

Article

Consecrated Medicines and Spiritual Practices: A Reflection on the Many Traditions Represented in the *Relics* by Zur mkhar ba mNyam nyid rdo rje

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Abstract: This contribution is aimed at analyzing a series of life-prolonging and rejuvenating treatments (*bcud len*), recipes of ambrosia for immortality (*bdud rtsi sman*), and yogic and meditative techniques incorporated in the *Man ngag bye ba ring bsrel* (Ten Million of Quintessential Instructions, *The Relics*; henceforth *Ring bsrel*), a medical corpus mainly authored by Zur mkhar ba mNyam nyid rdo rje (1439–1475). The many treads of mNyam nyid rdo rje's literary production reflect his rNying ma and bKa' brgyud spiritual legacies: the author systematically elaborated materials drawn from the rNying ma *gter ma* tradition and complex medico–alchemical practices ascribed to the third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339) and O rgyan pa rin chen dpal (1230–1309). The key ingredients of the recipes include saxifrage [*bdud rtsi 'od ldan*; *Micranthes melanocentra*; *Saxifraga melanocentra*], purple sage [*lug mur*; *Phlomis bracteosa*], potent substances such as black aconite [*bstan dug*; *Aconitum spicatum*], nightshade [*thang phrom*; *Anisodus* spp.; *Mandragora caulescens*], mercury–sulfide ashes (*zla bcud*; *bcud rgyal*), aphrodisiacs containing salamander meat [*da byid*, *gangs sbal*; *Batrachopus pinchonii*], caterpillar fungus [*dByar rtsiwa dgun 'bu*; *Cordyceps sinensis*], and other substances endowed with hot potencies that can enhance *gtum mo* practices such as the dwarf rhododendron [*da lis*; *Rhododendron* spp.] and compounds containing long pepper [*pi pi ling*; *Piper longum*], black pepper, [*pho bar is*; *Piper nigrum*], ginger, and so forth. The consecrated medicines and the rituals can bestow protection from any sort of diseases, diseases-carrier forces (*gdon*), and poisoning and lead to spiritual achievements. The analysis of these scriptural materials brings into focus the historical interrelation of diverse traditions that are represented by the heterogeneity of ideas and practices handed down through the Zur medical lineage.



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1. Introduction

This contribution is aimed at providing the reader with a content-based analysis of medical and alchemical writings preserved in the *Man ngag bye ba ring bsrel* (Ten Million of Quintessential Instructions, *The Relics*; henceforth *Ring bsrel*)¹ mostly authored by Zur mkhar ba mNyam nyid rdo rje (1439–1475), one of the most influential figures in the history of fifteenth-century Tibetan scholastic medicine and founder of the Zur medical system (Zur lugs).

Starting with a few introductory remarks about the author and his cultural and religious background as it emerges from the critical analysis of hagiographical sources, an

overview of the formation and the composition of this medical work will serve to understand better the plurality of literary influences that merged in the *Ring bsrel* corpus. The selected texts will, indeed, offer an insight into the spectrum of technologies, doctrines, and encoded medico-pharmacological terminologies handed down within this anthology, which reflects the historical interrelation of diverse traditions here reconciled.

The title conferred to this medical corpus not only explains the heterogeneity of its contents but given the religious and medical significance of the relics in the Tibetan culture, elicits the recollection of a complex narrative.² The *ring bsrel* are, indeed, potent spheric relics emerging from cremated bodies of saint masters, which are attributed with the capacity to multiply themselves, perpetuating and imbuing the spiritual power of masters, as well as embodying the endurance of lineages and traditions.

The implications conveyed by this metaphor shall be further investigated in light of the history of medical work and authorship. This introductory sketch may contribute to the aim of achieving the full sense of the intended meaning behind the title, as this work was conceived as the repository of an immense heritage of medical and religious written sources and aural teachings, establishing a nexus with religious figures of the past and present to the main author. It will appear clear that the *Ring bsrel* remained an open corpus to which different collections and scriptures were added centuries later after the passing of mNyam nyid rdo rje. The idea of the continuity of the lineage is given by the compilers, who included works ascribed to mNyam nyid rdo rje's main disciples to the corpus. These last two points will be further discussed in the upcoming section (Section 2.1) dealing with the structure of the *Ring bsrel*.

To begin with, as we shall be clear in what follows, mNyam nyid rdo rje condensed essential teachings from authoritative tantric medically and alchemically oriented sources, canonical and non-canonical, belonging to diverse lineages, and clarified the difficult points to facilitate the understanding of such a vast body of literature. Through this exegetical approach, he positioned himself and his erudite literary production at the node of an intricate religious network that connected him to the rNying ma (*bka' ma* and *gter ma*), bKa' brgyud traditions, namely the Karma, Dwags po, and 'Brug pa schools.³ As a result, his work, and by extension the field of medical knowledge, becomes a "bonded area" where theories and practices pertaining to those traditions intersect and come to define the Zur medical system.

The contention of this study is, at least to some extent, to provide a definition of Tibetan medicine, focusing specifically on the Zur medical tradition. The discourse on the relation between religion and medicine in the Tibetan cultural sphere—and more broadly across diverse Asian traditions—exposes contrasting academic positions.⁴ The contents of the *Ring bsrel* indicate that tantric alchemy, yoga, and rituals have informed mNyam nyid rdo rje's medical thought and practice. mNyam nyid rdo rje developed a well-defined vision of the history, theory, and practice of Buddhist medicine. In his medical corpus, the naturalistic and pharmaceutical interest in the curative potencies of medical substances is accompanied by the description of their applications in the context of contemplative practices and sexual yoga. Therefore, while engaging with the analysis of the formulas, the framing narratives, and his exegesis of seminal medical works and tantric scriptures, we shall acknowledge that the religious and medical methodologies are interfaced on multiple levels.

The original nucleus of the *Ring bsrel* was conceived as part of the *g.Yu thog snying thig* (g.Yu thog's Heart Essence), a literary corpus dealing with rituals, yogic and contemplative practices conforming to the characteristics of the rNying ma *Mahāyoga* and *sNying thig* literature, and which is an integral part of the formation of Tibetan physicians up to the present.⁵ As stated in the hagiography⁶ written by Zur mkhar bLo gros rgyal po (b. 1509),

mNyam nyid rdo rje wrote a series of texts on how to remove the four kinds of hindrances (*gegs sel*) for the development (*utpattikrama*; *bskyed rim*) and completion (*utpannakrama*; *rdzogs rim*) stages, including those to remove physical obstructions, which were actually inserted in the *g.Yu thog snying thig*, becoming, therefore, the draft to structure his medical masterpiece.⁷ mNyam nyid rdo rje is said to have composed these texts preserved in the *g.Yu thog snying thig* as addenda to or on the basis of notes written by Sum ston ye shes gzungs, which were meant to preserve the words of his master, g.Yu thog gsar ma yon tan mgon po (twelfth century). Based on this traditional narration, mNyam nyid rdo rje's contribution to the revision and extension of this corpus can be interpreted as an attempt to delineate the contours of his medical legacy, which originates from g.Yu thog.⁸

The hagiographical tradition, which was also developed thanks to the direct disciples (*dnegos slob*) of mNyam nyid rdo rje, such as Kong smad Phrag dpon bsod nams bkra shis, traces this connection to the rNying ma tradition back to familial roots, for mNyam nyid rdo rje has conferred the rNying ma oral transmission (*bka' brgyud*) and medical instructions by his father bla ma Rig 'dzin phun tshogs. While also situated in the context of a particular Yamāntaka tradition in the rNying ma school, his karmic connection with g.Yu thog is illustrated as follows:

At the age of thirteen, he experienced numerous visions. After having rested day and night without interruption in the clear light of *thug dam*,⁹ he fell unconscious before the eyes of other people and happened to laugh and prattle on and on. He wondered about the cause of such obstruction. Having accomplished the practice of Mañjuśrī Nāgarakṣa, he received this prophecy: “The enlightened activities and means of benefitting others is to be found in the practice of medicine, for G.yu thog the protector has been the master who accepted you as his disciple throughout many former lives. Supplicate him and accomplish the benefits for yourself and others”. Having requested the *gurusādhana* to the 'Brug pa master Mi bkyod rdo rje, he accomplished it.

At dawn, he had the vision of g.Yu thog himself. His body was white with a reddish glow, covered in a white silky garment with a dark red silky sash. Hair was coiled-braided. In the right hand, he held a fresh golden myrobalan with leaves, flowers, and fruit, and in the left hand, a precious vase adorned with saffron flowers. Four medicine goddesses, through their all-encompassing dense nets of luminous rays of offerings made of any desirable object, bestowed empowerments on him. He received a handful of golden myrobalan, just enough to cover the conjoined palms of his hands. As he was about to eat it, he awoke from his dream. G.yu. thog and the four goddesses actually appeared to him, conferring simultaneously the reading and exegetical transmissions of the *Four Tantras*.

The authentic words and meaning of the glorious *Four Tantras* appeared clearly in his mind, and an extraordinary blissful heat arose in his body. From the state of mind of the ultimate reality (*dharmatā*), free from any conceptual proliferations, he saw many celestial realms of infinite purity and so forth.

Subsequently, each time he made his invocations, [g.Yu thog] compassionately took care of him by manifesting either directly, through various visions or dreams, to solve all the doubts. As the Lord himself sang in a spiritual song: “At dawn on the first day of the waxing moon in early Spring, [my] deluded mind met with the Lord g.Yu thog, who conferred the empowerment and blessings of the glorious *Four Tantras*. Therefore, all misconceptions regarding the words and meanings were simultaneously severed. Blissful heat blazed in my body, and I realized the nature of mind as the ground, the unborn Body of Absolute Reality (*dharmakāya*). I saw the ways in which the beings of the three realms wander in delusion, and many vivid appearances of pure realms”. [...] ¹⁰

According to the previous passage, mNyam nyid rdo rje received a direct complete transmission-reading (*lung*), explanatory (*bshad*), spiritual blessing (*bying brlabs*), and em-

powerment (*dbang bskur*)— of the *Four Tantras* (*rGyud bzhi*), the canon of Tibetan medicine from g.Yu thog, achieving the correct knowledge and becoming himself an authoritative master of the tradition, who could comment on the source. In the quoted hagiographical sources, it is said that he completed his medical education under the guidance of dBang phyug bzang po (alias sman stod dBang phyug bzang po, fifteenth century), the direct disciple of Zul phu sman po che, receiving an oral and explanatory transmission of the *Four Tantras*.

The translated passage enumerates mNyam nyid rdo rje's spiritual accomplishments (including the direct introduction to the true nature of mind), associating him with diverse practices such as that of the wrathful Mañjuśrī Nāgarakṣa, the form of Yamāntaka who overcomes the diseases and obstructions caused by *nāgas*. How this practice was transmitted to him is unclear. Most probably, it should be considered as part of the teachings received from his father. The Mañjuśrī Nāgarakṣa-related writings represent a long-lasting *gter ma* tradition linked to numerous masters, including Rin chen gling pa (1289–1368) and Rig 'dzin rGod lem (1337–1408), who both appear in other instructions preserved in the *Ring bsrel*.¹¹ It is unclear if the practice was specifically related to one of them.¹² However, mNyam nyid rdo rje is credited to have been conferred the transmission of diverse Yamāntaka-related teachings, which he condensed to develop the so-called “Zur mkhar Ki kang tradition” (*king kang zur mkhar lugs*), whose texts are preserved in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.¹³

As we shall see, mNyam nyid rdo rje was quite interested in collecting and systematizing medical *gter ma* scriptures, either with the intent of preserving them or establishing this nexus with prominent masters of the *gter ma* traditions, anticipating, at least in some respect, what has been done several centuries after by 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892). This project was continued by his principal disciples, such as the quoted Kong smad bKra shis.

Another rNying ma master to whom mNyam nyid rdo rje seems to be connected is the Kong po bla ma bya khung ba, who most probably is Bya khyung pa Ngag dbang padma dbang rgyal (fourteenth–fifteenth century) from Kong po. It is said that he received the transmission of the *Kālacakratantra* (*Dus 'khor*) and the *dGongs 'dus* [*bLa ma dgongs 'dus*] revealed by Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396) from this master.¹⁴ As we know, Bya khyung pa Ngag dbang padma dbang rgyal was enumerated among the disciples of Sangs rgyas gling pa; therefore, the proposed identification of the Kong po bla ma proves to be credible. In the same hagiography, we read about this episode as well as mNyam nyid rdo rje's encounters with bKa' brgyud masters:

Once he received the transmission of *Kālacakratantra* and the *dGongs 'dus*, one night, both the *ācārya* and the disciple dreamt the same dream of a man who claimed to be the King [Mañjuśrīkīrti] of the noble family of Śambhala and bestowed on Chos rje [mNyam nyid rdo rje] the empowerments of the *Kālacakratantra*. [mNyam nyid rdo rje] was told that since he had understood the *Kālacakratantra*, there was no need of further training because it was sufficient that he has received the reading transmission. The next day, he received the transmissions of the visualization practices of maṇḍala rituals, astrological charts, the six-branch yoga, and all the commentaries on the tantras. The omniscient and beyond compare Sha ra ba was invited to reside for three years at Zur mkhar ba, and from him [mNyam nyid rdo rje] received experiential instructions on all series of teaching-cycles of bKa' brgyud; especially, he showed the signs of accomplishment in the practice of the “inner heat” (*caṇḍālī*), the “secret consort” (*karmamudrā*), the “clear light” (*prabhāsvara*), and the “illusory body” (*māyādeha*).

When he received numerous teachings in the presence of the Nirmāṇakāya the Fourth Zhwa dmar Crown-holder Chos kyi grags pa dpal ye shes bzang po, the clear recollection of the relationship master–disciple arose.¹⁵

Zur mkhar bLo gros rgyal po provides us with the list of teachings that mNyam nyid rdo rje received from Sha ra rab 'byams pa (1427–1470) including teachings on the *Mahāmudrā*¹⁶ such as the *Phyag chen ga'u ma* (Niguma's Amulet-Box *Mahāmudrā*) and *Phyag chen Ganggā ma* (River Ganges *Mahāmudrā*), traditionally described as the transmission given by the master Tilopa to Nāropa along the Ganges; *Ne [ni] gu nas brgyud pa'i chos drug* (Niguma's Six Dharmas), *Ras chung snyan rgyud* (Ras chung pa's Aural Transmission); *gTum mo gang seng ma* (Inner Heat, The Snow Lioness), which is part of the first Karmapa Dus gsum mkhyen pa's works on *caṇḍālī*; teachings on *gCod* such as *Pho gcod sbrul [sprul] mtsho drug* (The Male lineage of the Practice of Severance, the Six Emanation Lakes), *Ma gcig gcod yul* (Ma gcig Lab sgron 's Object of Severance), *[pha] dam pa'i zhi byed*, (Pha dam pa sangs rgyas' Pacification Practice); practice related to *Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* such as *bDe chen mchog lha drug cu tsa lnga'i ras bris yi dkyil 'khor* (The Painted Cloth-Maṇḍala of the Sixty-Five Deities of the Cakrasaṃvara's Maṇḍala).¹⁷

Although there is no precise information about the teachings taught to him by the Fourth Zhwa dmar Chos kyi grags pa dpal ye shes bzang po, space is given to the transmissions of Khirms khang lotsāwa chen po bSod nams rgya mtsho (1424–1482), who was the master of both the Fourth Zhwa dmar and mNyam nyid rdo rje. Among the received tantric teachings we shall enumerate: *Mi tra dzo ki'i lugs khrid skor* (Cycle of Instructions on Mitra yogin's System); *sMan dpyad man ngag* (Pith Medical Instructions); *dPal dus kyi 'khor lo 'grel chen dang skor* (Cycles of Great Comment to the Glorious *Kālacakratāntra*); *'Jigs rten khams le'i ri mo* (Drawings of the Wordly Realms); *dPal dgyes pa'i rdo rje* (*Hevajra tantra*); *dPal sgyu 'phrul chen mo'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* or *Mahāmāyā (Śrīmahāmāyātāntrarājanāma)*; *gSang 'dus (Guhyasamāja)*; *bDe mchog rnams kyi bshad lung man ngag dang bcas* (Pith Instructions of the Oral and Explanatory Transmission of the Cakrasaṃvara-related scriptures). mNyam nyid rdo rje was conferred the transmission of Mahāyāna teachings as well, such as *sPyod 'jug (Bodhisattvacāryāvātāra)*, *Byams pa'i chos lnga (mngon rtogs rgyan, Abhisamayālamkāra; theg pa chen po mdo sde rgyan (Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra)*; *dBus mtha' rnam 'byed (Madhyāntavibhāga)*; *Chos dang chos nyid rnam 'byed (Dharmadharmatāvibhāga)*; *theg pa chen po rgyud bla ma'i bstan bcos (Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānottaratantraśāstra)*; *[dBu ma] rig pa'i tshogs drug* (The Six texts on Madhyamaka Reasoning) by Nāgārjuna; *sKyes rabs mo bzhi ma (Jātakamālā)*, and *dPag bsam'khri shing rnams kyi lung (Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā)*.¹⁸

The religious and medical figures and traditions that influenced mNyam nyid rdo rje medical thought and practice informing his literary production do not end here.

mNyam nyid rdo rje was one of the most important figures involved in the codification and spread of mercury pharmacology¹⁹ in the fifteenth century. He systematically elaborated materials drawn from diverse sources, including complex medico–alchemical practices ascribed to the Brug pa bka' brgyud yogin and alchemist O rgyan pa rin chen dpal (1230–1309), and known as the “great purification of mercury calcinated ashes” (*dnugul chu btso bkru chen mo*).

O rgyan pa had an important role in the reception of later Indian alchemical traditions. He translates three *rasaśāstras* that dealt with the transmutation of metals into gold and the obtainment of the mercury elixir, now included in the *bStan 'gyur* (Translation of the Treatises) section of the Buddhist Canon, namely *Thams cad kyi dbang phyug gi bcud len nad thams 'joms shing lus stobs rgyas par byas pa*²⁰ (The Universal Lord's Elixir that, Dispelling All the Diseases, Promotes Physical Strength); *dNgul chu grub pa'i bstan bcos*²¹ (The Treatise on the Perfect Mercurial Elixir), and the *Gser 'gyur bstan bcos bsdus*²² (Compendium on the Transmutation into Gold) (Simioli 2013).

As we shall see, O rgyan pa composed adamantine verses (*gsung mgur; rdo rje tshig rkang*) as a part of a contemplative and yogic system known as the *rDo rje gsum kyi bsnyen sgrub* (Approach and Accomplishment of the Three Vajras), initiating the tradition that was later known and preserved in medical sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth century as *dNgul chu'i skor gsum* (The Trilogy of Mercury), which spread across the major medical school of Tibet such as the Brang ti's sa skya sman grong (Sa skya medical school) in thirteenth century, the Zur school, passing through lineages of master from Kong po (kong sman) that led to the formation of the 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud tradition of mercury pharmacology, and well dGe lugs tradition that was connected to the lineage of 'Brong rtse rin chen rgya mtsho (fourteenth century).²³

These instructions were passed down through the Zur school thanks to the third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1234–1339), who was a disciple of O rgyan pa and transmitted them to Punya Ratna alias dPon chen bSod nams rin chen (also known as dPon khams par grags pa) (Byams pa'phrin las 2000, pp. 209–15), the forefather (*mes po*) of the Zur mkhar lineage.²⁴

Rang byung rdo rje was a prominent religious figure of the thirteenth century, central to the history of Tibetan Mahāmudrā as well as the rNying ma *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (Dākinī's Heart Essence), and as said, mercury iatrochemistry. The master–disciple relationship between dPon chen bSod nams rin certainly explains the reason why in the *Ring bsrel* corpus, several medical works are ascribed to Rang byung rdo rje, including works dealing with mercury procedures²⁵ and other formulas,²⁶ external procedure and etiological themes.²⁷

The *Ring bsrel* includes works composed by the close disciples of mNyam nyid rdo rje, mainly Kong smad bkra shis,²⁸ thus becoming a collective corpus. This aspect will be touched upon in the following section.

2. The *Ring bsrel* Corpus: Collections, Compilers, and Contents

The selected texts deal with diverse topics, which range from long life and rejuvenating recipes (*bcud len; rasāyana*), virility therapy (*ro tsar bya ba, vājīkaraṇa*), mercury procedures (*dngul chu btso bkru chen mo; dngul chu sgrub pa*), and other medicines used in the context of the “sixfold yoga” (*yang lag drug gi rnal 'byor; ṣaḍaṅgayoga*) to panaceas (*chig thub*), compounds endowed with apotropaic properties to counteract poison-induced conditions (*dug nad*), epidemics and contagious diseases (*yams; rims nad; gnyan rims*),²⁹ and diseases-carrier afflictive forces (*gdon*). Far from being complete, for many sections of the corpus have not been taken into consideration in this contribution, the analysis of the chosen chapters is meant to provide the reader with a broad picture, as much complete as possible, of the many threads of practices and traditions preserved and represented in *Ring bsrel*. The texts have been collected in three groups reflecting their contents, namely *rasāyana*, *vājīkaraṇa* formulas, and *panaceas* (Section 2.2.1), *mercury alchemy* (Section 2.2.2), and *enhancing methodologies to develop the inner heat* (Section 2.2.3).

Before starting with the analysis of the chosen literature, the main differences between the consulted redactions will be addressed. It will appear clear that the editions received present variances in terms of topic outlines and catalogs. A few references to the compilers that collected the scriptures, arranging the diverse collections ascribed to mNyam nyid rdo rje and the holders of his lineage, will be given to adding supplementary information about the history of the *Ring bsrel* throughout the epochs, and clarify the reason why this remained an open literary corpus for centuries.

2.1. Catalogues and Editions

Diverse catalogs of the *Ring bsrel* are to be found in the consulted hagiographical sources and *ring bsrel* redactions. *Ring bsrel* (1) includes three collections, all classified as *ring bsrel*. These collections are distinguished based on whether they divide the original scripture or first draft from those not included in the original catalog or those that were composed later. Some of these works are being ascribed to the same mNyam nyid rdo rje, while others are to his disciples. The first collection included in *Ring bsrel* (1) starts with the *dkar chag mkhas pa'i yid 'phrod gi lhan thabs dad ldan snyims pa'i me tog*³⁰ (The Beautiful Flower [Homage of] the Faithful One, Supplement to the Catalogue “Captivating a Scholar’s Mind”) composed by Karma legs bshad 'tshol alias Zur mkhar ba bLo sgros rgyal po as addendum to mNyam nyid rdo rje’s catalog one hundred and ninety-eight years later after the passing away of mNyam nyid rdo rje. bLo sgros rgyal po explains how he arranged the text in his redaction of the *Ring bsrel* by following a threefold division of the topics in the macro-sections, reflecting the original catalog and nucleus of the *Ring bsrel* as preserved in the *gYu thog Heart Essence*. The first regards the (a) diagnostic methods (*rtsa dpyad nyi'od rab gsal; chu dpyad zla ba'i me long; mde'u nyal brtags [pa] nges pa rnam rol; glo rnag brtag pa 'khrul med ngos 'dzin; skrang pa brtag pa the tshom nges sel*). Here is also included a text clarifying the encoded terminology of the *Ring bsrel* (*gsang bas go 'byed bdud rtsi'i de mig*). The second one (b) regards curative methods (*gso thabs*) that correspond to the fifteen subdivisions (*rlung; mkhris; bad kan; ldan; 'dus; tsha ba; grang ba; grag; chu ser; gnyan; srin; gzer; rma; dug; thor bu*) of the *'byung lus 'khrugs kyi gegs sel* (Removing the Obstacles that Disturb the Elements and the Body) preserved in the *g.Yu thos Heart Essence*.³¹ The third section is devoted to (c) auxiliary practices, an extension of the previous section (*de las 'phros pa'i yan lag*).

However, he affirms that mNyam nyid rdo rje’s catalog was incomplete, and therefore, he relied on masters’ suggestions to add further elements to it.

After this first collection, *Ring bsrel* (1) includes two other collections that have been incorporated and structured according to the catalog preserved in the hagiography *dPal ldan Zur mkhar ba rnam thar thar pa'i lam ston*, also included in *ring bsrel* (1).³² These are *Bye ba ring bsrel gyi cha lag grangs med gsung ngag dum bu khrigs su bkod pa*³³ (Innumerable Auxiliary Scriptures of the Ten Million of Relics, Fragmentary Instructions Arranged in a Structured Manner), and *Bye ba ring bsrel gyi cha lag grangs med gsung ngag dum bu khrigs*³⁴ (Innumerable Auxiliary Scriptures of the Ten Million of Relics, Fragmentary Instructions Arranged as Structured Supplements).

The last chapter, *phongs pa gso ba rngo'i sgron me*, also in *Ring bsrel* (3),³⁵ ascribes the two redactions to Tai si tu bstan pa' nyin byed widely known as Tai Si tu Pañchen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774).

Ring bsrel (3) does not present any internal subdivisions. Its contents correspond to the first collection of *Ring bsrel* (1) (*rtags thabs; gso thabs; de las 'phros pa'i yan lag*).

bLo gros rgyal po also explains that in his time, diverse redactions of the *ring bsrel* were at his disposal. These presented a diverse arrangement and different catalogs of the texts classified as “maternal” (*ma yig*) and “filial scriptures” (*bu yig*), and included works ascribed to sGom sman 'od zer seng ge and the quoted Kong po Phrag dpon (Kong smad Phrag dpon bsod nams bkra shis).³⁶

This information is confirmed by *Ring bsrel* (2), which is structured as follows: (a) “maternal scriptures”, (b) “filial scriptures” otherwise called “arrowheads” (*lde'u [mthe'u] thung*), and (c) “scattered scriptures” (*kha thor ba*).

In this redaction, there are two catalogues: *Zur mkhar man ngag khyad chos ring bsrel gyi bu yig lde'u thung gi dkar chag nor bu phreng ba*³⁷ (Catalogue of the Filial Scriptures Arrowheads of the Zur mkhar Special Pith Instructions) at the beginning of collection (b),

and *Bye ba ring bsrel kha thor gyi dkar cha gsal sgron*³⁸ (Catalogue of the Scattered Texts, The Shining Lamp) at the beginning of collection (c). The order of the sections in this redaction is completely different from what is found in the other two. In the second catalog, it is said that the outlines of the maternal and filial scriptures faithfully reproduce the original collections written by mNyam nyid rdo rje, without any addendum or reduction and that it has been written having the complete entrustment (*bka' gtad*); about the catalog of the “scattered texts”, in the same section is said that has been composed by the lineage holder. However, the names of such compilers remain unknown.

The following sections will deal with the actual contents of the corpus. Where possible, the intertextual analysis will be provided to pinpoint the *gter ma* and medical sources mNyam nyid rdo rje drew upon to write the *Ring bsrel*. Particular attention will also be given to the medico–alchemical terminology, especially those regarding mercury recipes and panaceas to highlight the process of codification such disciplines went through.

2.2. Analysed Texts

2.2.1. *Rasāyana, Vājīkaraṇa Formulas and Panaceas*

The rejuvenating, life-prolonging, healing and spiritual purposes of the variegated medical-alchemical formulas and procedures subsumed under the umbrella categories of *bcud len*, as well as their interrelation with accomplishing rituals for empowering medicines (*smān sgrub*) in both Buddhist and Bon contexts have been the object of in-depth studies in the last years (Cantwell 2015, 2017; Chui 2019; Garrett 2009; Gerke 2012; Gerke [2012] 2013; Oliphant of Rossie 2016; Samuel 2012; Sehnalova 2019a, 2019b; Simioli 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2019). The historical development of Tibetan *bcud len* practices, to the extent of what has been discovered and reconstructed so far, has revealed literary and historical entanglements with diverse medical and alchemical traditions. It is well known, indeed, that Tibetan translated āyurvedic and later tantric sources incorporating *rasāyana* and that yogic instructions became fundamental to developing their own alchemical and iatrochemical traditions. To begin with, we may think of Ravigupta’s *Siddhasāra* and Vāgbhaṭa’s *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhita* translated into Tibetan between the ninth and the eleventh century, or the *Kālacakratāntra* literature and the *Amṛtasiddhi* corpus translated in Tibet at the beginning of the “Later Spread of Buddhism” (*bstan pa phyi dar* from the late tenth to the thirteenth century) and preserved in the Tibetan Buddhist Canon.³⁹ As we shall see in the next section on the mercury alchemy, the *Kālacakratāntra*, and the *Cakrasaṃvara* literature were certainly among the sources that mostly influenced O rgyan pa’s works and, therefore, became pivotal in mNyam nyid rdo rje’s pharmacological works on the mercury medicines. The successive phase in the history of Tibetan alchemy is represented by the development of the “accomplishing medicine” literature, modeled on rNying ma *Mahāyogatantras*, and alchemically oriented the *gter ma* literature that flourished in Tibet between the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. The role of the latter non-canonical sources in the history of Tibetan medicine has been reconsidered.⁴⁰ This literary tradition is well represented in the *Ring bsrel*.

Less studied but equally important and connected to the previous ones are the virility therapy-related formulas or *ro tsa*. Such texts have much to say about the development of a long-standing tradition whose presence in the Tibetan language sources can be traced back as far as the tenth century (Simioli 2024b).

The *Ring bsrel* preserves numerous formulas belonging to both categories, some of which will be sketchily presented in this contribution.

In these sections are included texts dealing with potent substances and panaceas, which are complex medicinal compounds used to cure severe diseases and poisoning, themes akin to that of ambrosia or elixirs of immortality (*'chi med bdud rtsi*) typical of the *rasāyana* scriptures.

To provide background for the analysis of the forthcoming formulas and to connect our discourse to the overarching theme of materiality in the present volume, a few general remarks on special powers and soteriological aims attained through *bcud len/rasāyana* practices in both medical and tantric contexts shall be discussed. The process of obtaining a long-life medicine reflects the interpenetration of different knowledge-domains and technologies. The practices described in the selected texts involve various kinds of engagements with the powerful substances: external alchemical and iatrochemical manipulation of medical substances, ritual consecration, internal alchemical manipulation of medical substances, and psychophysical constituents. These procedures and processes imply varying levels of expertise (medical, pharmaceutical, ritual, meditative, and yogic), as well as diverse transformative results (therapeutic benefits, spiritual achievements, ritual invulnerability, transmutation, and knowledge transmission).

Physicians engage with medical substances by observing, tasting, smelling, and touching them to recognize their natural or basic potencies (*rdzas kyi nus pa*) and be able to compound (*sman sbyor*) them appropriately. This experiential knowledge is initially preceded and mediated by a detailed textual study and memorization of texts (Tidwell 2017) (Ph.D. thesis). The latter aspect appears to be crucial in the *Ring bsrel*, as will be examined through the numerous quotations and literary references preserved in the explored texts, in which the features of plant and animal specimens are provided in detail. This concept of knowledge-making and transmission will be further developed in the conclusions.

Similarly to what scholars have observed in formative āyurvedic sources, in premodern Tibetan medical writings, such as the canonical *rGyud bzhi*, the *rasāyana* therapy is described as a methodology for: curing specific humoral disorders and conditions related to aging that can shorten the human life span (*tshe zad rga pa'i nad*); promoting and restoring physical health (*lus mdangs stobs skye*); improving cognitive faculties (*dran gsal; blo rno*); conferring crystalline voice (*skad mdangs*), longevity (*tshe ring*), and youthfulness (*na tshod dar ba*); restoring and enhancing virility (*ro tsar byed*) and fertility.⁴¹

However, both Tibetan and Indic sources preserve *rasāyana* formulas that can grant the consumer uncommon abilities and complete protection from epidemics, poisoning, evil beings, and cursing spells.⁴² An example of such kind of physical and spiritual invulnerability achieved through *rasāyana* practices and recipes can be found in the following paragraph devoted to the saxifrage *bcud len*. Similar to the case of the soma-related *rasāyana* described in *Suśrutasaṃhitā Cikitsāsthāna* (Wujastyk [2003] 2011, pp. 198–205), according to which the “visionary man” who has consumed consecrated soma achieves a god-like state, in the Tibetan medico–alchemical context, the used key plant substances, animal, metals and minerals are purported to be endowed with extraordinary potencies because they are attributed with divine origin, and once consecrated, can bestow physical and spiritual benefits.

The transmission and relevance of such rituals in medical settings are attested by scriptural sources, such as the series of *sman grub*-related texts that have been included in the *g.Yu thog snying thig*, which, as said, was a seminal corpus of the Zur medical lineage. The relevance of certain rNying ma *sman sgrub* rituals associated with the *bcud len* practices preserved in the *rGyud bzhi* can be inferred from their inclusion in the *Bai dū rya sngon po* (Blue Beryl) commentary composed by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.⁴³ This may lead to the assumption that such rituals were transmitted at the medical college founded by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho in Lhasa. In the *Bai dū rya sngon po*, it is said that the *sman sgrub* must be conducted by a qualified full-ordained monk.⁴⁴

The *Sman sgrub* rituals described in the chosen literature were not meant to be conducted on a large scale in monastic settings but were performed as solitary ascetic rituals, as can be seen in the section on purple sage *rasāyana*.

Generally speaking, the consecrations (*rab gnas*) of medical substances and compounds are based on *sādhanas* (*sgrub thabs*): through complex luminous visualizations of meditational deities (*rang nyid yi dam gyi bdag bskyed*) and *maṇḍalas*, and through the recitation of mantras, the officiant is spiritually and physically transformed,⁴⁵ and the substances are infused with divine benedictions becoming the ambrosia of long life. The transformation involves the whole universe of sentient beings who are cathartically purified, and the elements (*'byung ba*) forming the environments are restored.⁴⁶

A more nuanced understanding of the wide-ranging soteriological aims of these practices can be achieved considering their function of coadjutant methodologies to deepen and intensify a higher state of contemplation and enhance yogic practices. Similar applications are described in the sections on purple sage and black aconite *rasāyana*, as well as in the section on reptile meat aphrodisiacs. These *rasāyana* practices are classified under the yogic jargon of “enhancing techniques” (*bogs 'don*), as can be seen in the cases of the yogic uses of substances endowed with hot potencies (diverse kinds of pepper, ginger, rhododendron) that increase inner heat and can lead to purification of mental and physical defilements, and eventually to the realization of pure Buddhakāyas.

Some of the procedures described in the texts are, indeed, designed to refine and perfect both the medicine and the practitioner alchemically. As a case in point, we shall consider the sections on mercury medicines. The different stages to produce the mercury elixir are pursued by simultaneously enacting yogic-contemplative practices, thus reflecting the high level of interrelation of external alchemy (*phyi'i bcud len*) and internal alchemy (*nang gi cud len*). It shall be observed that in the selected texts, the *samskāras* of the aurification process (*gser 'gyur*), which represents the preliminary stage to prove the efficacy of the mercury elixir, are not taught extensively. However, importance is given to the obtainment of the mercury–sulfide ashes or *btso thal*, which represents on the microcosmic mineral scale the primordial unity of all the elements forming the reality. The terminology of *btul ba'i bcud rgyal nam mkha' mdog can* (the tamed king of the essence that is sky colored) conveys, indeed, alchemical, yogic, and metaphysical connotations. The alchemical procedure is indicated with the *btul ba'i bcud*, which refers to the process of detoxification of mercury as well as the refinement of an essential substance that carries the properties of the whole series of substances amalgamated in the compound and which can nurture the seven bodily constituents. *Nam mkha' mdog can* refer not only to the fact that these ashes are black-colored but also underlines their correspondence to the element space, which emanates and can reabsorb the other four elements. This process echoes the internal yogic control of the *prāṇas*, the five elements (*'byung ba rlung'i 'dzin*), which gradually enter the central channels, leading transformation of the coarse body into the rainbow body (*'ja' lus*; see the section on purple sage).

The multidimensional nature of mercury alchemy is clearly expressed by the *dā ki'i glu dbyangs* (Dākinī's Song) the *rDo rje tshig rkang* (Adamantine Verses), in which, as we shall see, mercury procedures, yogic and meditative practices are rooted in the *śadaṅgayoga* of the *Kālacakratantra* and the “body maṇḍala” (*lus kyi dkyil 'khor*) in the Cakrasaṃvara system. This process is not only aimed at obtaining the perfect elixir that can cure any sort of disease and grant protection, but the concomitant yogic phases lead to the realization of Buddhahood and to what is described as the “illusory body” (*rgyu lus*).

These summarized points will be further addressed in the following sections in order to substantiate what has been said at the beginning about the historiographical image of medicine reflected by the *Ring bsrel*: as the reader shall acknowledge, according to mNym nyid rdo rje, medicine is a discipline distinct from but strictly interrelated to alchemy, rituals, and yoga.

A. *Rasāyana*

Our literary excursus starts by examining these three *bcud len* texts preserved in the *Ring bsrel*:

- (1) *bDud rtsi 'od ldan kyi bcud len*⁴⁷ (Ambrosia Light Rasāyana)
- (2) *Lug mur gyi bcud len mkha' lding grub*⁴⁸ (Purple Sage Rasāyana, The Sky-Soarer)
- (3) *bTsan dug gi bcud len*⁴⁹ (Black Aconite Rasāyana)

(1) Ambrosia Light Rasāyana

The *bdud rtsi'od ldan* (most probably identifiable with *'od ldan dkar po mchog*) [*Micranthes melanocentra*; *Saxifraga melanocentra*]⁵⁰ is often addressed as associated with another plant known as *rtag tu ngu* (ever-weeping Bodhisattva plant [*Drosera peltata*]), equally used in the *rasāyana* formulas because it is usually associated with the same family (*rtag du ngu zhes bya ba'i rigs 'ga' yod*) and is covered by dew resembling the secretion produced by the latter. Indeed, in our text, it is described as topped by gloomy yellow flowers always covered by dew (*me tog la dus rgyun du zil pa chags pa*), with a stem similar to that of *sum cu thig* [*Swertia paniculata*] and the roots similar to that of *gro ma* or silver-wood cinquefoil [*Argentina anserina*].

It is attributed with numerous curative potencies and apotropaic properties, such as curing the four hundred and four classes of diseases (*bzhi rgya rtsa bzhi'i nad rnam ma lus sel*), including widespread diseases (*rims nad*) and poisons of different kinds (*dug rigs*) expelling diseases carrier forces (*gdon*) and obstructive beings (*stong phrag rgya rta bgegs sel*), life-prolonging (*'chi med bdud rtsi bum bzang yin*), and rejuvenating effects such as increasing physical strength (*lus stobs kun nas rgyas byed bcud len*). Since it is endowed with heavy, oily, and hot taste and potencies, it can cure pneumonia and increase bile and phlegm.

The medicinal compound is prepared by adding to the distilled essence (*khu ba 'byung ba'i dwangs ma*) obtained by triturating, mixing and suspending in water precise quantities of chebulic myrobalan (*a ru ra*) [*Terminalia chebula*], emblic myrobalan (*skyu ru ra*) [*Phyllanthus emblica*; *Emblica officinalis*], beleric myrobalan (*ba ru ra*) [*Terminalia bellirica*], Himalayan mash orchid (*dbang lag*) [*Gymnadenia orchidis*], and long pepper (*pi pi ling*) [*Piper longum*]. This clarified essence should be mixed with *mdzo* milk and fresh butter and be stirred up on slow fire for long time according to the practice of medicinal butter (*sman mar gyi phyag len ltar me chung ngu la yun ring bsrings nas dkrug cing btsos sman*). Thereafter, this medicinal butter is mixed with pure honey (*sbrang dkar kha med*) and poured into brown molasses. To this are furtherly added other substances: golden myrobalan (*a rug ser mdog*), pomegranate (*se 'bru*) [*Punica granatum*], safflower/saffron (unspecified *gur gum*; this could be either *kha che gur gum* or *bal po gur gum*) [*Crocus sativus*; *Carthamus tinctorius*], long pepper, green cardamom (*sug smel*) [*Elettaria cardamomum*], sal ammoniac (*rgya tshwa*) [NH_4Cl], true cinnamon (*shing tsha*) [*Cinnamomum verum*], sugar, and other minor ingredients not specified (*kha tshar*). Once prepared, the compound can be taken at dawn, at lunch, or according to one's habits.

(2) Purple Sage Rasāyana, the Sky-Soarer

This is a *gter ma* teaching ascribed to Padmasambhava, which opens with the following origin narrative: the plant was created by the long-life vase of the Amitābha Buddha (*bcom ldan sNang mtha' yas*), which fell on the earth transforming into what today is known as *lug mur*.

Lug mur can be identified as purple sage [*Phlomooides bracteosa*], a plant used for treating cold and pulmonary conditions, as well as fevers and severe and infectious dysenteric diseases (*'khrugs rims*).

In our text, it is used not just to cure humoral disorders and for its rejuvenating effects but to achieve, as we shall see, even higher spiritual results.

According to the author, there are three different variants of this plant: the male that has superior potencies (*pho ni stobs che ba*), the neutral plant possessing middle qualities (*ma*

ning 'bring), and the female (*mo ni chung ba*) that has less strong potencies than the others. The plant should be collected in winter when its leaves are dry. Deprived of dust and insects, once completely dried (*skam thag chod nas zhib ltar btags*), the plant parts are finely triturated. The next step is to transform the medical substance in ambrosia by consecrating it. Having chosen a remote place for the ritual, the sacred boundaries are set (*mtshams bcad*), the medicine is placed in a vase, and the *sman sgrub* ritual is conducted. Through visualizations, mantras, and hand gestures, the consecration is completed (*sngags dmigs phyag rgya rab gnas*), and the medicine, being empowered, is transformed into a long-life ambrosia (*bdud rtsir bying gyi brlabs pa*) that can be ingested as a *rasāyana* medicine.

The yogin can eat this medicine during fasting retreat, diminishing gradually the consumption of ordinary food (*za cha phri nas bcud len rim par bskyed la btang*), taking in just a small quantity of broth (water, salt, and a small quantity of butter) or other suitable substances.

Practicing the *samādhi* with constant attention (*ting 'dzin gzabs*), the yogin will be protected from all kind of obstructive beings, realize siddhis (*dngos sgrub*) such as the siddhi of long-life, and even experiencing “the non-conceptual ultimate reality, the union of Bliss and Clarity” (*bde gsal mi rtog nyams myong*), and ultimately to realize the pure rainbow body in this very life (*tshe gcig 'ja' lus 'grub par 'gyur*) through progressive purification and dissolution of the gross bodily aggregates and elements into lights. From the previous description, we can assume that the use of *rasāyana* remedies is here incorporated in the context of a set of practices, which apex is the *rlung dang rig pa'i bcud len* (*rasāyana* of breath and awareness), an advanced alchemical practice developed in the context rNying ma rDzogs chen tradition. The practice consists of breath control techniques (*prāṇāyāma*), including forceful *haṭhayogic* methods, aimed at stopping the ordinary respiration, pushing the upper *prāṇa* downwards and the lower *prāṇa* upwards so that they meet at the height of the navel, therefore, engendering increasing visionary experiences. When the *prāṇa* integrates with the mind the real nature of emptiness and luminosity, which has been described above as the “Bliss and Clarity”, the visions become the only source of nutrition for the practitioner. The meaning of the title “sky soarer” may have a connection to the alchemical-yogic ideas, such as the “obtainment of the state of *Khecara*” (*mkha' spyod*).⁵¹ However, since this practice is embedded in a Rnying ma framework, the title may also refer, in the light of the obtainment of the rainbow body, to the state of being in the sky-like ultimate reality that is akin to the vast expanse of awareness, unobstructed and full of beaming visions, the *dharmadhātu*.

(3) Black Aconite Rasāyana

bTsan dug is a secondary name of black aconite (*bong nga nag po*) [*Aconitum spicatum*; *Aconitum ferox*], a natural poison that in Tibetan medicine is considered a “potent substance”. The terminology conveys multiple semantic levels ranging from the basic potencies of the substances to their manipulation. Indeed, such potencies can be increased and modified through pharmaceutical and ritual procedures, which, in the case of poisonous substances, are aimed at “taming” (*dul ba*) or detoxifying (*dug 'don*) them to obtain effective remedies.⁵² Sometimes, this process can be achieved through inner yogic techniques.

In the examined text, there are two transformative practices: one ritual and one yogic. The first consists of reciting a mantra to overcome aconite poisons.

The second and main *rasāyana* practice is called *snyan brgyud phyag rgya* (Aural Lineage Mudrā), but unfortunately, here, it is only hinted at and kept secret. Although the practice is not described, it is possible to assume that it may refer to yogic practices that can allow the ingestion of poisons without danger. The author may refer to the ultimate attainment of a not well-defined aural Mahāmudrā tradition (*snyan brgyud phyag rgya[chen]*), which leads to the sameness of all the phenomena and the consequent invulnerability from any harms,

even poisons that in this case become potent remedies. We may think of internal alchemical techniques, such as the mahāmudrā, aimed at purifying the psychophysical elements, as an effective methodology to intake unprocessed substances and transform them into elixirs. Such practices are to be found in Indo–Tibetan alchemical and yogic sources, for example, the methods described in the quoted *Amṛtasiddhi* (Mallinson and Szántó 2021) or the later *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* (Birch 2018, p. 13).

Black aconite rasāyana has outstanding therapeutic effects. It cures all four hundred and four diseases, including *gnyan* diseases; metabolic dysfunction (*ma zhu*); oedemas and swellings (*dmu chu*, *skrang*s); heart-wind disorder (*snying rlung*); infections of the large intestine due pathogenic microorganism (*long sring*); cardiac condition, causing pain localized in the upper part of the torso and respiratory problems (*stod 'tshangs rlung gzer*) (Byams pa 'phrin las et al. 2006, p. 868); sinusitis (*ya ma*); and obstructed-throat infective disease (*gag pa*), which is usually aligned to diphtheria; prevents pregnancy (*sbru ma*), protects from injuries and wounds (*rma*), overcomes wide spread blood diseases (*khrag rims*).

It has apotropaic virtues that overcome obstructive and malevolent non-human beings such as planetary afflictions (*gza'*), *nāgas*, and protects from poisons (*dug srung*).

B. *Vājīkaraṇa*

In this section the following texts are examined:

- (1) *bCud len bde ba'i dpag bsam*⁵³ (Rasāyana from the Wish-fulfilling Tree of Bliss)
- (2) *bDud rtsi da byid kyi sbyor ba*⁵⁴ (Ambrosia, Salamander [Meat] Compound)
- (3) *Ro tsa yon tan rgya mtsho*⁵⁵ (Virility-Enhancing Formulas [Drawn from] Yon tan rgya mtsho's [gter ma])

(1) Rasāyana from the Wish-fulfilling Tree of Bliss and Ambrosia, Salamander [Meat] Compound

The following are medicinal herpetofauna, whose key-ingredients are lizards and salamanders' meats, in particular that of *da byid* or mottled salamander [*Batrachuporus pinchonii*], otherwise called "snow frog" (*gangs sbal*).

The chosen texts shall be analyzed together for they share similar content and are intertextually related to a series of aphrodisiacs and remedies aimed at curing sexual disorders (*ro tsa nyams pa*), life-prolonging formulas and recipes to enhance the meditative practice preserved in the Brang ti's *Man ngag gSer bre chen mo* (Great Measure of Gold, Brang ti's Collection of Medical Pith Instructions; thirteenth–fourteenth century),⁵⁶ thus demonstrating that mNyam nyid rdo rje studied that work and drew from its contents.

The various therapeutic, life-prolonging, and meditative applications of the recipes once again demonstrate the interrelation between pharmacological and spiritual practices. These remedies containing animal meats and orchids that span diverse Eurasian medical systems (Simioli 2024b), here are embedded in a tantric context. In particular, it shall be considered that reptile meats and the other animal substances used to enhance virility, can equally support internal yogic practices based on the development of the inner heat. This occurs because their consumption can arouse sexual desire and increase stages of blissful ecstasy. Therefore, these remedies can be used to stabilize the state of meditative absorption (*ting 'dzin*), which here is intended as the last stage of the sixfold yoga.

These medicines have a long history. The earlier scriptural testimonies are formulas preserved in the Dunhuang manuscript *Pelliot Tibétain 1057*,⁵⁷ where we find, for example, the description of a remedy to restore sexual potency" (*rgya'i sbyar rtsi dang mi mtshungs so*) used for the treatment of impotency and anaphrodisia. This recipe consists of a compound made of a male pigeon (*phug rong*) [*Columba rupestris Pallas*], male hoopoe (*phu shud*) [*Upupa epops*], male sparrow (*mchil pa*) [*Passerus montanus*], gecko toad-head agama (*rmigs pu*) [*Phrynocephalus vlangalii* Strauch], swan and the orchid that enhances the sexual desire

(*rgyo 'dod ldum bu*; dbang lag) [*Gymnadenia orchidis* Lindl], broth prepared with deer tail bones and dung, and donkey tail bones.⁵⁸

In this part, I will focus on those sections of the *Ring bsrel* where there are quotations from other sources with the aim of showing how such recipes were codified and which were the most influential sources in this process. This survey is conceived as part of ongoing research that has served to compare diverse formulas preserved in the quoted Brang ti's collection, the *Four Tantras*⁵⁹, and *Khu tshur 'bum* (Hundred Thousand Fists [Grasping the Teachings])⁶⁰ ascribed to sKyes bu me lha (also known as Bha ro phyag rdum, eleventh century?) (Simioli 2024b, pp. 265–66), and which has led to the assumption that such medicinal herpetofauna was a shared pharmacological knowledge circulated in diverse Eurasian medical systems. The aim of the present discussion is to find new literary treads of this connection, which may situate the *Ring bsrel* in the broader history of such recipes.

The *Wish-fulfilling Tree* text starts summarizing the two Buddhist and non-Buddhist viewpoints or systems (*phyi nang gi 'dod tshul gnyis; lugs*), presented in the *Bde ba'i man ngag zab btus*.

The non-Buddhist tradition of aphrodisiac recipes requires the use of bull, sheep, cat, dog as well as agama lizard meats to enhance virility.

The Buddhist system is characterized by the following recipes: the so-called *rgyal po skyin gor* (the king *skyin gor* formula), which actually is an encoded name for different reptiles such as the mentioned salamander (*da byid; gangs sbal*) and Himalayan Rock Agama (*tsangs pa*); the *blon po cog krong* (*cog [cog gzhang] krong [krong byed]*), lit. the minister recipe of “raising up what is freely resting”, which can be interpreted as a specific cure for erectile dysfunction.

The *skin gor* and *cog krong* are to be found in the canonical *Four Tantras*: (1) the method to compound *skyin gor* consists in mixing the five roots⁶¹ and the three myrobalan fruits, the dark mottled salamander, ram scrotum, field pennycress (*bre ga*) [*Thlapsi arvense*]. To this shall be associate a mixture of water and milk, ammonium, cardamom, ginger, black pepper, and sugar cane must be added.

The *cog krong* compound is made of the five herbs prepared as medicinal butter, which are mixed with dark mottled salamander, nutmeg, white sesame, black sesame seeds, nightshade, and minor ingredients added. There is also an alternative recipe. As in the upcoming section on the caterpillar fungus, the key-substances, here the salamander and rock Agama meats, are inserted into the stomach of a sparrow, which is sewed up, cooked with butter, and then dried and triturated finely to obtain a powder, which is mixed with the previous ghee and molasses.⁶²

In this section of the *Ring bsrel*, the *gTer mdzod* (Collection of Treasuries) is also quoted:

“Small and great Agamas, frogs, snakes, fish, and gecko toad-head agamas are the so called “*nāga's gemstones*”. Thereafter, if not separated from the three poisons, [your] body will become heavy, sleep and muscles are increased but mind is clouded. Essence drips, phlegm and bile increase. Bleary eyes, fulvous fluid proliferation and fever will occur.”⁶³

Another quoted source is the *ljong shing zhal gdams* (Oral Instruction of the Tree [of Immortality]), which is also quoted in the Brang ti's collection as *Sha sbyor rtsa ba'i rgyud bDud rtsi ljon shing man ngag*⁶⁴ (Root Tantra to Compose the Meat Medicine, Pith Instruction of the Tree of Immortality):

Besides, from that very source the method to extract its poisons is as follows: “attachment is dispelled by your own seminal drop (mercury); hatred is dispelled by musk; to extract delusion and all the poisons, leave snake meat in unfermented rice water for an entire day. Therefore, leave it in a beer of parched barley.”⁶⁵

Again, from the same text are drawn indications on how to detoxify reptile meats: as for the agama's meat, since its poison is located in the head, this should be cut off; as for the frog, poison pervades its entrails; snake's poison is located in the skin and the upper part of its torso; fish and toad head agamas have their poisons accumulated in their tails.

According to our text, the antidote to the three poisons is bearded vulture's meat (*go bo'i sha*) [*Gypaetus barbatus*], which can also be mixed with musk and golden myrobalan. Here is quoted the *Hundred Thousand Fists* [*Grasping the Teachings*], according to which even bird meat must be detoxified. To be detoxified, it should be placed on beef meat.⁶⁶ Bird poisons, in general, are to be found in their intestine and stomach.

The medium-length aphrodisiac formula contains information that differs from the narrative shared by the Brang ti's collection as the *sKyin skor yon tan* (The Virtues of *skyin gor*) and *sMan mar da byid* (Medicinal Butter [Prepared with] Salamander Meat)⁶⁷ and Skye bu sman lha's work.⁶⁸

To the medicinal ghee containing the tree myrobalan fruits and marsh orchid is added snow agama (*gangs tsangs*), whose meat is very fat and can release oil naturally (*sha shin tu tsho ste snum gyi rang bzhin gyi 'byung*). Subsequently, "snow-frog salamander" is mixed in. A description of male and female specimens is given. Males are those hidden in the snowy clefts and are golden; the females are turquoise colored. The agama are distinguished as "wild" (*tsangs rgod*) and "repulsive" (*g.yung*).

Rock agama *rlung 'ga'* should be mixed with meat of domestic poultry, sparrow and pigeon meats, snow cock (*gong mo*) [*Tetraogallus tibetanus*], and snake meat. Other ingredients include nutmeg (*dzāti*) [*Myristica fragrans*], cardamom (*sug smel*), sal ammoniac, sal lucidum, medicinal ginger (*sman sga*, namely brown ginger), kernels of field pennycress, malva seed (*lcam*) [*Malva* spp.] crab, powdered sugars, molasses, and honey. The last procedure consists of mixing the medicinal butter with this compound.

The short-length procedure consists of preparing a medicinal powder of bull (*glang*) and ram (*lug*) scrotum, triturated, exsiccated, and preprocessed in milk. Other ram parts are mixed with this compound and all cooked in water and milk. Once cooked, the compound is filtered with a cloth (*btsos pa'i khu bar as la btsags pa' dwangs ma*) to obtain a pure essence. Chinese or Tibetan sparrows are deprived of claws, beaks, and entrails filled with rock agama, *rlung 'ga'* agama, and snake meats. A medicinal powder prepared with nutmeg, cardamom, seeds of white and black nightshade (*thang phrom dkar nag 'bru*) [*Man-dragora caulescens*; *Anisodus tanguticus*], white sesame seed (*til dkar*) [*Sesamum indicum*] and sal ammoniac, should be mixed with further substances such as fresh 'bri butter, eggs and cooked. The obtained ghee is mixed with the previous meat and calcined. The powder, along with honey, sugar, and molasses, is mixed with bearded vulture meat and otter's tail (*sram gi mjug*) [*Lutra lutra*], and a *rdo ba* (most probably *rdo ba nu*, i.e., stalactite [$\text{Ca}(\text{HCO}_3)_2$]). By mixing all these compounds, an electuary is obtained.

Other scattered formulas are presented. In all of them, the key-ingredients are usually used in long life and rejuvenating formulas such as limestone (*cong bzhi*) [CaCO_3],⁶⁹ pale sundew (*rtag tu ngu*) [*Drosera peltata*] (Oliphant of Rossie 2016, pp. 55–65) (PhD thesis), saxifrage (*'od ldan*), mineral exudates. Moreover, a mixture of preprocessed mercury (*dnkul chu dug phral*), mica calcined ashes (*lang mtsher thal*), and preprocessed sulfur (*mu zi dul ba*), which are the primary substances of mercury-based *rasāyana* are enumerated as well.

For example, according to our text, limestone should be triturated, washed to remove poisons, cooked, and mixed with the juice of rock exudate (*brag zhun*), marsh orchid, malva root (*lca pa'i rtsa*) [*Malva parviflora*], caltrop (*gze ma*) [*Tribulus terrestris*], and the three myrobalan fruits.

There are also references to Chinese formulas that will not be analyzed here because they deserve further in-depth analysis.

The text *Ambrosia, Salamander [Meat] Compound* partially mirrors the content of the *Tsa ra ka'bum sde'i sha'i skyin gor chen mo*⁷⁰ (The Great Skin gor Meat Formula from the Caraka Collection in Hundred Thousand Verses) preserved in the Brang ti's collection, for they employ the same encoded names of substances and taxonomy, and describe similar therapeutic applications:

Applications according to the Caraka's Collection:

- a. Rejuvenating therapy (*rgan po gzhon par gtang*).
- b. Bestowing a healthy complexion to emaciated patients (*rid pa tshon par gtong ba*).
- c. Virility therapy to obtain an offspring (*rnamg po bu tshol bar ro tsa sbyor ba*).
- d. Curing cold diseases, oedemas, and renal failure causing bone disorders (*grang ba yul nas 'don mkhal nad tshigs pa lhung ba*).
- e. A formula to develop the clear state of meditative absorption *samādhi* by eliminating torpor and mental fogginess (*bying rmug gnas su gzhom pa sgom chen tin 'dzin gsal ba'i sbyor ba*).
- f. The method to cure erectly disfunction (*pho rtags las su rung bar sol bar bskyed pa*).

Applications according to the Ambrosia, Salamander Meat Compound of the *Ring bsrel*:

- a. Mental application to induce bliss (*bde byed sems sbyar ba*): the recipe enhances the state of meditative stabilization
- b. Physical application to make body and mind firm (*mkhregs byed lus la sbyar ba*): rejuvenating effects and prescribed as a tonic to strengthen mind and body.
- c. Applied to the descending jasmine semen (*'bab byed kun da dang sbyar*): used to overcome obstacles while engaging with the path of means through the body and the bodhicitta (*lus byams sems kyi sgo nas thabs lam*), or in other words, when practicing sexual union with a qualified tantric consort (*mtshan ldan rig ma*).
- d. Inducing firmness (*reng byed chu la sbyar ba*): to cure erectile dysfunction (as in the case of the *cog krong* remedy)
- e. Its application regards the obtainment of an offspring (*'phel byed rings la sbyar ba*)
- f. Applied to clear away possible obstructions (*sel byed gags su sbyar ba*) to the disturbing pathologies (*'khrugs nad*) when other medicines have failed (*sman mi thub*)

Encoded names of substances in the Brang ti's collection and the examined *Ring bsrel* section: Root Tantra to Compose the Meat Medicine, Pith Instruction of the Tree of Immortality from Brang ti's gSer bre ma:⁷¹

1. Salamander (*bcud rgyal da byid*)
2. Calcite (*rdo'i da byid*)
3. Fish (*chu'i da byid*)
4. Sparrow (*gnam gyi da byid*)
5. Chebulic myrobalan (*sman gyi da byid*)
6. *Asparagus racemosus* (*ldum gyi da byid*)
7. *Malva* spp. (*sngo'i da byid*)
8. *Oroxylum indicum* (L.) Kurz. (*spos kyi da byid*)
9. *Ferula assa-foetida* (*rtsi'i da byid*)
10. Sea salt (*tshwa'i da byid*)
11. *Semercarpus Anacardium* (*shing gi da byid*)
12. Garlic (*rtsa'i da byid*)
13. Field pennycress (*'bru'i da byid*)

Ambrosia, Salamander [Meat] Compound from the *Ring bsrel* Anthology:⁷²

1. Salamander (*sha da byid*, meat salamander)
2. Chebulic myrobalan (*a ru ra; shing da byid*, tree salamander)
3. Limestone (*cong zhi; rdo da byid*, mineral salamander)

4. Sparrow (*mchil pa*; *bya da byid*, bird salamander)
5. Rock Agama (*rtsang pa*; *rlung da byid*, wind salamander)
6. Himalayan Mandrake (*kha shog pa* [*g.yung ba kha shog pa*], plant salamander)
7. Sal ammoniac (*rgya tshwa*; *tshwa da byid*, salt salamander)
8. Chinese red-headed sparrow (*rgya mgo dmar mchil*; *gnam da byid*, sky salamander)

The previous analysis has shown an evident degree of intertextuality between the sources, highlighting how the Brang ti's medical collection and the earlier sKye bus man lha's work were considered authoritative. Being directly quoted or condensed, and embedded in larger formularies, these sources had a prominent role in the codification of Tibetan medicinal herpetofauna, not only in the fifteenth-century *Rin bsrel* but in the century to come.⁷³

(3) Virility-Enhancing Formulas [Drawn from] the Yon tan rgya mtsho's gter ma.

The key ingredient of this formula is the *dByar rtswa dgun 'bu* or caterpillar fungus [*Cordyceps sinensis*], a parasitic fungus that infects the caterpillars of swift moth species inhabiting Himalayan meadows (Boesi 2003). According to our text, in the *bTsan bcos yan lag bryad pa* (Treatise, the Eightfold Branches of Medicine) it is also called '*dam bu bur shing 'jag pa rtsa* (mare's-tail sugarcane with blade grass-root), which may reflect its sweet taste. It is said that medical pharmacopeias (*'khrungs dpe*) identify its habitat with the isolated mountain hermitages of rTsa ri sgom po (*rtsa ri sgom po la ri bo dben*). During the summer, the insects grow on the midribs of leaves, resembling that of wild garlic (*dbyar dus 'bu la lo ma'i rtsa ri sgog 'dab ma 'dra ba*); its flowers are silky and green similar to (*dar ljang*) that of Snowdon lily (*A wa*) [*Gagea serotina*]; the root extremities are similar to those of the Persian cumin (*go snyod*) [*Carum carvi*]. Due to its sweet and bitter taste, its sweet post-digestive taste, and its oily and slightly hot potencies (*nus pa snum drod zhing cung zad yang dang ldan*), it can overcome pneuma and bile. The *Yon tan rgya mtsho gter ma*, includes a pith instruction to prepare the caterpillar fungus-medicine: having collected the root in winter, once deprived of dirt particles and stirred, it should be triturated a fermenting agent is added (*phabs rtsi*), then it is sewed in the stomach of a sparrow and cooked (*mchil pa'i khog pa bkang la btso*) with goat milk and golden myrobalan until the juice dries out. Therefore, it is cooked a second time very gently, with other secondary ingredients such as the "six good substances" (*bzang drug*, namely sap of bamboo nodal silica, nutmeg, cloves, small and great Nepalese cardamoms), black pepper, bezoar (*gi wang*), bear bile (*dom mkhris*), and nightshade (*dkar po chig thub thang phrom*), with salamander meat (*gangs sbal*) [*Batrachopus pinchonii*] and honey. These pills are consumed with sweet and oily substances (sugars, honey, milk, butter, and curd) to achieve the best therapeutic results: increasing the seven bodily constituents and, therefore, the supreme radiance of spermatogenic origin, luminous completion (*bkrag mdangs*), sharp sense faculties (*dbang po bkra*), and leading to greater aphrodisiac effects (*ro tsa don mchog*) and the possibility of having a numerous progeny.

C. The White Panacea Literature

As seen in the previous paragraphs, *thang phrom dkar po* [*Mandragora caulescens*; *Asinodus spp.*], a venomous plant of the nightshade family, is often used in long-life remedies and aphrodisiacs. In Tibetan premodern pharmacopeia and medical sources, it is generally described as the "white panacea" (*dkar po chig thub*). The *Ring bsrel* preserves a series of texts dealing with formulas containing *thang phrom* and their lineage history, linking this practice to important masters to whom mNyam nyid rdo rje was connected.

A complete picture of the diverse therapeutic effects of the plant is provided in the *dKar po chig thub kyi sbyor ban go mtshar srog skyob*⁷⁴ (Compounding the White Panacea, The Marvelous Life-Protection). The plant here called '*khung pa gros 'debs* can be a suitable remedy against severe conditions, infective and widespread diseases (*gzer nad*, *srin nad*; *gnyan nad*, *rims nad*) of the time of spiritual degeneration (*snyigs ma'si dus*), to be used as a substitute of the precious medicine (those containing mineral and metals, precious and semiprecious stones), the apex

of Tibetan pharmacopeia. *Thang phrom* root should be collected during the first three months of winter to be dried and mixed with secondary ingredients according to the severity of the disease to be cured and the patient's age. There are no indications about the quantities and the dosages, as mNyam nyid rdo rje states, one should rely on his/her own experience (*thun tshad che chung gang gtong mkhas pas tshod dang sbyor*).

The practice is traced back to diverse lineages of transmission. The origin narrative of “the practice the remedy to all the natural and artificial poisons containing the white panacea” (*dngos dang sbyar ba gyur pa'i gnyan sman dkar po chig thub*) is outlined in the chapter entitled *sMan dkar gyi lo rgyus nges pa rnam rol snyan grags lha'i rnga chen*⁷⁵ (True History of the White Medicine, The Glorious Celestial Drum of Miraculous Manifestations). Here the origin of this knowledge is traced back to an unknown Nepalese great physician (Ha kta/hak ti bal po sman pa chen po), who is said to have saved the life of dge long Sangs rgyas rin chen from Phrag dmar mchong lung, who moved to Nepal, and during his pilgrimage to the sacred stūpa of Svayambhūnāth ('Phags shing kun mjal du phyin pa), happened to be poisoned by his hosts (gnas tshang gi dug zhor byung). Astonished by the great knowledge of this Nepali physician, he became his disciple and received an introduction to medicine, instructions on the methodology to collect the substances, and so forth, becoming, in his turn, an expert physician. This was the way the practice spread to Tibet. Therefore, dPal ngag di dbang po during his pilgrimage to the peak of Mchong lung, came across dGe slong sGrub pa byed who told him about the previous account generating in him great faith and motivated him to collect and put together dGe slong Sangs gyas rin chen's text with his own. dPal ngag gi dbang po was the master of Sha ra ba (alias Sha ra rab 'byams pa sangs rgyas seng), who passed this condensed teaching to mNyam nyid rdo rje, commanding him to write down, in a clear way, all the teachings from medicine scriptural sources and the oral instructions on the practice to compose the medicine (*sman gyi gzhang spyi dang yang sbyar ba'i lag len zhal gdams cad khyod kyis yi ger gsal bar gyis zhes bka gnang ba*). mNyam nyid rdo rje handed up writing the *Dug dpyad yid bzhin nor bu'i gzhang gdams* (The Text and the Guiding Instructions on the Identification of Poisons, the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel).

Other pieces to the puzzling transmission of this practice are added in another text entitled *sMan dkar gyi lag len*⁷⁶ (Practice of the White Medicine) for many religious lineages are reunited within the narrative framework:

1. Gter ma lineage

Padmasambhava

Ye shes mthso rgyal

Khri strong lde'u bstan

Chos rgyal Rin chen gling pa (alias Me ban rin chen gling pa, 1289–1368) who rediscovered the *gter ma*

Tshar rting ba Vajrakīrti

Kun bzang Jñāna

bLa ma Sum sman mdo sde

mKha' spyod dbang po

rDza mgon Kun spangs pa

bLa ma rGyal sdem pa

Zur mkhar bam mNyam nyid rdo rje (he received the teaching at the bKa' brgyud monastery of dGa' ldan ma mo in Kong po)

2. Nepalese–Tibetan Lineage a.

Hakti

Sangs rgyas ye shes

sKu zhang chos rje
 bLa ma Ra sgreng ba
 lha rje Chos rje rgyabs
 Dharmasvāmin (mNyam nyid rdo rje)

3. Nepalese–Tibetan Lineage b.

Hakti
 Sangs rgyas ye shes
 sKu zhang chos rje
 Lha rje 'tsho byed
 Tshe dbang chos rgyal
 Zur mkhar bam Nyam nyid rdo rje

4. Nepalese–Tibetan Lineage c.

Hakti
 Sangs rgyas ye shes
 sTag lung Chos rje
 rJe Sha ra ba (Sha ra rab 'jam pa sangs rgyas seng ge)
 Dharmasvāmin

5. Nepalese–Tibetan Lineage d.

Hakti
 Phyang sman dGe snyen
 Phag sman shā ka ye
 A pa Hor dar
 Phyang sman Sangs mgon
 Drin can dPon zhang
 Dharmasvāmin

6. Chinese–Tibetan Lineage

Mañjuśrī
 The Chinese master Mahā Pūzī [朴子]
 Dar rtse mKhas pa
 Mi nyag A seng
 Lha rje gNam lcags

Thus, practice arrives in Lho Rong County. mNyam nyid rdo rje received it from Bya tang kun dGa' dpal at Chab nag ma ta in Kong po.

The *gter ma* lineage is connected to Rin chen gling pa, who most probably was master of Rin 'dzin rgod ldem (Arguillère 2024b), to whom is ascribed the *gDon bshal rdo rje pha lam* (The Diamond Teaching Purging Away the Disease Carrier Beings), another *gter ma* teaching preserved in the *Ring bsrel*, which was conferred to mNyam nyid rdo rje by dKon mchog lhun grub. This work echoes Rin 'dzin rgod ldem's *Dug dbang rdo rje pha lam* (The Diamond Overpowering Poisons), a *gter ma* dealing with Vajrabhairava–Yamāntaka-related *rakṣā* practices against poisons preserved in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and in the Brang ti's *gSer bre ma*.⁷⁷ Therefore this lineage seems to point to a rNying ma *gter ma* tradition on poison-knowledge.

Interestingly, here, there is also a connection with the Phyang sman medical lineage developed by Zhang ston gzi brjid ba (eleventh century), Che rje Zhang stong zhig po (thirteenth century?) and handed over to Phyang sman rin chen rgyal mtshan and Byams chen chos rje shākya ye shes (1354–1419), who handed down the *Hundred Thousand Fists* [*Grasping*

the Teachings] and other collections ascribed to sKyes bu me lha. The latter has also been associated with Bha ro phyag rdum, the Nepalese master of Rwa lo, another important figure in the history of Tibetan Vajrabhairava–Yamāntaka tradition (Van der Kuyp 2010).

The actual practice described integrates elements coming from different sources, and aural lineage-transmission (*snyan brgyud*). In the *bdud rtsi rdzang bu*⁷⁸ (The Pond of Ambrosia) written by mNyam nyid rdo rje himself, there is a description of the plant as follows: the variant specimens are distinguished because they smell differently and have different characteristics and therapeutic applications.

The male *pho dres sa khregs* are grown in arid places or bad fields; its leaves are raspy, and the flowers are purple. Its taste is salty, and its potencies make it effective in curing diseases due to its pathogenic invisible being (*srin nad*) to cure wounds, skin lesions, and the flesh under the curing wounds (*sha'u gso*).

The female *mo dres rlan* can grow in open green meadows; it has soft leaves and blue flowers. Its taste is slightly sweet and hot; therefore, it possesses both warming and cooling potencies to cure brown phlegm, which manifests the same signs of poisoning (*bad smug rims dug thabs*), cold and hot diseases affecting the gastrointestinal area (*pho long rgyu mar tsha grang 'thab*), conditions caused by pathogenic invisible beings (*sring glang; srin nag*).

The neutral *ma ning ma nges* adapts to any habitat; it has pale flowers with black marks. It is particularly effective in curing metabolic dysfunctions, brown phlegm, and the infective biliary disease of yellow eyes (*mkhris pa mig ser*; hepatitis); it is excellent for curing poisonings, enhances metabolic heat, and cures the seven bodily constituents.

Another quoted source is that of *rDa'i thor 'bum du grags zhal gdams dmar khrid* (Essential Guiding Instructions known as One hundred Million Miscellaneous Writings) that was quite spread in Khams (khams kyi phyogs su dar ba), and which contains the *sNgo ldum chig rgyud gtong ba'i sbyongs sman zab mob cu gsum* (Thirteen Profound Medicines for the Cleansing Therapy of Herbal Compounds that Act Quickly). In this work, it is said that the *dkar po chig thub* (white panacea), also known as *ma ning dres*, in the Dgas po' area is known as *pho rog sgye gu*.

According to Nepalese tradition, poisoning will be cured by consuming the medicine, which in this case will have emetic effects.

The “king cleansing and emetic medicine the white panacea” is described in detail. The author provides information on how to collect the medicinal substance, as well as how to prepare it. In winter, when the leaves are dry, they are washed with water and filtered with a cloth, exsiccated and triturated. Alternatively, not all water is eliminated so that it can be prepared as a syrup. *The Essential Guiding Instructions known as One hundred Million Miscellaneous Writings*, contains an explanatory key to syrup formula,⁷⁹ according to which the syrup of nightshade should be mixed with “small beak myrobalan”, rhino horn (*bse ru*) [*Rhinoceros unicornis*], musk, *su mi* *Corydalis*, *nux vomica* (*ko byi la*) [*Strychnos nux-vomica*], and minor ingredients.

The chapter includes quotations from the sKye bus ma lha'i *Hundred Thousand Fists* [*Grasping the Teachings*], a gter ma text—this could refer to the unnamed source, we referred to it in the section on lineages—and instructions ascribed to a Chinese sage (most possibly Mahā Pūzī)

According to the text ascribed to sKyes bu me lha, the specimen *mo dres* is cool and heavy; the parts used to prepare the syrup are leaves and roots. One portion of *pho dres* can be added to two portions of *mo dres* syrup to be, thereafter, “tamed” on fire and by adding salts. With the final compound, some pills are prepared, which are as bid as sheep dung. The *ma ning dres* is prepared by extracting its juice, which shall be consumed with the pills. The therapeutic effects are numerous, including curing diseases such as pathogenic *srin* and hepatitis.

According to the *gter ma*, nightshade syrup (one thumb in measure) is prepared with ginger syrup, black sesame, spurge (*thar nu*) [*Euphorbia walllichii*], cow urine, trona (*bul tog*) [$\text{Na}_3\text{H}(\text{CO}_3)_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$], white conches, malva seeds, and a spoon of donkey's hooves.⁸⁰ The pills can cure oedemas at various stages (*dmu'or rkya bab*), and chronic poison-induced conditions (*dug nad rnying*) among others.

The instructions of the Chinese master describe the same general procedures to collect, triturate, and dry the medicine and enumerate the same beneficial effects as the perfect antidote to poisons.

In what follows, this contribution will continue dealing with potent substances and delve into the mercury alchemy tradition traced back to O rgyan pa rin chen dpal.

2.2.2. Mercury Alchemy

The first text analyzed here is the *dBang ril gzhal gdams thun mong ma yin pa*⁸¹ (Extraordinary Instruction on the Potent Pill).

The category of “potent pill” (*dbang ril*) subsumes both the category of natural potent pill and that of compounds. Natural potent pills, whose origin is related to the ancient Vedic legends and which are also narrated in the *Bshad rgyud* (Exegetical Tantra of the Four Tantras), deal with the origin of the prime and subsidiary poisons and their treatments. According to one of these legends, Indra once cast the five precious minerals, gold, silver, coral, pearl, and either sapphire or turquoise, into the great ocean. These were eventually consumed by various animals, which then formed bezoars within their bodies. They have different colors and potencies based on the animal they originate from. Their virtues are due to their association with the precious stones, “which defeat poisons and are endowed with natural occult virtues and siddhi” (*'joms byed rin po che mthun ldan rang byung dngos grub*). To this category belong the bezoars deriving from an elephant, peacock, musk deer, and snake and frogs (here called *klu'i nor bu* or *nāga's jewel*).

The pills described here are classified as *rin chen dbang po ril bu* or “potent precious pills”, wherein “precious” refers to the key substances belonging to the mineral and metal world, including precious and semiprecious stones.

In the first text, the main ingredients to be used are: astragalus (*srad nag*) [Astragalus spp; Oxytropis spp], preprocessed yellow sulfur (*mu zi dul ma*), and detoxified mercury according to two different procedures, namely the “wild procedure” (*rgod*) and “cultivating procedures” (*g.yung*).

The first one is the so-called “great purification” (*btso bkhrū chen mo*) to eliminate poisons. Generally speaking, this consists of three phases: (1) the “elimination of oxides and extirpation of poisons” (*g.ya' phyi dang g.ya' khu 'don*); (2) the “cooking and washing [processes] to eliminate perforating [poisons]” (*lce 'bigs btso bkru*); (3) the “confrontation with the enemy and changing form” (*dgra dang phral nas gzugs su bsgyur ba*) achieved by mixing mercury with sulfur and other metals and minerals. The eight minerals called the “eight devourers” (*za byed khams brgyad*) and eight metals or “eight binding elements” (*'ching byed khams brgyad*) cover a fundamental role in the entire process of stabilizing mercury.

The “cultivating procedures” indicate diverse methods to tame mercury: “hot and cold subjugations” (*tsha dang grang 'dul*), “pacifying subjugation and particular subjugation” (*zhi 'dul dang phyad par 'dul*). This combining methodology is extensively described in another section of the *Ring bsrel*.⁸²

However, here, it is said that the subjugation should be thoroughly conducted for the corroboration of when the “stick that is sunk into the amount of mercury” is not sufficient (*ber ga 'dzin pa tsam ma btul mi rung*). The stick is usually utilized once mercury is mixed with eight metals, juice of acid substances, and sesame and oil and cooked for an entire

day. The portion of mercury that is being regained becomes craggy: ripples appear, and it is possible to sink a wood stick into it.

Once completely distilled and detoxified, mercury sulfide ashes (*btso thal*), here given as *btul ba'i bcud rgyal nam mkha' mdog can* (the tamed king of the essence that is sky colored) is, mixed with musk white mustard (*yungs dkar*) [*Brassica alba*] astragalus, ashes of peacock feathers calcined on a metal mirror or in an iron vessel, the golden myrobalan, nutmeg, cloves, the two cardamom (*sug smel; ka ko la*), sap of bamboo nodal silica, and saffron. Mercury and tame sulfur should become indivisible in order to add powdered astragalus and an eight-year-old child's urine. Thereafter, it is cooked, and other medicines are added, and it is cooked again and rinsed with terse water. In the end, pills are prepared according to the "seeing lineage" (*mthong brgyud*); therefore, no more information about the preparation procedures is given. To intake the pills, the practitioner has to "open up the channel" (*rtsa kha 'byed*) by eating *lha chung si li*, a variety of the warming Sichuan pepper (*g.yer ma*) [*Zanthoxylum*].

Dietary prescription and commitments are provided: until the effects of the medicine have not vanished (for a period of four months), the person should not intake food and drink that may inhibit the effects of the mercury pills, such as sea buckthorn (*star bu*) [*Hippophae rhamnoides*], apples and acid chang.

Among the numerous iatrochemical works included in the *Ring bsrel*, the *dPal ldan zur mkhar ba khyad chos bye ba ring bsrel las grub pa'i ngag gi rtogs pa 'grol ba dā ki'i glu dbyangs* (Dākinī's Song, Instantaneous Liberation through Realizing the Accomplished Speech from the Ten Million of Relics, Special Teaching of The Glorious Zur mkhar ba) and the *rDo rje tshig rkang dang 'brel ba'i lag len grigs su bsdebs pa* (Systematic Collection of Practices Related to the Adamantine Verses) deserve particular attention for they reflect the interrelation of mercury procedures, yogic and meditative practices rooted in the *śaḍaṅgayoga* of the *Kālacakratantra* and the "body maṇḍala" (*lus kyi dkyil 'khor*) in the Cakrasaṃvara system, and in particular, as they were developed in later Tibetan religious and medical traditions. Therefore, the significance of these writings for studying the history of tantric Buddhism in general and Buddhist medicine in particular should be acknowledged. As has been said before, the translation and analysis of relevant sections from these texts have been published elsewhere (Simioli 2024a).⁸³ Here, pivotal points will be resumed and briefly discussed in the framework of *rdo rje gsum bsnyen sgrub* (*Approach and Accomplishment of the Three Vajras*) system developed by O rgyan pa rin chen dpal.⁸⁴ The "adamantine verses" (*rdo rje tshig rkang*) handed down in mNyam nyid rdo rje's anthology are the mercury-based alchemical instructions transmitted by O rgyan pa, who elaborated on them as part of the mentioned *sevāsādhana* (*bsnyen sgrub*). According to the tradition, these teachings were transmitted through blessing by Vajrayoginī and Dākinīs of the Four Classes to O rgyan pa rin chen dpal during the pilgrimage to the Western land of Oḍḍiyāna (modern Swat) in the city of Kasoka, located in the emanated realm of Dhumatāla.

The section on internal alchemy is based on the exegesis of *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* (*dpal sdom pa 'khor lo zhes bya ba rnal 'byor chen mo'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*), and in particular Vajraghaṇṭa's instruction on the *body maṇḍala*, which is used here to explain fundamental verses from the twenty-fourth chapter of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* on the *dākinī*'s language (*mkha''gro'i brda tshig*).

A sense of the many doctrinal and practical aspects of this teaching can be discerned by reading the following passage:

The indestructible abides in the *maṇḍala* of the central channel *avadhūti* at the heart, here the Consort of Śrī Paramādi is making offerings to him and chants the song of the death of Death.⁸⁵

With respect to those complementary aspects that supplement the branches of mercury fixation, which is the main topic here, it shall be clearly explained that externally it displays itself as mercury, internally it is made of the bodily constituents and essence, and moreover it turns into Heruka [Cakrasaṃvara] as abiding the *maṇḍala*. As [Vajra]ghaṇṭapada has elucidated, at the heart centre the three channels *rasanā*, *lalanā* and *avadhūti* are gathered together; this is the wisdom, who is the Mother; amidst there is the indestructible, always abiding and immutable essential sphere, the method, who is the Father.⁸⁶

The internal *maṇḍala* of Cakrasaṃvara, which replicates the tantric sacred sites known as twenty-four *pīṭhās*, is inhabited by *ḍākinīs* and *vīras* abide: the *ḍākinīs* have the form of the channels (*nāḍī*, *rtsa*), while the bodily constituents and essences (*dhātus*, *khams dwangs*) correspond to the *vīras*. The structure of the internal body follows Vajraghaṇṭapada's description in an essential mode, for the passage focuses on the knot where the three upper main subtle channels cross at the heart of *dharmacakra* (*chos kyi 'khor lo*), which is a lotus with eight petals.⁸⁷

Here it is clear that to alchemically transform mercury into the supreme elixir, visualizations and yogic practices should be performed. The successive phases of the practice regard the practice of inner heat (*gtum mo*) that leads to the arising of the Coemerging Primordial Wisdom, which “causes the death of those obscuring defilements obstructing the perfect realization of the illusory body, which is just made of mind and subtle wind and resembles the body of dreams” (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes de rmi lam gyi lus dang'dra ba'i rlung* [*rlung*] *sems tsam gyi sgyu lus grub pa'i legs kyi sgrub ba'chi bar byed pa'i don no*).

As anticipated, these instructions are said to belong or have been elaborated as corollary practice of the threefold *Approach and Accomplishment of the Three Vajras*. Therefore, a quick inspection of the latter may provide supplementary information about the doctrinal and yogic settings in which this alchemical practice has developed.

The core of O rgyan pa's *Approach and Accomplishment* (*bsnyen sgrub*) is the *sada-gayoga* articulated in subsequent levels. In his teaching, the yoga limbs are grouped in two different ways, one of which is formed by three levels:

(1) *The Yoga of the Approaching Practice of the Vajra Body*, which regards the limb of withdrawal (*so sor bsdud pa*) and its fruit, is the meditative concentration (*bsam gtan*). In this phase, the bodily channels are purified, and through the three vajra postures (*skiyil krung gsum*) of withdrawal, the upper and lower *prāṇas* are locked.

(2) *The Yoga of the Accomplishing Practice of the Vajra Speech* that consists in the breath controlling techniques (*rlung brtsol*) to bring the upper and lower winds onto the path and the retention limb (*'dzin pa*) practiced by means of the “union of the mouths” (*kha sbyor*) to clearly visualize the divine forms (*lha sku*) that are the Tathāgatakāyas of the five families and their consorts (*yab-yum*).

(3) *The Yoga of the Great Accomplishing Practice of the Vajra Mind* that is the recollection (*rjes dran*) to realize states of bliss through the inner heat (*gtum mo*) and the limb of meditative absorption (*ting 'dzin*) to realize the fixation without seminal emission. Through this recollection, the essential mind drop (*yiḍ thig le*) is purified. Maintaining the attention on the winds, the inner fire blazes and, having melted the luminous subtle essence, it burns the defilements. Once there are no more impure sediments, and the body is formed by pure subtle essences, the “obstructive tangible demon material body” (*thogs bcas dngos po'i bdud*) is replaced by the adamantine rainbow body, which is the *Dharmakāya*.

The practice describes day and night yoga characterized by postural yogic exercises and gazes to be used at different stages of the practice.⁸⁸

In light of what has been said so far, we can deduce that iatrochemical procedures were conceived as rooted in the yogic practice. The analyzed passages support the initial argument about the role of material substances in achieving soteriological goals.

In the same vein, the following section will be devoted to the interrelation of iatrochemistry and yoga, focusing on medical compounds used to enhance inner heat.

2.2.3. Key Instruction to Enhance the Inner Heat by the Means of Substances

Drag po me 'khor lo (Wheel of Wrathful Fire)⁸⁹

This is an auxiliary instruction devoted to enhancing (*bogs 'don*) the inner heat.

Enhancing methods and practices to remove hindrances, including forms of *haṭhayoga* and physical postural exercises (*'khrul'khor*), the ingestion of compounds endowed with specific potencies, are usually integrated into completion stage-related practices such as the inner heat.

Although, as seen in the hagiographical passages, mNyam nyid rdo rje received from Sha ra rab 'byams pa diverse teachings dealing with the inner heat including Niguma's *Six Dharmas* and Karmapa Dus gsum mkhyen pa's instruction, no reference is made to any specific tradition or lineage in the analyzed text.

Being incorporated as well in the sixfold yoga, which was widespread across Buddhist tantric systems and Tibetan schools, the stage of inner heat is generally explained as developed in connection and as a result of techniques used to redirect the vital breath's energy (*rlung*) into the central channel *avadhūtī*. Once the vital breath's energy has ascended through the cakras of the navel, heart, throat, and forehead, becoming unified with *bodhicittabindu* through the power of desire aroused by the tantric consort or the visualized goddess, the inner heat, located at the navel *cakra* flares up. This melts the white *bodhicitta* that flows from the crown along the *cakras*, determining luminous maṇḍalic visions and increasing bliss. If the seminal emission is avoided, the stage is followed by the purification of mental and physical defilements, and as can be seen at the end of this text, by the vision of the mind's natural luminosity and the realization of a pure body.

This key instruction is, indeed, divided into three parts regarding the preparation of compounds (*rdzas kyi sbyor ba*) to be ingested or smeared, meditative, yogic, and ritual practice (*lag len*), and the qualities (*yon tan*) that refers to the results of the practice itself.

The author recommends mixing the powders of the following substances: black pepper (*po wa ris; na le sham*) [*Piper nigrum*] here given under the encoded name of "dark black tree-taste" (*mthing nag ljon pa'i ro*); ginger from the southern regions (*lho sga*) [*Zingiber officinale* R.] here as "awned grain" (*gra[gra ma]*); long pepper here as (*tshan de*); the victorious chebulic myrobalan (*a ru rnam rgyal*) one of the six chebulic myrobalans [*Terminalia chebula*] here as (*'jigs pa'i stobs*); sal ammoniac here as "the sharp substance, friend of fire" (*rnon me yi grogs*); pomegranate here as "the medicine that acts quickly producing heat and removing cold" (*drod skyed rang sel las la rgyug sman*); rock salt (*rgyam tshwa*) or "the secret instruction-medicine" (*gsang ba'i man ngag sman*). They shall be ingested as pills accompanied with a cup of chang.

The first three substances, namely black and long pepper and dry ginger, are usually classified as the "three hot substances" (*tsha ba gsum*) because of their specific potencies that can increase bodily and metabolic heat (*pho ba'i me drod*). Black pepper can cure cold and phlegm disorders. Long pepper can cure metabolic dysfunction caused by the combination of cold disorder and pneuma (*grang rlung*), and which causes bloated stomach respiratory conditions (*dbug mi bde ba*) and, be used in rejuvenating formulas and aphrodisiacs.

Pomegranate and rock salt have similar potencies (Byams pa 'phrin las et al. 2006, pp. 939–40, 153). Brown ginger can also cure spleen infection (*mcher tshad*). The victorious myrobalan can cure diseases due to the combination of the three humors; it is beneficial

for the seven bodily constituents; it has life-prolonging and rejuvenating effects; it can cure wounds (*'phel rma*) and broken-off fractures (*chag grum*); it can cure pediatric diseases and wards off evil forces afflicting children (*byis pa'i nad gdon*) (Byams pa'phrin las et al. 2006, p. 1017).

Sal ammoniac can counteract poisons; it can cure channel diseases, urinary blockage (*dri chu 'gags*), and skin lesions of different types (*sha ro; rma'i rul ba*); it removes hindrances; It cures fluid accumulation conditions (*chu ser*) and eliminates pathogenic microorganisms (*srin*).

The same substances used for the pills can also be mixed with black aconite (*sman chen*), *'bri* fat and sweet flag, and *zho sha* (most probably *snying zho sha*) Nepal hug plum [*Choerospondias axillaris*].

After washing himself with the strained water of the “six good substances” (*bzang drug*, namely *cu gang*, *gur gum*, *li shi*, *dzā ti*, *sug smel*, *ka ko la*), the practitioner must rub his body with an unguent (*phyir phyug rdzas*) made from animal substances, such as g.yag and dog bile, and human bile. Afterwards, he must draw the seed-syllable *Raṃ* on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet using a coral-made stick (*byi ru'i smyu gu*) dipped in cinnabar (*mtshal*) [Cinnabaris; HSg]. The text refers to this ritual practice as a method for igniting or inducing the rotation of the [*maṇḍala*] of the element fire within the secret water channel (*gsang chu'i rtsar mes bskor ba*). To fully understand this short sentence, we shall reconnect the analysis of this section to what was stated earlier in the section on mercury procedures, as it represents a further example of how mNyam nyid rdo rje recontextualized tantric physiology in his medical writings. The *nāḍi* system of the *Kālacakra* tantra and the sixfold-yoga practice based on O rgyan pa's *Approach and Accomplishment of the Three Vajras* will be useful for our purpose, as these scriptures were two seminal works handed down within the Zur medical tradition.

Regarding the medical perspective on the body's channels, we shall refer to the *Ring bsrel* itself, which includes a chapter devoted to human anatomy. This chapter deals with vulnerable body parts (*gnad*) such as flesh, fat, bones, tendons, vital organs and viscera, and channels (*sha; tshil; rus pa; chu rgyus; don snod; rtsa*) that are described in connection to conditions difficult to cure (*sbyong gso dka'*) including swellings or abnormal masses (*skrang*s), palsy (*zha reng*s), and wounds (*rma*).⁹⁰ This chapter is based on the contents of chapter four of the *bShad rgyud* (Exegetical Tantra) of the *Four Tantras*,⁹¹ and chapter eighty-five of the *Man ngag rgyud* (Instructional Tantra) of the *Four Tantras*.⁹²

According to the sixfold yoga of the *Approach and Accomplishment of the Three Vajras*, when holding the downward-clearing *prāṇa*, one should visualize the elements as tiers piled one on the top of the other (*'byung ba rim brtsegs*).⁹³ The seed-syllable *Raṃ* corresponds to the element fire; when controlling or holding the fire-*prāṇa* (*me'i rlung*), one should visualize a red triangular fiery *maṇḍala* emerging from this syllable at the throat. This will cause an increase in body temperature. In the same text, O rgyan pa explains that to hold the *prāṇa* of the fire element forcefully one should focus on the area four fingers under the navel where the deity associated with the fire element abides on a solar seat over a luminous red lotus, very hot to the touch. This would cause the white bodhicitta to flow downward from the forehead *mahāsukha cakra*.⁹⁴

The *Kālacakra* describes a series of secondary channels that depart from the *cakra* of the navel and the secret *cakra* located at the perineum, spreading out to the hips, thighs, and soles of the feet. Therefore, the syllables on the soles of feet are presumably purported to exert some kind of effect on the element fire within the body at the secret *cakra*.

Turning to the medical description of the body's channels, the quoted chapter of the *Ring bsrel* on “vulnerable parts” describes the so-called “connecting channels” (*'brel ba'i rtsa*) whose ramifications connect to vital organs, bones, and muscles. The two main cate-

gories of these channels are the “white and black vital channels” (*srog rtsa dkar nag*), which correspond respectively to the neurological and lymphatic systems, and the cardiovascular system. As in the *Instructional Tantra*, the trunks of these channels are said to “stand up inside the spine as a pine tree” (*sgal nang gzhung shing bslangs 'dra*). Some of the channels are internal (*nang rtsa*) since they are connected to the vital organs (*don dang 'brel ba*) at different vertebral points (*tshigs pa*): they are the thirteen “hanging treads” channels (*dpyangs thag*) divided in the four “pneuma channels” (*rlung rtsa*) connected to heart and small intestine (*snying; rgyu ma*); the four “bile channels” (*mkhris rtsa*) connected to liver, gallbladder, lungs and large intestine (*mchin; mkhris; glo; long*); “phlegm channels” (*bad kan rtsa*) connected to the stomach, spleen, kidneys, and urinary bladder (*pho; mcher; mkhal; lgang*); one “combined humors-channel” (*dus pa'i rtsa*) connected to the vesicles of reproductive substances (*bsam se'u*). The “visible external channels” (*phyi'i rtsa mngon*) are connected to arms, legs and neck (*yan lag dang 'brel ba*). The white channels are divided in two categories. One is represented by the two main “tubular water channels” (*chu'i rtsa bu gu can gnyis*) that depart from the later sides of the occipital skull area (*ltag pa'i sdud khung gnyis*) and descend along the two sides of the cervical vertebra. These two are connected to the central channel (*gzhung rtsa*) at the fifth vertebra and to the channels of the seminal vesicles and kidney at the level of the eighth vertebra.

As seen in the *Wheel of Wrathful Fire*, the analyzed sentence refers to a secret water channel, which, at this stage of research, cannot be identified with certainty. However, in the *Kālacakra*-related literature, the left lunar channel (*rkyang ma*) is usually associated with the element water. Moreover, diverse proponents of the Zur lineage have linked the body's “somatic water channels” to the lunar channel.⁹⁵ We might think that mNyam nyid rdo je shared the same idea about the relation between the lunar channel and the nature or structure of the water channels.

The *Wheel of Wrathful Fire* does not provide us with sufficient information to support this conclusion. What we know is that the medicine should be used while meditating on the inner fire (*rgyun du gtum mo'i me dmigs bsgom*) and persevering in the practice of breath control (*rlung rtsol*), and physical yoga.

The beneficial results of the practice are: power accumulation, equaling that of a lion and physical strength of an elephant (*seng ge'i rtsal la glang po'i stobs*), long-life endurance as heavenly bodies (*nyi zla'i tshe*), lustrous complexion and strong bodily heat (*bkra mdangs me drod skyed*), control over gods and demons (*lha 'dre dbang du sdud*), success in practice of the dream yoga and clear light, and the obtainment the illusory body.

*Da lis bcud len*⁹⁶ (Dwarf Rhododendron Rasāyana)

Conforming to a recurrent topos of the Indo–Tibetan alchemical literature, the origin of this key substance is associated with divine seminal fluids. The opening mythical account narrates, indeed, the creation of the plant from the seminal fluid emitted by the divine prince (lha bu) Nor bu dri med, who fell in love with the Gandharva maiden (dri za) Rab dga'i bu mo.

Da lis is another name for the varieties of *ba lu* (*ba lu nag po; ba lu dkar po; ba lu dmar po*) [*Rodhodendrom* spp.] that grow in Himalayan open meadows and on rocky crevices (*gya' spang mtshams sus kye*). There is a detailed description of the plant. The information is said to be drawn from the already quoted *bdud rtsi rdzing bu* (The Pond of Ambrosia). However, further on, mNyam nyid rdo rje affirms that he has relied upon the work of his predecessors, mentioning g.Yu thog, and on another source that he identifies as Rang byung rdo rje's *bcud len rgya mtsho* (Ocean of Rasāyana).

Da lis is given as an Uigur loan word (*yu gur gyi skad dang mthun po*), and it is said that its black variant is called *su ru*. Its roots are said to resemble a coiled snake (*sbrul 'gyil 'dra*), the blooming flowers are similar to jewels that, once fully opened, resemble lotus in

different ways: the white one is similar to a water lily (*ku mud*), while the red one is similar to a coral rosary (*byi ru'i phreng ba*); the black variant is similar to the copper stem of the lotus flower (*nag po zangs kyi pad sdong dang'dra*). It smells similar to a fragrant wine (*dri zhim spos ngad*).

The taste is sweet, hot, and bitter (*ro mgar tsha kha ba*), while the post-digestive taste is acid and bitter (*zhu rjes skyu zhing kha ba*). Among its potencies there are that of being an excellent remedy for pulmonary diseases (*glo nad*) and oedema (*skya rbab*), and as *rasāyana* and ambrosia of immortality (*bcud len 'chi med bdud rtsi*). The flowers are used in *rasāyana* recipes; the leaves are used in the form of medicinal powder or as a syrup (*phye ma kan da*), while the roots are used as a decoction (*thang sbyor*). Red and white flowers are referred to as “*dākinī*’s sacred substances” (*mkha' 'gro'i dam rdzas*) and should be collected and let dry in the shadow, in a clean and hidden place, where no human or dog has access (*mi dang khyis ma 'gong gtsang sar sba*).

The dried flowers are finally triturated and mixed with the three white substances (namely, butter, milk, and curd), and the three sweet substances (sugar, molasses, and honey) are used to prepare *rasāyana* pills that are to be consecrated. However, the ritual is not described in detail, for no description of any meditational deity is given, but it is said to meditate on the male deity and his consort in union (*yid dam yab yum sbyor mtshams*). The ritual corresponds to a typical *smān sgrub* during which the pills are placed into a precious vase to become the receptacle of divine benedictions and are, consequently, transformed in ambrosia during the dissolution phase (*bdud rtsi bstim*). Heart mantras should be recited (*snying po bzla pa*), and the bodhicitta generated (*sems bskyed*).

The pills can be taken to enhance the practice of inner heat and can lead to achieving the same realizations (*rmi lam, 'od gsal, sgyu lus*) described in the previous text.

3. Conclusions

This contribution was meant to introduce the readers to the variegated alchemical and medical themes covered in the *Ring bsrel* corpus. The paper ends as it has begun: I would like, indeed, to return to the initial metaphorical title of the self-multiplying tiny relics and the authorial intent of equating them to the many instructions of the corpus, some very secretive and lapidary but full of implied references to the religious milieu of fifteen century Tibet.

In keeping with the overarching theme of this issue, the analysis of the *Ring bsrel* may shed some light on the way mNyam nyi rdo rje, its primary author, and other proponents of his lineage, members of the Zur medical school, engage with a system of medical and alchemical scriptures intended as the sacred receptacle of long-lasting traditions and practices. In light of what has emerged from the analysis so far, it can be assumed that “preparing and intaking” any of the plant-based–*rasāyana* remedies, medicinal herpetofauna, mercury potent pills, and so forth by the power of relying on the pith instructions handed down within the *Ring bsrel*, was envisioned and aimed as the means to establish doctrinal, material, and soteriological interrelations expanding through time and beyond time.

mNyam nyid rdo rje was a lineage holder of rNying ma and bKa' brgyud schools and among those masters who developed the *g.Yu thog sNying thig* literature. In this respect, in his works, he tried to represent all these traditions to preserve them. Such a project was also continued by his close disciples, mainly Kong po sman Phrag dpon bSod nams bkra shis. The *Ring bsrel* contains teachings coming from or summarizing references to the canonical medical literature of the *Four Tantras*, also evoked by the figures of *g.Yu thog* and *Sum ston ye shes gzungs*, the *gNying ma gter ma* tradition in general, and to specific *gter ston* such as *Sangs rgyas gling pa* and *Rig 'dzin rgod ldem*. Large space is given to *Rang byung rdo rje*'s medical works and *O rgyan pa*'s works and translations of *rasāśāstras*.

There are erudite quotations from tantric and medical instructions and treatises, such as sections from the *Cakrasamvara*-related literature, the Brang ti's *gSer bre ma* and Skyes bu me lha's *Khy mtshur 'bum*.

Particularly significant is also the importance given by mNyam nyid dor je to the experiential dimension of the medical practice that in his scriptures accompanies and complements the received knowledge, thus testifying to a dual way of engaging with the authoritative scriptural world.

Knowing one instruction means connecting to a lineage, to its doctrinal and practical components. Putting into practice the instruction with the aim of achieving therapeutic, alchemical, and yogic purposes means embodying a tradition and overall entering the Buddhist path, obtaining siddhis and ultimately Awakening.

Eventually, the analysis of the *Ring bsrel* may contribute to our understating of the history of medico–alchemical traditions in the fifteenth century, for each *ring bsrel* relic instruction reverberates the intricate entanglements of the many traditions encapsulated in it, which reflect the heritage of Tibetan Buddhist medicine.

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Notes

- ¹ I will be using the following redactions of the *Ring bsrel*: *Man ngag bye ba ring bsrel pod chung rab 'byams gsal ba'i sgron me*, kan su mi rigs dpe skrun khang ed., 1993, hereafter *ring bsrel* (1); *rJe mkhas pa'i dbang po zur mkhar ba khyad chos bye ba ring bsrel rab 'byams gzhuks so*, Tashigang ed., 1979, hereafter *ring bsrel* (2); *Bye bya ring bsrel*, Sherab Gyaltshen Lama eds., 1977, hereafter *ring bsrel* (3).
- ² For a further inquiry into the categories of relics and their etymology see (Martin 1994); on the conception of relics as reflected in rNying ma *Snying thig* tradition see (Germano 2004); the analysis of the medical potency attributed to the relics in Tibetan medicine is provided in (Gerke 2019a).
- ³ On this point see (Simioli 2024a).
- ⁴ For a discussion of examples of empirical mentality and approaches to medical practice in Tibetan history, see (Gyatso 2015). On the interrelation of Buddhism and medicine in diverse Asian contexts through centuries see (Salguero 2022). For an historical analysis of the interrelation of Buddhism and medicine in Tibet between the twelfth and the fourteenth century, see (McGrath 2017) (Ph.D. thesis).
- ⁵ For a preliminary analysis of the *g.Yu thog snying thig*, see (Garrett 2009).
- ⁶ Zur mkhar bLo gros rgyal po, *Drang srong chen po mnyam nyid rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa 'gog pa med pa'i yi ge'i gtam chen po*, in *Zur mkhar blo gros rgyal po'i gsung rtsom gces btus*, p. 100/12 et passim: [...] *man ngag gces so 'tshal kun gyi snying po bsdus pa'i g.yu thog snying thig gegs sel la' byung ba lus 'khugs kyi gegs sel ting 'dzin sems 'khugs kyi gegs sel bar chad bdud gegs sel de rnam thung mong gi gegs sel te bzhi mdzad par dgongs nas' byung les 'khugs kyi gegs sel la tshigs lung nyung ngu zhig dang tshigs bcad dpe tshan du byas pa la zur mkhar ba'i khyad chos bye ba rings bsrel du grags pa'di nyid mdzad |*.
- ⁷ *Yu thog snying thig gi bla sgrub 'byung lus 'khugs kyi gegs sel*, in *g.Yu thog snying thig zhes bya ba gzhuks so* pp. 526/12–571/18; see also *g. Yu thog snying thig gi bla sgrub gi lam rtags sel byed nor bu'i sgrong me*, in *g.Yu thog snying thig zhes bya ba gzhuks so* pp. 572/21–584/1.
- ⁸ Op. cit., pp. 561/16–18: [...] *thor bu nad gso thabs 'di nyid | sum ston chen pos mdzad 'phro lus pas zur mkhar mnyam nyid rdo rje zhes g.yu thog pa'i rnam 'phrul gang de nyid kyi mdzad pa yin no |*.
- ⁹ On *thugs dam* as postmortem meditative state and a comparative analysis of how the body at the time of death is approached by Tibetan Buddhist and medical tradition and the Euroamerican biomedical and scientific tradition, see (Tidwell 2024).
- ¹⁰ *dPal ldan zur mkhar ba'i rnam thar thar pa'i lam ston*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 671/14–678/4. Translated passages in pp. 672/6–673/14: [...] *dgung lo bcu gsum pa'i thog tug gzigs snang mang du byung | thugs dam 'od sal nyin zhag 'brel mar 'byams nas | phyi rol du skye bo*

rnams kyi ngor dran med du song nas bzhad gad chal chol du gsung nas bar cad 'dra zhig 'dug zer nas 'jam dpal nā ga rakṣa'i sgrub mdzad pas | phrin las dang gzhan phen gi sgo gso ba rig pa la yod | skyes bam ang por rjes su bzung ba'i bla ma g.Yu thog mgon po yin | de la gsol thob dang rang gzhan gyi don gnyis 'grub zer ba'i lung bstan byung bas 'brug pa bla ma Mi bskyod rdo rje la bla sgrub zhus nas sgrub mdzad | tho rang g.yu thog mgon po de nyid sku mdog dkar la dmar mdangs can dar dkar bo'i na bza' la dar mchin pa'i sku rag dbu skra lcang lo sil bu | phyag g.yas a rug ser mdog brlon po lo 'bras me tog dang bcas | g.yon rin po che'i bum pa gur gum gyi kha rgyan dang bcas pa bsnams pa | sman gyi lha mo bzhis 'dod yod pa mchod kyi 'od zer gyi dra ba kun nas 'khrigs pa dang bcas pa rmans kyis dbang bskur ba dang | a rug ser mdog snyim pa kha sbyor tsam zhig gnang bag sol zin la khad mnal sad pa dang | snga gyi g.yu thog mgon po lha mo bzhi dang bcas dngos su zhal gzigs | rgyud bzhi'i bshad lung thams cad cig car de nyid du gnang bas | sku lus bde drod khyad par can 'khrugs | thugs chos nyid spros pa thams cad dang bral ba'i ngang dag pa rab 'byams zhing khams mang po gzigs pa la sogs pa byung zhing | rjes su gsol ba nam btab pa'i tshe dngos su nyams snang sprul pa mnal lam ci rigs su sgro 'dogs chod cing rjes su 'dzin gsungs te | rje de nyi kyi mgur las | dus dpyid 'bring dkar ba'i tho rangs dus | sems 'khrul snang g.yu thog rje dang mjal | dpal rgyud bzhi'i dbang bskur byin brlabs pas | tshig don bcas sgro 'dogs cig car chod | lus bde drod 'bar zhing sems nyid ni | gzhi chos sku skye ba med par go | gnas gsum skye dgu'i 'khrul lugs dang | zhing dag pa'i gsal snang mang du mthong | zhes so | |.

11 See for example *sMan dkar kyi lag len*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 307/16–313/3. *gDon bshal rdo rje pha lam*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 389/1–397/6. See also the upcoming section on the white panacea.

12 For a complete list of *gter ma* teachings on Mañjuśrī Nāgarakṣa see *Rin chen gter mdzod*, pod nyer dgu pa ha (dza), pp. 5–199. See also (Arguillère 2024b).

13 (Arguillère 2024a, pp. 300, 321–23). See *Rin chen gter mdzod*, pod nyer rgyad sa (tsha), pp. 149–297. Many of these texts were edited by Karma chags med alias Rāga Asya (1616–1678).

14 *dPal ldan zur mkhar ba'i rnam thar thar pa'i lam ston*, in *ring bsrel* (1), p. 673/20 et passim.

15 *dPal ldan zur mkhar ba'i rnam thar thar pa'i lam ston*, in *ring bsrel* (1), 673/21–674/11: [...] kong bo [po] bla ma bya khyung ba [pa] la dus 'khor dang dngos 'dus gsan pa'i tshe | nub gcig dpon slob gnyis ka mnal gcig par shambha la'i rigs ldan gyi rgyal po yin zer ba zhig gis chos rjes la dus 'khor gyi dbang bskur nas dus 'khor shes zin pas | brlab mi dogs lung nod pas chog gis gsungs byung | sang nas mngon dkyil sa ris sbyor drug rgyud 'grel thams cad lung blangs pas mkhyen pa dang | mnyam med Sha ra ba lhag par lo gsum zur mkhar du gdan drangs nas | khyad par gtum mo las rgyas 'od gsal rgyu lus rnams la rtags thon pa mdzad | mchog gi sprul pa'i sku Zhwa dmar cod pan 'dzin pa bzhi pa Chos kyi grags pa dpal ye shes bzang po'i drung du chos mang du gsan pa'i tshe dpon slob du 'brel ba'i thugs dran gsal bo byung ba [...] | |.

16 For an overview on Mahāmudrā traditions see (Jackson and Mathes 2019).

17 *Drang srong chen po mnyam nyid rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa'gog pa med pa'i yi ge'i gtam chen po*, in *Zur mkhar blo gros rgyal po'i gsung rtsom gces btus*, pp. 102/6–10. See also (Simioli 2024a).

18 *Drang srong chen po mnyam nyid rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa'gog pa med pa'i yi ge'i gtam chen po*, in *Zur mkhar blo gros rgyal po'i gsung rtsom gces btus*, pp. 101/3–9. (Simioli 2024a).

19 For an historical overview of Tibetan mercury pharmacology see (Czaja 2013, 2015, 2019b). A major contribution on this topic in the field of transcultural medical anthropology is (Gerke 2021).

20 Toh 4318, *bStan 'gyur (Sde dge)*, vol. 203 (*mdo'grel, ngo*), ff. 17v1–18r2.

21 Toh 4313, *bStan 'gyur (Sde dge)*, vol. 203 (*mdo'grel, ngo*), ff. 1r1–7r 3.

22 Toh 4313, *bStan 'gyur (Sde dge)*, vol. 203 (*mdo'grel, ngo*), ff. 7r3–8v4.

23 See *O rgyan pa's sman ngag dgul chu skor gsum in Brang ti lha rje rim brgyud kyi sman ngag gser bre chen mo*, pp. 143–172; *'Brong rtse be'u bum dkar mo man ngag gi bang mdzod*, pp. 285–332.

24 See *rGyal sras Punya la gdams pa'i chab shog nas byung ba dngul chu*, in *ring bsrel* (1) pp. 322/16–324/3; see also *ring srel* (1), pp. 765/5–15. For this identification see (Simioli 2024a).

25 Paragraph on mercury alchemy in this contribution. See also *mTshung med rang byung rdo rje las rgyud pa'i dug 'dred dbang po ril bu'i sbyor ba*, in *ring bsrel* (1) pp. 319/7–320/13; *dBang ril zhal gdams thun mong ma yin pa*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 320/13–322/15; *rGyal sras pu nya'i chab shog nas byung ba*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 322/6–324/3.

26 See for example *Rang bung rdo rje mdzad pa'i cong zhi 'phrul thal*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 628/11–630/17.

27 See for example *Rang byung rdo rje mdzad pa'i bad rlung thur bshal bdud rtsi chu rgyun*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 517 et passim.

28 See for example *gDon bshal rdo rje'i pha lam*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 389/1–397/6; *'Phrag [phrag] dpon bsod rnam bkra shis kyi mdzad pa'i rtsa ldan zin bris*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 668/1–671/2.

29 For an overview of the history of medical literature dealing with epidemics, etiology, imagery and treatments of these ailments in premodern sources and the Tibetan contemporary medical perspective see (McGrath 2021a, 2021b; Simioli 2019, Forthcoming; Tidwell and Gyamtso 2021).

30 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 1–9.

31 See note 6.

32 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 671/14–679/1. See also notes 12 and 13.

33 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 441–678.

- 34 ring bsrel (1), pp. 679–854.
- 35 ring bsrel (1), pp. 851/7–854/8. ring bsrel (3), ff.402r4–403r6 (pp. 393–95) Here as *phongs gso sngo'i sgron me*.
- 36 ring bsrel (1), pp. 8/4–7.
- 37 ring bsrel (2), pp. 217–223.
- 38 ring bsrel (2), pp. 261–273.
- 39 On Ravigupta's *Siddhasāra* see for example *sMan dpyad gces pa grub pa zhes bya ba le'u sum cu rtsa gcig pa* and (Emmerick 1982). For a Tibetan translation of the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhita* see *Yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po'i bsdus pa in sByor ba brgya pa dang yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po*. *Kālacakratantra* Toh 375, *bKa' 'gyur* (Lhasa) vol. 79 (*rgyud,ka*), ff. 28v5–105v3. *Vimalaprabhā* Toh 1114, *bKa' 'gyur (sde dge par phud)*, vol. 102, (*rgyud, srī*), ff. 1v1–469r7. For a general overview on the contents of the medical and astrological teachings of the *Kālacakratantra* see (Wallace 2009). For a detailed study of yogic and contemplative aspects with a focus on metaphysics of light see (Orofino 2022). For a translation of the sections dealing with mercury procedures see (Fenner 1979). On the *Amṛtasiddhi* and its ancillary corpus see (Schaeffer 2002; Mallinson and Szántó 2021; Orofino Forthcoming).
- 40 See note 30.
- 41 See for instance the description of “the benefits” (*phan yon*) of *rasāyana* therapy in the *Man ngag rgyud* (Instructional Tantra) of the *bBud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa gsang ba man ngag gi rgyud* or *rGyud bzhi*. *rGyud bzhi* (Lhasa ed.) [III, 90, pp. 548/9–11]: [...] *tshe zad rgad pa'i nad las bsring ba yi\bcud len ni cho ga bshad par bya\di la phan yon gnas rten bya thabs bzhi\ phan yon tshe ring na tshod dar la 'jog\lus mdangs stongs skye dbang bo dran pa gsal\ blo rno skad mdangs ldan zhing ro tsar byed\ |*. Compare this section with the *rasāyana* chapter of the Tibetan translation of the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhita* (*yan lag rgyad pa'i snying po bsdus pa*) [in *sByor ba brgya ba dang yan lag brgyad pa'i snying po'i bsdus pa sogs*, 734/3–6]: *de nas bcud len gyi le'u bshad par bya'o\tshe ring dran dang yid gzhungs dang\ nad med gzhon dang lang tsho dang\gzugs bzang mdog ldang skad gsal dang\lus dang dbang po stobs skyed cing\ tshig grub ro tsa dang ldan pa\ bcud len gyi 'thob par 'gyur\ |*.
- 42 For a detailed analysis of the attainment of siddhis through the *rasāyana* practices in Indian medical and yogic contexts see (Maas 2017; Wujastik 2021).
- 43 *Gso ba rig pa'i bstan bcos sman bla'i dgongs rgyan rgyud bzhi'i gsal byed bai dū rya sngon po'i mal li kā*. (*Bai dū rya sngon po*) Lhasa ed. (1982), pp. 1139/6–1141/9.
- 44 *Gso ba rig pa'i bstan bcos sman bla'i dgongs rgyan rgyud bzhi'i gsal byed bai dū rya sngon po'i mal li kā*, [pp. 1141/10–11]: *gong bstan gyi bcud len 'di dag ni bsod nams dang ldan pa gnas brtan 'byor ba can gyi spyod yul yin te\ |*.
- 45 According to *Bai dū rya sngon po*, once the luminous visions are dissolved into one's body, the meditator imagines that all the diseases, evil forces, errors and mental obscurations are purified, and lifespan is increased. *Bai dū rya sngon po* [1141/8–9]: [...] *nad gdon dang sdig sgrib nmams dag te tshe ring 'phel ba bsams\ |*.
- 46 On the functions of the *sman sgrub* ritual and the deity yoga see also (Gentry 2017, p. 305) et passim.
- 47 In *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 379/9–381/6; *ring bsrel* (3), ff.175r3–176r2 (349–51)
- 48 In *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 383/13–385/4; *ring bsrel* (3), ff.177r–178r2 (pp. 353–55).
- 49 In *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 579/17–380/9.
- 50 In this paper, the proposed identifications of medical substances are based on the descriptions, explanations of encoded names that are to be found in the analyzed primary sources as well as on the information provided in Tibetan medical dictionaries and pharmacopeias such as (Byams pa 'phrin las et al. 2006; Dga' bar do rje 1995; Karma chos dpal 1993). I have been also consulting ethnobotanical and historical studies such as (Boesi 2006, 2007; Czaja 2017, 2019a, 2019b; Ghimire et al. 2021). Therefore, I invite the readers to consult the above-mentioned sources for further information about the substances.
- 51 See Mallinson's PhD thesis on the topic of *khacarividyā* in later Hindu tantric and yogic texts. (Mallison 2003).
- 52 For further inquiry in the topic of “potent substances” in Tibetan medicine see (Gerke 2019b, 2021).
- 53 In *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 367/4–377/14; *ring bsrel* (2), pp. 103–116; *ring bsrel* (3), ff.168v6–174r4 (336–47).
- 54 In *ring bsrel* (1) 700/13–707/12.
- 55 In *ring bsrel* (1) pp. 377/15–379/8; *ring bsrel* (2), pp. 417–19; *ring bsrel* (3), ff.174r4–175r3 (pp. 347–49).
- 56 See For a detailed study of the aphrodisiacs included in the Brang ti's anthology, see *gSer bre chen mo: Brang ti lha rje rim brgyud kyi sman ngag gser bre chen mo* edited by the Bod rang skyon ljongs sman rtsis khang and published in 2005 by the Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, pp. 276/6–289/15, hereafter *gSer bre chen mo* (1); *Brang ti lha rje rim brgyud kyi sman ngag gser bre chen mo*, in *Gso rig tshang lo tsā ba She rabs rin chen sogs kyi brtams* published in 2004 by the mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, pp. 189/1–203/5, here after *gSer bre chen mo* (2). Translation and analysis of these sections in (Simioli 2024b).
- 57 PT1057: Fols. 8.15–9.6.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 *rGyud bzhi* (Bod ljongs mi dmang dpe skrun khang ed), pp. 553/2–554/1.
- 60 'Bum khu tshur khu tshur 'bum be'u bum nag po, (Khro ru tshe nmams & al. 2006, pp. 369–74).
- 61 *ra nye* [*Polygonatum* spp.]; *nye shing* [*Asparagus filicinus*]; *lca ba* [*Angelica cyclocarpaba*], *spru* [*Mirabilis Himalayica*], and *gze ma* [*Tribulus terrestris*].

- 62 *rGyud bzhi* (*Bod ljongs mi dmang dpe skrun khang ed*), pp. 553/2–554/1. (Simioli 2024b, pp. 265–66).
- 63 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 367/11–14.
- 64 *gSer bre chen mo* (1), pp. 282/5–289/16; *gSer bre chen mo* (2), pp. 195/4–203/5.
- 65 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 368/2–5.
- 66 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 368/9–10.
- 67 Compare *gSer bre chen mo* (1), pp. 285/2–286/16 to *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 371/20 et passim.
- 68 'Bum khu tshur khu tshur 'bum be'u bum nag po, pp. 371/9–14.
- 69 On limestone containing recipes see (Gerke et al. Forthcoming). The *ring bsrel* contain many recipes with limestone as a key ingredient. See for example one recipe ascribed to Rang byung rdo rje: *rang byung rdo rje cong bzhi 'phrul thal*. In *ring bsrel* (1) 628/11–639/17.
- 70 *gSer bre chen mo* (1), pp. 276/7–280/7; *gSer bre chen mo* (2), pp. 189/1–193/8.
- 71 See note 64.
- 72 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 701/16–21.
- 73 This can be corroborated by the analysis of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho commentarial literature on the *Four Tantras*. See (Simioli 2024b).
- 74 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 82/1–86/16.
- 75 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 305/1–307/15.
- 76 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 307/15–313/3.
- 77 *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* (reproduction of the *stod lung mtshur phu par khang redaction*), Paro (1976–1980) (vol. 72, bi), ff. 1a1–6b2 (pp. 1–13). (Simioli 2024b, Unpublished).
- 78 I have not been able to locate this scripture, however, according to the *Bod lugs gso rig tshig mdzod chen mo* (Byang pa prin las et al. 2006, p. 384), this is the name of a *smān 'bum* written by mNyam nyid rdo rje.
- 79 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 311/9 et passim.
- 80 On its medical uses see (Byam pa 'phrin las et al. 2006, p. 528).
- 81 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 320/13–322/15.
- 82 *dNgul chu g.yung 'dul gdams pa*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 644/15–645/21.
- 83 See note 82 above.
- 84 *Grub chen o rgyan pa'i gdams ngag rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub kyi gzhung*. In *gDams Ngag Mdzod*. Edited by 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha^o yas, 15: 504–15. Paro: Lama Ngodrup and Sherab Drimey, 1979–1981. (Simioli Forthcoming).
- 85 *Ring srel*, p. 766/10–12: *snying la gnas pa'i dhū fī yi| dkyil 'khor la gnas pa gzhom med pa| der btud dpal mchog dang bo'i yum| 'chi ba'chi ba'i glu len to| |*.
- 86 *ring srel* (1), pp. 755/17–756/2: *'dir shes bya ba'i gtso bo dngul chu 'ching ba yan lag dang bcas zhig 'chad dgos pa la| phyi'i dngul chu mtshon pa ni khams dwangs dang| gzhan dkyil 'khor gyi hi [he] ru ka 'gyur zhing| de'i snying ga'i ro rkyang dhū fī gsum 'dus pa ni shes rab ste yum dang| de'i dbus su gzhom med rtag tu gnas pa 'gyur med pa'i thig ni te thabs te yab kyi don du ghaṅṅa pas bshad pa'i ltar yin pas [...] | |*.
- 87 Compare it to Vajraghaṅṅapada's *'Khor lo sdom pa'i lus dkyil 'khor mngon rtogs* ff.227a4–7.
- 88 For further inquiry, see (Simioli Forthcoming).
- 89 *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 813/9–815/1. The teaching shows similarities with the *ye shes mkha' 'gro'i gdams pa rdzas kyi gtum mo*, in *ring bsrel* (2), pp. 552–554.
- 90 See for example, *'Phrag dbon [dpon] bsod nams bkra shis kyis mdzad kyis mdzad pa'i rtsa ldan zin bris*, in *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 668/1–671/1; on channels pp. 669/7 et passim.
- 91 See *rGyud bzhi* (Lhasa ed.), II, pp. 21/9–25/10. A detailed analysis can be found in (Gyatso 2015).
- 92 See *rGyud bzhi* (Lhasa ed.), III, pp. 434/13 et passim.
- 93 *Grub chen o rgyan pa'i gdams ngag rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub kyi gzhung*, pp. 528/3 et passim.
- 94 Op. cit, pp. 535/1–3.
- 95 See Janet Gyatso's analysis of sKem tshe dbang and Zur mkha bLo gros rgyal po's visions of the body's channels and their relations to the tantric physiology. (Gyatso 2015).
- 96 In *ring bsrel* (1), pp. 381/6–383/12; *ring bsrel* (2), pp. 614–17; *ring bsrel* (3), ff. 176r2–177r4 (351–53).

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