# The Outer Support Arrangement: An Installation for the Worship of Pagan Gods in the Entourage of a Bonpo Tantric Divinity

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When the major tantric gods of Tibetan Buddhism and Yungdrung ("Everlasting") Bon are depicted in visual form or invoked in scriptures, they appear most commonly at the centre of an entourage of lesser divinities. The scriptures' presentation of these minor figures as manifestations of the central deity notwithstanding, they are sometimes identifiable as autochthonous powers that have been incorporated into the entourage. The main template for organising these divine cohorts is the mandala. This device is, in a sense, a mechanism for conversion, whereby pagan gods are bound with oaths to serve the doctrine of Buddhism or Bon, and, with their new status as vassals of the central divinity, are accorded a place in the outer reaches of his citadel. The process of conversion is sometimes only partial, to the extent that these native gods may continue to be the subject of local cults independent of their role in the tantric pantheon. If the legitimacy of including local gods in the practices and iconographies of Buddhist mandalas seems to have been a point of discussion among Tibetan authors (Gentry 2001, 2), I am not aware that such inclusiveness was ever regarded as controversial among Bonpos.

Some gods are so peripheral that, even though they are considered to belong to the entourage of a yidam (*yi dam*), they are not granted a place in the mandala but are received and propitiated in an external installation. This article is concerned with the gods who are on the very periphery of the entourage of the Bon tantric divinity Khrowo Tsochok Khagying (Khro bo gTso mchog mkha' 'gying), and more particularly with the support to which they are invited. While the ceremony that provides the focus for this study is performed in a monastic setting, there is good evidence, that will be examined at the end of this article, to suggest that it has its antecedents in an indigenous ritual for the propitiation of war gods and spectacular victory celebrations. I would like to offer this contribution as a modest tribute to an author whose

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tireless efforts in the field and in the library have done so much to uncover the depth and complexity of Tibetan civilisation in recesses that have too often been eclipsed by a more conspicuous Buddhist heritage.

### *1. The Bon yidam Trowo Tsochok Khagying*

The iconography of Trowo Tsochok Khagying is the subject of an article by Per Kværne (1990) that the author later reworked for a chapter on tutelary divinities in his landmark book on Bonpo iconography (Kværne 1995, 88–91). Trowo is revered by Bonpos as one of the "Five Supreme Citadels" (*gsas mkhar mchog lnga*), along with Walse Ngampa (dBal gsas rngam pa), Lhagö Thokpa (lHa rgod thog pa), Phurpa (Phur pa) and Gekhö (Ge khod), a quintet in which the first three form a group of their own, known as the Universal Embodiment (*spyi dpungs*). While a great deal of progress has been made in research on Bon in recent years, scholarly attention has tended to focus on the early history of the religion, or Dzogchen (rDzogs chen), or popular beliefs and practices, while the entire field of Bon tantra has been largely bypassed. An important step towards remedying this omission is a recent article by Stéphane Arguillère that discusses one of the most important of the Bon tantras, the *Sangwa Senthub* (*gSang ba bsen thub*), "The Secret Opponent of the Sen [Spirits]," and provides a translation of the seventeenth chapter, a treatise on natural contemplation (Arguillère 2025). While this chapter shows a marked influence of Dzogchen concepts, the tantra as a whole is a remarkably heterogeneous composition in which the subject matter of several chapters is far more reminiscent of indigenous mythology. Chapter three, for example, traces the origins of various ritual items used by Bon priests to the body-parts of demons that were defeated and dismembered at the conclusion of an epic battle – a theme to which we will return at the end of this article.

The *Sangwa Senthub* is the main basis for a *sādhanā* ritual dedicated to the propitiation of Trowo and his entourage. This work, entitled *gSas mkhar rin po che'i khro bo'i dbang chen gyis phrin las sgrub gzhung*, "The main text for the ritual propitiation of the Mighty Wrathful one of the precious Citadels," is the central text in the annual Dögyab (*mdos rgyab*) ritual of Lubrak (Klu brag), a small community of hereditary Bonpo lamas in Nepal's Mustang District. My curiosity about the support for the gods on the outer fringes of Trowo's entourage was

first aroused in the course of a study of the Lubrak Dögyab.[1] The most important of the three yidams (*yi dam*) that feature in the ceremony is Trowo, and the main installations are the altar, representing his mandala, and the *dö* (*mdos*) construction which is taken to the edge of the village on the last day and immolated. The construction of the tormas (*gtor ma*) and other objects on the altar, as well as the *dö*, closely followed the prescriptions provided in the texts. One of the ancillary texts, entitled *Khro bo dbang chen gyis rgyan bkod bya ba bzhung [gzhung]*, "The main text called 'The ornamentation of Trowo Wangchen'," (fols 5v–7r) described the construction of an installation involving an assortment of weapons, animal effigies, minerals and grains intended to serve as supports for an assortment of lesser-known divinities. This installation was identified in the text as the "Outer Support Arrangement" (*phyi rten bskos*). The text was recited aloud, but, contrary to the case of the *dö* and the altar, no corresponding construction was made.

In 1998, Triten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu organised a performance of the highly elaborate Mendrup (*sman sgrub*), "medicine *sādhanā*," ritual, under the auspices of its abbot, Khenpo Nyima Wangyal. An unpublished 32-page account of the ceremony, entitled "Mendrup Oser Kyilpa – The light infused medicine blessing ritual," was prepared by Colin Millard based on his personal observations (Millard n.d.). This account focuses on the main Mendrup ceremony, but also contains a photograph of the Outer Support Arrangement and a brief description of the associated rituals.[2]

The abbot of every Bon monastery is expected to organise a Mendrup ritual at least once during his tenure. Khenpo (now Khenchen) Tenpa Yungdrung succeeded Khenpo Nyima Wangyal as the abbot of Triten Norbutse in 2001, and decided that 2012 would be the year in which his turn should come. The event was closely documented by Anna Sehnalova, who subsequently completed a doctoral dissertation on the subject of the ceremony (Sehnalova 2018). I was able to attend this ceremony only briefly, and was not present when the Outer Support Arrangement was built, but Anna Sehnalova and Rosa Maria Mendez Duplan were kind enough to send me some photographs of the construction. Anna Sehnalova's description of the Outer Support Arrangement (2018, 77–79) is the most detailed account of this ritual to date, in spite of the fact that it was incidental to the main Mendrup ceremony that forms the subject of the thesis, and that

[1] This ceremony is the subject of a film based mainly on a performance documented in 1998 (Kemi Tsewang and Ramble 2012), and several articles, notably Ramble 2000.

[2] I am indebted to Colin Millard for providing me with a copy of this unpublished work.

the performance was not advertised by the monks. The author remarks that "no one else was present, as it was not considered a public event" (*ibid*., 77).

Two years after the event, the monastery produced a richly illustrated 122-page booklet entitled *bDud rtsi 'od zer 'khyil ba'i lag len skor*, "On the ritual performance of the 'Swirling Light-Rays of Nectar'," which provided extensive information about the background to the ceremony and the ritual procedures, including diagrams and descriptions of the Outer Support Arrangement (*bDud rtsi* 2014).

## *2. The Khalong Sangdö ceremony*

An opportunity to observe at first hand the construction of the Outer Support Arrangement at last presented itself in August 2023. My esteemed colleague Professor Yasuhiko Nagano had commissioned a performance of the Khalong Sangdö (*mkha' klong gsang mdos*), the most extensive *dö* ritual in the repertoire of Yungdrung Bon, at Triten Norbutse Monastery in Kathmandu, and invited me to assist his team with the documentation.[3] A detailed report on the Khalong Sangdö itself, with particular attention to the tormas, thread crosses and other artefacts that are produced for the occasion, was subsequently published,[4] and the main ritual will therefore not be discussed in any detail here. The Outer Support Arrangement, which was tangential to the authors' focus of interest, is described only briefly (Tsumagari et al. 2025, 43, 50–52).

If the ritual of the Outer Support Arrangement features in both the Mendrup and the Khalong Sangdö ceremonies, that is because the main yidam in both instances is Trowo Tsochok Khagying. As is well known, Tibetan rituals may have an "extended" (*rgyas pa*) and an "abridged" (*bsdus pa*) form, in which certain components may be performed in a limited way or omitted altogether. The Dögyab ceremony of Lubrak, mentioned above, may be regarded as an "abridged" version, as indicated by the omission of the Outer Support

[3] The project, which was funded by the Japan Society for Promotion of Sciences (ref. no. 24K00014), was entitled "International Research Project on a Bon Ritual of Tibet – its structure and meaning of ritual utensils." The subsequent research on which the present article is based was carried out in the framework of the project "Reconstructing the Pagan Religion of Tibet," funded by the European Research Council (ERC, PaganTibet, project 101097364). Views and opinions expressed are those of this author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

[4] Tsumagari, Nagano, Tridhe Tshultrim and Tachikawa 2025. Prior to this publication, the most authoritative study of this ritual was Blondeau 2000.

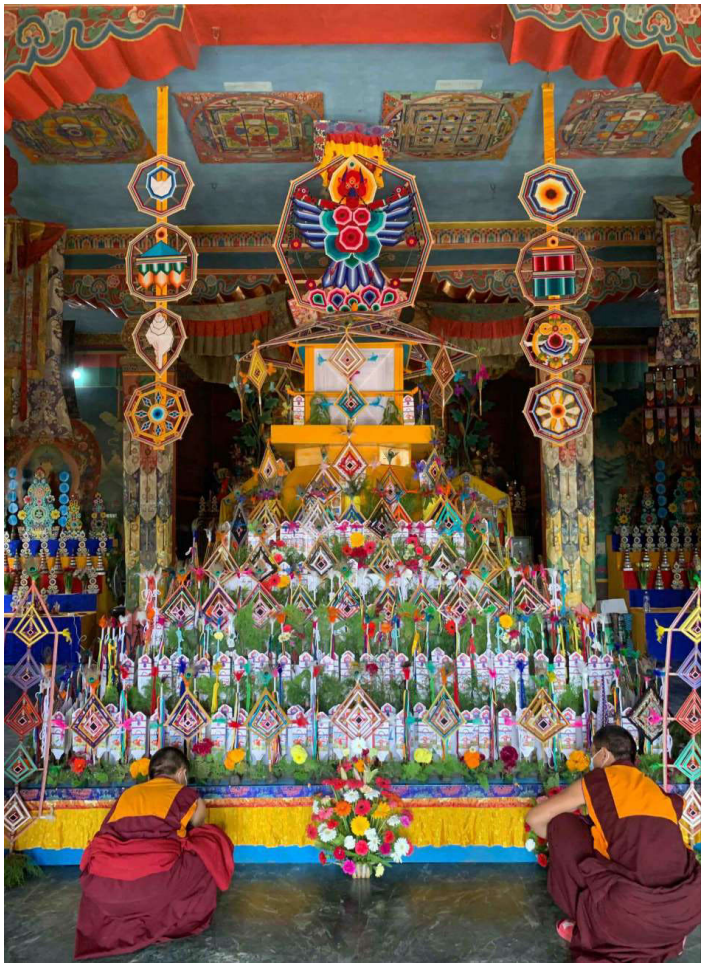


*Fig. 1 — The completed* dö *construction of the Khalong Sangdö in the main assembly hall of Triten Norbutse Monastery, Kathmandu.*

Arrangement. By contrast, the two Mendrup ceremonies of Triten Norbutse (1998 and 2012) and the Khalong Sangdö of 2023 were full-scale iterations of the respective rituals (Fig. 1).[5] It is said that the very first performance of a ritual in any given location should be the extended version, while subsequent occasions may be more modest in scope, especially when an elaborate version has not been commissioned by a munificent patron. Thus the annual performance of the Khalong Sangdö ritual to mark the end of each year at Menri Monas-

[5] Unless stated otherwise, all photographs are by the author.

tery in Dolanji, India, does not entail the construction of the Outer Support Arrangement. We do not know when the Dögyab ceremony was initiated in Lubrak; although the village archives record that it has been held annually at least since the first half of the nineteenth century, no details about the scale of the first performance survive.

In Bonpo mandalas, unlike their Buddhist counterparts, divinities are not depicted figuratively but are represented either by their sacred syllables or by their supports. In the Khalong Sangdö ceremony that was held in Triten Norbutse in 2023, the mandala was a reproduction of a painting, glued to a square wooden board, placed below a row of tormas standing in front of the image of Tönpa Shenrab Miwo in the main assembly hall, and behind the ceiling-high construction of the *dö* itself that occupied the centre of the hall (Fig. 1). Since the distribution of the divinities in the mandala is not our main concern here we may summarise the arrangement without specifying their exact positions.



*Fig. 2 — The mandala of Trowo Tsochok Khagying, with metal ritual objects inserted at designated locations to represent different sets of divinities.*

The mandala accommodates sixty-three divinities, each of which is represented by one of seven metal objects: stake (*phur pa*); claw (*sbar bshad*); sword (*ral gri*); mirror (*me long*); hook (*lcags kyu*); arrow (*mda'*), and tablet (*'byang bu*). There were nine of each of these objects, making a total of sixty-three, equal to the number of divinities (Fig. 2). These divinities are organised in seven groups, identified by the letters A to G that are used for the same groups as they are featured in the thangka (Figs 3, 4) that will be discussed presently.



*Fig. 3 — Thangka of Trowo Tsochok Khagying; Tibet; 15th century; distemper, ink, gold on cloth; 31 × 26 in. (78.7 × 66 cm); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of Carlton Rochell, in honour of John Guy, and in celebration of the Museum's 150th Anniversary, 2018; 2018.890; CC0 – CREATIVE COMMONS (CC0 1.0)*

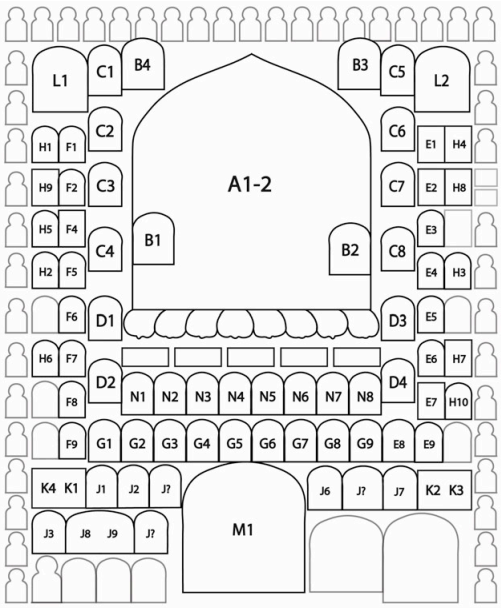



*Fig. 4 — Key to the images in the thangka of Trowo Tsochok Khagying shown in Fig. 3. (Drawing by Olga Helman).*

A1 Trowo Tsochok Khagying, stake
A2 Khala Dukmo, claw
A3 Lhagö Thokpa, sword
A4 Sipe Gyalmo, mirror.

B The Four [pairs of] Wrathful Ones who Avert Evil; the male divinities in these pairs are, as above, represented by stakes, and their consorts by claws.

C The Eight [pairs of] Wrathful Ones of Awareness; the male gods are represented by swords and their consorts by mirrors. Unlike the claws the mirrors are not free standing, but are attached to the swords.

D The Four [pairs of] Manifested Wrathful Ones; as in B above, these are represented by stakes and claws.

E The Nine Zema, hooks.

F The Nine Female Athletes, arrows.

G The Nine Jinte, tablets.

E, F and G form a larger group known as the Twenty-seven Powerful Females (*dbal mo nyer bdun*), who probably have their origins in a class of indigenous Tibetan divinities (Blezer 2000).

The thangka (Figs 3, 4) depicting Trowo in union with his consort, Khala Dukmo (mKha' la gdug mo), surrounded by their entourage of major and minor divinities, includes three sets of divinities that do not appear in the mandala.[6]

H The Ten Champions (*gyad bcu*)

J The Ten Generals (*dmag dpon*) and

K The Four Steadfast Ones (*ther zug*).

Brief iconographic descriptions of these three sets of divinities are to be found in various texts, with minor discrepancies regarding their attributes, but for the sake of convenience the descriptions given below are taken from the edited iconographies given in a recent two-volume collection of Bonpo thangkas (Phun tshogs 2019). All the images in this

[6] This thangka is the subject of a brief article by the present author (Ramble 2023a). For scholarly studies of two other thangkas of Trowo Tsochok Khagying and his entourage, see Kværne 1990; 1995, 83–90, and Heller 2015, 227–230.

collection are reproductions of modern thangkas painted by various artists in Khyungpo, in Kham, and the text cited below relates to a thangka of Trowo and his entourage painted by mDzo tshang lhun grub (*ibid*., 196).

Six of the Ten Champions (H1–H5, H10) have anthromorphic forms, while the remaining four are real or mythical animals. Unlike their ten female counterparts, they are all situated outside the mandala.

H1 A short golden man holding a red bomb (*gser gyi mi thung dzo dmar bsnams*)
H2 A short conch-shell man throwing a sharp spear (*dung gi mi thung dbal bdung 'debs*)
H3 A short turquoise man holding a bow and arrow (*g.yu yi mi thung mda' gzhu bsnams*)
H4 A short copper man holding a battleaxe (*zangs kyi mi thung dgra sta 'dzin*)
H5 A short iron man brandishing a sword (*lcags kyi mi thung ral kyu phyar*)
H6 A fierce striped tiger (*dbal stag khra bo*)
H7 A fierce blue dragon (*dbal 'brug sngon po*)
H8 A fierce white yak (*dbal g.yag dkar po*)
H9 A fierce blue garuda (*dbal khyung sngon po*)
H10 A bronze man lighting a blazing fire (*khro chu'i mi pho dbal me spor*).

The Ten Generals are a class of animal-headed female divinities, identified by the letter J:

J1 With the head of a bull, striking/throwing a rocky hill (*glang po'i mgo can brag ri 'debs*)
J2 With the head of a black bear, brandishing a sword (*dom gyi mgo can ral gri phyar*)
J3 With the head of a makara, and a sharp spear (*chu srin mgo can dbal mdung bsor*)
J4 With the head of a wolf, brandishing the wing of a falcon (*spyang khu'i mgo can khra gshog phyar*)
J5 With the head of a snow leopard, devouring a human corpse (*gsa' yi mgo can bam chen gsol*)
J6 With the head of a garuda, casting a serpent lasso (*khyung gi mgo can sbrul zhags 'debs*)
J7 With the head of a cormorant, holding a long spear (*so bya'i mgo can mdung ring bsnams*)
J8 With the head of a wild boar, lighting a pyre (*phag rgod mgo can me dpung spor*)
J9 With the head of a brown bear, attaching with a curse-cord (*dred kyi mgo can byad thag sdog*)

J10 With the head of a tiger, consuming the enemy's flesh (*stag gi mgo can dgra sha za*)

The last group, K, comprises the outermost gatekeepers of the four directions, referred to as the Four Great Steadfast Kings (*ther zug rgyal chen bzhi*), or more simply the Four Steadfast Ones (*ther zug bzhi*), a group of animal-headed divinities:

K1 A white man with the head of a lion, brandishing a sword (*mi dkar seng mgos ral gri phyar*)
K2 A red man with a pig's head, casting a serpent noose (*mi dmar phag mgos sbrul zhags 'debs*)
K3 A blue man with the head of a dragon, holding an axe (*mi sngon 'brug mgos sta re bsnams*)
K4 A black man with the head of a bear, holding a thunderbolt (*mi nag dom mgos thog mda' 'phen*).

### *3. Beyond the mandala: the "Outer Support Arrangement"*

More inclusive though it may be than the mandala, the thangka does not accommodate *all* the divinities that the textual sources name in the entourage of Trowo. In addition to the Generals and the Champions, there are seven other groups between the outer edge of the mandala and the Four Steadfast Ones. These are: the Walse (*dbal gsas*); Shense (*gshen gsas*); Seje (*gsas rje*); Göse (*rgod gsas*); Namse (*gnam gsas*); Garse (*gar gsas*), and the Messengers (*phonya*, *pho nya*).

The seven classes of divinities who are absent from both the mandala and the thangka appear in a number of texts. The Garse, the Göse, the Seje and the Namse each comprise sets of twenty-five gods with individual names who feature in the *Klong rgyas* – a text that is widely considered to be an excerpt from the *Zermig* (*gZer mig*), although, as Kalsang Norbu Gurung has shown, the relationship between these two works seems to be much less straightforward than that – as directional emanations of the god Shenlha Ökar (gShen lha 'od dkar; Gurung 2025, 240). To the best of my knowledge, no detailed textual description of the four groups has yet come to light. However, in the course of a recent field trip to Northeast India Kalsang Norbu Gurung was able to photograph a thangka of Shenlha Ökar in which these gods were depicted.[7] In the meditational system known as the Dzogchen Zhangzhung Nyengyü (rDzogs chen Zhang zhung snyan rgyud), each of the four, together with Shenlha Ökar himself, is regarded as one of sixteen pure manifestations of one of five lights that

[7] Kalsang Norbu Gurung, personal communication.

are refractions of the clarity (*gsal ba*) arising from the energy (*gdangs*) of the emptiness of the primordial state (*ka dag*) (Guinness 2021, 75–88).

In "extensive" performances of rituals – such as the Mendrup and the Khalong Sangdö – all these divinities must be invited and propitiated, a procedure that requires the construction of a special installation: the Outer Support Arrangement. Descriptions of this structure are provided in a number of works, several of which are included in the Bon Katen. However, since all the texts of which I am aware omit details that are contained in the others, for the sake of convenience the following description will draw on the synthetic description contained in *bDud rtsi* (2014),[8] the short work that was published after the performance of the Mendrup ritual at Triten Norbutse in 2012.

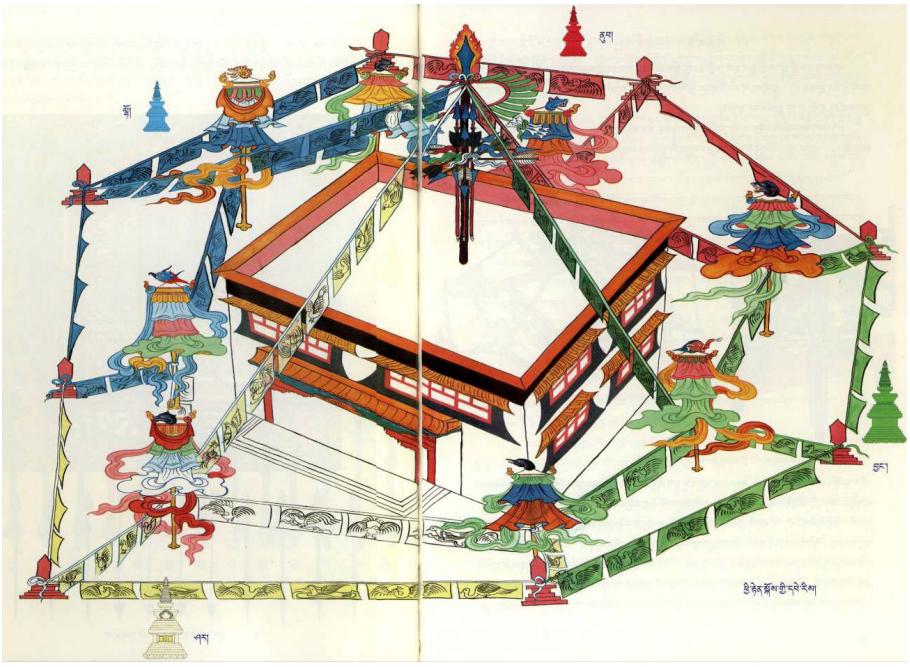


*Fig. 5 — A double-page spread in* bDud rtsi *(2014, 16–17) illustrating the Outer Support Arrangement. Drawing by gTsug phud dbang rgyal.*

[8] The two main sources that were used as the basis for the synthesis are the commentaries by sKyabs ston Rin chen 'od zer (b. 1354) and 'Gro mgon Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1198–1263): sKyabs ston A, sKyabs ston B, sKyabs ston C; 'Gro mgon. sKyabs ston C is a manuscript version. I am indebted to Samten Karmay for kindly sharing his photographs of this text with me. In this version, the relevant passage is found on fols 61r–61v.

In the performance of the Khalong Sangdö ceremony that was held at Triten Norbutse Monastery in 2023, the *dö* itself was completed on the morning of 20 August, and in the early afternoon of the same day a team of a dozen monks began the construction of the Outer Support Arrangement on the roof of the main temple. The components had been made several days in advance, and the ceremony consisted mainly of building the installation from these multiple parts. In the following account, the textual prescriptions for each phase will be juxtaposed with observations of the procedures that were actually followed during the construction. Since the components were not assembled in the order in which they appear in the text, the account given below will privilege the sequence followed by the monks.

A double-page spread in the booklet offers a scheme of the Outer Support Arrangement (Fig. 5). The installation that was created resembled this drawing in all the important details, although the location of Triten Norbutse Monastery on a rather steep hill, with very little space between its western walls and the densely wooded slope behind it, meant that ideal layout as presented in the image was compromised in certain details.

The text introduces two sets of supports, the "outer" and the "inner," for Trowo and his entourage:

> The following are required as the ornaments of the Universal Embodiment of the secret mantras: the fivefold Outer Support Arrangement (*phyi rten skos lnga*) and the nine essences as the inner supports. First, regarding the fivefold Outer Support Arrangement: this is a support for divinities that is placed on the topmost floor of the temple (*sgrub khang*) and on the outside. These are the fierce spears; the victory banners; the copper cairns (*pu tho*);[9] the array of birds; and the victory cairns (*rgyal tho*).[10]

The "inner support" refers to the mandala, which, beyond the brief description provided above, does not concern us here. The Outer Support Arrangement is, as the text indicates, a construction that surmounts and surrounds the temple in which the propitiation of Trowo and his inner circle takes place. The main installation is assembled on the roof of the temple, but components of it, notably four ribbons and their anchors, both of which are understood to be supports for differ-

[9] "Copper cairns": *pu* is a Zhangzhung term meaning "copper" (*Lexicon*, 140).

[10] *gsang sngags spyi spungs kyi rgyan rdzas la phyi rten gyi skos lnga dang / nang rten gyi bcud dgu ru dgos shing / de las dang po phyi rten skos lnga ni / sgrub khang gi yang thog dang phyi rol du bca' dgos pa'i lha rten zhig yin / de la dbal mdung / rgyal mtshan / pu tho / bya khra / rgyal tho dang lnga yod* (*bDud rtsi* 2014, 18).

ent classes of gods, extend beyond the roof and down the walls to the ground level.

The monks began by raising a wooden shaft some two metres in length topped by a metal spearhead. It was positioned upright with its base lashed to a heavy tree-stump to keep it in position (Fig. 6). This was the first of a set of nine "fierce (or sharp) spears" (*waldung*, *dbal mdung*):

> The spears are said to be the support of the 81 billion Walse divinities. As for the support-spear of the Walse gods that stands at the centre: you should erect a spear with a smoothed tree as a shaft and an iron spearhead, measuring five fathoms, to represent the divinities of the five Buddha families.[11]



*Fig. 6— Positioning the long spear (*waldung, dbal mdung*) as the central element of the Outer Support Arrangement.*

[11] *dbal mdung zhes dbal gsas dgu khri dgu 'bum gyi rten mdung la zer / dbus su dbal gsas gyi rten mdung ni / mdung yu gsom pa la bzhogs shing mdung so lcags las grub pa rigs lnga lha yi mtshon byed du ring tshad 'dom lnga yod pa zhig gzug dgos* (*ibid.*, 18).

Four ribbons, each of a different colour – red, white, green and blue – were attached to the neck of the spear and extended in the four directions: white for east, green for north, red for west and blue for south. The ribbons were some fifty metres long, and rectangular prints bearing images of birds were hung along their entire length.

> From the central spear four cords, one in each of the four directions, should be attached to each of the four cairns that are on the outer perimeter: these "tethering ropes for the array of birds" are extended as supports for the 81 billion Messengers. The "tethering ropes for the array of birds" refers to strings of drawings of various birds or stuffed birds. The eastern rope, which is white, is for the sweet-voiced finely plumed varieties of birds, Brahmā's birds: the cuckoo, the thrush,[12] the lark and so forth. The northern rope, which is green, is for the raptors: falcons, eagles, vultures, crows, owls and so on; the western rope, which is red, is for the mud-feeders such as geese and ducks, while the southern rope, which is blue, is for grain-feeders such as sparrows, warblers, pigeons and suchlike. When these have been strung along, one end should be attached to the central spear, extended eastwards and wound around each of the victory banners and copper cairns in turn and then tied.[13]

The fourfold classification of birds follows a scheme that is to be found in numerous sources, but most notably, perhaps, in the second volume of the fourteenth-century *Ziji* (*gZi brjid*), the twelve-volume biography of Tonpa Shenrab. In this work, a youthful Tönpa Shenrab recalls an earlier incarnation as a parakeet, during which he succeeds in organising the four classes of birds into a civilised and well-ordered society (Ramble 2023b). Images of birds considered by the monks of Triten Norbutse to correspond to these four categories had been identified on the internet and printed onto sheets of plastic, rather than paper (August is the heart of the monsoon in Nepal, and the installation was of course being built outside) before being stapled to

[12] Several dictionaries identify the *'jol mo* as a nightingale, which is improbable. The term is more likely to refer to one or more varieties of thrush.

[13] *dbal mdung gi phyogs bzhi nas tshon skud bzhi mtha' yi pu tho la sbrel nas pho nya dgu khri dgu 'bum gyi rten du bya khra rgyang thag 'then dgos te / bya khra rgyang thag ces pa ni bya rigs sna tshogs kyi par ris sam gsob brgyus pa la zer / shar tshon skud dkar po la skad snyan spu sdug tshangs pa'i bya rigs khu byug / 'jol mo / lco ga sogs dang / byang du tshon skud ljang khu la khra / glag ne'u le / rgod / pho rog 'ug pa la sogs sha gzan gyi bya rigs dang / nub tu tshon skud dmar po la ngang ngur la sogs 'dam zan gyi rigs dang / lho ru tshon skud sngon po la mchil ba / the le / phug ron sogs sgum thun gyi rigs rnams brgyus te sna gcig dbal mdung la btag cing shar nas drang te rgyal mtshan brgyad dang pu tho rnams rim bzhin g.yas su bskor la 'dogs so* (*ibid*., 19–20).

the ribbons and hung like prayer flags or bunting (Fig. 7).

The next addition to the spear was a shorter red ribbon along which eight green cloth flags were hung (Fig. 8).





*Fig. 7 (left)— Attaching the ribbons with images of the four kinds of birds.*
*Fig. 8 (right) — Eight green flags that serve as supports for the Namse gods.*

According to the "secret meaning commentary", a red silk radial cord (*gzhung thag*) with eight little flags of green silk affixed to it should be attached to the west as a support for the Namse gods.[14]

Supports for two further classes of divinities were then added:

> To the east side of [the central spear] should be attached a white cloth containing nine kinds of grain: barley, rice, millet, black mustard, unhusked barley, peas, white sesame, wheat and white mustard, as the support of the Seje gods. Gold, turquoise, silver, copper, pearl, earth from a lightning strike (*thog*), coral, crystal, agate and conch-shell should be wrapped up in a blue cloth and attached to the south as a support for the Göse gods.[15]

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14 *dar le brgan gyi gzhung thag la dar ljang gi lce brgyad btags pa gnam gsas gyi rten nub tu gdags zhes gsang ba don 'grel las gsungs* / (*ibid*., 19).

15 *gsas mda' mes ma bshur ba gcig mdun la bstan te mdung ring gi stod du 'ching* / *de la nas 'bras khre dang ske tse dang so ba sran chung til dkar gro nyungs dkar dang dgu ni* / *dar*

A blue and a white pouch with red drawstrings were filled with little sealable bags, each containing the specified requisites (Figs 9–11). The blue pouch bore a paper label, written in red ink, stating that it contained "the supports of the Göse" (*rgod gsas kyi rten*), while a red inscription on the cloth of the white pouch identified its contents as "the supports of the Seje" (*gsas rje'i rten*). These two pouches were tied to the neck of the spear, with the blue one to the south, as prescribed, and the white one to the east.



*Fig. 9— A blue and a white pouch, containing (left) the supports of the Göse and (right) of the Seje gods.*



*Figs 10, 11 — The contents of the blue pouch (left) and of the white pouch (right) – the supports of the Göse and Seje gods.*

*dkar nang du btums te gsas rje'i rten du shar du gdags / gser g.yu dngul zangs mu tig thog byi ru shel mchong dung dang bcu ras sngon nang du btums nas rgod gsas gyi rten du lhor gdags* (*ibid.*, 19)

Next came the supports for the Garse gods:

> The forelimbs of the elephant, black bear, brown bear, wild dog, wolf, snow leopard, vulture, falcon and eagle should be strung along a green cord and attached to the north as the support for the Garse gods. If these things cannot actually be obtained, then it is fine to use drawings of these limbs.[16]

The forelimbs were not represented by drawings but by ten identical bone-shaped silhouettes cut from yellow card (Fig. 12). They were gathered into a pile and bound around the middle with a green ribbon (Fig. 13), one end of which was attached to the neck of the spear and the other to a clod of clay that had been placed on the western parapet.





*Fig. 12 (left) — Cardboard silhouettes of animal forelimbs as supports for the Garse gods.*
*Fig. 13 (right) —A cardboard forelimb in position on the Outer Support Arrangement.*

With all the ribbons and flags now in place, the monks proceeded to clad the central spear with small spears – the supports of the Walse divinities (Fig. 14). The eight spears that were attached around the main spear were about two-thirds of the length of the latter. The heads were not of metal but formed from two pieces of black card cut into the shape of spearheads and glued together over the end of the wooden shaft. Photographs from the 2012 performance show that the smaller spears had metal heads. These metal heads were used in 2023

[16] *glang stobs chen dom nag dred mong 'phar ba spyang ki gsa' rgod khra glag dang dgu yi rje ngar dar ljang thag pas brgyus la gar gsas gyi rten byang du gdags / de rnams dngos su ma 'dzoms na rje ngar gyi 'dra ris bris kyang rung* (*ibid.*, 19).

for the arrows that were later attached outside the spears, as described further below. To judge from the photographs of the 2012 performance, the arrows were not added to the Outer Support Arrangement on that occasion.



*Fig. 14 — The eight minor spears being lashed to the central spear.*

> As for the eight minor spears: these should consist of eight shafts, either wild bamboo with seven nodes or any other appropriate wood, about two-thirds the length of the central spear, with spearheads three finger-widths long. These should be tied around the main spear with a cotton cord. The arrangement is described in the Trowo commentary[17] as follows:
>
> 1. the spear of the great striking horn: the tip of the horn of a wild yak, three finger-widths in length;
> 2. the spear of the one that is fearsome in its feeding: the teeth of a tiger or the tusk of a wild boar, three finger-widths in length;

[17] The work referred to here is the commentary by sKyabs ston. The first spear in this list of nine refers to the central spear.

> 3. the spear of the grasping talons: the claws of a makara and of a lion, three finger-widths in length;
> 4. the spear of the intensely sharp thorn: [parts of] the raspberry bush or the kutch tree, three finger-widths in length;
> 5. the spear of intensely hot fire: meteorite that has not gone into a fire, three finger-widths in length;
> 6. the spear of intensely cold water: ideally crystal or, failing that, zinc,[18] three finger-widths in length;
> 7. the spear of the lightning root: effigies of the tongues (?*lce gzugs*) of a snake and a crocodile pointing towards *rno tsha dkar po* (?), three finger-widths in length;
> 8. the spear of harmful poison: a peacock's feather, three finger-widths in length;
> 9. the spear of the tip of the lightning: the spear of the porcupine or the *khatvāṅga* that acquires wealth (?)." So it says.
>
> Since these are difficult to obtain, according to the Protector of Living Beings,[19] one may also make the spearheads from iron.[20]

Once the minor spears had been put in place, the monks attached nine outsize arrows outside them. The arrows were of roughly the same length as the spears, with bamboo shafts, metal heads, and paper flights, some of which were white and some black, with yellow and red streaks respectively extending outward from the shaft to represent feathers (Fig. 15). The arrows were affixed to the main structure, using

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[18] "Zinc," *tsita titsa*; the meaning of *tsita titsa* is unclear; *ti tsa* means "zinc," and *tsi ta* would mean "heart." The electronic version of the commentary gives *tsa ti ti tsa*. This can be explained by the second syllable in each component, *ta* and *tsa*, being subscribed in the manuscript, leaving the position of the diacritical vowel open to interpretation. In the manuscript version an attempt seems to have been made to delete *ti tsa*, suggesting that *tsi ta*, "heart," is what the scribe intended, although zinc would be more logical as an alternative to crystal.

[19] A reference to the commentary by 'Gro mgon Blo gros rgyal mtshan ('Gro mgon).

[20] *mdung phran brgyad ni snyug rgod tshigs bdun pa'am shing gang rung la bzhogs pa dbus mdung gi cha gnyis tsam yod pa la lcags kyi mdung so sor gsum btsugs pa brgyad dbal mdung la bskor nas ras thag gis bcing / de dag gi tshul ni khro 'grel las / rdung ru che ba'i dbal mdung ste 'brong g.yag gi ru rtse sor gsum dang / gcig la za la rngam pa'i dbal mdung stag dang phag gi mche sor gsum / gcig la 'dzin pa sder mo'i dbal mdung du chu srin dang seng ge'i sder mo sor gsum / gcig la rno dbal tsher mo'i dbal mdung ste stag tsher seng tsher sor gsum / gcig la tsha ba me dbal gyi dbal mdung ste mdog lcags ur mo mer ma phyin pa sor gsum / gcig la grang ba chu (p. 19) dbal gyi mdung ste chu shel yod na rab med na tsi ta ti tsa'i mdung rtse sor gsum / gcig la klog (glog) rtsa dbal gyi mdung ste rno tsha dkar po la sbrul dang srin mo'i lce gzugs gtod pa sor gsum / gcig la gdug pa dug dbal gyi mdung ste rma bya'i sgro sor gsum / gcig la klog (glog) rtse dbal gyi mdung ste gzung mo byi thur ram kha tang 'byor len gyi dbal mdung ste gzug / ces so / 'di dag rnyed dka' phyir mdung rtse lcags la byas na rung ba yang 'gro mgon gyis gsungs* (*ibid*., 18–19)

copper wire, pointing upward or downward or oriented towards the cardinal directions as specified in the following instructions (Fig. 16).

> In a circle around [the spears], nine divine arrows should be set up as the supports of the Shense gods. In order to repel the upper demons upwards there should be two arrows with white fletching in front and behind, pointing upwards. In order to crush the vampires downwards, there should be three arrows with black fletching, to the left, the right and in front, pointing downwards. In order to repel the earthly powers (*lha 'dre*) of the four directions there should be two arrows with white fletching, to the right and to the left, an arrow with black fletching behind, and a divine arrow that has not been scorched by fire, pointing to the front, attached to the upper part of the long spear.[21]





*Fig. 15 (left) — The nine divine arrows.*
*Fig. 16 (right) — Attaching the nine divine arrows, the supports of the Shense gods.*

The vertically oriented arrows were further secured with four khatas, coloured red, green, white and blue in descending order. There was no textual prescription for these; their addition was most likely intended to reinforce the structure while making a possible passing reference to the elements, although the conventional disposition of these was not

[21] *de yi phyi rim du gshen gsas lha yi rten du gsas mda' dgu btsug te ya bdud gyen la bzlog pa'i phyir sgro dkar can gnyis mdun rgyab gnyis su gyen la bstan / sri kha thur la gnon pa'i don du sgro nag can gsum g.yas g.yon mdun gsum du thur la bstan / phyogs bzhi'i lha 'dre bzlog pa'i don du sgro dkar can gnyis g.yas g.yon gnyis dang / sgro nag can gcig rgyab dang / gsas mda' mes ma bshur ba gcig mdun la bstan te mdung ring gi stod du 'ching* (*ibid.*, 19).

observed, and the element of earth – which would have been represented by a yellow khata (*kha btags*) – was missing. Colin Millard's photograph of the arrangement from 1998 shows coloured khatas draped across the horizontal arrows, suggesting that they were intended rather as a reference to the four directions (Millard 1998, 13). The final part of the arrangement entailed the installation of victory banners and plaques, representing respectively the eight generals and the eight champions (Figs 17–19).

> At the four cardinal directions and the four interstitial points of the central spear, eight big victory banners should be set up as the supports for the eight Generals. According to the Practice Manual of the Eight Scholars, these should be victory banners [featuring a] bear, crocodile, wolf, snow leopard, cormorant, wild boar, brown bear, and tiger. (The great [rMa ston] Srol 'dzin specifies that these should be Khyung victory banners.) The victory banners signify victory over the demons without ever declining. Outside the eight victory banners, there should be eight red cairns, with a red plaque on top of each. On the east side of each of them one should draw images of the eight great Champions, but not on the top or bottom, and these should be set up taking care not to make a mistake with respect to the direction, and one should imagine them as the eight champions.[22]

The cairns or mounds into which the wooden plaques were inserted were not in fact red, but consisted of pyramidal lumps of undyed black clay. Small victory banners were inserted into similar clay lumps, and arranged in a circle around the main spear, each with one of the red plaques immediately outside it. Photographs from 1998 and 2012 show that the red plaques were absent in both cases. There was, however, apparent compliance with the detail concerning red cairns, in that the victory banners in the first case stood inside small piles of bricks, and in the second, inside earth-filled red clay flowerpots. On top of each of the victory banners was the outward-facing coloured paper silhouette of the head of an animal, identifying it as the support of the

[22] *dbal mdung gi phyogs bzhi dang mtshams bzhi la dmag dpon brgyad kyi rten du rgyal mtshan chen po brgyad gzug dgos / rgyal mtshan brgyad ni dom / chu srin / spyang ku / gsa' / so bya / phag rgod / dred / stag gi ([rMa ston] srol 'dzin chen pos* [Shes rab seng ge, late 12th century]) *khyung gi rgyal mtshan dang brgyad du gsungs) rgyal mtshan dang brgyad mkhas bzhi'i phyag bzhes las gsal / rgyal mtshan zhes pa ni mi nub bdud las rgyal ba'i rtags mtshan yin no /* 3) *rgyal mtshan brgyad kyi phyi rol du tho dmar po brgyad kyi steng du byang bu dmar po brgyad la / shar phyogs dbal gyi gyad chen sogs steng 'og gnyis ma gtogs pa'i gyad chen brgyad kyi gzugs bris nas phyogs ma nor bar btsugs la gyad brgyad du bsgom dgos /*

corresponding General. With the completion of the Outer Support Arrangement (Figs 20, 21), the monks returned to the interior of the temple to rejoin the main ritual of the Khalong Sangdö.



*Fig. 17— The eight victory banners and five of the eight plaques, the supports of the Generals and the Champions.*





*Figs 18, 19 — A tablet being positioned outside one of the victory banners.*



*Fig. 20— Two senior monks pose beside their completed handiwork.*



*Fig. 21— The Outer Support Arrangement seen from the roof of a nearby building.*

The last part of the ceremony for the propitiation of the gods outside the mandala began early the following day at 6 o'clock on the morning of 21 August, when the detachment of monks responsible for the building of the Outer Support Arrangement gathered on the roof of the temple. It had rained heavily in the night, and some of the "tethering ropes for the array of birds," hung with images of birds, had fallen loose as their clay anchors had softened. The damage was quickly repaired, and the monks lined up beside the eastern parapet of the roof, facing the construction, and read a short work entitled simply *Phyi brtan bskos kyi yig chung*,[23] "A short text for the Outer Support Arrangement," a six-folio invocation consisting of a brief description of the components of the construction followed by an invitation to the different classes of gods to settle on their respective supports. Since this work contains no information about either the divinities or their supports that is not contained in the foregoing description, there is little point in providing a translation here. Our text continues:

> In the four directions of the temple, the four victory cairns should be set up, with colours corresponding to their directions, and surmounted with tablets on the front of which one should draw images of the kings of the four directions, together with their respective essential mantras and secret precepts. (According to Commentary of the Secret Meaning, there should be four stūpas.) East: A white man with a lion head; north: a blue man with a dragon's head; west: a red man with a pig's head; south: a black man with a bear's head, with no mistake. These should be arranged so that they are facing outwards.[24]

In this passage, the locations of the dragon-headed and boar-headed divinities have been erroneously inversed: the dragon should be in the west, and the boar in the north.

The four victory cairns did not in fact need to be set up since they are, in the case of Triten Norbutse Monastery, permanent constructions (Fig. 22). More commonly referred to as *kharthap* (*mkhar thab*),

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[23] The spelling *brtan* would change the meaning of the name of the construction to "Arrangement of Eternal Stability." However, since the more usual *brten* is used in the text itself, we may assume that the variant to be a simple omission of the diacritical vowel *e* on the part of the scribe.

[24] *sgrub khang gi phyogs bzhi la rgyal tho (gsang ba don 'grel las mchod rten bzhi dgos par gsungs) phyogs mdog ltar brtsigs la shing gi byang bu bzhi yi mdun logs su rgyal chen sde bzhi'i gzugs ris dang / rang rang gi snying po dang bka' bsgo bcas bris la / shar phyogs mi dkar seng mgo / byang phyogs mi sngon 'brug mgo / nub phyogs mi dmar phag mgo / lho phyogs mi nag dom mgo bcas ma nor bar rgyal tho so so'i nang nas zhal phyi ru bstan te gzug go* (*ibid*., 21).

literally "palatial ovens," these are four square-based brick and cement constructions with low pyramidal roofs, standing about a metre and a half in height and situated at points corresponding roughly to the four cardinal directions on the periphery of the monastery's grounds. Each had a glass-paned door that could be secured with a key.



*Fig. 22— The eastern victory cairn or "palatial oven".*

The consecration of the four victory cairns was carried out in the course of an anticlockwise circumambulation of the monastery's precincts by a large group of monks, which included all the senior figures (except for the abbot, who was away from Nepal at the time), such as the senior teacher (*slob dpon*) and the precentor (*dbu mdzad*). After a recitation of preliminary prayers in the temple, the group filed out and proceeded to the first cairn, located at the eastern edge of the monastery's grounds, and assembled on the roof of the adjacent medical school. The monks carried an assortment of musical instruments, incense sticks, a censer and other ritual items, notably torma offerings and inscribed wooden tablets that would be deposited at each of the cairns. The monks performed a slow dance, moving anticlockwise in two concentric rings. The inner group consisted of just four monks dressed in robes and masks to represent the Four Steadfast Ones (Figs 23–26). At the conclusion of the opening dance, all the participants moved to the edges with the exception of the dancer dressed as the snow lion, who took centre-stage and performed an animated dance as he brandished his attributes, a sword in his right hand and a replica of a skull cup in his left. Here, and at each of the subsequent locations, the monks read the appropriate section of the



*Figs 23, 24, 25, 26 – The lion-headed Steadfast One of the east; The boar-headed Steadfast One of the north; The dragon-headed Steadfast One of the west; The bear-headed Steadfast One of the south.*

*sādhanā* of Trowo Tsochok Khagying for the closure of the outer boundary (*phyi mtshams gcod*). The text enjoins each of the four guardians to watch over the cairn that marks his part of the sacred boundary, excluding whatever harm might emanate from the supernatural beings associated with that quarter and threatening them with annihilation should they venture to breach the boundary. After the dance, an offering torma was set beside the cairn and the inscribed tablet placed inside it. In each case, the glass door was locked before the group moved on.

The tablet consisted of a rectangular wooden board, tapered at its lower end to suggest the kind decorated boards that are planted in the ground or in some other support in the course of certain rituals (Fig. 27). The board was painted with a dark blue-grey wash, and glued to its surface was a blue paper print bearing an image of the divinity in question and a short passage of Tibetan in yellow *dbu can* script.

The passage was an excerpt from the abovementioned ritual for closing the outer boundary, and ran as follows:



*Fig. 27 – A junior monk holds the tablet representing the boar-headed Steadfast One of the north.*

> (*Mantras*.) O king of the east, white man with a snow-lion's head, just as you once took a vow in the presence of Shen Sangwa Düpa, since we priestly practitioners have entered this profound secret retreat, please guard the sacred outer boundary firmly to the very limit of space, admitting no external obstructions such as the harm caused by the fragrance-eaters in the east, and without letting the internal accomplishments dissipate.[25]

The three other tablets bore images of the guardians of the northern, western and southern quarters of the boundary, with the corresponding passage of text below each. The four guardians, together with their directions and the particular menaces against which each was requested to guard, were as follows:

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[25] *bswo wer zhi dmu slas ku tra gran la thun bhyo thun bhyo / shar phyogs rgyal po mi dkar seng ge'i mgo can gyis sngon gshen gsang ba 'dus pa'i spyan sngar khas blangs dam bcas pa bzhin du bdag cag gshen po sgrub pa po rnams kyis gsang ba'i sgrub pa zab mo 'di la zhugs nas nam mtha' ru phyin bar du shar dri za'i gdon la sogs phyi yi bar chod nang du ma gtong nang gi dngos grub phyi ru yal du mi 'jug par phyi mtshams gnyen po dam por srungs shig /*

East, white man with a snow-lion head: fragrance-eaters (*dri za*)
North, red man with a wild boar's head: yakṣas (*gnod sbyin*)
West, blue man with a dragon's head: nāgas (*klu*)
South, black man with a bear's head: lords of the dead (*gshin rje*)

*4. A perch for angry birds: the ancestor of the Outer Support Arrangement?*

An installation as elaborate as the Outer Support Arrangement, in which spears, arrows, stuffed birds, bones, minerals and grains are assembled as supports for divinities is unlikely to have been developed uniquely for propitiating the gods in Trowo's outer entourage, any more than the mandala was invented specially for accommodating his inner circle. If the mandala is Indic in origin, where might we look for the inspiration for the Outer Support Arrangement? The obvious place would be the domain of propitiatory rituals for powers unconnected with either Buddhism or Yungdrung Bon. One such class of rituals is the *jadang* (*bya rdang*). This word, which may be translated as "bird perch" or "bird pole" is defined in the *Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms* as "A tethering rope in the place of the support for the *sgra-bla*; a pile of stones on the crest or top of a mountain where the *sgra-bla* is taken care of" (*Lexicon*, 164). While these rituals have been adopted by both Bon and Buddhism,[26] with appropriate adaptations, recent research suggests that they are to be found in many variant forms, especially in eastern Tibet, as part of the cult of indigenous divinities (Fig. 28).

In the course of his investigations into the traditions of the Leu (*le'u*) priests of Phenchu and adjacent areas in eastern Tibet, Ngawang Gyatso of Lanzhou University was able to photograph a collection of thirteen bird perch ritual texts, and kindly made them available to colleagues, including the present author, whom he knew to be interested in these traditions.[27]

One of these texts, a short work of just three folios entitled *Bya rdang ka 'dzug*, "Setting up the poles of the bird perch," describes the raising of the poles or pillars (*ka ba*) in the opening stages of the construction:

[26] A drawing of a bird perch is provided in the collected works of Tenzin Namdak (*sMan ri'i yongs 'dzin* vol. *ca*, 292).

[27] Facsimiles of some of these texts, with *dbu can* transcriptions, were later published in Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso 2016. Research on these texts has been carried out by lCags mo mtsho, to whom I am sincerely grateful for sharing with me an unpublished article on the subject of bird perch rituals.



*Fig. 28 – A jadang (*bya rdang*) construction in a private house in Nyinkyi village, Thewo, Gansu Province, 2023. Photograph by Leu Druk go.*

Today, in order for me and my patron to set up the sacred bird perch, we request the bird perch pole of the armies of the Lha and Se gods in the east, who include Karse Tsenpo (Kar gsas btsan po); we lift the eastern pole of the bird perch.

We request the bird perch pole of the armies of the Lha and Se gods in the south, who include Namse Yingrum (gNam gsas dbyings rum); we lift up the southern pole of the bird perch of the earth lords, the Lu and the Nyen in the south.

We request the bird perch pole of the armies of the Lha and Se gods in the west, who include Seje Manggön (gSas rje rmang

> mgon); we lift the western pole of the bird perch of the earth lords, the Lu and the Nyen in the west.
>
> We request the bird perch pole of the armies of the Lha and Se gods in the north, who include Göse Khampa (rGod gsas kham pa); we lift the northern pole of the bird perch of earth lords, the Lu and the Nyen in the north.
>
> We request the bird perch pole of the armies of the Lha and Se gods in the centre, who include Zowo Tsegu (Zo bo rtse dgu); we set up the central pole of the bird perch of the earth lords, the Lu and the Nyen in the centre.[28]

Karse Tsenpo, Namse Yingrum, Seje Manggön and Göse Khampa appear to be names of individual divinities. However, it is clear that they also represent four of the classes of divinities – the Garse, the Namse, the Seje and the Göse – who are invited to the Outer Support Arrangement, even if the cardinal direction with which each is associated differs. A few lines later in the text, Zowo Tsegu is named as Walchen Zowo Tsegu, suggesting that he stands for the class of Walse divinities who gather in the centre on the nine spears, to which the epithet Tsegu (*rtse dgu*), "nine points," is an apparent allusion.

Further details about the components of the bird perch construction, the divinities who are invited to it, and the offerings they receive are provided in the most extensive of the texts in this collection, a work of twenty-six folios entitled *Bya rdang gzhung chen*, "The main bird perch text," which recounts at length the primordial occasion on which the ritual was performed.[29] A wide-ranging study of bird perch

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[28] *deing (de ring) bdag dang yon+gis (yon bdag gis) / bya rdang nyyon (gnyan po) bkyaṭ (bkyags) pa la / karss (kar gsas) btsan po laswoeṭ (la swogs ste) / sharogs (shar phyogs) lha dmagss (dmag gsas) dmagis (dmag gis) / deing (de ring) bya rdang ka ba slong / bya rdang shar gi ka ba 'kyoṭ ('kyogs) / gnaṃss (gnam gsas) dbyings ruṃ laswoeṭ (la swogs ste) / lhoogs (lho phyogs) lha dmagss (dmag gsas) dmagis (dmag gis) / bya rdang lho'i ka ba slong / lhoogs (lho phyogs) sa^g (sa bdag) klun (klu gnyan) gis / bya rdang lho'i ka ba 'gyoṭ ('gyogs) / gsas rje rmang mgon laswoeṭ (la swogs ste) / nubogs (nub phyogs) lha dmagss (dmag gsas) dmagis (dmag gis) / bya rdang nub gi ka ba slong / nubogs (nub phyogs) sa^g (sa bdag) klun (klu gnyan) gis / bya rdang nub gi ka ba 'gyoṭ ('gyogs) / rgodss (rgod gsas) khaṃ pa laswoeṭ (la swogs ste) /* (2v) *byonggs (byang phyogs) lha dmagss (dmag gsas) dmagis (dmag gis) / bya rdang byang gi ka ba slong / byonggs (byang phyogs) sa^g (sa bdag) klu =/ bya rdang byang gi ka ba 'gyogṭ ('gyogs) / zo bo rtse dgu laswoeṭ (la swogs ste) / dbusogs (dbus phyogs) lha dmagss (dmag gsas) dmagis (dmag gis) / bya rdang dbus gi ka ba slong / dbusogs (dbus phyogs) sa^ṭ (sa bdags) klun (klu gnyan) =/ bya rdang dbus gis ka ba btsug /*

[29] A partial translation and summary of this myth, as related in another of the texts in this collection, is provided in a study of the figure of the main antagonist in this account, the demon Kyareng Trakmig/Trakme (Ramble 2015).

rituals based on field investigations and textual research is currently being undertaken by our colleague Valentina Punzi, who has kindly permitted me to cite part of the provisional translation she has made of the *Bya rdang gzhung chen*. The background to the section is the invasion of the territory of Takcha Al-ol, the king of the Cha, by the demon Kyareng Trakmik, who purloins some of the king's livestock. The king resolves to kill the raider and his mount, a goat, but Kyareng Trakmik raises a castle from the bodies of men and horses, and assembles a demonic army to launch a full-scaled attack on the Cha realm. Takcha Al-ol then seeks counsel of his priests.

> He invited Sinbön Gong-ngul, who performed a ritual and an assessment. (18v) Sipön (*sic*) said, "In order to subdue the Demon Kyareng, and to repel the ill omens and magical manifestations, we need to perform a Sipa[30] bird perch ritual. And so the king of the Sipa, he of the Cha race, summoned priests of the Si[pa], the Kö and the Cha. They spread out a mat of white silk to the right, and from the sky, poured the medicine of the deer. They set up a yellow spear of gold as the divine stone. They drew a curtain of precious brocade. They raised the lamp that blazes with the light of a turquoise lake. They raised the sacred Sipa bird perch. They spread out gold, silver and pearls, and set up the sacred birch tree with its spreading leaves. In front of it they tethered a white yak and a white sheep. They arranged a red hen and a red goat as ornaments. They made a pile of all the ephedra (or arrows, *mtshe*) (19r) like a hill, and spread out gold, silver, copper and iron like a floor. For the mighty king of the *khyung* they appointed the bejewelled tree and the black hen of the Sin demons as attendants. The amazing powerful falcon has the vast power of the fierce thunderbolt; speeding swiftly on its wings of wind it alighted on the peak of the bird perch. In order to subjugate the female Dre demons of the Sin, the Drabla, a conch-white lion with red wings of fire and claws like blazing hooks, alighted on the top of the Sipa bird perch. To subdue the red Sin bull, the one with the turquoise horns of a manifested conch-shell yak alighted in front of the Sipa bird-perch. In order to subdue the Sinpo demon Kyareng Trakmik (19v) those three heroic Drabla siblings alighted on the top of the Sipa bird perch. In order to subdue the Sinpo demon Thelrang Mikgu, the one that manifests as a powerful Werma, wearing secure armour on his body, holding sharp weapons in his hands, alighted on the top

[30] The term Sipa (*srid pa*) may refer to a class of divinities or else may mean the "phenomenal world." Since it is unclear which of these meanings the term carries it has been left untranslated.

of the Sipa bird perch. […] (22r) In order to kill the goats of the Sin, they slaughtered a goat in front of the bird perch, and hung the head and the heart as a support to the right of the bird perch; they nailed the skin of the goat to the top of the Sipa bird perch; to the right of the Sipa bird perch they set up the captured red banner of the Sin. The divine armies delighted in the spear and the banner; the Drabla rejoiced in the enemy's wealth. They rejoiced in the light and the gold of [the enemy's captured] armour. (22v) The nine royal Sin siblings were seized, and the sovereign of the Sin was killed in front of the bird perch. This is where the act of killing enemies at the bird perch originated. His head was cut off and placed at the top of the bird perch; the Werma were worshipped with his heart; this is the greatest medicine of the Drabla of the Khyung. The bird perch was nourished with his bile as nectar. From in front of the bird perch the powerful and fearsome king cast a fiery bomb, and the black land of the Sinpo was burned in fire. A Sin bull was killed in front of the bird perch, and its heart and head were placed at its top. […] (23v) They spread out the turquoise medicine. They set up golden arrows and the turquoise divine stone, and raised the lamp of blazing crystal. They raised the sacred Sipa bird perch and gathered the armies of powerful Drabla. They set up thirteen beribboned spears to the right and gathered the divine armies of the Thugkar…[31]

[31] *srin pon gong rngul gshegs su gsol / tyo (gto) dang dpyad du byas pa la /* (18v) *srid pon de'i zhal na re / srin po skya rengs 'dul ba dang / ltas ngan cho phrul zlogs pa'i phyir / srid pa'i bya rdang bzhengs 'tshal skad / phya rabs srid pa'i rgyal po yin (< yis) / srid skos phya'i pon po gnyer / dar dkar g.yas pa'i 4 (gzhi) ma btings / gnaṃ nas sha ba'i smran ma blugs / gser mdung ser po gsas rdo btsug / za 'og rin chen yol ba bris / g.yu' mtsho' 'od 'bar sgroṃn (sgron ma) bkyags / sri pa'i bya rdang gnyan po bzhengs / gser dngul mu tig bcal du bkraṃs / gnyan shing stag pa lo rgyas btsug / g.yag lug kar po kong du btags / bya ra dmar po chas su zal / mtshe yongs mang po* (19r) *ri ltar spungs / gser dngul zangs lcags kraṃs ltar blugs / mthu chen khyung gis rgyal po la / mngon sheng nor bu rin chen can / srin gis bya nag brnyen du sgos / yaṃtshan dbal gyi bya khra la / drag po thog gis mthu' dbang rgyas / pang mgyogs rlung gis gshogs pa can / srid pa'i bya rdang rtse la byon / sgra bla dung seng kar po la / me'i gshogs pa dmar po can / lcag kyu 'bar ba'i phyir lder can / srin gyis mo 'dre 'dul ba'i phyir / srid pa'i bya rdang rtse la byon / sprul pa'i dung g.yag g.yu' ru can / srin glang dmar po 'dul pa'i phyir / srid pa'i bya rdang drung du spyon / sgra bla* (19v) *dpa'o mched 3 de/ srin po skya rengs 'phrag mid 'dul ba'i phyir / srid pa'i bya rdang rtse la byon / mthu chen wer ma'i sprul pa can / brtsan pa'i go khrab lus la kyon / rno dbal mtshon cha phyag na bsnaṃs / srin po thelng (thel rang?) mig dgu 'dul ba'i phyir / srid pa'i bya rdang rtse la spyon /* […] (22r) *srin gi ra skyes gsad pa'i don / bya rdang drung du ra skyes bshas / mgo snying bya rdang g.yas su rten du bzhags / srin gis ra skyes g.yang gzhi des / srid pa'i bya rdang 'go la gzer / srin dar dmar po 'phrogs pa de / srid pa'i bya rdang g.yas su btsugs / mdung dang dar la lha dmag 'gyed / dgra nor gnaṃ la sgra bla rga / go mtshon 'od la gser la dgyed / ye srid lha'i rgyal po dang / mthu chen gser gyis seng ge de / ma thang srin la sbad de btangs /* (22v) *srin gyis rgyal po mched dgu bzungs / bya*

While I am not aware of any reliable accounts testifying to the practice of executing captured enemies in front of bird perches, Valentina Punzi has undertaken extensive documentation of a bird perch ritual among the Baima, in Sichuan, which does involve the sacrifice of goats and chickens. Remarkable video footage she has taken also shows one of the participants, dressed in a brightly coloured robe to resemble a bird, dancing in front of the main construction as if he is about to alight on it.

## *5. Conclusion*

A comparison of the Outer Support Arrangement that features in rituals related to Trowo Tsochok Khagying and bird perch rituals for the propitiation of war gods and other indigenous divinities offers compelling evidence of a relationship between the two. As to the question of the direction of travel, there can be little doubt that it was the *sādhanā* that was influenced by the *jadang*, and not the other way around. That a religion like Yungdrung Bon, which so strenuously eschews animal sacrifice, should have incorporated a ritual of such explicit violence into its repertoire need not be a cause of surprise. The biographies of Tönpa Shenrab Miwo himself recount how, when promulgating his doctrine in the Tibetan borderlands, he encountered forms of Bon that featured blood sacrifice. He incorporated some of these rituals into his new system after divesting them of all their native cruelty and imbuing them with spiritual significance. From the perspective of a historian of religion, the adoption of modified forms of Tibetan indigenous ritual serves as another illustration of inclusiveness and eclecticism for which Bon is known.

In the introduction to this article I expressed the hope that a case study of indigenous strands in a monastic ceremony would be a suitable tribute to a scholar who has contributed so much to our understanding of Tibetan religion and society behind the political and doctrinal structures of Buddhism. I would also like to think that a ritual featuring the cult of martial divinities descending onto a support in the form of fearsome birds may have a special resonance in the present

*rdang drung du srin rje gsad / bya rdang dgra gsad de nas srid / mgo gcad bya rdang rtse la bzhag / snying gis mthu chen wer ṃa brngan / khyung gi sgra bla'i sman du che / mkhris pas bya rdang bdud tsi gsol / mthu chen stobs drag rgyal po yin (< yis) / bya rdang drung nas me zor 'phang / srin yul nag po me'i sregs / bya rdang drung du srin glang gsad / mgo snying bya rdang rtse la bzhags* / […] (23v) *g.yu'i sman ma bcal du bkraṃs / gser mda' g.yu'i gsas rdo btsug / shel 'od 'bar ba'i sgron ma 'gyogs / srid pa'i bya rdang gnyan po bzhengs / mthu chen sgra bla'i dmag tshogs bsdus / mdung dar bcu gsuṃ g.yas su btsug / thug kar srid pa'i lha dmag bsdus* (*Bya rdang gzhung chen*, fols 18r–22v).

context, where the Germanic terms for war, *gund*, and for raven, *hraban*, are combined as *gundhraban*, "War Raven," in the archaic form of the modern name – Guntram.

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