

GATHERING THE ELEMENTS

The Cult of the Wrathful Deity Vajrakīla according to the Texts
of the Northern Treasures Tradition of Tibet

(Byang-gter phur-ba)

Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition
Volume One

by
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CONTENTS

Abbreviations	viii
Introduction	1
rNying-ma-pa Literature	16
The Byang-gter Kīla texts	19
PART ONE	
Chapter 1. The Byang-gter Tradition	31
Concealment of the treasures	32
Rediscovery of the hidden treasures	38
Maintaining the continuity of the tradition	45
Establishing the tradition in the hidden land of Yol-mo	64
Northern Treasures Studies in Tibet	77
Second state oracle	81
The Byang-gter tradition in the modern world	83
PART TWO	
Chapter 2. Buddhist assimilation of the <i>kīla</i>	89
Vedic antecedents	89
Architecture	90
<i>Vetāla</i> : ghouls at the limit of life and death	92
The <i>sūtras</i>	97
Dawn of the <i>kīlamantra</i> (<i>dhāraṇī</i>)	99
<i>Sīmābandha</i> in the lower Buddhist <i>tantra</i>	101
<i>Sīmābandha</i> in the <i>yoganiruttaratantra</i>	108
Other <i>kīla</i> rituals	109
Chronological summary	112
Coda	129
Chapter 3. Iconography of Vajrakīla	134
High aspirations and low activities	134
Māra and Rudra: embodiments of evil	140
Conquest of evil and the birth of Vajrakīla	141
The nature of the conqueror	143
Manifestation in the form of symbols	145

The consort Trīptacakra; ‘Circle of Satisfaction’	154
Embodiments of paradox	156
The divine retinue	157
Variations on a theme	159
A handful of nails	161
 TABLE 1: The 18 arms of Mahottarakīla	 164
 Chapter 4. The religious chronicles	 165
The texts	165
The revelation of <i>mahāyoga</i>	165
Apportionment of the <i>sādhana</i>	170
Ācārya Padmasambhava	174
The Kīla <i>Vidyottama-tantra</i>	179
The <i>mahottarakīla</i> cycle	187
Iconic scorpions and <i>kīla</i>	192
The transmission to Tibet	196
Later lineages of practice	198
 PART THREE	
 Chapter 5. The Byang-gter Vajrakīla tantras	 209
 Chapter 6. Rites of empowerment	 227
 Chapter 7. Rituals of the creation stage (<i>utpattikrama</i>)	 252
TABLE 2: Iconography of the <i>daśakrodha</i> kings	268
 Chapter 8. Attainment of the higher <i>siddhi</i> (<i>sampannakrama</i>)	 269
 Chapter 9. Gaining control of the mischievous spirits	 274
 Chapter 10. Wrathful activities for the benefit of others	 297
Scattering	297
Burning	299
Pressing Down	306

Chapter 11. Activities for the benefit of the <i>yogin</i>	310
Chapter 12. The ritual supplements	321
Conclusion	330
APPENDIX I	
Five collections of Byang-gter Vajrakīla literature	334
APPENDIX II	
Notes from the Sanskrit	348
BIBLIOGRAPHIES	
Sanskrit	368
Tibetan	370
Western languages	372
Index	395
ILLUSTRATIONS	
The <i>gter ston</i> Rig-'dzin rgod-ldem © Gega Lama	30
The deity Vajrakīla © Jamyang	88
<i>Kīlamudrā</i> © A. Snodgrass	102
Black hat sorcerer	208
Pit for the destruction of enemies	281
Altar for the wrathful fire rite	300

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A,B,C,D,E The five collections of Byang-gter Vajrakāla mss upon which the present study is based. See Appendix I
- BRT *The Black Razor Tantra*
- CIHTS Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath
- BEFEO *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*
- BHS Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit
- GOS Gaekwad's Oriental Series, Baroda
- GST *Guhyasamāja-tantra*. Ed., F. Fremantle, 1971
- HT *Hevajra-tantra*. Ed., D.L. Snellgrove, 1959
- IASWR The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, Carmel, New York
- IIBS The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, Tokyo
- JA *Journal Asiatique*, Paris
- JASB *Journal of Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*
- JIABS *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Madison
- JRAS *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London
- LTWA The Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala
- MLB Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi
- MMK *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. Ed., G. Sastri, 1925
- NGB *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*. Reproduced from a manuscript preserved at gTing-skyes dgon-pa-byang monastery, Thimbu
Published in 36 vols., 1973-1975
Catalogue by E. Kaneko, Tokyo, 1982
- NGMPP Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project
Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin
- NSTB *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism; its Fundamentals and History* by 'Jigs-bral ye-shes rdo-rje. Translation and annotation by G. Dorje and M. Kapstein (2 vols.), 1991
- OUP Oxford University Press
- P Peking *bKa'-'gyur* and *bsTan-'gyur*
Catalogue and Index of the Tibetan *Tripitaka* kept in the library of Otani University, Kyoto
Ed., D.T. Suzuki. Suzuki Research Foundation, Tokyo, 1962
- PTS Pali Text Society, London
- RAS Royal Asiatic Society, London

RKP	Routledge & Kegan Paul, London
SBB	Sacred Books of the Buddhists, PTS, London
SBE	Sacred Books of the East. Gen. ed., Max Müller, Oxford
SDPT	<i>Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra</i> . Ed., T. Skorupski, 1983
SOAS	School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London
STTS	<i>Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha</i> . Ed., L. Chandra, 1987
SUNY	The State University of New York
T	Taisho edition of the Chinese <i>Tripitaka</i> , Taisho Issaikyo Ed., Takakusu Junjoro & Watanabe Kaigyoku Tokyo, 1924-1929
TPS	<i>Tibetan Painted Scrolls</i> . G. Tucci, 1949
VKMK	<i>Vajrakīlamūlatantrakhaṇḍa</i> (P.78)
WZKSA	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens</i> , Wien
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i> , Wiesbaden



INTRODUCTION

The present work surveys the cult of the wrathful deity Vajrakīla as represented by the literature and living tradition of the Northern Treasures (Byang-gter) school of Tibetan Buddhism. Divided into three parts, it focuses its attention, in turn, upon the Byang-gter (Part One), the *kīla* (Part Two) and the Byang-gter Kīla cult (Part Three).

Part One: the Northern Treasures

The first part seeks to trace the origin and development of the Northern Treasures Tradition and to indicate its vitality and relevance as a school of spiritual development within the modern world. Much of the information for this section is derived from Tibetan hagiographies dealing with the lineage of masters through whom the tradition has been transmitted, as well as from various notes and references to be found in the works of Western scholars. The latter works are mainly short papers on diverse topics, for this tradition until now has not been the subject of any major research.

In the eighth century CE, Tibet was the greatest military power in Central Asia and its control extended from what is now China and Iran to the Ganges River in India. Buddhist teachers had been visiting the country for some time but their influence had been fairly marginal. According to tradition, the learned scholar Śāntarakṣita had been invited to teach in the central provinces of Tibet but, being unable to establish the religion on any firm footing, he advised the king to invite Padmasambhava, a charismatic adept in the branch of Buddhism known as Guhyamantrayāna, the mystical path of secret utterances. Together, Padmasambhava, Śāntarakṣita and the king Khri Srong-lde'u-btsan (742-796) managed to integrate Buddhism into the Tibetan way of life and thus set the stage for more than twelve hundred years of Tibetan cultural development.

Before departing from Tibet, Padmasambhava was requested by his Nepalese consort Śākyadevī to leave further instructions for future generations. In response, Padmasambhava and the noble lady Ye-shes mtshorgyal together concealed religious teachings and material objects in secret locations all over the country. Empowering his close disciples to become the future masters of these hidden treasures (*gter*) when the time was

right, Padmasambhava protected the treasures from the gaze of the unworthy by entrusting their safe preservation to the ancient spirits of the land. Often written on scrolls of yellow parchment in a symbolic script, only to be comprehended by the one intended to receive it, these religious instructions have subsequently inspired future generations by providing them with novel methods of meditation practice, as well as sacred objects of support, including ritual implements and prescribed substances of occult power, statues and paintings.¹

The Byang-gter is concerned exclusively with the esoteric tenets of *guhyanmantra* and thus its documentary records consist of largely psychological narrative replete with religious symbolism, a stream of apparently miraculous events brought about by wonder-working sages (*siddha*). It claims a place within the more general fabric of Buddhism by recognising each of its principal protagonists as the reincarnation of an earlier historical personality of acknowledged religious significance, the purpose of each rebirth being to carry on the work begun in a former life (sometimes several centuries earlier) on a deeper, more esoteric, level. These reincarnations, moreover, are said to have been prophesied by the earlier Buddhist masters and thus the importance of their roles in the grand design of Buddhist history is placed beyond dispute among the faithful. Among the many great disciples of Padmasambhava who later appeared in the Northern Treasures lineage are sNa-nam rdo-rje bdud-'joms, Nam-mkha'i snying-po, gNyags Jñānakumāra, rGyal-ba mchog-dbyangs, and Princess Pemagsal. As for the 'treasures' of this school, they are found to consist of an admixture of extraordinarily profound and subtle methods of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* (yogic preoccupations of the earliest Buddhists, brought here to their apogee in the teachings of *atiyoga*²), together with magical rites of every weird and wonderful sort, so beloved of the medieval Indian *siddha* tradition. In particular, the Northern Treasures contain many prophecies which emphasise their importance for future descendants of king Khri Srong-lde'u-btsan and the preservation of Tibet as a homeland of Buddhism and haven of religious practice in the coming degenerate age.

According to the Byang-gter chronicles, cultic texts and practices concerning the wrathful deity Vajrakīla were among the many teachings transmitted to Tibetan devotees in the eighth century by the visiting

¹ For a study of the rNying-ma *gter ma* tradition see Tulku Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*. Wisdom Publications, London 1986

² See Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection (passim)*

Indian *siddha* Padmasambhava.³ A number of these esoteric teachings, said to consist of sacred texts from India and oral instructions concerning them, were specifically entrusted to the *yogin* sNa-nam rdo-rje bdud-'joms before being sealed up in a casket, together with a vast quantity of other material, and hidden away for several hundred years in a cave in La-stod-byang to the north of the Brahmaputra river. When they were eventually rediscovered and revealed to the world in 1366, this particular collection of teachings became famous as 'The Northern Treasures' and the doctrines of Vajrakīla found among them were widely acclaimed as being of paramount importance.

As knowledge of the Byang-gter spread throughout Tibet, it gradually became established as a major religious system with over fifty monasteries propagating its teachings, chief among which was the mother monastery of rDo-rje-brag. Monks of this seminary, properly trained in its rituals, have always been highly prized for their religious expertise. One such monk, for example, was invariably required in the *sKu Inga* shrine in the Jo-khang in Lhasa, another at the *lHa mo khang* and eight in the *mGon khang* at the base of the Potala palace engaged in the worship of Mahākāla. Four monks from rDo-rje-brag annually performed the 'Gong po ar gtad ritual for the suppression of demons at the Lhasa *Rigs gsum* shrine and the oracle of dGa'-gdong was regularly consulted to divine the whereabouts of deceased lamas.

Having surveyed the general history of the Northern Treasures school in Tibet, the chapter goes on to look at the particular lineage of Yol-mo sprul-sku in Nepal and concludes with a brief note on the Byang-gter monks and monasteries now established among the Tibetan refugee population of Northern India.

Part Two: the history and form of the vajra spike

The second part of this study consists of three chapters. In the first of these (Chapter Two) I have attempted to clarify the cultural milieu out of which the Kīla deity arose. To this end I have looked at the social context as well as the religious and have drawn upon both historical and mythological sources.

³ In the view of the Byang-gter tradition, the three principal recipients of these Kīla *upadeśa* were the king Khri Srong-lde'u-btsan, the noble lady Ye-shes mtsho-rgyal and the *yogin* sNa-nam rdo-rje bdud-'joms.

With regard to the name ‘Vajrakīla’: *vajra* as a prefix is almost ubiquitous within the Buddhist system of *guhyanmantra*. Originally meaning ‘the hard or mighty one’ and referring in particular to the thunderbolt as a weapon of Indra, it subsequently became so intimately associated with the development of tantric ideas in Buddhism that the entire system of practice came to be known as the Vajrayāna or *Vajra Vehicle*. Indeed, as a symbol within the Buddhist *tantra* it is as pregnant with meaning as the very texts themselves. Characterised as *abheda* ‘unbreakable’ and *acchedya* ‘indivisible’, the term may be said to represent nothing less than the full enlightenment of the *samyaksambuddha* who himself came to be referred to as Vajradhara, “He who holds the *vajra*”. The Sanskrit word *kīla* means ‘nail’, ‘peg’ or ‘spike’ and thus Vajrakīla may be taken to mean “the unassailable spike” or, on a higher level, “(He who is) the nail of supreme enlightenment”.

The roots of *kīla* mythology, however, may lie buried deep within the pre-Buddhist religion of ancient India where, in the *Ṛgveda*, the story is told of the god Indra who slew the demon Vṛtra.⁴ It is said that, at that time, Indra stabilised the earth and propped up the heavens and thus, at the outset, we have clearly discernible indications of a path along which a humble wooden stake might travel so as eventually to become deified as a terrifying god of awesome power, one by whom all demons are vanquished.

The idea of stabilising the earth by pinning it down with a *kīla* was taken up by architects and priests who projected a magical function onto the wooden pegs employed by them in the process of marking out a plot of ground chosen as the site for a temple or other building. Since Buddhists also used wooden pegs and lengths of string to mark out the ground plan of a *stūpa* or *vihāra*, they naturally enough also adopted the concept of those pegs as magically potent items. In particular, the pegs struck into the four corners of the site or around its periphery were regarded as estab-

⁴ The name Vṛtra derives from the root *vṛ* with the sense of “to surround, enclose, obstruct”. Hence the noun *vṛtra* means restrainer, enemy or hostile host. It also stands as “the name of the Vedic personification of an imaginary malignant influence or demon of darkness and drought supposed to take possession of the clouds, causing them to obstruct the clearness of the sky and keep back the waters”. M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. We shall meet with the *kīla* as an implement employed in the magical control of weather below, Chapter Two.

lishing a protective boundary (*rakṣācakra*) capable of repelling all harm.⁵ As it says in the *Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa* [p.693]:

खदिरकीलकमष्टशतजप्तां कृत्वा चतुर्षु दिशासु निखनेत् ।
सीमाबन्धः कृतो भवति ॥

Having prepared *kīla* of acacia wood, empowered by 108 recitations of *mantra*, they should be embedded in the four directions. That is the way in which the boundaries are sealed.

This idea may have been established in Buddhist practice at a remarkably early period because literary evidence for the use of the *kīla* as a magical implement is to be found in the *dhāraṇī*, some of which conceivably date right back to the third or fourth centuries BCE.

The earliest extant pegs of this type, in which the form of the *kīla* unambiguously reflects its identification with a wrathful divinity, are believed to have been carved in the first century BCE. They were discovered by the archeologist and explorer Sir Marc Aurel Stein among the debris associated with the ancient watchtowers situated at the southwest extremity of the frontier defence system to the north of Dūnhuáng. In the detailed reports of his expeditions, Stein describes a watchtower (which he identifies as T.VI.b) and the artefacts discovered there, among which are a number of *kīla* to which were originally attached loops of string. He describes these items as resembling tent pegs and exhibiting evident signs of having been pegged into the ground and yet “certainly not strong enough to have served as real tent pegs”. Similar finds were made at the watchtowers T.VI.c and T.VIII. Some of these pegs bore Chinese inscriptions that could only make sense if read as personal names but no indication is given as to whether they might be the personal names of men

⁵ All that has a terrible aspect (*ghora*) is traditionally regarded in India as *vighna*; an impediment, obstacle, interruption, hurdle, difficulty or trouble. Indeed, the vast size of the problem of *vighna* led to its being associated with the boundary or circumference which, it is said, the Vedic Prajāpati finally overcame by taking control of the centre (an inconceivable subtlety totally devoid of extension) so that “the very root of (demonic) arrogance and conceit, viz. the vast size, ceased to have any meaning”. V.S.Agrawala, “The Meaning of Gaṇapati”. *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Baroda, vol.XIII.1 (1963) 1-4. So, too, we will observe throughout this study that the *kīla* that protects the circumference is also the instrument through which the centre is conquered.

or gods. The evidence put forward by Stein for dating these finds to the first century BCE seems overwhelming.⁶

The theme of the apotropaic spike, having come to the surface in the early *dhāraṇī*, was subsequently developed extensively within the *kriyā*- and *yogatantra* of the later periods. Throughout this time spikes came to be employed increasingly in rituals of mundane sorcery which seem to have posed no moral dilemma for their perpetrators, even within a Buddhist context.

Although the *mantra* of Vajrakīla is to be found in the fundamental *yogatantra* STTS and, as pointed out by authorities on tantric practice, “the *mantra* is the god”, the absolute deification of the sacred spike and its transformation into an awesome god of terrible wrath seems not to have been finally completed until the period of the *yoganiruttaratantra*. By this time the spike that brought death and destruction to its opponents came also to be regarded as the harbinger of liberation, a bestower of *nirvāṇa*. As a symbol of absolute stability, the paradoxical nature of the magic spike is expressed in the religious myth and ritual of the deity which everywhere depicts chaos as the natural condition of *saṃsāra*. The *maṇḍala* of the deified spike is a bloody charnel ground, in the centre of which dwells the god in a palace of skulls, astride a throne of demonic corpses. His sanguinary sport (*līlā*) is the archetype of violent behaviour, leading to a distinct antinomian trend in the religious ideals of his worshippers.

Within the sacred texts of both this deity and others like him, it is said that the function of ‘wrathful compassion’ is to kill sentient beings and thus apparently to violate one of the primary ethical precepts of Buddhism. The question naturally arises – Is this vile injunction to be taken literally, or is it symbolic? In fact, it is to be taken both ways. The major commentary on the *Kālacakra-tantra* says that provisionally (*neyārtha*) “a Buddha may kill those who are really committing the five immediacies, who break their vows, and who damage the teaching. But a *mantrin* who has not attained the five special knowledges (*abhijñā*) should not perform such fearful actions.” On the definitive level (*nīārtha*), however, killing

⁶ M.A. Stein, *Serindia* (5 vols.), Oxford, 1921. Stein's description of the watchtower and his finds is to be found in vol.III 644-651 and the *kīla* themselves are depicted in plate LII (vol.IV)

More recent photographs of two of those *kīla*, currently housed in the British Museum, are to be seen in R. Whitfield & A. Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas; Chinese Art from the Silk Route* 174

refers to the yogic practice of holding the semen at the top of the head.⁷ Klong-chen-pa in his commentary on the *Guhyagarbha-tantra* says that the skilful *yogin* should kill wrongdoers and release them into an exalted realm, thus saving them from the certainty of rebirth in limitless evil existences. The rite itself has two main parts: (1) destruction of the evil body, speech and mind and (2) guiding the consciousness of the deceased to a 'Pure Realm' (*buddhakṣetra*). There is no hatred in the rite, only an altruistic mind of awareness and compassion.⁸ As it says in the *Samvarodaya-tantra*, "Ah! Marvellous is the rite of killing. It kills the transmigration which is only imagination. It does not kill the mind recognising suchness (*tathatā*, the real state of things)."⁹

Finally, Śubhakarasiṃha says that 'killing' expresses the basic concept of the vow to cut away the life of all beings, where 'life' means 'beginningless ignorance and passion' (*kleśa*).¹⁰

The various biographies of those who practised this magical art of slaying, however, provide us with evidence of occasional, all too human, lapses from such noble altruism. Mortal nature is such that there have inevitably arisen in the past certain self-centred, power-hungry *yogins* who have been tempted to turn this philanthropic 'white magic' into 'black' for their own nefarious purposes. In the chronicles of the Byang-gter, for example, is recounted the story of combative sorcery between Lang-lab and the translator of Rva, which is told below in Chapter Four.

Following the introduction of these ideas to Tibet, the *kīla* as a weapon of ritual magic became immensely popular among both Buddhist and Bon-po – both within the Kīla cult in which the deity Vajrakīla is worshipped, and independent of that cult.

To date there have been several western studies published concerned with the ritual *kīla* and the Kīla cult, although none of them could be called in any way major. The first book to be published was by John Huntington (*The Phur-pa; Tibetan Ritual Daggers*. Ascona, 1975) in which a number of ritual *kīla* are described in terms of length, weight, material of manufacture, etc. It contains almost nothing that has any bearing on the

⁷ M. Broido, "Killing, Lying, Stealing and Adultery; a Problem of Interpretation in the Tantras" 73

⁸ G. Dorje, *The Guhyagarbha-tantra* 918

⁹ S. Tsuda, *The Samvarodaya-tantra* 279

¹⁰ A. Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Maṇḍalas in Shingon Buddhism* 481

present research. The second book is by Thomas Marcotty (*Dagger Blessing. The Tibetan Phurba Cult: Reflections and Materials*. Delhi, 1987) in which more is said concerning the rituals in which *kīla* are symbolically employed. This book also presents translated excerpts from four Tibetan texts, including the canonical *Vajramantrabhīrusandhi-mūlatantra* (P.467) but is, unfortunately, highly subjective in nature and riddled with unwarranted and spurious assertions. Its many shortcomings have been adequately brought to light by Cathy Cantwell in her review for the *Tibet Journal* XIV,2 (1989) 61-64.

Many other books have carried passing references to either the deity Vajrakīla or to symbolic *kīla* as encountered in iconography or ritual, foremost among which is the classic *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz. The large number of instances cited in this text clearly demonstrates the ubiquity of the ritual *kīla* as a magic weapon throughout the entire realm of Tibetan tantrism, especially following the importation from India of the cult of Vajrakīla. The several studies and text translations that have been published in more recent years, concerning the ritual techniques of the deity and the theoretical basis underpinning these techniques, serve to highlight the continuing relevance of the cult of Vajrakīla in the modern age.

Several papers have also been published in academic journals and the like which have a bearing on our topic. One of the most interesting of these is the study by Bischoff and Hartman¹¹ on the manuscript from Dūnhuáng listed as ‘Pelliot tibétain 44’. This is said to be “possibly the oldest document in existence referring to Padmasambhava” and is considered by Prof. Tucci as a major proof of the *siddha*’s historicity. Its theme is the summoning of the Kīla *Vidyottama-tantra* from Nālandā University to the Asura cave in Nepal. In their introduction to the text, the translators deal with the problem of the widespread assertion in Tibetan literature that the Sanskrit term for *phur ba* is *kīlaya* (with or without a long *i*) when all dictionaries and Sanskrit works agree the word to be *kīla* (or *kīlaka*). I am convinced that this is due to an indiscriminate use by Tibetans of the dative singular *kīlāya*. This form would have been familiar to them in the simple salutation *namo vajrakīlāya* (homage to Vajrakīla) from which it could easily be assumed by those unfamiliar with the technicali-

¹¹ FA. Bischoff & Charles Hartman, “Padmasambhava’s Invention of the Phur-bu.” *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou* 11-28 Paris 1971

ties of Sanskrit that the name of the deity is Vajrakīlāya instead of Vajrakīla. It should also be noted that the term (*vajra*)*kīlaya* is frequently found in Sanskrit texts (as well as in virtually every *kīlanamantra*) legitimately used as the denominative verb ‘to spike’, ‘transfix’, ‘nail down’, etc.

John Huntingdon made the assumption that the precursor of Vajrakīla was Mahākāla.¹² Such an identification appears quite plausible for Mahākāla is, indeed, one of the earliest wrathful deities to become clearly defined in the Vajrayāna pantheon and among his many epithets and guises he is widely renowned as the destroyer of obstructors and misleaders,¹³ a role subsequently taken up by Vajrakīla. Mahākāla is, of course, a deity known to both the Buddhists and Hindus and in the opening chapter of the Hindu *Uḍḍīśa-tantra* there is given a rite for the destruction of an enemy which involves burying “a terrible pin made of copper” in the chest of his effigy. Sitting on a seat of tiger skin, the *yogin* should mutter the *mantra* “OM Honour to the Lord Mahākāla whose lustre is equal to the fire of destruction; Liquidate liquidate, destroy destroy this enemy of mine called So-and-so; HŪM PHAṬ SVĀHĀ”.¹⁴ Such a procedure differs in no way from its Buddhist counterparts. There is, furthermore, an attested Buddhist form of Mahākāla with *kīla* legs which was worshipped in Khotan,¹⁵ a place known to have accepted early on the notion of the *kīla* as a god¹⁶ and culturally connected via the ‘silk route’ with those Central Asian finds of Sir Aurel Stein. There is also the widespread opinion that ritual *kīla* evolved to a certain extent from tent pegs¹⁷ and it is certainly true to say that tent pegs are viewed by *yogins* as *kīla*.¹⁸ In rites of meditation, *kīla* are employed to effect a protective tent (*pañjara*) around an area that is to be kept ritually pure¹⁹ and the special form of Mahākāla with the *kīla* feet is known as ‘the Lord of the Tent’ (Pañjaranātha). That god also has *garuḍa* wings and other details of iconography that match exactly those of the later Vajrakīla. On the face of it, therefore, one might sup-

¹² John C. Huntingdon, *The Phur-pa* 32

¹³ More than one dozen rites of Mahākāla are to be found in the *Sādhanamālā*.

¹⁴ T. Goudriaan & S. Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature* 120

¹⁵ René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* 51

¹⁶ R.E. Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan* 46-47

¹⁷ P. Pal, *Art of Tibet* 244 and *passim*

¹⁸ W.Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* 324

¹⁹ J. Hopkins, *The Yoga of Tibet* 98-100

pose Huntingdon's theory of the identity of Mahākāla and Vajrakīla to be correct. In Chapter Two of the present work, however, I have drawn together several strands of literary evidence that clearly reveal not Mahākāla but Amṛtakuṇḍalin (a god also associated with the protection of boundaries) to be the precursor of Vajrakīla.

This identification of Amṛtakuṇḍalin with Vajrakīla remains valid even in the Byang-gter literature of a much later period. The short Byang-gter text *Phur pa'i dam can gnad rem*, for example, gives proper names to the Kīlas of the three families: Buddhakīla is called Yamāntaka, Padmakīla is Hayagrīva and Vajrakīla is Amṛtakuṇḍalin.²⁰ This grouping of three families (*kula*) belongs to the system of *kriyātantra*²¹ and therefore indicates an early provenance for this material said to have been unearthed in 1366. Such primitive features are widespread in the Byang-gter literature and I see no reason to doubt that much of it could indeed have been brought to Tibet from India in the eighth century CE.

The Byang-gter text *sGrub thabs rgyun khyer* exemplifies the manner in which the *yogin* mystically identifies himself with the deity Vajrakīla as he takes the ritual nail into his hands. Thinking of himself as the single-faced, two-armed god with the lower half of his body in the form of a triple-edged spike blazing in a mass of fire, the *yogin* blesses the ritual *kīla* by contemplating that his right hand is the *maṇḍala* of the sun from which arise the *bīja* of the *pañcatathāgata* and his left hand is the *maṇḍala* of the moon emanating the *bīja* of their five consorts. Then, as his hands are brought together with *mantra*, the male and female buddhas unite and the *bodhicitta* of their union flows into the *kīla*. Rolling it between his palms, the *yogin* exhorts the *kīla* to fulfil the four magical acts. He places the deity Hūmkāra on the top of the spike and Mahābala at its lower tip. Upon the upper 'vast knot' he places the *krodha* kings of the four cardinal quarters, and the kings of the intermediate directions are installed within its lower knot. Then, as the *yogin* rolls the empowered spike between the palms of his hands, he recites the *mantra* and simultaneously blesses the entire *traidhātuka* with 'liberation'.²²

20 C8 99

21 Lessing & Wayman, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems* 103

22 A29 199-200

Chapter Three of the present work discusses the iconographic details of the principal *kīla* deities in the retinue of the supremely wrathful Vajrakīla.

The ‘history’ of the *Vajrakīla-tantra* as described in cultic documents is outlined in Chapter Four. Although the several short Tibetan texts²³ (*lo rgyus*, ‘chronicles’) dealing with this subject may not be regarded as historical works according to our own definition of the term (they tell us, for example, that the doctrines of Vajrakīla were once taught in a cremation ground by a gigantic iron scorpion with nine heads), they nevertheless throw considerable light upon the subject. According to these traditional accounts, the canon of Vajrakīla arose in a previous aeon at a time when the buddhas felt impelled to subdue the arch-demon Rudra. The myth of the subjugation of Rudra in fact constitutes the central theme of the entire genre of wrathful *tantra* of *mahāyoga*. In the light of comparative literature and iconography, this myth may be regarded as indicative of the final formulation of *mahāyoga* tenets (including the cycle of teachings of Vajrakīla) as a conscious development designed to present a direct challenge to the perceived evils of the growing cult of Śaiva (Rudra) tantrism. The Buddhist view, however, is that the appearance of Rudra in the world is a skilful expedient (*upāya*) for the sake of those to be converted.²⁴

Having been taught among the gods and *nāga*, the doctrines of Vajrakīla were transmitted to the human realm where they were spread in India by Indrabhūti, Dhanasaṃskṛta, Śrīsimha, Prabhahasti and an unnamed *kāpālika* brahmin. In Nepal they were taught by Śīlamañju and Śākyadevī. Śīlamañju is said to have taught a prostitute by the name of Śānti who, in her turn, transmitted the doctrines to Guṇapatala (a prince of Nepal) so that they then became widely known in that country²⁵ and Śākyadevī is said to have taught them to Dharmakośa by whom they were

²³ As far as possible for this section I have drawn upon texts of the Northern Treasures tradition but, in fact, the ‘history’ of the deity as outlined here is broadly accepted (discounting endless variations of detail) by followers of all Vajrakīla lineages in Tibet.

²⁴ Explained in detail by Klong-chen-pa in his commentary to Ch.XV of the *Guhya garbha-tantra*.

²⁵ gTsang mkhan-chen, *rDo rje phur pai’ chos ’byung* 171. Nepalese *kīla* rituals and the spread in that country of the Kīla cult have, as yet, been inadequately studied. This lamentable situation will surely change as further Nepalese manuscripts are brought to light.

subsequently propagated throughout Oḍḍiyāna.²⁶ The doctrines are also said to have been taught in Khotan by Vairocana²⁷ and in Tibet by Padmasambhava, Vairocana and Vimalamitra. Since one of the stated aims of the Kīla doctrines is to provide a method “for the subjugation of all enemies and obstructors”, the cult was readily able to assimilate troublesome local gods and demons wherever it spread. In particular, Padmasambhava is said to have employed the occult power of Vajrakīla to tame the spirits of the Himalayan regions on his journey to Tibet and convert them all to defenders of the Buddhist faith.

Part Two concludes with the observation that Indian traditions of Vajrakīla must have reached their peak in the early eighth century CE, just when the cult was transmitted to Tibet. In Tibet, subsequently, a large number of Vajrakīla lineages became firmly established, while in India worship of the deity seems to have been abandoned.

Part Three: the Byang-gter Kīla

The primary sources for this entire study are various collections of Byang-gter Kīla texts rescued from Tibet since 1959 and subsequently made available to a wider readership under the American Library of Congress PL 480 acquisition scheme.

(A) The first of these collections, the *Phur pa dril sgrub*, was published in Leh in 1973 as volume 75 of the *Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod* series and consists of manuscripts from the libraries of Padma Chos-ldan and sTag-lung-rtse-sprul rinpoche. From its short preface we learn that the Byang-gter tradition contains three cycles of teachings related to Vajrakīla. The largest (*rgyas pa*) is the Che-mchog (Mahottara) cycle in fifteen sections,²⁸ the medium (*'bring po*) is the sPu-gri (*Kṣura) cycle and the shortest (*bsdus pa*) is the Drag-sngags (Mantrabhīru).²⁹ The *Dril sgrub* is a com-

²⁶ gTsang mkhan-chen, *rDo rje phur pai' chos 'byung* 170

²⁷ Vairocana is held to have learned the doctrines of Vajrakīla in India from Śrīsimha. S. Karmay, *The Great Perfection* 25

²⁸ In fact, however, only 13 of these 15 sections are to be found in the currently available Byang-gter literature as demonstrated, below, in this Introduction.

²⁹ Of these three divisions, it would appear that the *mahottara* cycle is unique to the Byang-gter school, the black *kṣura* and *mantrabhīru* cycles being the common property of all Kīla lineages (each of which, however, has its own textual tradition).

bination of these three cycles with the proper name *Byang gter phur pa lugs gsum gcig tu dril ba'i chos skor*, “the religious cycle of the three traditions of Northern Treasures Kīla rolled into one”. This name acts as a pun in Tibetan because Kīla meditation is accompanied by the ritual act of rolling (*'dril ba*) a symbolic nail between the palms of the hands. The collection itself comprises 364 folios (727 pages).

(B) The second collection, in two volumes, was published in Dalhousie in 1977 under the name *Phur-pa Texts of the Byang-gter Tradition*. The title page says that it is a reproduction of a rare collection of manuscripts held in the LTWA, Dharamsala. Its contents also encompass the three cycles listed above but, in 614 folios, it is the largest single collection of such literature that has so far come to light.

(C) The third collection was published in Darjeeling in 1984 with the title *Byang gter phur pa'i skor*. The reproduction of a manuscript on 288 folios belonging to Yol-mo bla-ma rdo-rje, it is similar in scope to both A & B.

(D) *Byang gter phur pa lha nag gi chos tshan* (*sNga 'gyur byang gter phur pa lha nag thun min yol mo lugs su grags pa*) contains a collection of 33 supplementary texts, chiefly dealing with the protectors of the cult, most of which are unique to this collection. Covering 225 folios, these texts were written and compiled in the early 17th century by bsTan-'dzin nor-bu, the third Yol-mo sprul-sku.³⁰ This neatly written manuscript in *dbu can* script was published by Tingkey Gonjang Rinpoche, Gangtok, 1994.

(E) Eventually, in 2002, after many years of research and collection, the Bod-kyi shes-rig zhib-'jub-khang in Chengdu was able to publish a set of 45 volumes entitled *dPal chen rdo rje gzhon nu'i chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (*Phur pa phyogs bsgrigs*), within which are contained Tibetan Vajrakīla texts and teachings assembled from all lineages. Texts from the Northern Treasures cycle of Vajrakīla are mainly gathered together in volumes 12, 13 & 14 of this large compilation, and it is vol. 12 of this series that constitutes our Collection E. Except for a few minor changes

³⁰ The importance of the Yol-mo lineage of the Northern Treasures is highlighted at the end of Chapter 1, below.

(noted in Appendix I, below), vols. 13 & 14 of this series are photographic reproductions of collections B & A, above.³¹

The title of every text contained in these five collections is listed together with its page number in Appendix I of the present work, thus facilitating reference to these original sources. The texts themselves are referred to throughout the present book by their sequence numbers: A1, A2, etc. All five collections include original material said to have come from the treasure trove of Zang-zang lha-brag, unearthed by the revealer Rig-'dzin rgod-ldem in the 14th century, as well as commentarial material, liturgical arrangements and the independent compositions of various historical holders of the lineage. The texts vary in length from those that merely cover a single side of a single folio to those that extend to over one hundred sides (50 folios). It is invariably the original *gter ma* material that is brief, the later compilations and commentaries tending to be more expansive. The *gter ma* material consists of a few texts of supposedly Indic origin not found elsewhere, as well as a large number of esoteric teachings on the Vajrakīla system said to have been taught by Padmasambhava to a select few among his close disciples. From the colophons of these texts, it would appear that Padmasambhava gave many of the teachings in Bhutan and that transcripts were also hidden there.

There are only two root *tantra*³² at the heart of all this material, neither one of which is accompanied by any commentary. This would seem to reflect their transmission through a lineage more concerned with meditative experience and mystic praxis than philosophical theory.³³ The

³¹ In recent years, several of these Kīla texts have been republished in general anthologies of Byang-gter literature, newly edited by masters of the lineage in India and Nepal. For details of these modern collections, please refer to the bibliography.

³² These are the BRT on seven folios listed as A2, B31, C19 & E21, and the *Vajrakīlacittaguhyakāya-tantra* on ten folios found at A3, B10 & C1. A31, C13, D16 & E15 are said to be the 21st chapter of a lost *tantra* called *Phur pa me lce'i 'phreng ba*.

³³ Tāranātha claims that tantric adepts, in general, had no interest in philosophical speculation and the only religious works they composed were “great and small *sādhana* and empowerments as well as major and minor texts concerning *sampannakrama*. The *siddhas* themselves did not speak at all about commentaries and explanatory works ...”

David Templeman, *Tāranātha's Life of Kṛṣṇācārya* 45

overwhelming mass of material in the collections is devoted to *sādhana* and ritual and there are also several chronicles that place these rituals within a more or less mythological context. These consist of both original *gter ma* texts and later elaborations.

Authors of the later texts range from the famous to the obscure. The most illustrious name, perhaps, is that of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. A staunch supporter of the Byang-gter school, the Fifth Dalai Lama's recently published *Secret Visions* (Samten Karmay, London, 1988) show him to be a firm believer in the power of the ritual *kīla*. Better represented, however, is his disciple Padma 'phrin-las (1641-1718), traditionally regarded as the fourth incarnation of the Byang-gter's founder and widely acknowledged as the greatest scholar in the history of this school.

All the texts, other than those of collection D, are written in headless (*dbu med*) script with only a couple of exceptions, both of which are found in collection A. A45 is a short xylographed *sādhana* on six folios and A48 is a hand written ritual for turning away evil, calligraphed in *dbu can* on 24 folios. All the other texts abound with shorthand abbreviations as well as orthographic and grammatical irregularities so that deciphering and editing them has been a major task. The handwriting of collections A and B is quite similar (although not uniform throughout) and seems to conform to a type categorised by John Stevens as "originated by Vairocana the translator".³⁴ Collection C is not very different but I found it the most difficult to read. My chief native informant (prof. C.R. Lama of Viśva-bharati University, West Bengal) describes the handwriting of A & B as "East Tibetan style" and I suppose C to have been written in Nepal (Yol-mo), where the Byang-gter tradition has long been established.³⁵ Collection E, of unknown provenance, is written in a more fluid hand. A particular

³⁴ J. Stevens, *Sacred Calligraphy of the East* 75

³⁵ Yol-mo in northeast Nepal (marked on maps as Helambu) is one of the seven "hidden lands" (*sbas yul*) deemed preeminently suitable as sites for meditational retreat, a "place where the Dharma will flourish after its disappearance in Tibet". Graham Clarke, "A Helambu History", *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre* IV (1980) 7. See also; 'Gu ru'i ga'u bdun ma; *A collection of prophecies of Guru Padmasambhava on the location of the various treasure caches concealed for future revelations and the concealed lands destined for future gter-ston to reveal. From the Byang-gter discoveries of Rig-'dzin rgod kyi ldem-'phru-can and his tradition.* Reproduced from a rare manuscript from the library of Khanchung Rinpoche and published by Dorjee Tsering, Delhi, 1983. For a modern ethnographic account of life in that region see Graham Clarke, "Lama and Tamang in Yolmo".

problem, of course, is presented by the many *mantra* with which this kind of tantric literature is inevitably saturated. After so many centuries in isolation from their Indian matrix, these *mantra* which may originally have been encoded in formal Sanskrit interspersed with various vernacular phrases and nomenclature as well as the usual non-semantic *bīja* and expletives, are found within the manuscripts rendered more or less unintelligible in Tibetanized forms. Despite (or, in some cases, because of) the repetition of the most salient *mantra* in several texts so that we are thereby presented with an enormous number of variants from which to choose, a ‘correct’ reading could only be hoped for in a minority of the more obvious cases.

rNying-ma-pa literature

Only one of our source materials attempts to place the Northern Treasures Kīla doctrines within the context of rNying-ma sacred literature as a whole, and that is B4, the *Nor bu'i do shal* (‘Necklace of Gems’), in 17 folios by 'Phrin-las bdud-'joms (1725-1789). This text was composed as an introduction to the doctrines of Vajrakīla for a group of his disciples about to become initiated into the cult. The author states at the outset his belief that a single Vajrayāna empowerment encompasses within itself every aspect of the path and goal. “For those who cannot grasp this immensity within a single *maṇḍala*”, however, he says that the Buddha taught the two vehicles known as ‘the causal vehicle of dialectics’ (*mtshan nyid rgyu yi theg pa*) and ‘the resultant *vajra* vehicle’ (*'bras bu rdo rje'i theg pa*). The teachings of the former being contained within the *sūtra* and those of the latter within the *tantra*.³⁶

The various *sūtra* and *tantra* followed by the rNying-ma-pa were translated into Tibetan from the languages of India, China and Central Asia, from the reign of Srong-btsan sgam-po (629-710 CE) up until the last of

³⁶ B4 176

the early translators, Smṛtijñāna, in the tenth century.³⁷ Later, however, when the *bKa'* 'gyur and *bsTan* 'gyur were compiled as canons of sacred literature for the followers of the gSar-ma traditions, many of the early *tantra* were excluded on the premise that no Sanskrit original could be found as verification of authenticity. As a consequence, many followers of the New Translation schools (*gsar lugs*) tended to reject the rNying-ma texts as unrepresentative of the true teachings of the Buddha. Followers of the Old Translation schools, however, embrace all the texts of the *bKa'* 'gyur and *bsTan* 'gyur and study them in the monasteries, although the philosophical viewpoints of the old and new traditions often diverge from one another quite radically.

'Phrin-las bdud-'joms continues his explanation by saying that the two *yāna* known as 'the vehicle of cause' and 'the vehicle of result' may, alternatively, be considered under three rubrics as 'the vehicle which controls the source of suffering' (*kun 'byung 'dran pa'i theg pa*), 'the vehicle of the outer *tantra* of austere awareness' (*phyi dka' thub rig pa'i rgyud kyi theg pa*) and 'the vehicle of overpowering means' (*dbang bsgyur thabs kyi theg pa*).³⁸ Each of these three *yāna* has three divisions and thus there are the nine vehicles of the 1) *Śrāvaka*, 2) *Pratyekabuddha*, and 3) *Bodhisattva* (followers of the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna *sūtras* that control the source of suffering through renunciation, wisdom and compassion), 4) *Kriyātantra*, 5) *Ubhayatantra*, and 6) *Yogatantra* (which, by means of austere awareness, gradually transform the universe and its inhabitants into a sacred *maṇḍala* populated with deities), 7) *Mahāyogatantra*, 8) *Anuyogatantra*, and 9) *Atiyogatantra* (which, respectively, emphasise the skilful means of the *utpattikrama*, the discriminative awareness of the *saiṃpannakrama* and

³⁷ It is said that during the time of persecution of Buddhism in Tibet in the early ninth century by king gLang dar-ma, lay tantric *yogins* were spared the excesses of ill treatment suffered by their monastic brethren because the king had been frightened by demonstrations of occult power displayed to him by the *kīla-siddha* Sangs-rgyas ye-shes.

T. Thondup, *The Tantric Tradition of the Nyingmapa* 153
gZhon-nu-dpal comments that those tantric adepts hid away the *sāstras* and *sūtras* that had been translated before the time of Ral-pa-can and it is thanks to them that the early doctrines survived the ensuing years of chaos between 901 and 973 CE. George Roerich, *The Blue Annals* 60-61

³⁸ These three divisions are said to have been outlined in the *anuyoga* text *sPyi mdo dgongs pa'i 'dus pa* and elaborated by teachers in the sMin-grol-gling tradition. G. Dorje, *The Guhyagarbha-tantra* 18

the pristine cognition free of duality that is the great perfection of the final result).

'Phrin-las bdud-'joms then informs us that, within this ninefold scheme, the canon of Vajrakīla embodies the skilful means (*upāya*) of the *yoganiruttaratantra*, a general term for the teachings of the seventh, eighth and ninth *yāna*.³⁹ Generally in rNying-ma literature these three are known as 'the inner *tantra*', within which category the doctrines of Vajrakīla mostly pertain to *mahāyoga*.⁴⁰ They are classified as '*tantra* of skilful means' because of their strong bias towards enlightened activity ('*phrin las*) but this is not to say that they lack the view of transcendental wisdom (*prajñā*). As well as the *anuyoga* techniques discussed below in Chapter Eight, Kīla literature is thoroughly pervaded by the viewpoint and terminology of *atiyoga* (the system of rDzogs-chen)⁴¹ and the Byang-gter cycle even contains two *sādhana* (A32 & A35) that purport to have been taught by Śrīsiṃha, one of the greatest luminaries of the *atiyoga* tradition.⁴² It should be noted, however, that in at least one early *atiyoga* document, the word *kīla* is used disparagingly as an indicator of only the relative aspects of Buddhist religious practice: the accumulation of merit, contemplation and the purification of *sāmsāric* traces.⁴³

"Furthermore", continues 'Phrin-las bdud-'joms, "in this country of Tibet having both early and later transmissions of the doctrine, especially with regard to the transmissions of *guhyanmantra*, it is the early transmission of the Vajrayāna that has the two great systems of *bka' ma* and *gter ma*. Now within this system, the tantric doctrines of Vajrakīla under consideration here are classified as *gter ma* because they were taken out of hiding during a later period."⁴⁴

³⁹ B4 176-177

⁴⁰ They are found under that heading, for example, in the NGB.

⁴¹ A fact already noted by Eva Dargyay, *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* 35. In Chapter Three of the present work, in which the nature of the *kīla* as well as its form and function is explored, we note the *kīla* in both material (relative) and philosophic (absolute) guises: "Annihilating enemies and obstructors by means of symbolic *kīla*, grasping thoughts of ignorance are cut off by the actual *kīla*." A47 471

⁴² The emphasis in both these *sādhana*, found in all three collections and dealt with below in Chapter Seven, is on the absolute, non-dual nature of the *kīla*.

⁴³ S. Karmay, *The Great Perfection* 72

⁴⁴ B4 177

Thus, with regard to the transmission of the doctrines, the received texts (*bka' ma*) of the rNying-ma school are divided into three categories: *rGyal ba'i dgongs brgyud* ('intentional lineage of the *jina*'), *Rig 'dzin brda' brgyud* ('symbolic lineage of the *vidyādhara*') and *Gang zag snyan brgyud* ('aural lineage of mundane individuals'). The discovered texts (*gter ma*) moreover, have three additional lineages called *bKa' babs lung bstan brgyud* ('lineage of prophetically declared spiritual succession'), *Las 'phro gter gyi brgyud* ('lineage of treasures of karmic maturation') and *Tsig brgyud shog ser gyi brgyud* ('lineage of transmitted words on yellow scrolls'). The Byang-gter doctrines of Vajrakīla are said to have been transmitted along all six of those lines.⁴⁵

The Byang-gter Kīla texts

The received Byang-gter Kīla literature consists of a chaotic confusion of texts dealing in large part with ritual formulae and their magical correlates, the open-ended nature of which appears to imply no theoretical limit to their exegesis. Many of the texts may, at first, seem verbose and repetitive in their opening and closing, largely panegyric, vignettes whilst remaining cryptic in the extreme with regard to central content. I have tried to reflect a little of the original literary flavour of the source materials in my study but have, of necessity, to a certain extent abbreviated the flowery rhetoric and opened up the more obscure passages in order to shed a modicum of light into the cryptic gloom. In order to facilitate cross-referencing this material with the data of other Buddhist schools, I have included a number of Sanskrit key terms in parentheses throughout the study, generally employing Tibetan terminology only when the Sanskrit appeared doubtful.⁴⁶ The Tibetan-Sanskrit equivalents of most of these words are to be found in the index.

Even though the texts overlap with much repetition of data, it is noted that a fresh element or novel twist is introduced with each retelling so that the material seems to grow in organic fashion quite unlike the lineally structured logical progression of modern western writing. The discrete

⁴⁵ B4 178

⁴⁶ Although based entirely upon Tibetan sources I am in no doubt that the material presented here has an Indic origin, as argued below in Chapter Two. It is understood, however, that the implications of these key terms gradually shift with time so that modern Tibetan usage may not coincide exactly with that of ancient India.

title applied to the individual sections of the literature and their idiosyncratic assemblage within the various collections here studied indicates a random structure to the whole within which any given text may or may not be included with impunity. The texts put forward an interconnected, self-sustaining dogma of symbols and ritual technique designed to serve as a means through which the initiate may both express this symbolic world and interact with it. Growing ever more skilful in this interaction, the *yogin* supposedly develops ritual power, the magical ability to control events in the world at large. Despite a preponderance of technical vocabulary and cosmological/religious dogma, the texts are clearly intended to convey not physical but rather psychological truths. Their purpose is conveyed to the emotion rather than the intellect so that the *yogin* realises their validity within his heart not his head. Indeed, it is axiomatic that mystical insight into the ‘truth’ of the *maṇḍala* is experienced by the *yogin* as a knowledge utterly free of propositional content. Such a result is a phenomenologically potent spiritual ecstasy equated with the higher *siddhi*. The meditator is imbued with a profound sense of well-being that is understood in the Kīla tradition to be the result of having banished the evil hordes of Māra beyond the confines of the *maṇḍala*, the *yogin*’s symbolic world. Within that context, the lower *siddhi* are indicated by omens encountered either in dreams, visions or the ordinary waking state. Thus, through his practice, the *yogin* learns to sustain the condition within which the world is experienced in the image of the sacred *maṇḍala* of Vajrakāla.

Although among Tibetans there exist several important lineages of Vajrakāla teachings, at no time during the writing of this book did I feel impelled to refer to parallel texts from traditions other than the Byang-gter, either to clarify my doubts or verify my conclusions. As I worked I found that each document studied, although presenting enigmatic riddles to ponder, shed fresh light on the significance of others in the cycle so that the entire tradition seemed to fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, each small text being meaningful only within the context of the whole.

The currently available collections of Northern Treasures Vajrakāla texts at the heart of the present study together comprise a total of over 250 separate titles, all of which are listed in Appendix I in the form in which they appear at the head of the texts themselves. When these texts are checked for duplications, however, their number is reduced by more than 50%. The collections also contain a few random texts that are not relevant to our purposes. B8, for example, is neither a Northern Treasures text nor does it relate to the Vajrakāla cycle. C37 is a Northern Treasures

text but unrelated to the Kīla cycle. And so on. This leaves us with a core collection of little more than one hundred separate texts, the overwhelming majority of which claim to have been among the original treasures revealed by the *gter ston* Rig-'dzin rgod-ldem in 1366. To this essential core, carefully considered commentarial notes and supplementary prayers have been added in later years by named authors, so that the original gems of the tradition have been repeatedly polished and allowed to shine under different lights. Each of the individual collections contains texts that are not found elsewhere, as well as texts that it holds in common with one or more of the other collections. The full details of these correspondences are also listed in the Appendix.

The systematic ordering of the eight chapters of Part Three is based upon an arrangement set out in the very first of numerous minor commentaries to be found within this Northern Treasures Kīla literature, the *Phur pa che mchog gi them byang rin chen gter mdzod*, in which we are presented with a list of the essential elements of the Vajrakīla cycle.⁴⁷ Scarcely more than a single folio in length, this valuable text arranges the Byang-gter Kīla literature into five groups, each of which consists of three elements:

1) The fundamental elements that underpin the sacred tradition are the three called *rgyud* (*tantra*), *dbang chog* (rites of initiation and empowerment, *adhiṣṭhānavidhi*) and *'phrin las* (ritual activities, equivalent here to *sādhana*).

2) The methods which are taught so that *yogins* may appropriate the *siddhi* of the deity are the three called *dKar po lam gyi sgron ma* (Lamp of the White Path), *bKa' nyan lcags kyi ber ka* (Iron Cloak of Attendants) and *Nag po dug gi 'khor lo* (Wheel of Black Poison).

3) The heart of the fierce activities is said to be the three called *zor* (a magic weapon to be hurled against the enemy), *sbyin sreg* (ritual burning, *homa*) and *mnan gtad* (forcing down, subduing).

4) For the benefit of *yogins* are taught the three called *tshe sgrub* (for the attainment of long life, *āyurvedhi*), *nor sgrub* (for the attainment of wealth) and *bza' tshogs* (the presentation of offerings for a sacramental feast).

⁴⁷ Found independently as A1, also included within C15. Although the title of the text indicates a specific relationship to the *mahottarakīla* cycle, its analysis of the doctrines appears equally valid for the *kṣura* and *mantra-bhīru* cycles.

5) As supplements to make up for any deficiencies are taught the method of making *sāccha* (*tsha tsha*, miniature reliquaries, the preparation of which fulfils broken vows), *rgyud rims* (*sic.*) and the *zur 'debs* (appendix).⁴⁸

Only one of the texts at our disposal (E49, a short ritual composed by Padma 'Phrin-las) teaches an independent procedure for the attainment of wealth (*nor sgrub*), considered by the *them byang* to be an essential part of the Vajrakīla cycle and taught for the benefit of *yogins* under section 4. Collection A apparently once contained a wealth rite that focussed upon the deity Jambhala,⁴⁹ for the publishers of that collection have listed such a text between our A27 and A28. No such text is to be found there now, however, so that we are unable to ascertain whether that text was an original treasure text or not. E49 also focusses upon Jambhala but makes no reference to a 'root text.' It is quite possible that Padma 'Phrin-las composed his text solely in order to fill this gap. There remains also a question mark over the term *rgyud rims* in section 5. *Rims* means 'infectious disease' so the word is surely a misspelling (despite its recurrence at C15) of *rim* for *rim pa*; 'order, series, succession'. *rGyud rim* could then mean either the successive stages of tantric practice – the *bskyed rim* (*utpattikrama*) and *rdzogs rim* (*saṃpannakrama*) – or 'the succession of *tantra*' more commonly referred to as *brgyud rim*, the succession of masters through whom the tantric tradition was transmitted (*paramparā*). Among the texts in the various collections are found several *brgyud 'debs* (prayers to the lineage masters) and these could perhaps be thought of as "supplements to make up for deficiencies in the *yogin's* practice". Our text C15 contains the words *rgyud rims* in its title and the text itself deals, among other things, with the transmission of the Vajrakīla doctrines from the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra to Vajrasattva, Vajrapāṇi, Karmendrāṇī,⁵⁰ Padmasambhava and finally to sNa-nam rdo-rje bdud-'joms who was the last to receive them before they were hidden away as treasures to be rediscovered by sNa-nam rdo-rje bdud-'joms' own later incarnation as a *gter ston*. This, however, is unsatisfactory and thus we are left with no original *gter ma* texts at all in

⁴⁸ A1 2-3

⁴⁹ Jambhala is a god of wealth popularly worshipped by Mahāyāna Buddhists in general, having no particular connection with the cycle of Vajrakīla.

⁵⁰ E2 puts Vajravārāhī in place of Karmendrāṇī.

any of the collections that pertain unmistakably to either the category *nor sgrub*, the meaning of which is clear, or *rgyud rims*, the meaning of which is problematic. The remaining 13 sections of this 15-fold system of categorising the Northern Treasures Vajrakīla literature, on the other hand, are all well represented by precisely those texts which are generally to be found in common within collections A, B, C & E.

1) The first group of (a) *tantra*, (b) *adhiṣṭhānavidhi* and (c) *sādhana* are represented by:

(a) The two root *tantra* called *Śrīvajrakīlapotrihala-tantra* (*sic.*) (BRT, A2, B31, C19, E21) and the *Vajrakīlacittaguhyakāya-tantra* (A3, B10, C1, E3). These two *tantra*, which form the subject matter of our Chapter Five, present the fundamental mythology of the Vajrakīla cycle as accepted both within and without the Byang-gter school. The *tantra* from the black iron cache in the north is observed to correspond remarkably closely to the fragment included in the *bKa' 'gyur*, translated by the Sa-skye paṇḍita from a Sanskrit original thought to have been brought to Tibet by guru Padma himself.⁵¹ The Mahottarakīla text from the golden southern cache puts forward the origin myth of the demon Rudra and the deity Vajrakīla as well as a paradigm for the fierce rites of the Vajrakīla cult utilising the device of questions and answers between Vajrapāṇi and the lord of the *maṅḍala*, a traditional format of Buddhist texts.

(b) The *Phur pa che mchog gi dbang chu* (A8, B12, C5, E8) and the *sPu gri nag po'i dbang chog* (A14, B63, C20, E30) are analysed in Chapter Six. These are the rites of empowerment enacted in terms of a symbolic palinogenesis through which the *yogin* who aspires to membership of the Kīla cult may be introduced to its doctrines and authorised to participate in its sacred mysteries. Within this chapter the *yogin's* 'price of admission' to the cult is considered⁵² as well as those benefits he may seek to gain by his entry.

(c) The *Phur pa'i thugs kyi 'phrin las* (A45, B42, C35) and the *Dril sgrub kyi 'phrin las* (A36, &c.) are the fundamental rites through which

⁵¹ For these two texts, see my *A Bolt of Lightning from the Blue*, pp.79-90

⁵² By "price of admission" is meant not only the fee paid to the teacher at the time of empowerment but also the vows (*samvara*) and commitments (*samaya*) to which the neophyte is subsequently bound for the rest of his life. According to Śrīsinha, the essential *samaya* to be observed by initiates into the cult of Vajrakīla is that they should carry with them at all times a symbolic *kīla* made of iron. A32 227

the *yogin* expresses his commitment to the cult and through which he seeks to draw upon its power. Essentially these rites may be viewed as a reenactment of his own first ceremony of initiation (or ‘empowerment’) which, in turn, sought to recreate the primordial state of purity described in the deity’s *tantra*. It is by means of these rites that the *yogin* seeks to transform his view of the world until he is able to maintain it in his mind as being nothing less than the deity’s sacred *maṇḍala*.⁵³ His image of himself, meanwhile, has simultaneously to be transformed into that of the deity. This process of *sādhana*, known as *utpattikrama*, through which both the deity and his *maṇḍala* are generated, is examined in Chapter Seven.

In accordance with the tripartite schema ubiquitous in Buddhist tantric praxis, the *sādhaka* effects the total identification of himself with the deity by absorbing his mind in the *samādhi* of the deity, causing his speech “to resound with the unceasing recitation of *mantra*” and ‘sealing’ his body by *mudrā*.⁵⁴ The significance of this last term is by no means restricted to a simple ‘gesture of the hands’ but may include the physical placement of the practitioner in the deity’s favoured abode (a fearful charnel ground where wild animals roam) where he dwells within a hut made of skulls, besmearing himself with ashes and drops of blood and grease, consuming the foodstuffs of the god (especially meat and alcohol) and wearing the deity’s apparel of animal skins with ornamentation of bone.⁵⁵ Through this process of *utpattikrama* the *yogin* aims to gain direct and intuitive insight (the antidote to ignorance) and thus, as part of his *sādhana*, he is

⁵³ In fact the distinction between ‘the mind’ and ‘the world’ is not much maintained in these texts. Although the theatre of *sādhana* praxis is generally the imagination of the practitioner himself (with body, speech and mind all having their role to play), in the black deity cycle the ritual is thematically projected upon the outer world whereas the *mahottarakīla* cycle deems it to occur almost entirely within the *yogin*’s own body. The anthropocosmos, however, is ritually homologised with the containing macrocosmos, especially with its underlying process of endless becoming based on ignorance and its resultant suffering, defined as birth in any realm under the sway of Māra.

⁵⁴ Such a simplistic outline, however, is belied by the texts themselves within which the boundaries of ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, remain remarkably fluid.

⁵⁵ Vajrakīla meditation is concerned with the nature of *samsāra* and not *nirvāṇa*. HT I.X.34,36 describes the calmness of the innate (*sahaja*) specifically as being *nistarāṅga* “without waves” whereas the violently agitated nature of the Vajrakīla *maṇḍala* is repeatedly stressed. Indeed, the *maṇḍala* itself is stated in the *sādhana* to rest upon “a churning ocean of blood” indicative of the waves of *samsāra*.

instructed to “gulp down *saṃsāra*” and experience the one taste (*ekarasa*) of all phenomena and phenomenal processes. With the whole world in his belly he is no less than the god himself.⁵⁶ He has ‘liberated’ and ‘blessed’ all beings by killing them and, having gained control over worldly ‘demonic’ forces (the hosts of Māra), he has become master of his own destiny. Thus the *yogin* obtains the ‘dual benefit’ of the Mahāyāna: freedom from *saṃsāra* for others as much as for himself.⁵⁷

2) The second group consists of three named texts. The *dKar po lam gyi sgron ma* (A9, B15, C6, E9) examined in Chapter Eight describes the climax of the *utpattikrama* process. Building on his success in appropriating for himself the outward appearance of the deity, the *yogin* now purifies his internal nature until it, too, becomes ‘divine’ in the process known as *sampannakrama* brought about by close meditation upon light.

The *bKa’ nyan lcags kyi ber ka* is found as A10 & E10 and the *Nag po dug gi ’khor lo* as A11 & E11. In collections B and C, however, the two texts are found together under a single title as B19 & C7. These documents are studied in Chapter Nine together with related texts of the black deity cycle which detail the manner in which the *yogin*, having achieved total self-identification with the deity and being thus empowered to “roll the ritual nail between the palms of his hands”, may strive to bring all ‘lesser’ spiritual beings⁵⁸ under his majesty. Once adept at controlling those powers, the *yogin* is able to dispatch them against his enemy in a display of violent sorcery. This chapter, then, is permeated with the darkest images of witchcraft and yet the texts themselves claim to rank among the most profound of spiritual practices. Much of their content is almost indistinguishable in kind from that encountered in the grimoires of late medieval Europe where procedures of black magic are taught for gaining

⁵⁶ This expansion of the *yogin*’s perception from that of a merely theoretical knowledge of the dynamic principles of existence (such as the 12 *nidāna* and so on) to a first-hand (if interiorised, mystical) experience of the totality of created being is enhanced by his psychic ‘growth’ to a gigantic form of many colours with nine heads and 18 arms in which he holds all manner of symbolic attributes, etc.

⁵⁷ The sequential stages of *utpattikrama* meditation are analysed in full detail in volume two of this series: *A Roll of Thunder from the Void*.

⁵⁸ These “lesser spirits” are included within the mythology of the Vajrakīla cult as local deities who, having submitted to the authority and power of Vajrakīla (in the guise of Padmasambhava or other adept) were subsequently given seats around the periphery of the Vajrakīla *maṇḍala*.

the upper hand in a struggle for power over the forces of nature, personified in the guise of ‘elementals’ or mischievous sprites. Publicly disavowed by Buddhist hierarchs throughout the course of religious history, these texts nevertheless claim huge rewards for those sorcerer *yogins* who master their apparently appalling methodology.

3) All of the collections link *zor*, *sbyin sreg* and *mnan gtad* together within the single text called *mNan sreg 'phang gsum* found at A13, B20, C11 & E12. Under these three rubrics, dealt with in Chapter Ten, the hitherto highly introspective yogic procedures for the destruction of foes are simplified and recast in the form of rituals that readily lend themselves to the involvement of the *saṅgha* as a whole. In particular, this group involvement may be coordinated in the monastic masked dances (*gar 'cham*, *nartana*), during which participants don the divine accessories specifically “designed to set the individual free from any naturalistic expression, so that all the codified elements (gestures, postures, utterances) may fall into place with the structural rigor of a veritable body writing”.⁵⁹ Thus the mythology of the Kīla cult is transmitted in the form of sacred drama to the wider audience of lay faithful, whose pious offerings support and maintain the monastic establishments enacting these colourful rites.

4) The *rDo rje phur pa'i tshes sgrub* is found at A18, B22, C12 & E13 while the *bZa' tshogs* is found at A23, B24, C14 & E17. There are no root *nor sgrub* texts to be found in any of the collections. Chapter Eleven therefore investigates the two remaining techniques said to be of direct benefit to the *yogin* in his personal life: the means to prolong his youth and vitality, and the contemplations through which he may bless all that he eats and drinks.

⁵⁹ M. Thevoz, *The Painted Body* 90. The impersonal nature of the rites in the case of the Vajrakīla cult is further reinforced by their scatological nature. The painted faces of the Kīla sorcerers make play with “the very things (modern man) is so intent on averting; the dissociation of the body, the break-up of the physiognomy, the release of wild impulses, the disintegration of the Ego” (*ibidem* 25). In this remarkable book, Thevoz points out that the function of makeup has always been essentially magical and that ritual body decorations “are all polarized by the supernatural world, by the magical powers that govern and order reality, by their reference to the elemental forces and primordial causes which are external to and dissimilar to the society of man.” (p.33)

5) *Sāccha* are taught at A24, B24, C14 & E19 and additional notes (*zur 'debs*) at A28, B25, C16 & E20. The final chapter of the book is dedicated to an investigation of these procedures through which the *yogin* is instructed to make up for any deficiencies in his practice and pays particular attention to the symbolic value of the various sacraments utilised within the Kīla cult for the celebration of community feasts (*gaṇacakra*). Spontaneously generating the Vajrakīla *maṇḍala* within his body, speech and mind, each *yogin* presents his own defilements (*kleśa*) as offerings to the deities. He thus seeks to eradicate from himself all traces of imperfection, “the obscurations to enlightenment”, and achieve the divine purity of his goal. His oath of *bodhicitta* is fulfilled by contemplatively offering a boundless quantity of blood (= *prajñā*) and nectar (= *upāya*).

Throughout this study it is observed that the religious system of the wrathful deity Vajrakīla requires its followers entirely to abandon all preconceived views of the mundane world and immerse themselves instead in a world of symbols, a fantastical model that adheres solely to its own internal system of logic based upon earlier Buddhist concepts of cosmology and psychology. That model, it is claimed, will liberate the *yogin* who is successful in its realisation so that he may dwell in a state of permanent bliss. More than that, however, it will also bestow upon him a number of occult powers which may be used at his discretion for the benefit and ultimate liberation of all his fellow creatures. The work concludes with the observation that it is this ‘intention of great compassion’ that is offered as the legitimising factor for the inclusion of the cult within the general framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism⁶⁰ and points to a profound psychology underlying its somewhat bizarre approach to the age-old problem of man’s quest for enlightenment and spiritual fulfilment.

⁶⁰ The Mahāyāna (‘Great Vehicle’) is so called by its adherents precisely because of the emphasis it places on great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*). Within the way of *guhya mantra*, this great compassion takes the form of such magical activities as the slaying of demons – acts considered to be great expedients (*mahopāya*) for the ultimate benefit of all living beings.

