deer and other victims. A story usually accompanies this ritual action to legitimate its potency and performance as stated above.<sup>46</sup> Contemporary Bon, by contrast, does not perform bloody sacrifice. Buddhist apologists have repeatedly accused Bonpos of spilling blood for their gods. However, Bonpos in general advocate the use of substitutes in the form of sacrificial cakes shaped like the intended victims or some body parts. Needless to say, none of the recipes consulted so far requires the spilling of blood or the sacrifice of a life, despite containing life-taking magic (*bsad pa*).

The second method is the most likely to be used while intending to perform some of the methods of Nyima Gyaltsen. The main principle is to transform oneself into one's tutelary deity along a cycle such as Tagla Mebar (*stag la me 'bar*) (fols 14, 35, 150b, 170) and conduct the magical operation required, which may sometimes be as simple as reciting a single mantra.

As Lin rightly pointed out, the *To* rites, which use the recipes of our Man ngag, require recitations. It is in the recitation that efficiency in magic lies. The 'strength of truth' (*bden stobs/ bden brdar*) is the power behind the results (Lin 2005, 114). The former in Bon refer to the mythical antecedent, the mythical declaration (*smrang* and *rabs*) on which ritual performances rely to justify them as well as to render magic efficient. Prescribed recitations surrounding the practice are justified since the recipes represent mere 'bare bones' essentials which presumably require embellishment in order to render them potent with the results expected by the patrons.

## 5 Conclusions

The interest of this text resides in its uniqueness as a Bon manuscript. Although *To* rites can be found in some ritual compendia and among the various Man ngag

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<sup>44</sup> Ramble 2015, 511–513; Ramble 2014, 15–28; Huber 2013, 281.

<sup>45</sup> Lalou 1953, 341–342.

<sup>46</sup> Berounsky 2015, 2 and *passim*.

dispersed in the canonical literature, it is the first time, to my knowledge, that such a Bonpo magical recipe collection has been presented in Western literature. Although the various methods it contains are not uncommon in some published Buddhist literature, as seen earlier, it is significant that the practice of the collection of magical recipes was also practiced among the Bonpo lamas. The sources of the 302 topics it contains remain unknown. However, Bonpos were known to use ritual methods and spells coming from a wide number of extraneous sources, some Buddhist, many probably oral and local as well as some from China.<sup>47</sup> This Man ngag is therefore a testimony of the syncretism of the Bonpo priesthood and it further points to the universality of the *grimoire* formula among religious specialists from antiquity to the present.

The study of *To* rites is only in its infancy in Tibetan Studies. One of the reasons has much to do with the difficulty in obtaining or copying such material from private collections. The other has to do with the current rise in interest in the scholarly world on esoterism and its place in religious institutions and among the ordained, the monastics and the priesthood in general.

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## Abbreviation

KT = *G.yung drung bon gyi bka' brten*, Lhasa: Sog sde sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma, 1998.

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<sup>47</sup> Karmay 1972, x–xl.

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