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The Myth Chapter

BY

Tathāgata-rakṣita

gtam rgyud kyi rtog pa

· Toh 2006 ·

Degé Tengyur, vol. 47 (rgyud 'grel, mi), folios 213.b–214.a



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co.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ti. Title
- im. Imprint
- co. Contents
- s. Summary
- ac. Acknowledgements
- i. Introduction
- tr. The Translation
 - 1. The Myth Chapter
- ab. Abbreviations
- n. Notes
- b. Bibliography
 - Tibetan Sources
 - Secondary Literature
- g. Glossary

SUMMARY

s.

- s.1 *The Myth Chapter* concisely relates the story of Vajrabhairava's subjugation of Yama and his entourage. The text describes how Vajrabhairava crushes the city of Yama and forces its inhabitants to surrender. He then binds them under oath and empowers them to serve as protectors of his teachings. The text also presents the root mantra of Vajrabhairava, which encapsulates the essential life force of Yama and his followers.

ac.

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ac.1 This publication was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha.

ac.2 The text was translated, edited, and introduced by the 84000 translation team. Bruno Galasek-Hul produced the translation and wrote the introduction. Ryan Damron edited the translation and the introduction, and Dawn Collins copyedited the text. Martina Cotter was in charge of the digital publication process.

i.

INTRODUCTION

i.1

In *The Myth Chapter*, Vajrabhairava, a tantric deity considered to be the wrathful emanation of Mañjuśrī, travels to the city of Yama that lies beyond the southern ocean and easily crushes the iron city. This prompts Yama and his followers to surrender to him and offer him their life force, which takes the form of syllables constituting the thirty-two syllable mantra of Vajrabhairava. Vajrabhairava subsequently teaches the mantra and then empowers Yama and his followers to become servants of liberation. He also commands the female inhabitants of Yama's city to uphold his teachings during the final five-hundred-year period of the Dharma by supporting the activities of yogins and vidyādhara. Once they all have given their word, Vajrabhairava releases them.

i.2

The Myth Chapter begins rather abruptly and lacks the traditional introductory formulas of Buddhist scripture that establishes the time, location, and setting for the discourse. In common with many Buddhist tantras, the fact that the text omits this formula can be attributed to the text's status as an extraction of a longer, complete text that is inaccessible in the human realm. One such account for the Vajrabhairava cycle states that the Indian siddha Lalitavajra received the transmission of the Vajrabhairava corpus from the ḍākinīs in Oḍḍiyāna and was only allowed to copy and take as much of the text with him back to India as he was able to recite and memorize in seven days.¹ The colophon of the *Vajrabhairava Tantra* itself states that the tantras of the Vajrabhairava cycle are mere extracts from a much more comprehensive tantra.² That *The Myth Chapter* can be considered such an extract is further indicated by its title, which identifies the text as a *rtog pa* (Skt. *kalpa*). While this term often refers to a "ritual" or "procedure," it can also refer to a section or chapter of a larger work.³

i.3

The Myth Chapter sparked a degree of controversy in Tibet. According to Tāranātha, some scholars considered *The Myth Chapter* to be a spurious tantra (*rdzun rgyud*)⁴ because it contains content that suggests a Tibetan

provenance. For example, the text includes a reference to non-human beings named *tšen (btsan)*, an indigenous class of beings with no known Indic equivalent.⁵ Tāranātha, however, contends that this verse alone was a later interpolation because it is not found in an old witness of this text and that the rest of the text is indeed authentic.

i.4 There are at present no known Sanskrit witnesses of *The Myth Chapter*, nor is there an available extant recension of the source text from which it was extracted. The text is included twice in the Degé canon, once in the Unexcelled Yoga tantra section of the Kangyur (Toh 471), and once again in the Tengyur (Toh 2006). Neither of these versions includes a translator's colophon, but a colophon is included in the versions preserved in the Kangxi and Lithang Kangyurs. These colophons are, however, quite terse and do not yield much useful data that could help determine the context of the text's transmission and translation in Tibet.⁶

i.5 This English translation was prepared on the basis of the two Degé witnesses (Toh 471 and 2006), in consultation with the Comparative Edition (*dpe bsdur ma*) of the Degé Kangyur and the version of the text that is preserved in the Stok Palace Kangyur.

The Myth Chapter

1.

The Translation

[F.213.b]

1.1 Homage to the glorious Vajrabhairava.

1.2 “Now, I will explain
How the great Vajrabhairava—
He who has emerged from the vajras
Of the Blessed One’s body, speech, and mind—
Crossed the southern ocean
And reached the city of Yama.

1.3 “With his overwhelming sixteen legs
He trampled the sixteen gateless iron castles.
With his organ⁷ of single-pointed wisdom
He pounded the great central iron castle.

1.4 “Once he gained victory over the great Māra,
He roared *ha ha hi hi*.
Yama Dharmarāja and the rest,
Feeling overwhelmed, said to him:

1.5 “ ‘Great hero, what is this? [F.214.a]
We will do whatever you require, hero.⁸
We likewise offer our essential life forces.
Please accept them, hero.’

1.6 “The eight classes of beings⁹ also offered their essential life forces:
Yama offered *ya*, the *mātṛs ma*,¹⁰
The rākṣasas offered *ra*, the yakṣas *kṣe*,
The humans offered *ṇi*,¹¹ the earth lords *sa*,
The tsen offered *tṣa*, and the māras *da*.¹²

- 1.7 “They came together as one
And promised to become his servants.
Due to this great declaration,
They were well-regarded by the wisdom deity¹³
And gained a profound experience of service.¹⁴
- 1.8 “After they gained this experience of serving the deity,
They would never transgress their former oath
And it became impossible for them to fail.
- 1.9 ‘*ya ma rā ja sa do me ya | ya me do ru ṇa yo da ya | ya da yo ni ra yakṣe ya | yakṣe
yaccha ni rā ma ya*¹⁵
- 1.10 “After saying this,
The great Vajrabhairava
Empowered Yama Dharmarāja
And all of Yama’s messengers
To become servants of liberation.¹⁶
- 1.11 “To their mothers, sisters, daughters,
And their retinues, he gave this command:
- 1.12 “ ‘In the final five hundred years¹⁷
During which my teachings appear,
You must correctly carry out activities
Of yogins and vidyādharaś.’
- 1.13 They took this oath and were released from the oppression that afflicted
them.¹⁸
- 1.14 *The Myth Chapter is complete.*

ab.

ABBREVIATIONS

C Choné

H Lhasa Kangyur

J Lithang

K Kangxi

N Narthang Kangyur

S Stok Palace

Y Yongle

NOTES

n.

- n.1 For the full account, see Gonsalez 2021, p. 309. See also Siklós 1990, p. 83.
- n.2 See Toh 468, folio 163.b.
- n.3 For example, the term *kalpa/rtog pa* is used in this way in *The Tantra of the Glorious Black Yamāri in Three Chapters*.
- n.4 Cf. Sparham 2009, p. 63 and Tāranātha, folio 17.b. Here, however, a Sanskrit title is preserved (*śrīkṛṣṇayamāritantratrikalpa*) that contains the word *kalpa*, indicating that this may be a specialized meaning of the word.
- n.5 Another reason mentioned by Tāranātha (f. 17.b) is the allegedly wrong Tibetan transcription in the tantra of the Sanskrit word *dza la tsa*. However, none of the editions that we have consulted contain this word.
- n.6 The colophon in K reads *thar chen rgyal rigs gyis zhus chen bgyis bas dag*, which can tentatively be translated “This was corrected by Tharchen Gyalrik in his capacity as editor.” The identity of Tharchen Gyalrik (*thar chen rgyal rigs*) is uncertain.
- n.7 Tib. *mtshan ma*, which is here understood to be equivalent to the Sanskrit *liṅga*.
- n.8 H, N, S and Toh 2006 read “we will follow your wishes” (*dpa’ bo’i dgongs pa bdag gis bgyi*).
- n.9 Neither Toh 471 nor Toh 2006 offers an entirely satisfactory reading of this line. Toh 471 reads *lha ma srin ni sde brgyad kyis*, which could be interpreted to mean “The devas (*lha*), mātr̥s (*ma*), rākṣasas (*srin*) [and others from] the eight classes of beings...” Alternatively, *lha ma* could indicate devas (*lha*) and asuras (*lha ma yin*). Toh 2006 reads (*lha ma yin sde brgyad*), which could be interpreted as “the eight classes of asuras.” Since eight classes of beings are

listed in the next four lines, we have rendered this simply as “the eight classes of beings.”

- n.10 These eight syllables are part of Vajrabhairava’s root mantra.
- n.11 Toh 2006 reads “the humans offered *na*” (*mi yis na phul*).
- n.12 Tāranātha believed this verse to be a later addition since the *tsen* are indigenous Tibetan deities. See Tāranātha, folio 17.b.
- n.13 This translation follows Toh 2006 in reading *ye shes lha yis dgongs pa*. Toh 471 reads *ye shes lha yi dgongs pa*.
- n.14 Translation tentative.
- n.15 This transliteration follows Toh 471 without emendation. Toh 2006 reads *om ya ma rā jaḥ sa do me ya | ya me do ru | ṇa yo da ya | ya da yo ni ra yakṣe ya | yakṣe yaccha ni rā ma ya | hūṁ hūṁ phaṭ phaṭ*.
- n.16 According to Tāranātha (ff. 17.b–18.a), this means, “he blessed them as messengers of the lord of death” (*bsod byed pho nyar byin gyis brlabs*).
- n.17 Likely referring to the final five hundred years in which the Dharma will remain in this world. This is generally considered a time of degeneration.
- n.18 This translation is tentative. Toh 2006 reads, tentatively, “They took this oath, and were freed from the oppression that oppressed them” (*zhes byas dam bcas pa dang / mnan bzhin du mnan bor ro*). Both versions are syntactically ambiguous.
- n.19 Apparently, this later appeared as Siklós, Bulcsu. 1996. *The Vajrabhairava Tantras*. Buddhica Britannica, Series continua. London: Institute of Buddhist Studies. We were unable to obtain a copy of this work.

b.

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GLOSSARY

· Types of attestation for names and terms of the corresponding ·
source language

AS	<i>Attested in source text</i> This term is attested in a manuscript used as a source for this translation.
AO	<i>Attested in other text</i> This term is attested in other manuscripts with a parallel or similar context.
AD	<i>Attested in dictionary</i> This term is attested in dictionaries matching Tibetan to the corresponding language.
AA	<i>Approximate attestation</i> The attestation of this name is approximate. It is based on other names where the relationship between the Tibetan and source language is attested in dictionaries or other manuscripts.
RP	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan phonetic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the Tibetan phonetic rendering of the term.
RS	<i>Reconstruction from Tibetan semantic rendering</i> This term is a reconstruction based on the semantics of the Tibetan translation.
SU	<i>Source unspecified</i> This term has been supplied from an unspecified source, which most often is a widely trusted dictionary.

g.1 earth lord

sa bdag

ས་བདག

bhūpati^{AD}

Soil-dwelling, non-human spirits who dominate certain locales (hills, mountains, certain regions). They are said to cause problems such as diseases and natural disasters, etc., when disturbed and irritated by human activities, such as the pollution of their environs, etc.

g.2 eight classes of beings

sde brgyad

ལྔ་བརྒྱད།

—

A set of non-human beings that varies, but often includes devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas.

g.3 final five-hundred-year period

lnga brgya dus kyī tha ma

ལྔ་བརྒྱ་དུས་ཀྱི་ཐ་མ།

—

According to prophecy, the Buddha's teachings will only remain for a certain amount of time in our world system before conditions deteriorate to such a degree that practicing the Dharma becomes impossible. The different phases of the predicted gradual decline and loss of the Dharma are usually given in 500-year increments.

g.4 māra

bdud

བདུད།

māra^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

Māra, literally “death” or “maker of death,” is the name of the deva who tried to prevent the Buddha from achieving awakening, the name given to the class of beings he leads, and also an impersonal term for the destructive forces that keep beings imprisoned in saṃsāra:

(1) As a deva, Māra is said to be the principal deity in the Heaven of Making Use of Others' Emanations (*paranirmitavaśavartin*), the highest paradise in the desire realm. He famously attempted to prevent the Buddha's awakening under the Bodhi tree—see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), 21.1—and later sought many times to thwart the Buddha's activity. In the sūtras, he often also creates obstacles to the progress of śrāvakas and bodhisattvas. (2) The devas ruled over by Māra are collectively called *mārakāyika* or *mārakāyikadevatā*, the “deities of Māra's family or class.” In general, these māras too do not wish

any being to escape from saṃsāra, but can also change their ways and even end up developing faith in the Buddha, as exemplified by Sārthavāha; see *The Play in Full* (Toh 95), [21.14](#) and [21.43](#). (3) The term māra can also be understood as personifying four defects that prevent awakening, called (i) the divine māra (*devaputramāra*), which is the distraction of pleasures; (ii) the māra of Death (*mṛtyumāra*), which is having one's life interrupted; (iii) the māra of the aggregates (*skandhamāra*), which is identifying with the five aggregates; and (iv) the māra of the afflictions (*kleśamāra*), which is being under the sway of the negative emotions of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

g.5 mātr

ma mo

མ་མོ།

mātr^{AD}

“Mothers,” a class of female deities, typically seven or eight in number, who are common to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions.

g.6 Oḍḍiyāna

—

—

oḍḍiyāna^{AD}

An ancient kingdom, most likely located in the Swat Valley of present-day Pakistan.

g.7 rākṣasa

srin po

སྲིན་པོ།

rākṣasa^{AD}

Definition from the 84000 Glossary of Terms:

A class of nonhuman beings that are often, but certainly not always, considered demonic in the Buddhist tradition. They are often depicted as flesh-eating monsters who haunt frightening places and are ugly and evil-natured with a yearning for human flesh, and who additionally have miraculous powers, such as being able to change their appearance.

g.8 tsen

btsan

བཙན།

—

An indigenous Tibetan class of violent primarily mountain-dwelling spirits who can cause diseases when disturbed.

g.9 Vajrabhairava

rdo rje 'jigs byed

དོར་རྗེ་འཇིགས་བྱེད།

vajrabhairava^{AD}

The main deity of the Vajrabhairava cycle of tantras. He is an extremely wrathful manifestation of Mañjuśrī.

g.10 vidyādhara

rig 'dzin ldan

རིག་འཇིགས་ལྷན།

vidyādhara

Meaning those who wield (*dhara*) spells (*vidyā*), the term can be used to refer to both a class of supernatural beings who wield magical power and human practitioners of the magical arts. The later Buddhist tradition, playing on the dual valences of *vidyā* as “spell” and “knowledge,” began to apply this term more broadly to realized figures in the Buddhist pantheon.

g.11 Yama

gshin rje

གཤིན་རྗེ།

yama^{AD}

The Lord of Death who judges the dead and rules over the hells.

g.12 Yama Dharmarāja

chos kyi rgyal po

ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ།

dharmarāja^{AD}

Literally “Dharma-king.” An epithet of Yama, the Lord of Death, who judges the dead and rules over the hells. He was converted and bound by oath to Vajrabhairava as the special protector of the Vajrabhairavatantras.

