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The Raven And The Serpent: "the Great All Pervading Rahula" And Daemonic Buddhism In India And Tibet

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE RAVEN AND THE SERPENT:
“THE GREAT ALL-PERVADING RĀHULA” AND *DĀEMONIC* BUDDHISM
IN INDIA AND TIBET

By

CAMERON BAILEY

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For my parents

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vi
Abstract	vii
1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
2. CHAPTER TWO: RĀHU AND THE <i>DĒMONS</i> OF INDIA	6
2.1 THE GRASPERS	12
2.2 HINDU MYTHS OF RĀHU	17
2.3 RĀHU IN HINDU ASTROLOGY	23
2.4 INTERLUDE: WHAT OF BUDDHISM?	27
2.5 HAUNTING THE BUDDHA	30
2.6 BUDDHIST MYTHS OF RĀHU	35
3. CHAPTER THREE: THE TANTRIC TRANSFORMATION	42
3.1 THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE <i>DĒMON</i>	47
3.2 RĀHU IN THE TANTRAS	60
3.3 THE WHEEL OF TIME	64
4. CHAPTER FOUR: RĀHU IN TIBET	70
4.1 ARMY REPELLING	93
4.2 THE GREAT PERFECTION	109
5. CHAPTER FIVE: THE OCEAN OF OATHBOUND PROTECTORS	115
5.1 RĀHULA IN THE OCEAN OF PROTECTORS	118
6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	136
APPENDIX	140
FIGURES	165
REFERENCES	172
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	189

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Rāhu, sun and moon in hand. Made of stone (schist). Thirteenth century, Orissa, India. The British Museum (1951,0720.2AN170839). © Trustees of the British Museum.165
2. Za protection wheel from the *Summary of the Guru's Intention*, revealed by Sangyé Lingpa. Fourteenth century166
3. Rāhula with za and sinmo retinue. Tibet, 1800 – 1899. Nyingma Lineage. Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton. Courtesy of Jeff Watt and the Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 169)..... 167
4. Rāhula mural at Tengyeling (Bstan-rgyas-gling) Monastery in Lhasa. Photo courtesy of Christopher Bell (2007).....168
5. Rāhula on dragon mount, with za and sinmo retinue. Tibet, 1700 – 1799. Nyingma Lineage. Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton. Courtesy of Jeff Watt and the Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 65081).....169

ABSTRACT

My thesis is a profile of the Tibetan Buddhist protector deity Rāhula (Tib: Khyab 'jug chen po), particularly the ritual/magic and mythic complex that surrounds the cult of this deity. However, I will be using Rāhula as a case study to make a larger theoretical point. Namely, I will argue that the cult of Rāhula, as it developed in Tibet, was part of a broader Buddhist campaign to demonize the landscape of Tibet for missionizing and political purposes, in what we might call the mandalization of Tibet. While this took place in Tibet approximately from the twelfth century through the seventeenth, I will further argue that Buddhism, since its inception and as it developed in India, rested firmly on the foundation of a cosmology teeming with spirits (or daimons, to use a Greek umbrella term for a host of different kinds of beings). That is to say, conceptions of daimons like Rāhula have historically been intimately connected with Buddhist doctrine and philosophy. As such, I will critique both the borrowing model and (to a lesser extent) the substratum model which both suggest that daimon cults are somehow an amalgamation or epiphenomenon in Buddhism.

I am particularly interested in using Rāhula as a case study because he represents a peculiar case of Tibetan elaboration upon an Indian antecedent. Rāhula, or Rāhu in Indian conceptions, has been a more or less abstract cosmological force that is synonymous with malignancy. While all the other planets (Skt. *graha*, Tib. *gza'*) are deemed to be gods, Rāhula alone is an asura (demon or titan), in fact the only asura to have tasted the elixir of immortality. Thus he is regarded as a particularly fierce enemy of the gods. By the early second millennium in Tibet, Rāhula has become a high-level Buddhist dharma protector (specifically of the Dzokchen (Rdzogs chen) tradition of Nyingma (Rnying ma) philosophy) and an emanation of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (or often, Vajrapāṇi). He has historically been heavily associated with destructive rites or war magic, and weather-making magic.

There are a number of specific questions concerning this particular deity that I intend to answer in my thesis, in particular: How do the mythology and astrological functions of Rāhula in Tibet relate to Indian antecedents? Why might Buddhists have transformed a relatively minor figure in Hindu mythology in such a significant way? Who were some of the Tibetan figures involved in valorizing this deity? What larger social and political climate in Tibet might have

contributed to this transformation? How might Rāhula's mythology relate to Buddhist philosophy, specifically Dzokchen thought?

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The present work is a study of the deity Rāhu(la), a well-known figure of Indian myth and cosmology who, in later traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, is developed into a major *dharmapāla* (“defender of the Buddhist teachings”). In what follows, I will examine how and why it was that this originally non-Buddhist character, best known for his mythic cosmological role in causing solar and lunar eclipses, in a little over a thousand years after his first appearance in a datable written account (specifically the famous *Mahābhārata* epic of Hindu literature) becomes associated with the highest reaches of Tibetan philosophy. All of this will be contextualized as part of a broader argument that deities like Rāhula, prevalent in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism specifically and across the Buddhist world generally, are in fact indispensable elements within the tradition, and around which fundamental Buddhist soteriological assumptions were built.

Ronald Davidson, in his important study of the Rudra-subjugation myth of tantric Buddhism, begins by observing:

Perhaps one of the least examined topics in Buddhism is the utilization of myth in service of clerical values. Myth, of course, is intimately connected with all the varieties of praxis, yet to read many descriptive analyses of the Buddhist dispensation, the nonspecialist might rapidly come to the conclusion that Buddhism has few concerns outside of doctrine.¹

Indeed, as Davidson implicitly suggests, Buddhist scholarship in general has neglected the religion’s mythic literature in favor of an overemphasis on abstract philosophy and doxography. While there has been some progress in rectifying this lacuna in the field in the two decades since Davidson’s article was published, the general tendency that Davidson highlights is still very much in place. Myths, and the primary characters in them – the various deities, spirits, and ghosts with which most of these stories deal – are, and have been since the nineteenth century,

¹ Davidson 1991: 1.

the proverbial elephant in the room for Buddhist scholars. While these figures permeate every level of Buddhist discourse as the religion evolved across Asia, few Buddhism scholars, it seems, wish to take them seriously.² There are, of course, scholars who are notable exceptions, many of which will be cited in the following pages, and in whose footsteps I follow.

Davidson defines Buddhist myth specifically (in opposition to the myths of Abrahamic religion) as beings stories that “[seek] to focus the attention of the audience on paradigms exemplifying the potential for immanent rectification.”³ Davidson goes on to suggest that, in the Buddhist context, myth is not opposed to doctrine but rather, in Buddhist canonical texts and commentarial literature, doctrinal expressions consistently draw on mythic elements; that is, they use the language of myth to express the Buddha’s message. Deities like Rāhula were, over the centuries, consistently used as the *dramatis personae* of cosmic dramas (and, in some cases, comedies) to act out the vision of Buddhist soteriology in a symbolic, didactic form.

Many of these characters, including Rāhula, are what the tradition classified as *laukika*, or mundane, worldly, and unenlightened deities and miscellaneous spirits, which I will argue are best referred to with the Greek umbrella term “*démon*,” commonly set in contradistinction with the enlightened Buddhas and bodhisattvas who are classified as *lokottara*, or transcendental. This dichotomy is one that is repeatedly and consistently made by tradition, and one that Western observers have repeatedly and consistently misinterpreted. Since Buddhism has tended to be viewed by scholars as primarily *lokottara* in orientation, that is to say, entirely directed toward the attainment of arhatship or Buddhahood and consequently the transcendence of the world, the *laukika* deities are generally thought of as being superfluous to the tradition. Since many of the deities, including Rāhula, likely predated Buddhism and appear as centrally important in clearly non-Buddhist contexts, when they do appear in Buddhist texts, artistic representations, and ritual practices, Western observers have tended to presume that the Buddhists are merely “incorporating” the figures as a kind of expedient means. There have been numerous theories as to why Buddhists would have done this. One of the most popular, as we shall see, is that Buddhists were pandering to the laity, i.e., attempting to make their tradition more relevant by

² Or, if these mythic elements are examined, they are done so superficially, usually extracted from the broader political, historical, and doctrinal contexts that produced them.

³ Davidson 1991: 1. I do not wish to engage here in an extended discussion of the definition of mythology. For such a discussion, and a history of how Western scholars of various disciplines have defined this term, see Csapo (2005). For our purposes here we can loosely and simply define myth as narratives of a legendary or supramundane quality, the main characters of which are either supramundane themselves, and/or of a *démonic* quality, the definition of this term discussed below.

absorbing already popular cults.⁴ Specifically in the context of Buddhist tantra (Vajrayāna), where Buddhist deities are commonly depicted trampling, murdering, dismembering, and eating laukika-level deities, one popular theory is that this violent iconography and mythic trope reflects real world, on-the-ground conflicts (or at least competition) between Buddhists and non-Buddhists, specifically Śaivites, that were occurring when these texts and images were produced. While this is a somewhat compelling explanation, it rests on the underlying assumption that the laukika deities are fundamentally foreign to Buddhism. But, as Ruegg has pointed out, there are plenty of examples of Buddhist protector deities that are understood to be laukika, that are shown trampling or destroying other deities.

In other words, in certain cases, the mere fact that a deity is represented iconographically as treading on an inferior being does not indicate that it is automatically to be classified as a supramundane (lokottara) tutelary. It is thus possible for a protective divinity on the laukika level, such as a *lokapāla*, to be represented as overcoming inferior powers.⁵

Indeed, Buddhists seem to have consistently valorized laukika-level *démons*, and they appear in Buddhist stories as allies of the Buddha from the earliest period. I will argue that this was due to the fact that these figures were part of the “popular” religion of India, recognizable to and part of the cosmological assumptions of every Indic religion. I am not using “popular” here to refer to a religious substratum that was followed by common Indians in contradistinction to the religion of the elites. Rather, the *démons* of India, including Rāhula, were part of a kind of vernacular religious language that was “spoken” by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. I will argue that these figures were not superfluous to Buddhism’s core teachings and soteriological message, but ultimately central to it, and were employed by Buddhists to express their doctrinal ideas. We can see this as part of the project of Buddhist authors to make their messages readily understandable by using recognizable linguistic and symbolic tropes. As Richard Nance has put it:

Indian Buddhism was not simply Buddhist; it was also Indian, and Buddhist authors...clearly drew on their understanding of non-Buddhist texts and practices when they composed their

⁴ These theories and some scholars that have posited them will be discussed in chapter one below.

⁵ Ruegg 2008: 50. A “*lokapāla*” is a directional guardian, the most well-known examples of which are the Four Directional Kings.

own works...These authors consciously endeavored to compose their works appropriate to the audience(s) they sought to address. Such terms were not confined to the broad matter of language choice, but extended also to matters of style...⁶

And, it should be further clarified, the Buddhist authors themselves were deeply (perhaps inextricably) embedded in these “matters of style.” While Nance’s point here is made specifically in regards to linguistic structure in Buddhist commentarial literature, I believe the same argument can be made regarding Buddhist myths and rituals which discuss, treat with, and are aimed at manipulating *démons*.

Thus, my study of Rāhula’s iconographic, doctrinal, and ritual evolution from India to Tibet is made within a broader theoretical argument about the importance of such deities in the Buddhist tradition since its inception. These deities are in no sense foreign elements which Buddhists had to work to “incorporate;” rather they were fundamental to the Buddhist worldview from the beginning, and ultimately Buddhist soteriological paradigms rest on them. Laukika deities provide the foundation upon which the lokottara *maṇḍala* rests, so to speak. Consequently, I posit an “original syncretism” between the *démon*-cults of ancient India and Buddhism.⁷ It is not that the laukika/lokottara distinction, and the related binaries that Buddhism scholars have posited between monastic and lay, elite and popular, institutional and “shamanic,” is entirely useless. They are, in fact, recognized within the tradition itself. The point is that these binaries are not static, but rather dynamic, so that elements of what we might be tempted to call lay, shamanic, and popular in fact also ascended to the upper echelons of monastic, institutional, and elite Buddhism. A good metaphor for these (posited) social dichotomies, perhaps, is the general doctrinal and cosmological dichotomy between the mundane and transcendental levels of reality, which must be dynamic for Buddhist soteriology to operate; simply put, the unenlightened must be able to reach enlightenment. Deities like Rāhula, known in Tibet as the “all pervading one,” perfectly symbolize this dynamism; they are laukika, but sometimes assumed to be enlightened, or at least docetic projections from the lokottara “realm.”

⁶ Nance 2012: 4. The same can be said for Buddhists in any geographical region.

⁷ The concept of “original syncretism” I am using here is drawn from Jean-Loup Amselle’s so-called “mestizo logics,” which conceptualizes Islam’s interaction with purportedly non-Islamic local religions thus: “To appropriate biological metaphors, the relationship between these [various religious] elements must not be conceptualized in terms of oppositions and cleavages, but rather in terms of oscillation, of systole and diastole, of shrinkage and dilation, of multi-belongingness” (Amselle 1998: ix).

Furthermore, in actual practice, Rāhula similarly has historically been intimately connected both to the Great Perfection tradition, often considered the highest Tibetan philosophy, as well as understood to be one of the most potent weapons used by tantric sorcerers in army-destroying war magic rituals. That is to say, Rāhula, and the *démons* like him, provided Buddhists with a way to bridge and oscillate between the theoretically irreconcilable spheres of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

CHAPTER TWO

RĀHU AND THE *DĀMONS* OF INDIA

The various cultures in the Indian subcontinent have historically (and up to modern times) maintained a consistent and elaborate “belief”⁸ in various kinds of what Western observers would call “supernatural” beings. That is to say, the Indian religious, literary, and general imaginative landscape is populated with a host of various beings, as well as whole species of beings, that are normally non-obvious to humans, but nonetheless abide in their own plains or realms of existence.⁹ Indeed, most, if not all, societies and cultures prior to the European “Enlightenment” seem to have held the same basic assumption. Consequently, what we in the modern West would call “supernatural” is in fact as much a part of the natural world, for these cultures, as are trees, rivers, and animals. Indeed, the natural world (as Western observers would tend to define it) is usually seen as being the dwelling place or physical manifestation of these entities. Consequently, the term “supernatural,” while an often-employed etic category in studies of Indian (and Asian) religions, is inadequate. “Superhuman” is somewhat better, but it is generally understood in India and elsewhere that there are entire species of these beings that are in fact inferior to humans on some level, such as those trapped in various hell realms. “Non-human” is one common (Buddhist) emic term for referring to these beings, but this is also insufficient for my purposes, since this classification could be misunderstood to include animals as well.¹⁰

⁸ For the potential problems of employing the term “belief” in the study of religion, see Bell (2002). I do not mean to imply that all Indians at all times “believed” in the ontological reality of the beings discussed in this study in the same way. There were in fact, as in any human society, a great many differing opinions and philosophical interpretations of these beings. Nonetheless, there is overwhelming evidence (of which this paper will present but a portion) to indicate that many, if not most, Indians from centuries before the common era up to the present day have assumed that these beings are, on some level, real.

⁹ My use of the word “imagination” here in no way implies that it is less than real. “Non-obvious” here meaning not usually perceived by the physical senses. Although even this characterization becomes problematic when we consider that people in pre-“Enlightenment” cultures often regard things like mountains, forests, or the celestial bodies as the actual physical forms of deities. Nonetheless, there is usually at least an aspect of these beings that is considered numinous and elusive to direct perception. People who do have such direct perception or contact with these beings are often regarded as particularly blessed (or cursed), or special in some way.

¹⁰ Although, interestingly, certain species of “superhuman” beings in India, such as *nāgas*, are sometimes classified as simply being a type of animal. Also, as we shall see, there are cases of these “spirit” entities taking the form of, or manifesting as messengers, various animals.

One possible solution to this classification problem is to simply use the emic terminology for whichever type of being happens to be under discussion. In India specifically there are a host of different categories of “superhuman” beings that are repeatedly and consistently mentioned in various religious, literary, political, and what we might call “proto-scientific” texts. However, as Robert DeCaroli nicely puts it:

Even attempting to list the types of spirit-deities that fall under the purview of [Indian] spirit religions is bewildering. Such beings as *yakṣas*, *nāgas*, *guhnyakas*, *bhūtas*, *pretas*, *gandharvas*, *pitṛs*, *kumbhāṇḍas*, *piśācas*, *vr̥kṣadevatā* (*rukkhadevatās*), *vetālas*, *mahoragas*, *devaputras*, *vidyādharas*, *kiṃpuruṣas*, *apsarases*, *rākṣasas*, *kinnāras*, *assamukhīs*, and *asura* populate the texts. The confusion surrounding this panoply of beings is compounded by the fact that many of the ancient authors use the names interchangeably, and nowhere is there a delineation of explicit differences between the types.¹¹

While some types of Indian “superhuman” beings are regularly depicted as being distinct “species” (*garuḍa*, for example, is almost always a term for a giant, sometimes man-like, eagle), other classes are often blurred together, or the names are used interchangeably to refer to the same type of being, or a particular mythological figure. For instance, *bhūtas* and *pretas* are both terms for unquiet ghost-like entities. *Rākṣasa* and *yakṣa* are sometimes used interchangeably to refer to a type of fearsome demonic creature (often associated with forests) that oppress religious sages and interfere with sacred rituals, except when they are considered fearsome but benevolent bestowers of wealth and protection.¹² In fact, while *rākṣasas* are portrayed as arch-villains in a number of Hindu myths and legends, most notably the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, the term “*rākṣasa*”

¹¹ DeCaroli 2004: 10.

¹² DeCaroli (also citing Gail Hinich Sutherland’s work) gives several other examples of how these various classificatory schemes, while at first seeming to be clear-cut, are in fact, in practice, usually hopelessly blurred:

Sutherland notes the frustrating fact that the designation *yakṣa* is often used interchangeably with the terms *rākṣasa*, *gandharva*, *asura*, and *piśāca*. Similarly, T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede have stated that in the Pāli literature many *yakkhas* (Skt. *yakṣa*) are in fact a form of contented *peta* (Skt. *preta*), whereas in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* we find mention of a *yakṣa* who becomes a *piśāca*. This confusing blurring of terminology, prevalent in the literature from all periods, is well exemplified in the *Devadhamma Jātaka*. In this tale, the Bodhisattva must confront a being that haunts an enchanted pool. This creature is alternatively referred to as a *yakkha*, *rakkhasa* (Skt. *rākṣasa*), and a *dakarakkha* (Skt. *udakarakṣa*), while its lord, the well-documented king of *yakṣas*, Kubera, is here referred to as the Lord of *Vidhyādharas* (Decaroli 2004: 12).

comes from a Sanskrit root meaning “protector.”¹³ Thus, in addition to the fact that the distinctions between different types of “superhuman” beings in India are often extremely vague, so are their qualities, specifically their moral character. This is the case even in the apparently clear-cut antagonistic dualistic cosmology of the Vedas, in which the devas (“gods”), who are often allied with humans, are locked in an eternal struggle with the asuras (often translated as “demons,” literally “anti-gods”), who are generally considered to be hostile to humans.¹⁴ That said, however, devas are also often portrayed as greedy, lustful, and malevolent and anything but the, for instance, angelic hosts of Christian myth. Conversely, asuras are often portrayed as having a benevolent side to them, while never completely losing their fearsome reputation.¹⁵ In many cases, early mythological portrayals of a particular deity associate him or her with a certain set of qualities, while later accounts of him or her reveal a kind of enantiodromic reversal, so that he or she is now associated with completely opposite qualities.¹⁶ One early story may portray a particular figure as the paragon of virtue, but in another (perhaps written centuries later), the figure has become the paragon of evil. The same process works in reverse as well. The god Śiva, in modern India, is the second most popularly worshipped deity and is usually depicted in a benevolent form, but he began his mythological career in the Vedas as the terrifying, almost Satanic, Rudra (or “Howler,” hinting at his fearsome animalistic qualities).¹⁷

Gail Hinich Sutherland, in her study of yakṣas, traces how this particular class of being evolved (or perhaps devolved) and changed in Indian mythology over the course of time. But she also, at one point, notes how the god Varuṇa was transformed from a god of justice and the day-time sky, to one of darkness and malevolence:

¹³ Although, *rākṣasa* specifically means something to be guarded against (see Monier-Williams 1899: 860). In any case, they are frightening. “In India they were known to haunt caves and trees. They roamed about at night, often in animal form, but sometimes disguised as humans and sometimes in purely monstrous form. They belch forth fire, eat meat (including human flesh), drink milk, and disturb ritual offerings” (Strickmann 2002: 64).

¹⁴ The devas and asuras were generally understood in Vedic and later *Purāṇic* mythology to be descended from different lineages, the devas being born from the goddess Aditi (“unbound,” or “limitless”) and the asuras born from the goddess Diti (“bound” or “limited”). “Thus asuras and devas were, to a great extent, members of two dualistically opposed divine families” (Fontaine 1990: 112). For more on the asuras see Hale (1986).

¹⁵ In fact, this study focuses on one such asura.

¹⁶ Enantiodromia is a Jungian psychological principle which holds that a superabundance of or excessive emphasis on one quality or force or aspect inevitably leads to a sudden reversal in which the opposite is privileged. The concept originally derives from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (Bishop 1995: 122, n. 67).

¹⁷ For more on the mythic history of Śiva, see Chakravarti (1986).

Like the yakṣa, Varuṇa began his career as an exemplar of universal notions and in associations with the highest Vedic gods. Ultimately, however, those lofty beginnings were overshadowed by elements of the underworld that his elusive persona also contained... Varuṇa, as king of the daytime sky is...the eye of the sun...[but also] As the god of the night sky, Varuṇa is associated with those bodies that shine in the darkness, the stars and moon... Whereas, the daylight order produces a sense of harmony and clarity, the ordering principle of the night is associated with the stars, the “thousand eyes” of Varuṇa, thought to be the “spies” (*spāśa*) of the secretive and angry judge whose punitive weapons are the subtle “magic” of tortured conscience, disease, and sudden death.¹⁸

Another aspect of the ambiguity of Indian (and indeed, pan-Asian) deities is the tendency for what Sarah Fremmerman Aptilon has nicely summarized as “mythological contagion.”¹⁹ This refers to, for instance, multiple deities (or types of deities) that have similar qualities or similar symbolic associations that are eventually collapsed into a single deity or, alternatively, a single deity with multiple aspects might be turned into an entire mini-pantheon, depending on context. Sutherland characterizes the *kirtimukha* or “face of majesty” (which we shall examine in greater detail below) as representing a case of this mythological and symbolic blending, where multiple deities and different classes of superhuman entities, such as both *nāgas* and yakṣas, are simultaneously associated with this image.²⁰ What the principles of mythological contagion and “mythological enantiodromy” show is that one cannot study a single deity in isolation, but must follow strands that sometimes lead far afield from where one originally began.

Given this symbolic, terminological, and moral blurring, it is more than fair to say that the emic classification schemata do not suffice for a discussion of India’s fluctuating pantheon of gods, demons, and spirits. This is precisely due to the fact that the various texts in which we find these classifications operating were written (or carved or performed) by a wide variety of people in a wide variety of geographical locations and periods of time, and belonging to differing (often mutually exclusive or mutually hostile) religious/philosophical/political groups. There was never any dominant religious tradition in India (or anywhere in Asia) with a strictly defined orthodoxy and the political power to enforce it for an extended period of time, as there was, arguably, in

¹⁸ Sutherland 1991: 77-78. For more on Varuna see Dumézil (1988).

¹⁹ Aptilon 2011: 893.

²⁰ Sutherland 1991: 36.

Europe beginning with Constantine. It makes perfect sense, then, that the various myths, symbols, and cosmological systems that were passed down in India over generations which scholars are left to sift through would be messy, bewilderingly multivalent, and at times contradictory.²¹ That said, it is possible to make some generalizations by examining the recurring themes and figures, India's cast of characters, or *dramatis personae* (so to speak), in the mythology.²² Furthermore, we can (as, for instance, Sutherland does in her book) examine how, and, perhaps, to a certain extent why, certain deities and classes of superhuman beings were regarded the way they were, and changed through time.

But I still have not answered the question I began with; namely: What are the objects of study? What are we to call, and how are we to classify, these entities (which I have been variously calling "supernatural," "superhuman," or "non-obvious") in Indian religions which in many ways defy categorization? Robert DeCaroli, in his excellent and important study *Haunting the Buddha* (which I will examine in further detail below), uses the term "spirit-deities," as a catch-all umbrella term for India's mythological cast. He argues that this term is able to encompass the various classes of beings, from the high gods of the *deva* realms (the "deities"), down to the lesser "spirits" like the *pretas* and *bhūtas*, and everything in between (*yakṣas* and *nāgas*). The term is also flexible enough to convey the sense that these beings could be, and would be, worshipped ("deities") or, alternatively, act in the capacity of haunting "spirits" that may need placation, but were not regarded as being worthy of devotion.

²¹ Scholars of religion often like to speak of a particular religious tradition as if it were a distinct person that can make choices and do things on its own (i.e., Buddhist doctrine tends to view the person in such and such a way). This is a common but problematic metaphor (one that I will use myself throughout this work). I believe it is a salvageable metaphor, however, if we think of religions as people in the way Buddhist doctrine tends to view the person – as a collection of different aggregates (texts, institutions, and most importantly the practitioners and thinkers who write those texts and make up those institutions) which are themselves constantly in flux. For an extended discussion of the metaphorical language with which scholars of religion speak about their subject, see Campany (2003).

²² I say "India" because, as noted below, there very much seems to be a kind of pan-Indian mythology which the individual religious traditions of "Hinduism," Buddhism, and Jainism (and later Islam and Sikhism) draw from; a kind of vernacular religion that is intelligible across ethnic and sectarian boundaries. Furthermore, it should be recognized that "India" is an overly narrow (but for the purposes of this first chapter at least, a convenient) restriction and many of the mythological and cosmological figures and ideas that seem to have been formulated by Indians over the centuries were exported, sometimes far beyond the borders of the subcontinent. Of course, many elements of Indian mythology and cosmology seem to have been imported from outside the subcontinent - for example, Sutherland notes the relation of Varuṇa to the Persian high god Mithra (Sutherland 1991: 76). Consequently any claim that any element of Indian religion is distinctively and exclusively Indian is, of course, deeply problematic.

DeCaroli's term is adequate and indeed useful, as far as it goes, but simply pushes two terms together rather awkwardly, and gives the sense that all the various classes of "superhuman" beings of India were "spirits," or somehow "spiritual," terminology that is loaded down with the baggage of Western assumptions and associations. The "spirit," for instance, tends to be regarded as the rarified essence of a being, in opposition to or somehow distinct from (and radically different than) the physical body. Here we might draw a parallel with the Jain concepts of *jīva* and *ajīva*, or life essence and dead physical matter.²³ But the "superhuman" creatures of India are commonly depicted as having bodies as physical as those of humans and, as noted above, are often deeply embedded with the natural world, sometimes considered to be imminent in natural features (for example, the "spirit" and a physical tree or river might be considered continuous).

Consequently, I propose using the Greek word "*démon*" to refer to these beings, a term that captures a range of qualities with which these beings are endowed in Indian literature. *Démons*, in ancient Greece, was a term used to refer to non-human "spirit" intelligences, that were often considered to be continuous with a sacred place (Latin: *Genius loci*) or a person's individual protector or guardian deity. Interestingly, they were also considered to be continuous with a person's emotional or psychological state, and passions or moods were thought to be driven by one's own *démon* (as we shall see, beings like *yakṣas* are depicted in Buddhist texts as being, in some sense, the causers of afflictive emotions and control of one's emotions, by logical extension, meant control over hostile *yakṣas*).²⁴ *Démons* were also considered to be morally ambiguous, and could take any number of forms, just like the "superhuman" beings of Indian mythology.²⁵ Overall, *démons* were liminal beings, like the Indian creatures, not only in the sense that they were often thought to haunt liminal areas like forests and graveyards on the edges of civilization, but also in the sense that they are neither fully embodied nor fully "spiritual." They are depicted as sometimes solid and sometimes numinous. They are halfway between

²³ For a discussion of these concepts in relation to Jain soteriology, see Prasad 2009: 195-204.

²⁴ Dodds (1951) discusses the various ways that the Greeks spoke about the concept of *démons*. At times it referred to a general principle or trans-human agency not identified with any specific deity. In Greek myth, when a character is seized by sudden inspiration or madness, it is said that this is the affect of a *démon* at work, who act in the capacity of personal guardians/tormentors (11, 12, 68). See also Burkert 1985: 179-181.

²⁵ *Démon* is, of course, where the term "demon" comes when later Christian thinkers began to regard these beings, which were not directly related to God, as "fallen angels, and servants of the devil who were inherently evil and inimical to humanity" (Bailey 2006: 8). However, the term *démon* was applied to refer specifically to beings with a propensity toward blood and sex in the pre-Christian era by Xenocrates (c. 396-314 BCE) (Burkert 1985: 332). As we shall see, as in the Xenocratic understanding, the *démons* of India and Tibet, at least in a Buddhist context, were consistently regarded as being paradigmatically afflicted by negative emotions such as lust and hatred.

literal beings and mere metaphors for psychological states, bridging the ontological gap. All the various “spirit-deities” of India, from the *devas* to the *nāgas* and *pretas*, possess these various levels of ambiguity (such as ontological and moral), and the umbrella term “*démon*,” I believe perfectly captures the vagueness of these beings, as well as some of their more specific qualities (such as their relation and ability to effect humans and the physical environment, as well as their extra-human “spirit” quality). One problem with the term *démon*, however, is that in the Greek context, *démions* were understood to be inferior to (and sometimes act as the intermediaries for) the gods. Consequently, to call beings like the *devas* and deities like Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Devī (the three most important and powerful deities in modern Hindu worship) *démions* is inappropriate. However, I believe it can be applied to most of the other categories of Indian “spirit-deities,” and I will use it in that capacity.²⁶

THE GRASPERS

One type of Indian *démon*, not hitherto mentioned, is the *grahas*, a word literally meaning “to grasp.” The *grahas*, are, simply put, the *démions* of the planets in Indian cosmology and systems of astrology.²⁷ They are called “graspers” because they are thought to literally grasp the fates of men, just as in all classical cultures the movements of the planets and other celestial bodies were believed to affect the fate and day-to-day lives and well-being of earth-bound humans. The Hermetic maxim “As above, so below” perfectly captures this idea of macrocosmic/microcosmic correlation. In the Indian context specifically, complex doctrines of karma (certain actions which individuals engage in which lead to positive, negative, or neutral results in this life or following rebirths) both augmented and complicated ideas of how exactly the *grahas* controlled the fates of men. Some thinkers held that the *grahas* were the primary causes of a person’s karma, that is to say, the *grahas* had total control over one’s fate in a

²⁶ For the most part, in the Buddhist context, I will be using the term *démions* generally to refer to *laukika* (or “mundane”) beings, as opposed to the *lokottara* Buddhas.

²⁷ Likely the earliest Indian text related to the observations of the motions of the celestial bodies is the *Jyotiṣa Vedāṅga* “which claims a fairly close connection with the Vedas.” Hindu astronomy/astrology generally is called *Jyotiṣa* (“science of light”). See Kaye (1981), especially pages 7, 17, and 21. According to Audrius Beinorius “The *Vedāṅga jyotiṣa* is traditionally known to be one of the six auxiliary sciences (*aṅgas*) of the Vedas and its purpose was to provide Vedic priests with a means of computing the times for which the performances of sacrifices are prescribed, primarily new and full moons” (Beinorius 2008: 190).

doctrine not dissimilar to predestination. Other Indian thinkers, however, asserted that the planets, like all beings, were themselves merely the instruments of karma. Varāhamihira, in his sixth century encyclopedic treatise on astrology, the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, writes on this matter, saying that: “Sins accumulated by men through wrongful actions bear fruit, which is fore-shadowed by these portents. Dissatisfied with the conduct of men, Gods create these portents. Hence the necessity for propitiation.”²⁸ In India (and later in Tibet) the planets were also thought to specifically “grasp” or “seize” certain unfortunate individuals, afflicting them with seizures and diseases that Western biomedicine would probably diagnose as epilepsy. The Hindu god Skanda, one son of Śiva, and god of war who is often said to rule the planet Mars (Skt. Kuja), “was originally one of the “seizers” (*graha*, fem. *grahī*), astral demons who attacked children. The symptoms of Skanda-possession included trembling shoulders (*skanda* means “shoulder”).”²⁹

By the middle of the first millennium CE, traditional Indian cosmology (“cosmology” here referring to astronomical aspects of the universe, specifically what modern science would classify as the “solar system”) had taken a distinct and highly elaborated form within a range of *purāṇic* literature and related astronomical/astrological treatises that often attempted to reconcile creation myths with observed heavenly phenomenon. The major texts of what is now called “Hinduism,” much prior to this period, such as the Vedas and Upaniṣads

are seldom concerned with any but the most obvious of astronomical phenomena; and when they are so concerned, they speak with an obscurity of language and thought that renders impossible an adequate exposition of the notions regarding celestial matters to which their authors subscribed.³⁰

²⁸ Bhat 1981: xxi. Here Varāhamihira seems to be specifically referring to worship of the planets which he recommends throughout.

²⁹ Stickmann 2002: 67. The planets, especially the female *grahīs*, are said to particularly adversely affect children (*grahapīḍā*). For example, in the days, months, and years after a child’s birth, it is believed that particular *grahīs* will cause the newborn various kinds of diseases and afflictions which may kill him or her. For example: “On the second night after the birth of the child [a] female planet called Bhīṣaṇī attacks it. Symptoms of the attack are coughing, deep breath and the shrinking of bodily organs” (Mani 2010: 297). There are various remedies and rituals that the parents or other caretakers are to use in order to ward off these attacks. Furthermore, in certain contexts, female planetary demonesses (and I believe that, in this instance, the overwhelmingly afflictive nature of these particular beings merits the charged term “demon”) are considered the *primary* cause of disease. In certain *purāṇas* a female *démon* by the name of Grāhi is considered the main cause of disease, destruction, and death (O’Flaherty 1980: 170).

³⁰ Pingree 1963: 229

However, by the time the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, for example, Indian thinkers had developed a very elaborate and systematic conception of the earth and its relationship with neighboring planets, as well as a host of analogical correspondences and associations linking the nine recognized planets with certain deities in the Hindu pantheon, animals, types of metals, and stones, as well as the behavioral and physical characteristics of those born under the influence of a certain planet (or conjunction of planets).³¹ The development of Indian conceptions of the planets as well as the zodiac (and related divinatory traditions such as natal astrology) are likely due, at least in part, to the influence of Babylonian and Greek systems and related astrological treatises that entered the subcontinent in the early first millennium.³²

³¹ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is one of the eighteen so-called “*Mahā Purāṇas*,” which, along with the requisite myth of the universe’s origins (a key feature of every *Purāṇa*), also details the structure of the universe including the planets and their movements. It should also be noted that while some scholars have attempted to date the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* to the last century or so of the first millennium CE, the *purāṇas* are likely written collations of centuries worth of oral, popular narratives. See Matchett 2003. For the purposes of this present work I follow Doniger who notes:

it is notoriously difficult to date Indian religious texts, though it is reasonable to postulate several broad areas of Indian mythology: Ṛg Veda (c. 1200 B.C.), Brāhmaṇas and Artharva Veda (c. 900 B.C.), Upaniṣads (c. 700 B.C.), *Mahābhārata* (c. 300 B.C. – A.D. 300), *Rāmāyaṇa* (c. 200 B.C. – A.D. 200), early Purāṇas (*Brahmāṇḍa*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Matsya*, *Vāyu*, and *Viṣṇu*, c. 300 B.C. – A.D. 500), middle Purāṇas (*Kūrma*, *Liṅga*, *Vāmana*, *Agni*, *Bhāgavata*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Saura*, *Skanda*, and *Devī*, c. A.D. 500-1000), later Purāṇas (all others, c. A.D. 1000-1500) (O’Flaherty 1980: 11).

It should be noted here that I am attempting to give a general overview of Indian astronomy/astrology, but that many of the cosmological beliefs mentioned were not necessarily universally shared by all writers and thinkers in India from the first millennium CE onward. There are a huge number of *purāṇic*-style texts (let alone other genres of Indian literature) and it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that each one provides a (at least slightly) different account for the creation and structure of the universe. Nonetheless, certain details stay more or less the same. For example, nine is the standard number of planets given in many accounts (though other times it is seven).

³² See Pingree (1963). Western astrology is also, of course, heavily influenced by these systems which accounts for often close similarities between European and Indian astrology, specifically the conception of the zodiac, which is nearly identical in both cases. Jack Lindsay’s *Origins of Astrology* (1971) similarly privileges the Western tradition, specifically the Babylonians, with first making numerous astrological/astronomical advances and innovations, such as the zodiac. Bhat (1981), for his part, in his introduction to his translation of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, argues against the “bogey of Greek influence,” claiming in fact that Western astrology/astronomy was more influenced by Indian advances than vice-versa. I am not an expert in the history of the sciences as they developed in antiquity, so I feel ill at ease supporting one model over the other. That said, however, Bhat’s arguments are vague compared to Pingree’s and Lindsay’s, and the only specific innovation he attributes to the Indians first is the twenty-four hour day. Beinorius succinctly comments:

The Babylonian astral sciences, in the form in which they had reached India in the Achaemenid period [c. 550-330 BCE], became the foundations of Indian *jyotiḥśāstra* (“the science of luminaries”), though they were undoubtedly considerably altered to fit with Indian intellectual traditions and with Indian society which the diviners had to serve. It seems that the main and earliest Sanskrit text that has preserved for us what remains of Greco-Babylonian planetary astrology in India is the *Yavanaajātaka* (“*The Horoscopy of the Greeks*”) of Sphujidvaja composed perhaps around 270 CE....the Greek origin of this treatise is reflected by its title, and its Babylonian character by its planetary theory. From the concluding three verses of *Yavanaajātaka* we are

That is not to say, of course, that this represents an example of nothing more than wholesale borrowing from Middle Eastern and Western sources by Indian authors. On the contrary, there seem to be a number of specific Indian astrological innovations which were then later re-imported to the Middle East and used, for instance, by Islamic scholars.³³ One particular innovation regards the so-called *nakṣatras*, the lunar “consorts” (constellations) through which the moon proceeds during its monthly cycle. Also, seven of the nine planets commonly listed in Indian cosmology are the same as in the Babylonian (or Greek) system; namely the readily observable celestial bodies, the *navagrahas*³⁴ Āditya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Budha (Mercury), Śukra (Venus), Kuja (Mars), Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) and Śani (Saturn). However, in addition to these planets, Indian astrology also recognizes Rāhu(la)³⁵ and Ketu, which are not so much planets in the Western understanding (although they are regarded as such in the Indian system, albeit a kind of phantom or shadow planet), but are rather an aspect of the moon’s movements, being the so-called ascending and descending nodes of the moon.³⁶ Based on this complimentary relationship,

informed that it is a versified version of a prose translation of a Greek text, with a high degree of probability from Egyptian Alexandria... (Beinorius 2008: 191, also Pingree 1997).

But in any case, suffice to say here that there was likely cross influence on the matter of astrology/astronomy between the two cultures from at least the beginning of the Common Era forward.

³³ Pingree 1963, 1989.

³⁴ But there are considered to be far more than just nine *graha démons*. Each individual planet has a retinue of lesser *grahas* that serve them (for example, their charioteers, as each celestial body is believed to be drawn through space in its own chariot) as well as (usually female) planetary *démons* that rule various asterisms and constellations, such as the twenty seven *nakṣatras* (lunar mansions) which are considered to be the wives of the moon (Candra). Cornu (1997) comments: “Well before the Mesopotamian zodiac reached India, there was an ancient system of twenty-eight lunar constellations, which had existed since Vedic times. This lunar zodiac is common to China, Mesopotamia, India, and the Arab world, although certain variations are found” (130). He also provides some of the mythic background (with Buddhist undertones) on these *grahā*:

In the course of his monthly revolution, the Moon God Candra, riding his crystal chariot, pursues the twenty-eight beautiful goddesses of the stars, and each night he stays with one of them. These encounters give rise to different types of energy that influence our terrestrial world. These twenty-eight goddesses are known as the daughters of the Four Guardian Kings of the Quarters of the Universe. (131)

For more information on the *nakṣatras* (Tib. *gyukar*) as adapted into Tibetan astrology, see especially pp. 130-143. There are specific practices related to these star goddesses called *nakṣatrayoga*, described in the *Mahābhārata*, that give details on specific types of offerings that should be given, and to whom, on the days the moon is in a particular house. See: Mani 2010: 517.

³⁵ “Rāhu” and “Rāhula” are used generally interchangeably when speaking of this planet/deity. However, in the “Hindu” context he/it is usually referred to as “Rāhu” and it is more common to see him referred to as “Rāhula” in a Buddhist context. For the purposes of this chapter, examining Rāhu’s early “history” in India, I will be referring to him as “Rāhu.” Later, when I begin speaking of him in a Buddhist context exclusively, I will switch to “Rāhula.”

³⁶ The moon follows virtually the same path that the sun does across the sky, called the “ecliptic.” However, the moon zig-zags back and forth across the ecliptic during its monthly cycle. When it crosses the ecliptic moving to the north, this is referred to as the “ascending node,” and when it crosses back again moving to the south, this is the

it comes as no surprise that Rāhu and Ketu are often regarded as essentially the same being, Rāhu identified as being the head of a monstrous creature (sometimes, particularly in east Asia, called a dragon), and Ketu understood to be the tail. The two are usually depicted as such in medieval Indian drawings; Rāhu shown as a disembodied head sitting on the back of his *vahāna* (or “vehicle”) animal, and Ketu as a decapitated body.³⁷

These two (or sometimes one, Ketu being Rāhu’s body) are associated with a number of astronomical and meteorological phenomena. Most (in)famously, Rāhu is the Lord of Eclipses, said to periodically devour the sun and the moon (which enter his mouth for a time, but then always pass out again from his severed neck). While the other graha are said to be gods in their own right (though relatively minor ones, usually understood to be ruled by higher divinities like Śiva and Viṣṇu, or mid-level *dāmons* like Skanda), Rāhu is an asura, one of the “titan” enemies of the gods (devas) in Vedic mythology onwards who are said to be locked in nearly constant warfare with them. Unfortunately for the asuras, the devas are more powerful and intelligent, and even though there are some myths in which the asuras temporarily militarily defeat the devas, the gods (or a high god like Viṣṇu or Śiva) are eventually able to outsmart (and kill) them. In Buddhist cosmology, the asuras are especially afflicted by jealousy toward the devas, desiring their superior wealth, power, and lifespan. However, they are smaller and can be killed far easier than the devas and always lose to them. Rāhu, while he never conquers heaven (like, for instance, Mahabalī does, which prompts Viṣṇu to outsmart him in his incarnation as the dwarf Vamana³⁸), in many ways shows himself to be one of the most dangerous and craftiest of all asuras in Hindu mythology.

“descending node.” Western astrology also refers to these as the head and tail of “the Dragon,” and the concept likely originally derives from Babylonian planetary theory. There are actually more than these two shadow planets (*chaya graha*) in Indian astrological theory. A massive and well known Indian astrological treatise, called the *Bṛhat Parāśara Horāśāstra*, refers to five of these shadow planets: “These invisible planets are named Rahu, Ketu, Dhuma, Parivesha and Indradhanus. They are considered to be malefics or productive of harm” (Behari 2003: 99). Rāhu and Ketu are by far the two most well known out of the five, however, being the only ones included in the nine major planets (*navagraha*), and by and large they are understood to usually (though not always) aspect badly with the other planets and the zodiacal signs in Indian natal astrology. For instance, in another astrological treatise, the *Vegarājaviveka* “it is said that if Rāhu and the sun are in the eight place (*bhava*) [or “house,” of which there are twelve] in the horoscope of a person, he will suffer leprosy” (Beinorius 2008: 196).

³⁷ Pingree 1989: 13.

³⁸ Dimmitt 1978: 80-82.

HINDU MYTHS OF RĀHU

Rāhu, who's name, like graha, also means to grasp, according to various *purāṇic* sources, was born the son of the sage Kaśyapa, one of the first people, created directly by the demiurge deity Brahmā (or sometimes the grandson of Brahmā), and the giantess Simhikā.³⁹ Simhikā is said to have angered her husband when she asked for a child at the wrong time, and consequently gave birth to a son “who was dreadful like the God of Death.” As a child, Rāhu is said to have gotten into a fight with a son of Aditi, the wife of Kaśyapa who produced the devas, and lost. Embarrassed and angered by this humiliation, Rāhu undertook severe austerities in the Himalayan Mountains for many thousands of years.⁴⁰ When Brahmā appeared before him to

³⁹ Kaśyapa and his thirteen wives are considered to be the progenitors of all living beings, a different type of being associated with each wife. In other sources, specifically the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Agni Purāṇa*, Kaśyapa is Rāhu's grandfather, and his father's name is Vipracitti. Rāhu and Ketu are both born of Simhikā and become the first in a specific lineage of asuras known as the *Saiṃhikeyas* (Mani 2010: 718). The fact that Rāhu and Ketu are here depicted as siblings seems to contradict other stories in which they are the same being until cut in two, but such is the nature of *purāṇic* literature (and indeed, any mythological “system,” which is no system at all, but a series of haphazard, un-standardized, often competing, systems). A detailed genealogy of asuras (also called Daityas or *Dānavas*), including Rāhu, is also given in the *Māhabhārata*. See Bhattacharyya 2000: 102-103. Regarding the etymology of Rāhu's name, it comes from the root rabh, (similar to grabh, related to graha, and probably a cognate of “grab”) to grasp or embrace, or even “to desire vehemently” (see Monier-Williams 1899: 867).

⁴⁰ In Indian religions generally, it is a common assumption that the performance of various ascetic practices will lead one to gain supernormal abilities or receive boons from the *démons*. These practices usually include, though are not limited to, sexual abstinence, deprivation of sustenance, and some kind of bodily mutilation. Consequently, in *purāṇic* literature, it is a common trope that many characters (in particular the antagonists) are depicted as gaining near invulnerability through these practices, done over an incredibly long period of time. It is also a common trope for heavenly nymphs (*apsarās*) to seduce sages (be they human, god or demon) into sexual intercourse, thus spoiling their ascetic practice and their chance to get a boon. It should be stressed that these ascetic practices have little to do with moral considerations; as we see below in the Rāhu story, he goes on to use his powers gained through asceticism for “evil,” or at least cosmically unsettling, ways. Samuel (2008) nicely summarizes the importance and function of ascetic celibacy:

...spiritual power, which is expressible through various this-worldly results, is derived from asceticism, while the normative mode of asceticism is carried out by males, and involved the rejection of, or at least conscious control over, sexuality. Correlatively, as we learn from the *Purāṇas* and other sources of Hindu legend, if an ascetic was becoming so powerful that the gods felt threatened and the order of nature was being interfered with, the standard solution was to send along an *apsarās* or celestial dancing-girl to seduce him and so destroy his power. It is worth stressing that none of this necessarily has anything to do with morality. When the ascetic succumbs to the *apsarās*'s wiles, this not a moral fall, but a loss of self-control, leading to a loss of spiritual power. This is only a moral or ethical issue in so far as self-control is seen as morally good. In the Buddhist or Jain traditions, one can argue more convincingly that some degree of positive moral value has become attached to celibacy, but here again the key issue would appear to be self-control as part of a process of discipline. The discipline is justified not for its own sake but because it is held to lead to a state of enlightenment or liberation. Here there is an explicit contrast with the idea in mainstream Christian traditions that celibacy is a morally superior state in its own right, as opposed to any end-result that is supposed to arise from its practice. (181-182)

As we shall see below, important among the powers that one gains from this celibacy (and discipline in general) is the mastery over *démons*.

grant him whatever he wished, Rāhu asked to be granted immortality, to be made a planet, to have victory over the devas, and to be able to devour the sun and moon. Brahmā had no choice but to grant him these wishes, but as is usually the case in these stories, the gods found a loophole in the “contract,” and Viṣṇu cut off Rāhu’s head with his cakra weapon, making sure that, even though Rāhu could swallow the sun and moon, they would quickly remerge from his severed neck. After beheading him thus, Viṣṇu spoke to Rāhu, telling him “In your respective periods you may devour the two luminaries and thereby indicate the good and bad things in the world.”⁴¹ Rāhu’s periodic, though ultimately fruitless, attempts to swallow the sun and moon are called, respectively, Suryagranaha (solar eclipse) and Candragranaha (lunar eclipse).⁴²

A more well known and possibly the earliest of Rāhu’s origin stories appears in the first book of the *Mahābhārata* (c. 300 BCE – 300 CE) and is part of perhaps the most famous creation story in Hindu mythology, the so-called “churning of the milky ocean” myth. In this myth, the devas and asuras cooperate to churn the primordial milky ocean in order to produce the elixir of immortality (*amṛta*). Once it is created, the *asuras* prepare to claim it for themselves. Taking on an enchanting female form known as Mohinī, the supreme *apasarā*, Mahāviṣṇu seduces the *asuras* into giving the elixir back to him/her.

As the gods were drinking the ambrosia which they so desired, a demon named Rāhu took the form of a god and began to drink, but when the ambrosia had reached his throat, the moon and the sun reported it, for they wished to help the gods, and the lord Viṣṇu took his discus and cut off the well-adorned head of that demon who was drinking the ambrosia he had obtained by force. The great head of the demon, which was like the peak of a mountain, fell to the earth as it was cut off by the discus, and it shook the earth. The severed head rose up to the sky, roaring terribly, but the headless torso of the demon fell and split open the surface of the earth, causing a tremor throughout the earth with its mountains, forests, and islands. Since then there has been a deadly enmity between the head of Rāhu and the moon and sun, and the immortal head swallows them up even today.⁴³

⁴¹ Bhat 1981: 42-43.

⁴² In another version of Rāhu’s origin story, found in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, it is one of Rāhu’s sons, Meghahāsa, who, upon hearing of his father’s decapitation, undertakes austerities in order to be granted a boon on Rāhu’s behalf. With it, he wishes his father a place among the planets (Mani 2010: 500).

⁴³ O’Flaherty 1975: 277-278. The Tamil version of the *Vālmikī Rāmāyaṇa* tells a slightly different version of this story. Here, after the elixir of immortality (*amṛta*) is created (amongst a host of other divine treasures), an asura

Hence, not only is Rāhu the only asura to ever drink the elixir of immortality and thus cannot be killed, even by the Lord of the Universe himself, he is also, alone among the asuras, crafty enough to resist the charms of Viṣṇu's female form Mohinī, and fool the god with a disguise of his own. In fact, were it not for the betrayal of the Sun (the story implies) Rāhu would have completely outwitted Viṣṇu. Here, Rāhu is acting in the capacity of the classic Trickster deity, who, like the Norse Loki, or the Egyptian Set, throws a wrench in the works of cosmic order.⁴⁴

Rāhu never attained nearly the same level of notoriety in Hindu mythology as did Trickster gods of other pantheons, though he does appear as a recurring character throughout *purāṇic* literature (unusual for asuras and other demonic, antagonistic figures, which usually have their fifteen minutes of fame, as it were, in this or that legend, but are soon disposed of). Most of the time, when he is mentioned, it is only in passing, or his features and movements are described as part of a broader explanation of the cosmos. For example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes Rāhu thus:

Eight bee-black horses, yoked once for all time, ceaselessly pull this gray chariot of Rāhu...Going forth from the sun, Rāhu travels to the moon on the lunar eclipse days and from the moon to the sun on the solar eclipse days. The horses of the chariot of Ketu (Rāhu) are eight, fleet as the wind, dark as the color of straw smoke and red like lac juice.⁴⁵

Rāhu, like the other *navagraha*, is said to orbit many leagues above the earth on a different plain of existence (or heavenly sphere). He is said to move 10,000 *yojanas* below the sun, but is still

magician by the name of Saimhikeya steals the vessel in which it is contained while the gods are busy with the other treasures, and takes it to one of the underworlds. Mahāviṣṇu assumes a seductive female form, Mohinī, charms the *asuras* and takes the elixir back. Saimhikeya, however, is persistent and while the *devas* are partaking of the *amṛta*, disguises himself as a brahmin priest and is able to drink some of the elixir himself. However, the sun and moon, who are acting as the *devas*' sentries, see through Saimhikeya's disguise and inform Viṣṇu as to what is happening. Viṣṇu cuts off Saimhikeya's head, but since he has already drunk the elixir of immortality, both parts remain alive. The head eventually turns into Rāhu, and the trunk of the body turns into Ketu (Mani 2010: 171). Notably, while the *Māhabhārata* is among the earliest texts to mention the asura "Rāhu," there are earlier Hindu scriptures, specifically the *Rgveda*, that make reference to an eclipse *dāmon*, but here he is named "Svarbhānu," who is among the named asuras defeated by Indra, king of the *devas*. (Bhattacharyya 2000: 49).

⁴⁴ I do not feel qualified to engage in an extended analysis of Rāhu's origin myth, but it is interesting to note Rāhu's seeming (brief) superiority to Viṣṇu, the King of the Gods, and may relate to the motif of eclipses being (it was believed) an extremely negative portent for, and having control over, rulers (in not just Indian belief, but Western, Chinese, and Babylonian as well).

⁴⁵ Dimmitt 1978: 46

many thousand yojanas above the earth (*Bhūloka*).⁴⁶ Like Sūrya (and, indeed, all the planets) Rāhu rides in a horse-drawn chariot. In somewhat later depictions of him, however, he is shown sitting on the back of a single *vāhana* (“vehicle”) animal, usually a predatory animal like a lion or some other carnivorous beast.⁴⁷ But of more interest in the above quote is the (brief) description of his movement through the heavens, in which he is said to oscillate back and forth between the sun and moon during eclipse days. While this makes a nice image, it does not account for actual observed astronomical patterns since it suggests there are an equal and regular number of solar and lunar eclipses. But since the purpose of *purāṇic* literature was primarily to tell a good story, clearly some poetic license should be expected. That said, however, there were a number of Indian texts written with scientific (or pseudo-scientific) levels of detail that attempted to calculate Rāhu’s exact movements through the firmament and thus predict eclipses. We will have occasion to examine two such texts below, one the “Hindu” *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* from the sixth century, and another, a Buddhist text, written about four hundred years later. For now, we shall restrict our discussion to the Rāhu of myth and legend, without concerning ourselves with the natural phenomena attributed to him.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* account, there is nothing apparently particularly sinister about Rāhu; the potential destabilizer of the cosmos and Viṣṇu’s foil in the *Mahābhārata* story is simply described in matter-of-fact terms, and Rāhu plays no significant role in the stories which are to follow. Nevertheless, there are other *purāṇic* stories in which Rāhu plays a pivotal part. Again, he is never portrayed as main protagonist in the vein of Bali or Ravana in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but usually as a messenger or ally of a higher power, either deva or asura. That said, even more so than in the *Mahābhārata* myth, Rāhu is usually portrayed as having a penchant for disrupting cosmic order, his actions providing the catalyst for near disaster.

For instance, in one story told of Hanuman in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the mischievous young monkey god mistakes the sun for a piece of fruit and flies into the heavens to devour it. As it turns out, however, it is the same day of a scheduled solar eclipse. Rāhu sees Hanuman attempting to (inadvertently) usurp his position as the Lord of Eclipses, and complains to Indra, the King of the Gods. This prompts Indra to attempt to stop the monkey god, injuring him in the

⁴⁶ Mani 2010: 456. A yojana, usually translated as “league,” is a commonly cited large unit of measurement in Indian texts, but there is no exact standard length associated with it. Sadakata (2004), working off of Buddhist abhidharma texts, estimates a yojana to be approximately seven kilometers, or a little over four miles, long. How Rāhu is capable of intercepting the sun, when he is so far below him, is not, to my knowledge, explained.

⁴⁷ See Pingree (1989) for examples of early second millennium drawings of Rāhu and the other planets.

process. Hanuman's father, Vayu, the God of Wind, rescues his son and takes him to a cave to protect and heal him. In the meantime, he withdraws all air from the universe, causing all beings to begin to suffocate and preventing the recitation of the Vedas (which maintains all order in the universe). The creator god Brahmā is eventually able to effect a solution, but the whole situation nearly ended in a catastrophic collapse of the cosmos.⁴⁸ While Hanuman himself would seem to be the one to blame for initiating the sequence of events, his original "attack" on the sun was simply due to youthful innocence/ignorance. Rāhu is the first one to have malicious or hostile intent, calling on Indra to stop Hanuman by force (though to be fair, Hanuman also mistakes Rāhu for a piece of fruit and tries to eat him, too).

This is not the only myth in which Rāhu acts as a catalyst for a near cosmic disaster. In several stories he acts as the messenger, informant, and friend of a greater asura warrior by the name of Jalandhara, said to have been the grandson of the Sea of Milk.⁴⁹ In one story in the *Padma Purāṇa*, Jalandhara meets with Rāhu who relates to him the story of how the devas churned the Milky Ocean to create the universe. Angered that the devas would have treated his ancestor in this way, the powerful asura goes to war against the gods and even manages to capture and imprison Viṣṇu, for a time. Here, Rāhu (inadvertently?) causes the overthrow of the Lord of the Universe himself, and his old foe. In another story from the *Skandha Purāṇa*, Jalandhara

desires an incestuous relationship with his adopted mother Parvati – the consort of Shiva.⁵⁰ Jalandhara persuades his demonic friend Rahu to demand Parvati's favour. In an infernal rage, Shiva creates from the blaze of his third eye another horrific demon, which rushes to devour Rahu. Terrified, Rahu begs for mercy and Shiva accepts his repentance. Ravenously hungry and deprived of its prey, the demon turns upon itself, and devours its own body until only the head remains.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Lutgendorf 2007: 131-132.

⁴⁹ Often conceived of as its own deity.

⁵⁰ Jalandhara was born from Śiva's third eye, and is thus technically his son; not the only frightening or hostile *démon* produced by Śiva (often particularly identified as the Lord of Death, and often depicted in various myths as a dangerously unstable, half-crazed yogin). Śiva is also often said to be surrounded by a retinue of therianthropic imps called *gaṇas*, of which his son, Gaṇeśa, is the most important.

⁵¹ Beer 1999: 69. This story also appears in the *Śiva and Padma Purāṇas* (O'Flaherty 1973: 281, 370, n. 172). It should be noted that Robert Beer tells the *Skandha Purāṇa* myth in the context of an explanation of the so-called *kirtimukha*, or "Face of Majesty," a disembodied monstrous head that is often depicted in Buddhist temples and

Interestingly, the structure of this story (or at least Rāhu’s part in it) is very similar to the Hanuman myth. The notorious devourer (Rāhu) is in both cases almost himself devoured, which we can presume is used by the author as a kind of poetic irony. Secondly, Rāhu’s actions bring about a tremendous destabilizing effect, though as in the *Mahābhārata* myth as well, the problem is quickly solved; Rāhu’s actions have little to no lasting consequences. In the Skandha *Purāṇa* as well, Rāhu is acting specifically as the messenger for a more powerful demon, just as in the Hanuman myth he acts a sort of messenger to Indra, the king of the gods. This “messenger” aspect of Rāhu is his fairly consistent role in Hindu as well as early Buddhist mythology.⁵²

These are just a few examples of the myths in which Rāhu appears, but these give a good sense of the role which he normally plays. To sum up, in the *purāṇic* literature (including India’s two great epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*), Rāhu appears as a kind of recurring, though minor, stock character. While he is consistently associated with greed, malignancy, and outright evil,⁵³ and a harbinger (or catalyst) of cosmic disturbance and disharmony, he is relatively weak and powerless in and of himself. In Buddhist mythology, many of the same themes and elements are present, but there is a different dynamic at work. But before examining the “Buddhist Rāhu,” as it were, let us turn briefly away from the Rāhu of myth (Rāhu as literary character or trope) and examine him in his more scientific (or pseudo-scientific), astrological aspect.

monasteries (particularly in the Tibetan cultural context), usually acting in the capacity of a guardian to an entrance. While the *Skandha Purāṇa* myth identifies the kirtimukha with the unnamed demon that Śiva unleashes from his third eye, it is sometimes identified with Rāhu:

Variations of the kirtimukha include the simhamukha (lion head) garudamukha, kalamukha (the devouring head of time, Rahu), shankhamukha (the conch, or alligator head), and the kalamakara (the makara which devours time)...the association between Rahu and kirtimukha as disembodied and voracious heads is quite apparent. (Beer 1999: 69)

⁵² It is tempting to read this messenger role as reflecting the belief that eclipses are messengers or portents of misfortune and doom, as astrological treatises like Varāhamihira’s *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* make clear. It is also tempting to read the apparently significant effects of Rāhu’s actions, and his ultimate impotency, as reflecting an eclipse’s seemingly momentous, but ultimately fleeting obstruction of the light of the sun and moon. But these will have to remain little more than intuitive speculations.

⁵³ Wendy Doniger, in her study of the concept of Evil in Hindu mythology, notes that greed, and specifically hunger, often acts as the origin of Evil, or that hunger is directly equated with Evil (see especially: O’Flaherty 1980: 25-35). If we accept this interpretation, Rāhu’s ravenous head which forever tries to devour the celestial lights is a paradigm for the hunger and craving that afflict mankind, and consequently, a paradigm of Evil.

RĀHU IN HINDU ASTROLOGY

The various treatises on astrology written in India during the first millennium CE may not be quite as widespread or extensive as the mythological literature of the *purāṇas*, but seem to have been a widely popular genre nonetheless, with astrology often being singled out as the best of worldly sciences. A comprehensive study of the different ranges of astrological texts in India during this period is of course far outside the purview of this work. Instead, I wish to focus on one particularly notable, important, and representative astrological treatise, the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. This text is important for a number of reasons. Its author Varāhamihira (505-587 CE), who seems to have worked as a court (or at least royally patronized) astrologer near the city of Ujjain,⁵⁴ wrote on a number of subjects, and was a noted poet, is often credited with initiating a kind of revival in the study of astrology. The *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* is his masterwork on the subject, and is an encyclopedic collection (“*Saṃhitā*”⁵⁵ meaning “compilation”) drawing on and condensing the information in numerous other astrological treatises by a number of highly regarded (many semi-historical or fully legendary) sages. For Varāhamihira, there are three separate but interlocking aspects to what I am broadly calling “astrology.” First, astronomy, the observation and recording of the movements of various celestial bodies through the heavens (this also includes the work of predicting certain phenomena, like eclipses and the appearance of comets). Secondly, there is horoscopy, which specifically refers to predicting a person’s fate or life trajectory based on the position of the planets in various sectors of the sky at the time of their birth. And finally, and most important for our purposes, there is “Śākhā” or “*Saṃhitā*,” the way in which the movements of the *grahas* affect different types of people, different aspects of

⁵⁴ Located in east-central India in the modern state of Madhya Pradesh.

⁵⁵ Varāhamihira was a particular devotee of the Sun god (known as a “*Saura*”), and according to Sanderson (2009): “It appears that the *Sauras*, the initiated devotees of the Sun-god, possessed their own canon of scriptures, known...as *Saṃhitās*” (54). However, the “*Saṃhitā*,” in our current context, seems to be a more general bibliographic category, as it contains no specific ritual instructions for worshiping the Sun specifically, nor theological discussions about the Sun god. And as Sanderson later asserts, that while we have a list of 85 such texts:

... no manuscript of any one of these *Saura* scriptures has surfaced; and the decline of *Saurism* as a distinct tradition, of which this is the consequence and evidence, is probably to be attributed, at least in part, to a failure to continue to attract patronage and so maintain its separate identity as Śaivism became more influential and encroached upon its territory. (55)

For a more general discussion of *Saurism* (especially in the context of its absorption into Śaivism) and some of its important royal patrons from the sixth century onwards, see Sanderson 2009: 53-58.

human culture, and natural phenomena, perhaps most importantly weather conditions and food production.⁵⁶

As we might expect given Rāhu's mythological reputation and associations, eclipses (either lunar or solar) are considered to be very bad omens and have negative consequences across the board (with a few minor exceptions). Eclipses are considered to be one instance of so-called "planetary warfare" (graha yuddha), in which certain planets who are considered hostile to each other, come into conflict. In chapter five of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, Varāhamihira gives fairly extensive descriptions of different kinds of eclipses, based on how they initially enter the solar or lunar discs, what color they appear to be during the eclipse, and how the shadow begins to exit the disc once it ends. There are, Varāhamihira explains, ten different kinds of eclipses based on how, and from which direction, the shadow enters the disc. Each different type of eclipse causes different effects on earth and specifically affects different groups or castes of people. Other details are also important for predicting the outcome of a particular eclipse, such as which house the luminary is in when it is being eclipsed. Most of these effects are overwhelmingly negative and include, but are not limited to, floods, earthquakes, and famine. Occasionally there are mentions of positive effects of the eclipses as well, but these are relatively rare, and seem odd considering the other supposed effects. So for instance:

⁵⁶ Notably Varāhamihira, at least in this particular text, seems to have little interest in various religious or philosophical theories and speculations, noting only briefly (for instance) five theories of the origin of the universe in Hindu thought (Bhat 1981: 4). The text primarily meant to act as a guidebook (although, it must be said, a very well-written one given the high level of poetic Sanskrit that the author employs) for how the movements of the planets affect life on earth, and is thus very practical in that sense. Also, while Indian astrological treatises sometimes try to reconcile the descriptions of the universe given in the mythological literature with observed phenomena, Varāhamihira seems to have little concern for this either. While Varāhamihira occasionally cites traditional mythological explanations of certain phenomena, he also gives their (more or less correct from the perspective of modern science) natural explanation. For example, Varāhamihira cites the mythological explanation for eclipses (that Rāhu's head swallows the luminaries), but positions himself as a kind of skeptic, averring:

Some Sages declare that Rāhu...is of a serpentine form with only the face and tail, while others hold that he is formless and of the nature of pure darkness. In case Rāhu has a body, moves in the zodiac, possesses only the head and a circular shape, how is it that he seizes the luminaries who are separated from him by 180°, when his own movement is fixed and uniform? If, on the other hand, his motion is not fixed, how is it that his exact position is determined by calculation? If he is to be identified only by his tail and face, why should he not seize them (the luminaries) at other intervals (instead of only when 180° apart)? If this Rāhu who is a big serpent in appearance actually seizes the Sun or the Moon with his tail or mouth, why should he not obstruct half of the zodiac that lies between his head and tail?

Varāhamihira then goes on to give the scientific explanation for the solar and lunar eclipses – the moon passing between the earth and sun, and the shadow of the earth on the moon, respectively.

When the shadow (Rāhu) is on the southern side of the solar or lunar orb at an eclipse, the world will be inundated by floods, but people will be happy and free from fear. If the eclipse occurs on the northern side, people will perish as a result of the tyranny of kings and depredations of robbers.⁵⁷

Elsewhere, Varāhamihira writes “If an eclipse takes place in Sign Aquarius, it will harm people living on the mountains and in the west, bearers of burdens, thieves, Ābhīras (herdsmen), the Daradas, noble men, residents of Simhapura and the Barbaras.”⁵⁸ It is never really explained why these specific associations hold true or how they came to be discovered. Varāhamihira is simply relying on the wisdom of the ancient sages.

There are also different unusual meteorological events that are significant when they occur in conjunction with an eclipse. So, for instance, if there is a dust storm within seven days after an eclipse, this will result in famine, while a heavy mist will result in a disease outbreak. Other significant signs are thunder, lightning, clouds that are multi-colored or oddly shaped, misty haloes around the sun or moon, rainbows, earthquakes, and more. These various portents (if appearing after an eclipse) can mean any number of bad things, from the outbreak of wars and fires to the sudden deaths of kings and ministers.⁵⁹ Rāhu is also considered to be related to the appearance of certain comets and meteor showers, commonly called “ketus.”⁶⁰ Chapter nine of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* is titled “On Comets,” and like the eclipse chapter, gives an extensive list of different kinds of comets (or groups of comets), what planets they are related to, and what earthly effects their appearance heralds.⁶¹ Like eclipses, comets are generally bad omens, and the appearance of a particular comet usually means misfortune or death for someone. For our purposes, I will only mention one specific group of comets here, the so-called Tāmasakīlakas. These are considered to be a group of 33 comets that are the children of Rāhu, associated with

⁵⁷ Bhat 1981: 55.

⁵⁸ Bhat 1981: 54.

⁵⁹ Bhat 1981: 67.

⁶⁰ The long luminous comet tails seem to have been commonly associated with Rāhu’s serpentine tail.

⁶¹ It should be noted that neither the eclipse or comet chapters are concerned with predicting eclipses, not because Varāhamihira, or Hindu astrologers generally, were incapable during this period of making such calculations, but because the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*’s stated function is to act as a guidebook of signs and portents, not as an astronomy textbook.

the eclipse demon apparently because they appear as dark spots within the disc of the sun.⁶² Their appearance results in a number of negative affects and further ill omens:

When these comets make their appearance the following effects are observed: The water turns turbid; the sky is filled with dust; a storm arises carrying sand and breaking the tops of mountains and trees...the trees and creepers show effects contrary to the seasons; animals and birds get heated by the Sun; there appear flares in the quarters; and thunderbolts, earthquakes and such other unusual phenomena take place foreboding evil.⁶³

But this is just the beginning of the malignancy these particularly bad comets cause. Varāhamihira continues in rare graphic detail:

In whichever country these Dark Shafts are sighted on the solar orb, the kings of those countries will have great suffering. Even sages with emaciated bodies owing to hunger will forsake their religious duties and righteous conduct, and emigrate to other countries with difficulty, carrying in their arms their children that are reduced to mere skin and bones. Virtuous people will be robbed of their wealth by thieves, will heave deep sighs and have tears of great grief blinding their eyes.⁶⁴

And so on. Varāhamihira carries on like this for some time, also noting that the shape of these “Dark Shafts” determines particular ill fortunes (usually for the king). In the entirety of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*’s chapter on the movements of the sun, Rāhu’s children are by far the worst omens mentioned.

Fortunately, however, like all the planets, Rāhu (and the ketus) can be propitiated. While the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* itself does not contain instructions for propitiating the planets (*grahapūjā*), David Pingree, in a 1989 article entitled “Indian Astral Magic,” examines two texts also written by Varāhamihira at about the same time as the *Saṃhitā* that do, namely the *Yogayātrā* and *Bṛhadayātrā*. The latter details how specific aspects of *grahapūjā* are to be done properly,

⁶² Bhat speculates that these may have been sunspots which the ancient observers interpreted as comets.

⁶³ Bhat 1981: 25.

⁶⁴ Bhat 1981: 26.

includ[ing] the metals or other substances out of which the images of the planets are to be made [Rāhu's statue, as befits his dark nature, should be made of lead], the wood used as a fuel in the sacrificial fire, the kinds of incenses or perfumes and flowers to be employed, the food to be fed to the officiating Brahmanas, the...fee to be paid to them, and the mantras that they must mutter.⁶⁵

Varāhamihira notes in the eclipse chapter of the *Samhitā* that, if nothing bad happens following an eclipse, but instead good fortune and prosperity increases, this is a sign that planetary worship was done properly and the negative effects were averted. Like the *grahīs* mentioned above (and indeed, all afflictive deities in Indian religions), proper ritual practice or offerings can avert the malignancy of the Lord of Eclipses.

INTERLUDE: WHAT OF BUDDHISM?

In the same article on Indian “astro-magic,” Pingree also reproduces pictures of some well-preserved examples of drawn and carved images of the planets, including modern statuettes, carvings found in temple complexes, and drawings included in ritual propitiation texts. One of the best-preserved examples that he cites is a bas relief carving of the navagraha found at the ruins of a (probably) Buddhist site at Vikramaśīla. While there is no direct evidence that these images were used in *grahapūjā* ceremonies and may have simply been decorative, it might strike some as odd that such well-produced depictions of “Hindu” deities would be present at a Buddhist site.

After all, there has been a tradition in Western scholarship on Buddhism (or perhaps it is better to call it a bad habit) that unfortunately still persists to this day. Many Buddhist scholars have argued, either directly or implicitly, that the *démons* of India (while they may be important in many of the various religious traditions now collectively called “Hinduism” since these are more devotional and theistically centered in the first place, the narrative goes), are merely a superfluous accretion onto the core of the Buddha's message.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Pingree 1989: 4.

⁶⁶ And the core of the Buddha's message is usually identified, in the context of so-called Nikāya Buddhism of the Pāli canon, with philosophical and moral ideas, like the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve-fold Links of Dependent

A few examples will suffice to show the pervasiveness of this attitude.⁶⁷ Wendy Doniger, in her study of evil in Hindu mythology, has this to say about the Buddhist interpretation of evil: “...the Buddhists tended to face the problem of evil in terms of psychological factors within man rather than cosmological factors acting through or upon gods, and most cosmogonic myths in Buddhism *are probably intended as satires on Hindu myths*. [emphasis added]”⁶⁸ Frankly, I find this “satire” hypothesis a bizarre interpretation and utterly baseless,⁶⁹ but for now I will hold off comment and let the weight of the mythological evidence below speak for itself. Doniger’s move to psychologize the *démons* in Buddhism is, as I will argue, not entirely wrong, but is an oversimplification of the matter.

Another way of dealing with the problem is by arguing that *démon* worship in Buddhism was a kind of concession made within the *saṅgha* to popular local cults, possibly as a cynical attempt to gain converts. Robert DeCaroli in *Haunting the Buddha*, which I will be examining in detail below, thoroughly refutes this argument. DeCaroli in particular notes that Ananda Coomaraswamy “speculates that the presence of popular deities on Buddhist sites [such as the *navagraha* at Vikramaśīla] provides evidence of moments in which the public’s desires, rather than monastic interests, held sway.”⁷⁰ But this argument rests on a logical fallacy, namely that there did in fact exist a radical divide between Buddhist monks and the laity. As Richard J. Kohn nicely characterizes *démon* worship in Tibetan Buddhism (after noting its pervasiveness among lay people within villages):

The monastic elite comes from the same villages and same families. As monks, their involvement with the cult of the protectors increases dramatically...There is nothing to suggest that belief in the protectors or any other supernatural entities decreases or is vitiated

Origination, the Three Marks of Existence, and so forth. The *démons* become harder to ignore in the Mahāyana sutras (for instance, most of these texts begin with a description of the Buddha surrounded by a vast retinue of *démons*), but even here “true” Buddhism is often identified with doctrines of Emptiness, the bodhisattva ideal, and so on. I do not mean in any way to dismiss or downplay the importance of these doctrinal concepts. My purpose here is to reject (strongly) the unfortunate tendency within Buddhist studies scholarship to dismiss the *démons* and their worship, within Buddhism, as so much chaff.

⁶⁷ I do not mean here to single out the scholars that I cite for particular critique, I am simply trying to give a sense of how taken for granted these assumptions about Buddhism have tended, and still tend, to be.

⁶⁸ O’Flaherty 1976: 33.

⁶⁹ Though, as we shall see in the next chapter, Buddhists seem to have intentionally reversed or inverted Hindu mythological values in what might be interpreted as an example of enantiodromy.

⁷⁰ DeCaroli 2004: 8.

by the monastic experience. If anything, it increases. To the Sherpa monk, disbelief in the protectors is nearly unimaginable, especially in anyone interested in religion.⁷¹

While it would be a mistake to assume that the religious dynamics among Buddhists in modern Nepal (where Kohn's research is focused) are the same as they were in medieval India, the point still applies. Indian Buddhist monks in ancient India were not colonists from some other part of the world, or aliens from another planet, with an entirely different worldview from the general Indian populace (as many Buddhist scholars seem to assume when they posit a radical monastic/lay distinction). They *were* the Indian populace, and there is no reason to believe that *démon* belief would have been driven from a person as soon as he shaved his head and put on robes (in fact, given, as we shall see, the vast number of *démons* present in Buddhist literature and archeological evidence like the *navagraha* at Vikramaśīla, if anything, belief in *démons* *increased*). Nonetheless, scholars like Coomaraswamy have argued "that ultimately the inclusion of popular deities at Buddhist sites arose due to complications in the Buddhist's desire to completely subvert these earlier, "animistic" practices."⁷²

This characterization leads us to a third, and relatively sophisticated, way of dismissing the importance of *démons* in Buddhism. Namely, this is the so-called theory of "Inclusivism" posited by Paul Hacker. This theory holds, essentially, that Buddhism incorporated fundamentally alien elements into itself as a way of subordinating them, but ultimately holding them at an inferior level. The various *démon* figures important to other Indian religious and philosophical traditions and *démon* worship in general are considered among these "Inclusivistic" elements, which are "reinterpreted, purified and ethicized" on Buddhist terms. Hacker notes in particular the example of the "Hindu" god Brahmā's important appearances in the Pāli Canon.⁷³ Hacker is not alone in these conclusions, as Ruegg notes throughout his study on the historical relation between Buddhism and Hinduism/Brahmānism in India that there is a general tendency among Buddhist scholars to interpret supposedly "Hindu" *démons*⁷⁴ as incidental, ultimately "alien" (to use Hacker's characterization) elements within Buddhism.

⁷¹ Kohn 2001: 39.

⁷² DeCaroli 2004: 8.

⁷³ Hacker's argument is presented in Ruegg 2008: 97.

⁷⁴ By "supposedly Hindu," I mean to problematize the unspoken assumption in much Buddhist scholarship that these are somehow more "Hindu" than Buddhist.

This is, to a certain extent, an understandable conclusion, especially given the rhetoric within the Buddhist tradition of a radical distinction between *lokottara* (supermundane) Buddhas and other enlightened beings, and *laukika* (mundane, worldly) beings, which would include the various types of “Hindu” *démons*, including Rāhu. Consequently, there is a tendency to think of the *démons* as less important, or indeed incidental to the true Buddhist goal which lies at the *lokottara* level. I shall have much more to say about the *lokottara/laukika* categories and their distinction in the next chapter. But for now, I wish to assert that the *laukika démons*, while they may be definitely considered worldly or inferior to the Buddha, this does not mean that they and their worship are popular accretions onto a pure *lokottara* center (as it were). Rather, the *laukika* deities, both as the religion developed in India and outside of India (specifically Tibet), are *fundamentally*, and even *pivotaly important* to Buddhism. DeCaroli’s work goes a long way (though perhaps not quite far enough) in showing this.

HAUNTING THE BUDDHA

In *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, Robert DeCaroli argues that, contrary to the claims by many Buddhist scholars (like Coomaraswamy) since the nineteenth century, the cults of various *démons*, in particular yakṣas and *nāgas* (DeCaroli uses the umbrella term “spirit-beings”), have been vitally important to Buddhist practice, cosmology, and soteriology since its inception. He argues that the incorporation of these “popular” cults were key to Buddhism’s widespread success in India, insofar as Buddhists were able to “sell” the new religion as a particularly efficacious means of managing the danger that spirit-deities represented. Indeed, DeCaroli’s argument is an almost one hundred eighty-degree shift from the traditional scholarship on the subject of Buddhism’s interaction with spirit cults, but given the veracity of the evidence that he marshals, his conclusions are undeniable.

DeCaroli begins his argument by noting the pervasiveness of “spirit-deity” (*démon*) worship in India before and during the early rise of Buddhism. There is much evidence, both textual and archeological (Buddhist and non-Buddhist), which indicates belief in *démons* like *nāgas* and yakṣas was pervasive within Indian society at the time of the Buddha, on every level

of society. These beliefs were not just the purview of the rural, lower class “folk,” but were also held by urban-dwelling aristocrats and kings. DeCaroli points out that “significantly, images of yakṣas and yakṣīs constitute the earliest examples of figural, freestanding sculpture in India,”⁷⁵ and not surprisingly they figure prominently in the earliest examples of Buddhist art and architecture as well, including early stūpas, where the Buddha is depicted as being surrounded by all sides by various *démons*, some of which seem to have had transnational cultic status. DeCaroli argues that “by assembling these spirit-deities from across vast distances only to represent them in positions of secondary importance, the *saṃgha* was making a bold statement that challenged the very foundations of spirit-deity worship in India.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, archeological surveys of early Buddhist monasteries and temple sites show that they were built near or directly on top of cemeteries and/or sites that had been associated with the worship of local deities. In addition, DeCaroli points out that there are, for example, certain Buddhist monastic disciplinary texts which indicate monks lived near cemeteries and were involved in handling funerary materials such as grave offerings.

DeCaroli argues that all this indicates that Buddhist monks intentionally set themselves up as intermediaries between the world of non-human spirits and the dead and that of the lay community. Their status as ascetic renunciates who cultivated moral and mental discipline gave them (or it was believed that it gave them) special skills and powers to interact with, subvert, convert, and control *démons*, or at the very least make offerings to them on behalf of the human community. In short, the Buddhists set themselves up as the ghost busters of ancient India. DeCaroli explains: “In the stories, the *saṃgha* repeatedly positions itself as an unassailable, impassive buffer between the people and these capricious beings of desire and whim.”⁷⁷

One case study that DeCaroli highlights in particular is the example of Ajaṅṭā monastery, about which we have several textual sources that indicate the monastery was located at the purported dwelling site of a *nāga* king. Indeed, the monastery is actually named after the deity that supposedly lived there prior to the monastery’s foundation. The monks there apparently made offerings to the *nāga* in exchange for good fortune, particularly seasonal rains. DeCaroli

⁷⁵ DeCaroli 2004: 20.

⁷⁶ DeCaroli 2004: 76

⁷⁷ DeCaroli 2004: 43

...argues that the monks had an economic reliance upon the spirit-deities because their presence was believed to ensure the rains that pleased the laity, who in turn supported the monks...however...this system of exchange presupposes the importance of the *nāga* at Ajaṇṭā and the public's recognition of the *saṃgha*'s ability to mediate on their behalf.⁷⁸

One of the most interesting approaches DeCaroli takes is to (re)read the life-story (more specifically, three different tellings of it) of the Buddha himself in light of the apparent intimate Buddhist connection with *démon* cults and cults of the dead. He argues that “the enlightenment tales are both reflective [of Buddhist deity cults before and during the writing of the narratives] and productive insofar as they model appropriate interaction between spirit-deities and the ideal monk, Śākyamuni.”⁷⁹ DeCaroli essentially argues that the Buddha's enlightenment story is (or, at least on one level, acts as) a kind of foundation myth for the cultic practices of subjugating *démons* and performing funerary rites. Regarding the latter, DeCaroli argues that the enlightenment story contains coded references to Brahmanical funerary rites (here Buddhafied), such as the forty-nine day period of the rite (corresponding to the length of the Buddha's meditation under the Bodhi tree) and the offering of milk rice to the starving Buddha-to-be by Sujātā, milk rice being a traditional Brahmanical funerary offering. With regards to the subjugation of spirits, DeCaroli notes that Bodh Gaya has long held the reputation of being a particular haunt of *démons* (and is depicted as being such in the enlightenment stories). And Mara himself, whom the Buddha must defeat before he can become fully awakened, “can be understood as an, or perhaps *the*, archetypal spirit-deity.”⁸⁰ DeCaroli's point in highlighting all this is to argue that the Buddha's enlightenment story was one of the ways Buddhists portrayed themselves to the Indian public as being supremely qualified for the task of dealing with the dead, with *démons*, and conducting all the rites which that entailed.

All this raises the question of exactly how Buddhists (especially Buddhist monastics) viewed the spirit cults in which they were participating. That is to say, were spirit-deities and their ritual placation considered to be actually important to Buddhist monks? Or was it all a skillful means (read: swindle) by which Buddhists made themselves relevant to the lay community, playing off their superstitions to gain monetary support? DeCaroli argues that, while

⁷⁸ DeCaroli 2004: 77.

⁷⁹ DeCaroli 2004: 106.

⁸⁰ DeCaroli 2004: 116.

there were likely some swindlers to be had, by and large all the archeological and especially textual (*jātaka*, *sūtra*, and *vinaya* stories) indicate that Buddhist monks genuinely believed in these beings, at least as much as the broader community did, and were majorly concerned with their placation and, more importantly, their conversion.

In addition to numerous sculptures of *yakṣas* and other *démons* that are commonly found acting as the guardians of monasteries,⁸¹ “numerous accounts exist in which monks or nuns turn to spirit-deities in times of need.”⁸² First-hand travelogues by Chinese monks visiting India depict Indian monastics making extensive, regular offerings to local protector deities, and there are *sūtras* which give protection spells said to be capable of defending monks from hostile *démons*. In the monastic codes, there are numerous rules that indicate Buddhist monastics took the (ever-present) existence of *démons* for granted. Even more than that, the texts depict a kind of low-level warfare between Buddhist monastics and hostile *démons*, a monk driving off a *preta* in one story, another monk being killed by a *yakṣa* or possessed by a *piśāca* in the next.⁸³

⁸¹ The *kirimukha*, the fierce, ravenous head, that is alternatively associated with *nāgas* and *yakṣas*, as well as Rāhu, commonly appears as a kind of gargoyle above or on doors of Buddhist monasteries.

⁸² DeCaroli 2004: 122.

⁸³ The warfare comparison, far from being hyperbole, is quite apt, especially when we consider the possibility, as Samuel (2008) does (working off of Dundas’s studies on the Jains (1991, 2002)), that the renunciate traditions of Buddhism and Jainism may have had their basis in the Vedic era warrior brotherhood known as the *vrātyas*, who were groups of seemingly celibate (certainly unmarried) young men who engaged in violent acts such as cattle rustling. We might think of them as a kind of ancient Indian street gang. Samuel asserts: “...military imagery is quite widespread in both Jaina and Buddhist traditions. Of course, both Jainas and the Buddhists had founders from the *ṣṭriya* or warrior caste. Dundas noted that Jainism has in fact historically been ambivalent about war, and Jaina communities have certainly been supported by violent and aggressive rulers.” Samuel argues that the same holds true for Buddhist rulers, citing the example of King Aśoka (c. 304-232 BCE) and the Sri Lankan King Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (r. 161-137 BCE), the latter justifying genocidal slaughter of Tamils on religious grounds. In fact, there is evidence that Buddhist kings in India throughout the medieval period considered devotion to the Buddha to be a source of power which enabled them to conquer their enemies. In an inscription on the ninth century king Kāntideva of Harikela in West Bengal, there is “a benedictory verse in praise of the Buddha [after which] it begins the eulogy of the donor’s forebears with this king, saying that his devotion to the Buddha had intensified his power and that he had [thereby] conquered all his enemies” (Sanderson 2009: 86). In another instance, the Rāṣṭrakūta king Govinda III, also in the ninth century, is said to have had an image of the Buddhist savior goddess Tārā imprinted on his war banner (94). For a succinct yet detailed and systematic account of the history of royal patronage of Buddhism in India, see Sanderson 2009: 70-108. Ultimately, however, Samuel hesitates to make too strong of a connection between the *śramaṇa* groups and the *vrātyas*: “...while Dundas’s point about martial imagery is true enough, it is also true that the central emphasis of the early Buddhist and Jaina teachings are anything but martial.” (127-128). I would strongly disagree with this assessment, and would counter-argue that the Buddhist teachings are martial, but the enemy upon which the Buddhist monastics are waging war are their afflictive emotions and *by extension* the armies of hostile and malicious *démons*. Furthermore, there are statements attributed to the Buddha from the Nikāya canon that employ highly militaristic and violent imagery, perhaps most notably this statement from the *Dhammapada*:

Having killed
 Mother, father,
 Two warrior kings,

DeCaroli points out that what usually determines a Buddhist monastic's success in confronting a hostile *démon* (whether he or she is able to convert it or ends up being killed by it) in these stories is his or her discipline and, by extension, spiritual power. *Démons*, at least untamed ones, are usually depicted as being driven by (or causing) intense passions that the good Buddhist should have learned to control.⁸⁴ Therefore, one is tempted to read the controlling of *démons* in the Buddhist imagination as a metaphor for the overcoming of negative emotions (recalling Doniger's psychologizing of *démons* in Buddhism). To a certain extent this is a fair reading, except that it should be kept in mind that the Buddhists themselves almost certainly saw *démons* as literally existing entities, but that the taming of passions necessarily and logically gave one the power to subjugate and control them. Such control is an external sign of one's worthiness and attainments as a Buddhist monk or nun. As DeCaroli explains: "On this level, the taming of popular deities becomes an act that is laden with spiritual meaning. Such an encounter [with a hostile spirit deity] dramatically demonstrates one's resistance to the tendencies that lead to rebirth and mark the *saṃgha* as a worthy field of merit, with all the donative consequences that this validation entails."⁸⁵

In the final part of the book, DeCaroli explains that this dynamic remained an integral part of Buddhism as it spread beyond India into other Asian countries. While only a relative select few Indian *laukika* (mundane) deities would be exported with Buddhism, the logic of Buddhism's power over the spirit world remained stable.⁸⁶ To cite one of many examples,

A kingdom and its subjects,
The brahmin, undisturbed, moves on. (Fronsdal 2008: 76)

Now, the commentary to this passage explains that these statements are of course metaphorical, mother and father representing attachment and aversion and so on. But the point here is that the Buddha expresses this teaching by using the rhetoric of patricide, matricide, regicide, and genocide.

⁸⁴ "The monastic ability to suppress base desires protects the *saṃgha* from the threats and seductions of the spirit deities and, I would argue, it is this same ability that makes the Buddhist teachings so appealing to the passion-driven spirit-deities. On numerous occasions such beings seek out the *saṃgha* in order to gain ease from their overwhelming passions and respite from their hungers by taking refuge in the Law. For this reason, spirit-deities are drawn to moral actions and tend to look favorably upon those who embody fearless virtue" (DeCaroli 2004: 46). Hence, these stories show the *démons* to be the embodiments of (or "literal metaphors" for) the main afflictive emotions of Buddhist doctrine; ignorance, craving and hatred. In fact, rebirth as one of these species of *démon* was considered to be a result of a particular transgression. For instance, "birth into the form of a yakṣa or yakṣī is often a punishment for sexual transgressions" (Sutherland 1991: 123). But at the same time, their conversion and impressment into the service of the *saṃgha* as protectors of the dharma, represent "literal metaphors" for the taming of the same afflictive emotions. According to a famous medieval Indian collection of folk tales, the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, "speaking the truth, circumambulation of images, and eating only at the time when the Buddhist mendicants do are acts of devotion that please yakṣas" (DeCaroli 2004: 46).

⁸⁵ DeCaroli 2004: 117.

⁸⁶ As we shall see, this is particularly true in the case of Tibetan Buddhism.

DeCaroli notes that traditions like the Chinese Ghost Festival “demonstrate how completely the *saṃgha* became associated with the tending of the dead.”⁸⁷

All in all, DeCaroli’s work in *Haunting the Buddha* is a badly needed and necessary corrective to the “inherited biases” within Buddhist studies. After the wealth of evidence and soundness of argument that DeCaroli is able to marshal, the field should be able to put to rest the tired stereotype that spirit cults in Buddhism were “reluctant concessions to the masses” and that there was historically “consistent tension and deep incompatibility between Buddhism and spirit religions.”⁸⁸

BUDDHIST MYTHS OF RĀHU

Now, with this understanding of how Buddhism has consistently related to laukika-level *démons*, from its earliest texts and institutions, we can return once more to the *démon* of the hour, Rāhu. Given the relative popularity of this figure both in the *purāṇic* myths and astrology-related literature (including texts explaining *grahapūjā*), as well as the numerous sites from all over India in which his image is depicted, Rāhu would seem to be one of the transnational *démons* that Buddhists would have been likely to subordinate and claim as their own. Indeed, early Buddhist literature refers to Rāhu quite frequently.

In certain Buddhist myths of Rāhu, many of the same themes encountered in the *purāṇas* are also present, though of course the Buddha takes on the role elsewhere assigned to an overlord deity like Viṣṇu, Śiva, Indra, or Brahmā. But before we examine these, let us first look at the Buddhist accounts of Rāhu’s place in the structure of the cosmos (comparable to the Hindu cosmological descriptions given in, say, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), drawn from both *sūtra* and abhidharma literature. According to the systematic Buddhist descriptions of the structure of the universe,⁸⁹ Rāhu is one of several particularly important asura kings who resides at the base of the gigantic Mount Sumeru (or Meru), the axis mundi of the Hindu/Buddhist cosmos. Some of the Buddhist descriptions of Rāhu show why “titan” is, indeed, a good translation of “*asura*.”

⁸⁷ DeCaroli 2004:147.

⁸⁸ DeCaroli 2004: 7-8.

⁸⁹ All of these accounts are said to have been spoken by the Buddha in approximately 500 BCE and written down about 500 years later. But like the Hindu *purāṇic* literature (and at about the same time), these Buddhist cosmological myths seem to have developed, likely orally, over the course of centuries.

The asurs, who reside under Maha Méru, are of immense size. Rāhu is 76,800 miles high; 19,200 miles broad across the shoulders; his head is 14,500 miles round: his forehead is 4,800 miles broad; from eye-brow to eye-brow measures 800 miles; his mouth is 3,200 miles in size, and 4,800 miles deep; the palm of his hand is 5,600 miles in size; the joints of his fingers, 800 miles; the sole of his foot, 12,000 miles; from his elbow to the tip of his finger is 19,200 miles; and with one finger he can cover the sun or moon, so as to obscure their light.⁹⁰

There are numerous other Buddhist accounts of Rāhu that make him out to be the most famous and well known of the asuras. In a Chinese translation of the *Dīgha Nikāya*,⁹¹ Rāhu rules a massive, splendidly built city to the north of Mount Sumeru.⁹² Angered by the sun and the moon's repeated violation of his territory, Rāhu is said to have gone to war with Indra over this, threatening to steal the luminaries and use them as his ornaments.

According to other sūtras, Rāhula sometimes leaves his dwelling beneath the sea and ascends Mount Sumeru to see the heavenly maidens. Unable to see them for the brightness of the sun, he covers the sun with his right hand. This creates a solar eclipse. When he covers the moon, a lunar eclipse occurs.⁹³

Buddhaghosa, the renowned fifth century Theravādin monk-scholar, in his commentary on the *Dīghā Nikāya* tells a story of how Rāhu, who was originally hostile to the Buddhist cause, was converted when the Buddha expanded his size, making Rāhu seem a dwarf by comparison.⁹⁴ Here, Rāhu is described as being 4800 *yojanas* ("leagues") tall, so tall that the deepest ocean only comes up to his knees. Note here that Rāhu seems to be generally depicted as greater and more powerful than he tends to be in the Hindu context. In one Buddhist retelling of the origin myth of Rāhu found in the *Mahābhārata*, it is the demiurge Brahmā, not Viṣṇu, who hurls a

⁹⁰ Hardy 2003: 58.

⁹¹ "The Long Discourses of the Buddha" one of four large collections of early Buddhist sutras.

⁹² Our world, Jambudvīpa, is usually said to be located south of the great mountain in Buddhist cosmology.

⁹³ Sadakata 2004: 55.

⁹⁴ Bhattacharyya 2000: 65-66. Bhattacharyya mentions a whole list of various facts on Rāhu described throughout the Pāli canon, its commentarial literature as well as other types of literature such as the *jātaka* tales. He mentions that Rāhu is identified as one of five causes of drought, similar to the ill effects attributed to the eclipse in the *Brhat Samhitā*. Also, Rāhu has several other names, including Rāhubhadda and Veroca (a.k.a. Vairocana). As we shall see in more detail in chapter two, the figure of Vairocana is extremely significant in Hindu and Buddhist mythology.

discus to cut off Rāhu’s head. He is successful in this, but Rāhu then proceeds to (somehow) hurl it back, cutting Brahmā’s cheek “and inflicted such pain on him that he fainted and remained unconscious for a long time.”⁹⁵ Indeed, Buddhists seem to have fully accepted the story of how Rāhu lost his head (though details may change depending on which story one looks at). Most notably, however, while Hindu depictions of Rāhu fairly consistently describe or show him as a disembodied head, or at best, a head with two hands⁹⁶ (as in the case of the *kirtimukha*), Buddhist depictions or descriptions of Rāhu usually give him a full, intact body. For example, as noted above he is described in one account as having full arms complete with shoulders as well as legs. In another, he obscures the sun and the moon, not by swallowing them but by simply covering them with his massive hands (see Fig. 1).⁹⁷

Of course, despite Rāhu’s seemingly greater power in the Buddhist context, he is, obviously, still shown to be subordinate (humiliatingly so) to this mythic complex’s central deity, the Buddha. This brings us to what are perhaps the earliest textual references to Rāhu in the Buddhist tradition, two very short *suttas* that appear in the Pāli *Samyutta Nikāya* (“The Connected Discourses” of the Buddha), the *Candimā* (Skt. Chandra) and *Suriya* (Skt. Sūrya) *Suttas*. While all the *Nikāyas* contain numerous *suttas* (Skt. *sūtras*) in which the Buddha interacts with *démons*, the *Samyutta Nikāya* contains by far the most, with entire sections devoted entirely to the Buddha’s discourses with various deities or classes of *démons*. The *suttas* in which Rāhu appears are in the *devaputta* or “young *devas*” section, since the moon and sun were apparently thought to be “junior gods.” Like most of the *Samyutta Nikāya suttas*, these two are quite short, and highly formulaic. In fact, both have essentially identical structure, with the only notable

⁹⁵ Rechung 1976: 9. This story is told in the Tibetan tradition to explain the origin of medicine, because, when Brahmā comes to, he must think of a way to heal the cut on his cheek. He comes up with the idea of washing the wound out with clean water, and this becomes the first act of healing in creation. Other stories are told in Tibetan Buddhism which connects Rāhu with the origin of medicine which we shall examine later.

⁹⁶ For another example of Rāhu shown in this manner, see Banerjea 1956: Plate XXXI.

⁹⁷ See also Pingree 1989: 6 for a description of a bas relief depiction of the planets found at the ruins of the Buddhist monastery at Vikramaśīla in north India. In this Rāhu is depicted as having a full body, with the lower body of a snake. The British Museum in London also holds an exquisite thirteenth century statue of Rāhu from Orissa, previously a major Buddhist center in southern India, which shows the planetary deity in full body form (also with a curled snake tail for a lower body) holding both the sun and moon in his hands (see Fig. 1). We should be careful, however, not to push the distinction in the depiction of Rāhu in Buddhism and Hinduism too hard. In fact, modern Hindu depictions of Rāhu usually show him in full body form, with a snake tail as well. See Pingree 1989: 5, for a description of modern statuettes used in *grahāpūja*, which shows Rāhu in this form. Generally speaking, however, from the materials I have seen, Rāhu, in the Buddhist context from very early on, tends to be depicted as greater in both a physical sense (based on how he is described in texts or shown in statuary) and in his cosmological role. As we saw in the Hindu myths, Rāhu is usually shown to be a catalyst for cosmic disaster, but he is relatively impotent in and of himself. In the Buddhists myths, on the other hand, he tends to be an impressive godly (or demonic) power in his own right.

difference being that, the first takes place during a lunar eclipse, the second during a solar eclipse. Both follow the same plot. Rāhu (who, interestingly, is called here “lord of the *asuras*”) attacks the moon and sun,⁹⁸ and the luminary deity calls, in verse, on the Buddha to save him, notably taking refuge in the Buddha in the process:

Let homage be to you, the Buddha!
O hero, you are everywhere released.
I have fallen into captivity,
So please be my refuge.⁹⁹

The Buddha, residing in Sāvattihī (where a great many of the *sūtras* take place), hears the young god’s plea and responds by commanding Rāhu to release him:

Candimā [or Suriya] has gone for refuge
To the Tathāgata, the Arahant.
Release Candimā [Suriya], O Rāhu,
Buddhas have compassion for the world.¹⁰⁰

Rāhu is immediately compelled to release the luminary, the eclipse is aborted, and Rāhu flees to Vepacitti to explain to him what has occurred.¹⁰¹ Vepacitti first asks:

⁹⁸ Bhikku Bodhi, in an endnote, gives a synopsis of the commentary on these suttas which gives some fascinating information on the nature of eclipses in Buddhist cosmology, worth reproducing here in full:

When Rāhu sees the sun and moon shining brightly, he becomes jealous and enters their orbital paths, where he stands with mouth agape. It then seems as if the lunar and solar mansions have been plunged into the great hell, and the devas in those mansions all cry out simultaneously in terror. While Rāhu can cover the mansions with his hands, jaw, and tongue, and can even stuff his cheeks with them, he is unable to obstruct their motion. If he did make such an attempt they would split his head and come through the other side or pull him along and push him down...because their motion is determined by the law of kamma [Skt. karma] and is extremely hard for anyone to stop directly. (Bodhi 2000: 388, n 158)

Interestingly the Buddhist explanation here says nothing about the sun and moon eventually passing out of Rāhu’s severed neck (again, it appears clear that Rāhu is, in this account, more than simply a disembodied head), simply that he cannot hold them for long or the force of their continuing motion would tear them out of his body.

⁹⁹ Bodhi 2000: 144 and 145.

¹⁰⁰ Bodhi 2000: 145

¹⁰¹ Vepacitti (which means “crazy nerve” owing to his deranged mind) is also here called “lord of the asuras” and who is consistently depicted as Sakra’s (Indra’s) arch-enemy in several early Buddhist *sūtras* and other Buddhist literature. It is interesting that both figures are referred to as “lord of the asuras” when Rāhu is clearly Vepacitti’s

Why, Rāhu, did you come in a hurry?
Why did you release Candimā?
Having come as if in shock,
Why do you stand there frightened?

Rāhu replies:

My head would have split in seven parts,
While living I would have found no ease,
If, when chanted over by the Buddha's verse,
I had not let go of Candimā [Suriya].

Both suttas end here. Obviously, the point of these stories is to show the Buddha's power and, closely related, the power of taking refuge in him. What is striking here, though, is the ease with which the Buddha alters the cosmos, and unlike in the *Rāmāyaṇa* examined above, no cosmic catastrophe follows upon the Buddha's thwarting of Rāhu. Rāhu runs to Vepacitti, as he does to Indra in the Hanuman myth, but Vepacitti seems powerless to change the situation. Interestingly, though, there is a story from the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* which is virtually identical to these two Pāli suttas. Here, the sage Prabhākara earns his name by stopping a solar eclipse, commanding Rāhu to let go of the sun by simply uttering the word "Svasti."¹⁰² While I know of no other story in which a sage reverses an eclipse like this so easily, I suspect that it may be an Indian hagiographical trope on which both the Pāli suttas and the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* are drawing.¹⁰³

The *Candimā* and *Suriya Suttas*, however, are fairly forgettable *suttas*, and there are a number of others that depict far more significant, interesting, and noteworthy encounters

subordinate. Rāhu might be understood here to be acting in the capacity of Vepacitti's general or steward, in much the same way he is often depicted in *purāṇic* literature as being the messenger or subordinate to a greater asura lord such as Jalandhara. For more on Vepacitti and his conflicts with Sakka in Buddhist *sūtras*, *sūtric* commentary and *jātaka* stories, see Bhattacharyya 2000: 64-65. In a commentary on the *Samyutta Nikāya*, Vepacitti, Rāhu, and another figured named Prahārada are described as being the three main asura lords (Bhattacharya 2000: 66).

¹⁰² Mani 2010: 592.

¹⁰³ There could also be a direct one-way influence, as well, with the Pāli source drawing on the Sanskrit story, or vice-versa. However, this is just as speculative.

between the Buddha and various *démons*, such as the hostile *yakṣa* Sūciloma, who in one *sutta*, threatens to drive the Buddha insane and throw him over the Ganges if he does not answer his questions. It would seem, then, that Rāhu is a relatively minor figure in the earlier *suttas*. That said, however, Rāhu, or at least his symbolic presence as the eclipse, plays a more significant role in various accounts of the Buddha’s life story than any *yakṣa*.

As we might expect just from the brief examples of Indian mythology examined here thus far, there are multiple versions of the Buddha’s hagiography, based on numerous texts in numerous sectarian traditions. But an eclipse factors in some way into the story of Siddhartha Gautama’s quest for enlightenment, marking one or more significant events in his life. In fact, all sources agree that his son is named Rāhula, and this is often explained as being because he was born on the night of a lunar eclipse. In canto II of Aśvaghōṣa’s *Buddhacarita*, in a clever play on words, Siddhartha’s wife Yaśodharā is said to have given birth to

a son who had a face like Rahu’s foe [Chandra, the moon],
a son who was, indeed, named Rāhula.¹⁰⁴

Upon hearing that his son was born, Siddhartha is said to have called him a “fetter,” because he considered him an obstacle to renouncing the householder’s life as he had come to realize he needed to do. Edward Thomas avers, though that “Rāhula” does not mean “fetter,” but rather comes from the fact that the boy was born during an eclipse, and names deriving from astronomical phenomena are quite common in India.¹⁰⁵ I would argue that both interpretations are correct, and that an eclipse was considered a “fettering” of the moon’s (or sun’s) light.¹⁰⁶

In any case, once again we see the distinctly (and overwhelmingly) negative connotation that is associated with Rāhu. But then, in the Buddha’s hagiography, something very interesting happens regarding Rāhu. The negative omen of the eclipse is inverted, becoming a kind of “backhanded” positive, because, in some versions of the story, the Buddha abandons the palace also on the night of an eclipse. In another version of the story, from the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya*, Yaśodharā dreams of an eclipse right before the bodhisattva’s departure.¹⁰⁷ In another *vinaya* account, the Buddha attains enlightenment on the night of an eclipse, in this version being

¹⁰⁴ Olivelle 2009: 53.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas 2006: 53, fn.1.

¹⁰⁶ Besides, as we saw, the name Rāhu likely comes from a word meaning “desire” or “attachment.”

¹⁰⁷ Strong 2008: 14.

the same night that both his future disciples, his son Rāhula and his main attendant Ānanda, are born.¹⁰⁸

Thus, here, Rāhu marks significant events in the life of the Buddha as he progresses toward enlightenment; a sign of malignancy is, in this case, distinctly (and even supremely) positive, heralding the Buddha's victory over Māra's realm.¹⁰⁹ The question is, why would Buddhist authors use the trope of the eclipse in this way? And why, if my earlier hypothesis is correct, would they depict Rāhu as consistently greater and more powerful in his own right than stories in the non-Buddhist context? There are two possible answers to these questions, one relatively narrow in scope and the other quite broad.

First, the Buddha's association with the concept of the *cakravartin* ("universal ruler") needs to be kept in mind. It is said that, at his birth, brahmin priests foretold that Siddhartha would either become a great, world-conquering king, or a Buddha. Since, as we have seen from the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, eclipses were generally thought to be distinctly bad omens, especially for kings (often auguring their death), it seems logical that the eclipses during the bodhisattva's flight from the palace, or during his enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, signal the "death" of the possibility of Siddhartha's cakravartin-hood.

The second answer involves a general tendency in Buddhist doctrine historically to invert the values, cosmology, and soteriology of, in particular Vedic, Hinduism. This was not unique to Buddhism alone. Just as daimon-cults must be understood as a pan-Indian phenomenon, cutting across religious and philosophical sectarian boundaries, so too was the tendency to intentionally invert the traditional Brahmanical values systems found in Buddhism, Jainism, and many "Hindu" renunciate orders, ultimately leading to the "tantric" movements of the mid to late first millennium of the common era. This process and specifically Rāhu's part in it will be examined in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁸ Roerich 1976: 20.

¹⁰⁹ There is also a relatively early legend associated with the paradigmatic Buddhist king Aśoka in which an eclipse is regarded as a positive omen, though it is caused not by Rāhu, but by the arhat Yaśas who, on an order from Aśoka, eclipses the sun as a signal to yakṣas all across India to simultaneously build 84,000 stupas in one day. See Strong 1989: 115-116. For a more general, but in-depth analysis of the Buddha's hagiography, see Strong 2001.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TANTRIC TRANSFORMATION

In the previous chapter we examined some of the ways in which Buddhist authors used both the character of Rāhu as well as the trope of the eclipse in their scriptures and other writings. In many ways Rāhu is used in much the same way as he is in Hindu myths dating from around the same period, but in other ways the Buddhist literature portrays the asura as a somewhat more powerful figure, and the eclipse, at least in the context of certain versions of the life story of the Buddha, in a kind of symbolic inversion, in which the obscuration of the moon, seen as a overwhelming negative portent within mainstream Indian thought, becomes a portent of the Buddha's enlightenment. The question is, why would Buddhist authors make this rather charged association? Why would they use such a negative symbol for a supposedly supremely positive event?

One possible answer relates to the way Buddhism reinterpreted the asuras and the other more hostile and demonic types of *démons*. Sutherland, in her examination of the place of the yakṣa in Buddhism and Jainism, argues that these religions, at least doctrinally, had an entirely different way of relating to *démons* than did the practitioners of mainstream Brahmanical Hinduism. This is not surprising given that these traditions began as two of many *śramana* (renunciate or ascetic) orders that rhetorically distanced or even downright rejected many normative Brahmanical assumptions.¹¹⁰ Consequently, as might be expected, there are numerous "Hindu" texts that refer to Buddhists and Jains as being heterodox, heretical, or downright evil.¹¹¹ For Sutherland, Buddhists and Jains, from the earliest stages, came to intentionally invert

¹¹⁰ There are numerous sūtras which portray the Buddha rejecting commonly held assumptions in Hindu doctrine and mythology, in particular the ideas of a creator god. See, for instance, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (Walshe 1987: 67-90) in which the Buddha famously explains that Brahmā is actually a fallen god from a higher heaven, and mistakenly thinks that he creates the beings of the universe when they start being reborn in the same realm.

¹¹¹ There are numerous Hindu myths which depict a high god, usually Viṣṇu or Śiva, incarnating as the Buddha in order to test the faithful with a false doctrine. For instance, in the *Agni Purāṇa*, the devas have been overthrown by the asuras and consequently, Mahāviṣṇu incarnates as the Buddha (one of his ten avatars) in order to convert the asuras to Buddhism and away from faith in the Vedas. The plan works, and all the asuras become Buddhists and as a result lose all their power and fall to hell (Mani 2010: 165). Similarly, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states:

When the Kali Age has begun, in order to delude the enemies of the gods, Viṣṇu will be born as the Buddha...When the enemies of the gods come to know the Vedic rites and begin to oppress people, then he will assume an attractive and deluding form and teach adharma to the demons...making them heretics....With words

the cosmology and the pantheon of various types of *démons* as portrayed particularly in Vedic Hinduism:

The heavenly realm, which is so central to Vedic eschatology, assumes an inverted position in the Buddhist and Jain cosmic hierarchy. Heaven, with its temptations to forget dharma and to cast aside spiritual effort for the enjoyment of karmic rewards, is actually a kind of hell, and gods are, in reality, demons who are unable to use the power that they have accrued through sacrifice and meritorious deeds for anything truly dharmic.¹¹²

The more demonic *démons*, like Rāhu, “while [they]...are frequently characterized as enemies of Buddhism...in most cases...retain the capacity for repentance and conversion, and in this sense, they have more in common with humans.”¹¹³ Thus, if we hold to this interpretation, we can read the eclipse symbol of the Buddha’s enlightenment as representing a defeat of the gods who represent the bondage of the laukika level of existence.¹¹⁴

he will delude those who are not deserving of the sacrifice...Homage to Buddha, the pure, the deluder of the demons. (O’Flaherty 1976: 188)

In a similar vein, Buddhists (and other ascetics such as Śaiva renunciates and Jains) frequently appear cast in the role of villains in other forms of Hindu literature. For example, in Somadeva’s ninth century *Kathāsaritsāgara* (the “Ocean of Rivers of Story”), a Buddhist monk by the name of Kṣāntaśīla is the villain of the frame narrative and is ultimately beheaded by the royal protagonist of the story (White 2009: 20).

¹¹² Sutherland 1991: 132.

¹¹³ Sutherland 1991: 133-134.

¹¹⁴ Māra, as ruler of the Desire Realm, is in fact a high ranking god in Buddhist cosmology. Similarly, Māra is commonly identified with Kama, the god of desire, and Yama, the god of death, the forces that keep the universe in order from a Vedic perspective, but simply trap beings in the cycle of suffering from a Buddhist one. The lesser gods, like the sun and moon, as the masters of karmic fate, act as Māra’s henchmen. We can draw an almost exact parallel with the evil demiurge Ialdabaōth and his host of world rulers and “authorities” in Gnostic Christian cosmology. As Brakke (2010) (interestingly, for our purposes) notes regarding one of the few cosmologically detailed Gnostic texts still extant:

The Secret Book According to John provides the most extensive discussion of the rulers and lists of their names. Here the rulers are heavenly authorities, associated with the stars and planets, and astrological fate constitutes much of their power over human beings. The rulers thwart our potential virtue and knowledge of God by controlling our choices astrologically. (64-65)

I do not in any way mean to imply some kind of historical connection between Buddhism and Gnostic Christianity, or that one somehow influenced the other. I simply mean to suggest that such a cross-cultural comparison may be heuristically useful in understanding how some Buddhists may have regarded the deities of the classical Hindu pantheon. The idea that the planets are, to a certain extent, malignant “world rulers” is strongly attested to in various Indian astrological treatises such as the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. Furthermore, the theme of *démons* as the instruments of karma is also very common. Sutherland cites one story in which an evil king is punished by a yakṣa who tears out one of his eyes. Sutherland comments:

While this interpretation is persuasive, I believe Sutherland’s analysis here is somewhat lacking. In early Buddhist scriptures and other literature, the gods are consistently depicted as upholding Buddhist moral norms. The king of the Vedic gods, Indra (usually called Śakra in Buddhist texts), as well as Brahmā, are depicted as being allies of the Buddha. Meanwhile the asuras are depicted as paradigmatic of worldly (laukika) thinking and morality, which is refuted by the true Dharma. In a perfect example of this dynamic, one sutta in the *Samyutta Nikāya* depicts a kind of debate between Sakka (Skt. Śakra) and Verocana.¹¹⁵ Each speaks twice, with Verocana going first, giving an incomplete statement which Sakka then corrects, making the point that among all goals, patience is best.¹¹⁶ It is strongly implied that Sakka is speaking for the Buddha here. In a similar sutta just before this one, entitled “Victory by Well-Spoken Counsel,” the Buddha relates the story of a debate between Sakka and Vepacitti. Sakka is depicted as speaking (what is implied to be) the correct doctrine, silencing the asuras. Consequently, according to the Buddha: “Sakka, lord of the devas, has won his victory by well-spoken council.”¹¹⁷ Similarly, in a number of famous *Jātakas* (stories of the Buddha’s previous lives), the Buddha is commonly portrayed as having been reborn as a god, even Śakra himself, because of his cultivation of normative Buddhist morality.¹¹⁸ Similarly, there are numerous sūtras in

In this case, the yakkha functions as an instrument of retribution who, because his nature is violent and the very embodiment of cruelty, may be employed as a sort of “hit man,” punishing the more egregious evil of the king whose violation of his charge as just ruler has drawn the impersonal rebellion of nature against his deadly excesses. (Sutherland 1991: 114)

¹¹⁵ Yet another figure called “Lord of the Asuras,” whom this sutta is named after. “Virocana” is also a very famous asura in the *purāṇic* literature, and appears in a number of different collections. In one story, he and Indra are said to have both been the students of the creator god Prajāpati, from whom they learned about the concept of Ātman, or the supreme Self. Virocana was a poor student, however, and misinterpreted Prajāpati’s teachings and spread the false doctrine among the asuras that the body and soul were identical. The devas, on the other hand, recognized the true doctrine of Ātman, that the soul is independent of the body and mind. (Mani 2010: 862). The idea that Indra (Śakra) represents the paradigmatic good student and Virocana the paradigmatic bad student may also be at play in the “Verocana, Lord of the Asuras” Sutta.

¹¹⁶ Bodhi 2000: 326.

¹¹⁷ Bodhi 2000: 324.

¹¹⁸ To take one notable example in probably the most famous collection of Sanskrit *Jātakas*, Ārya Śūra’s *Jātakamālā* (a compilation, made in the mid first millennium CE, of earlier stories, many of them likely originally oral), the eleventh story begins by saying:

According to tradition, when the Bodhisattva had for some time been assiduously practicing virtue and had made a habit of generosity, self-control, restraint, and pity—when he was devoting his remarkable energies to the good of others—he was at one time born as Śakra, lord of the gods. Around him the aura of celestial majesty shone with greater luster and intensity...The majesty, for the sake of which the Daitya demons breasted the furious onslaught of the world elephants, whose tusks are like clubs, allowed him to enjoy good fortune but did not tarnish his heart with pride. (Ārya Śūra 2006: 81)

which the Buddha advises practices (usually to do with moral restraint) that will lead the doer to be reborn in the heavenly realms.¹¹⁹ Clearly, while the gods are subordinated under Buddha's power and the heavenly realms are seen as inferior to ultimate enlightenment, in these contexts the deva realm of traditional Brahmanical cosmology does not represent a kind of "Buddhist hell," nor are the gods demons, as Sutherland argues.¹²⁰

That is not to say, however, that Sutherland is entirely wrong in her overall analysis. For she goes on to also argue, more accurately I believe, that the śramana groups had an entirely different dynamic when dealing with *démons*, doctrinally, and how they are portrayed in myths and other literature. First she compares the depictions of *démons* (in particular, yakṣas) in Buddhist literature such as suttas and *Jātaka* tales, noting various instances in which a seemingly overwhelmingly hostile yakṣa is tamed upon hearing a teaching by the Buddha, and is consequently converted to the Dharma.¹²¹ That is, the once-hostile *démon* is pacified, not because he switches sides, so to speak, being reborn as a completely different species. Rather, he remains a yakṣa, but is now converted and becomes a *dharmapāla*, protector of the Buddhist teachings. But, as Sutherland points out, in the classical (Vedic) Hindu view, such a shift in behavior violates Vedic dharma, in that the Vedic cosmos is one in which every being must play a specific, predetermined role, or else the entire order of the universe comes undone. "From this point of view, the...conversion of the yakṣa [Skt. yakṣa] is itself a demonic act because it abrogates the ordering principle inherent in the Hindu concept of dharma that underpins the whole cosmological order of Hinduism."¹²²

We can, perhaps, see these two ethical views portrayed in two of the stories related in chapter one above. In the Hindu story in which Hanuman attempts to eat the sun and drives off Rāhu, thus preventing an eclipse, Rāhu receives Indra's aid after invoking the fact that his universal, dharmic duty (namely, causing eclipses) has been disrupted. Consequently, after Indra wounds Hanuman, this disruption leads to the near-collapse of the entire cosmos. In the Buddhist

Consequently, not only do good practices (from a Buddhist perspective) lead to rebirth in the heavens, but some gods are capable of restraining themselves from the poison of pride once there.

¹¹⁹ For instance, while the eleventh sutta of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Kevaddha Sutta*, shows the god Brahmā to be ignorant of the true nature of reality (and a kind of pompous charlatan, convincing lesser *devas* that he is all-knowing when he knows that he is not), in the thirteenth sutta of the collection, the *Tevijja Sutta*, the Buddha advises on the proper practices that, if done, will lead to rebirth in the Brahmā realm. See: Walshe 1987: 175-180, 187-195.

¹²⁰ As we shall see, however, Sutherland's interpretation becomes far more accurate when applied to later tantric developments in Buddhism.

¹²¹ See, for instance, the *Yakkhasamyutta* section of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, Bodhi 2000: 305-316.

¹²² Sutherland 1991: 136.

story, however, when the Buddha prevents Rāhu from eclipsing the sun and the moon, there is notably no great disaster. Rāhu tells his tale to a higher power, as in the Hanuman story, but nothing comes of it. Hence, we can read the seemingly minor and insignificant *Candimā* and *Suriya Suttas* as making significant and highly charged doctrinal statements; the Buddha's power trumps the karmic bonds of the universe, and he can flaunt *dharma* (from a Vedic perspective) with apparent impunity.

Sutherland ends her discussion of the Buddhist dynamic with *démons* by, like DeCaroli, calling attention to the continuity in Buddhist thought between dangerous and unpredictable forces within as well as without, and that control over the inner dimension necessarily leads to control over the outer:

Through an intellectual analysis and simplification of the essential constituents of the cosmos, the individual is able to identify divine and demonic characteristics within himself. In his internal mastery of them, it is implied, he is able to exert an irresistible moral and rational power over the 'actual' demons outside.¹²³

This outer mastery is portrayed in Buddhist art from the earliest period, including the extremely early Bhārhut *stūpa*, which gives the relics of the Buddha a massive retinue of depicted *démons* of every sort, from *nāgas* to *yakṣas*, *yakṣīs*, and *apsarās*, iconography that is reflected in texts like the *Mahāsamaya Sutta*, which is mainly a laundry list of various kinds of *démons*, of every stripe, both fearsome and benign, that are said to have come to wait on the Buddha, and behold his assembly of monks.¹²⁴ This massive retinue of *démons* becomes standard in later Mahāyāna

¹²³ Sutherland 1991: 136. This recalls Doniger's argument that Buddhists tended to "psychologize" the gods, but is more thoughtful in that it recognizes the Buddhist belief that *démons* were, on a certain level at least, independently, ontologically real entities. Besides, Buddhists themselves seem, particularly in ritual texts, to have recognized a clear distinction between outer and inner obstacles or obstructions. But the dividing line between them often becomes unclear (as befits the nature of the *démonic*). For instance, the eighth century Trisamaya Acalanatha *Krodharāja* scripture:

explicitly differentiates inner and outer purification of karmic obstructions. The outer obstacles may be objectified as demonic agents, hostile to well being. The internal obstacles consist of mental tendencies, the *kleśa*, the 'poisons,' karmic debt, and so forth, which bar the path to enlightenment. Without a doubt, these internal obstacles are often garbed in symbols or metaphors and disguised as [external] enemies of Buddhism (Linrothe 1999: 24, 29 n. 36).

¹²⁴ One passage notes that the asura lords are among these hosts:

sūtras, and the Buddha “occup[ies]...in later pictorial representations the central focus of a swirling, Bosch-like *maṇḍala*...”¹²⁵ In fact, it would not be much of a stretch to interpret the early Buddhist *stūpas*, and the descriptions of the Buddha’s *démonic* hosts as loosely organized precursors to the tantric *maṇḍalas*, to the development of which we will now turn.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE DĒMON

As we have seen, based on the earliest extant scriptural texts and architecture, *démons* were apparently ubiquitous within the Buddhist worldview (as they are within all Indic religions). I will argue in the following that as the tradition developed in its “tantric phase,” not only did they remain ubiquitous but became (if they were not already) important, even centrally important, to Buddhist soteriology. The Buddha, as the ideal monk, is consistently and necessarily depicted as being accompanied by a host of submissive *démons* of every moral valence, because the Dharma, it was understood, can convert even the most recalcitrant of beings both human and non-human. The tantric *maṇḍala*, then, which begins to appear in its most basic form in Buddhist texts dating from around the fourth or fifth century CE, should be seen as simply a formalization and a geometrical structuration of this age-old Buddhist literary and

Asuras too, whom Indra’s hand once struck,
 Ocean-dwellers now, in magic skilled,
 Vāsava’s resplendent brothers came,
 The Kālakañjas, terrible to see,
 Dānaveghasas, Vepacitti,
 Sucitti and Phārādha too,
 Fell Namucī, and Bali’s hundred sons
 (Who all were called Veroca) with a band
 Of warriors who joined their master Rāhu,
 Who had come to wish their meeting well. (Walshe 1987: 318)

Interestingly, depending on how one reads this passage, Rāhu is possibly depicted here as being the lord over the whole *asura* host, including Vepacitti (who seems to be his superior in the *Candimā* and *Suriya Suttas*). Regarding the Bhārhut *stūpa*, see DeCaroli 2004: 68 ff.

¹²⁵ Sutherland 1991: 134. Not surprisingly, Rāhu is commonly mentioned as one of the top asura kings in the sometimes absurdly long descriptions of the Buddha’s *démonic* assembly at the beginning of Māhayāna sūtras. For instance, the extremely popular *Lotus Sūtra* lists four asura kings: “Balin [Bali] Asura King, Kharaskandha Asura King, Vemacitri [Pali. Vepacitti] Asura King, and Rāhu Asura King, each with some hundred thousand followers” Bunnō 1975: 33. Also of note, Māhayāna sūtras also commonly list, among the key benefits of their recitation, the protection of fearsome, but ultimately (due to their conversion) benevolent, *démons*. The *Lotus Sūtra* in particular offers *dhāraṇī* “spells” capable of invoking the aid of ten *rākasas* and ten *rākāsīs*, as well as the popular early Buddhist protectress Hārītī, “the Mother of Demon Sons” (Bunnō 1975: 331). For a discussion of this early and very important female protector deities in Buddhism, see Shaw 2006: 110-142.

artistic trope.¹²⁶ Much of the ritual practice of tantric and early “proto-tantric” texts should also be seen in the context of the importance of *démonic* cults and *démon*-placating/subjugating/conversion rituals performed by the Buddhist *saṅgha*. The practices that characterize Māhāyāna, and then later Vāḥrayāna, Buddhism as it developed in India (as well as in Tibet, China, and Japan) from the mid-first to the early second millennium CE can be interpreted, on one level, as simply more advanced ritual techniques (we might even characterize them as weapons) in the *saṅgha*’s ongoing war with *démonic* forces.¹²⁷

It may be objected that Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, based on Mahāyāna cosmological paradigms which assign numerous Buddha fields (*buddhakṣetra*) to multiple directions in the universe, primarily (or exclusively) depict enlightened (that is, *lokottara*-level) beings and have little to do with *démon*-cults, but everything to do with attaining enlightenment. Indeed, by the sixth century or so, the institutional *maṇḍala*, as Davidson has characterized it, had fully developed within the Buddhist ritual complex, complete with its *abhiṣeka* rites of sacralized kingship for the purpose of realizing oneself as a Buddha.¹²⁸ When *laukika*-level *démons* do appear in these *maṇḍalas*, they tend to be depicted on the outside ring, acting as a kind of fence defending the enlightened beings inside. That is, they are relegated to secondary or even tertiary roles, behind the Buddha’s “sons,” the *bodhisattvas*.

¹²⁶ Samuel argues that the first rudimentary Buddhist *maṇḍala* is described in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa (Golden Light) Sūtra*, which was translated into Chinese in the early fifth century. This text describes the “scheme of the four Buddhas of the four directions...” which becomes the basic, even default, structure of Buddhist *maṇḍalas* in later textual descriptions and artistic representations. As for the terms “tantra,” “tantric” and “proto-tantra,” which I will be using from here on, their definition is much debated within Buddhist and Asian studies generally, a debate which I intend to sidestep. For our purposes we can define “tantra” and “tantric Buddhism” as a strand of Indian religion that has specific and notable doctrinal, ritual and iconographical features of which I specifically identify four as being key; (1) the self-identification of a practitioner with a transcendent deity who (2) is envisioned as an imperial lord over a retinue of secondary, emanated deities in a *maṇḍala*. (3) These deities often (though not necessarily) are wrathful or semi-wrathful in appearance and are depicted as being in union with consorts. And (4) “tantric” practice highlights the use of transgressive violence or sexual acts, either literally performed or visualized, often for the purpose of gaining “*siddhis*” or supernatural powers. Secondary features of tantric practice include the importance of a personal guru to transmit empowerments and secret instructions, emphasis on mantras, and analogical correlation between deities, directions, colors, places, times and so forth. For in depth discussions of the definition of “tantra” and various methodologies used to study it, see White 2001: 3-38, Payne 2006: 1-31 and Orzech 2011: 3-18.

¹²⁷ Broadly defined as both internal and external obstacles, including not just the hostile beings of the spirit-world, but the often all-too hostile beings of the human realm. As the first millennium wore on, Buddhists seem to have been coming under increasing pressure to make themselves relevant, struggling for patronage against competing and (certainly in the case of the Muslim invasions) downright hostile non-Buddhist religious groups. See Davidson 2002: 75-112.

¹²⁸ For the development of the “institutional *maṇḍala*” and the notion that it sacralizes the medieval Indian “segmentary state,” see Davidson 2002: 113-168. For an example of one of these *maṇḍalas*, the *Trailokyavijaya Maṇḍala*, made up of a central *maṇḍala* surrounded by four directional *maṇḍalas*, each containing a central Buddha figure surrounded by *bodhisattvas*, see p. 138.

This is also the case in early tantric Buddhist ritual texts, such as the highly significant seventh century ritual text *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, and in sculptural depictions in northern India during this period as well. In fact, in the latter the *démons* are depicted as being secondary to the lokottara deities by their very stature, appearing often as ugly, portly dwarves waiting on handsome, royally attired Buddhas or bodhisattvas.¹²⁹ Rob Linrothe, in his study of the evolution of wrathful laukika deities in Buddhist art, classifies these relatively early and relatively minor figures as “stage one” depictions of “*krodha-vighnāntaka*” (“wrathful destroyers of obstacles”) that “derive from Yakṣa figures, the localized earth deities who were incorporated into Buddhism as protectors at an early period.”¹³⁰ In stage one *krodha-vighnāntaka* depictions, the *démons* appear as, at best, the servants of the main lokottara figure. Nonetheless, as ritual texts such as the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* attest, these henchmen figures were anything but marginalized by Buddhist thinkers. Rather, they have become integrally important messengers, in the Hermetic sense, acting as a kind of personal *démon* for the lokottara deity.¹³¹ Specifically, they clear away obstacles in the initial phase of the ritual so that the rest of the practice can be carried out as smoothly as possible. One *krodha-vighnāntaka* mentioned is the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī’s *démon*, Yamāntaka, whom the practitioner is enjoined to invoke with the wrathful mantra “Om āḥ hūm” which:

...embodies the “essence” of Yamāntaka; it is therefore used in any ritual for the purpose of destroying malevolent obstacles...Placing his hand on the head of Yamāntaka, Mañjuśrī invokes the authorizing presence of all *buddhas*. Yamāntaka becomes an agent of the *bodhisattva*, who in turn is an agent of all *buddhas*. So empowered, Yamāntaka gains

¹²⁹ The rotund and semi-wrathful appearance is one common way yakṣas were depicted in Indian art generally. Indeed, most of the important Buddhist protector deities began their careers as being associated in some way with the yakṣa species of *démon*.

¹³⁰ Linrothe 1999: 20. Linrothe defines “*krodha-vighnāntaka*” as a kind of general term for the most powerful wrathful deities that can be (but is not necessarily) applied to various types of Buddhist protector deities including *dvārapāla*, *dikpāla*, *kṣetrapāla*, *lokapāla*, and *dharmapāla* as well as, in later phases of Buddhist tantra, fully enlightened meditational deities. The various *pālas* are classified based on what they protect. So, for example, a *dvārapāla* is a “Gate Guardian” while a *dharmapāla* is a trans-local protector of the Buddha’s teachings. These deities may be laukika or lokottara level. As we shall see (in true ambiguous *démonic* fashion) the laukika/lokottara divide becomes more and more blurred within Buddhist tantric literature, and the distinction becomes more of a sliding scale than a clear-cut dialectic.

¹³¹ Or perhaps the term “familiar” in the sense of a witch or wizard’s preternatural animal servants, would serve as a better term.

mastery over all evil forces within the world. In subduing “all evil-minded beings,” Yamāntaka converts them into agents of his own aggressively purifying, protective force.¹³²

Yamāntaka here is technically a *laukika*-level *démon*, but he is empowered by the lokottara deities in order to act as their operative within the world to, at least in part, bind other *laukika démon*s. Yamāntaka thus, in some sense, is parallel to the (yet) unenlightened practitioner. It should also be noted that, in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, Yamāntaka’s “mantra counteracts the power of [Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaṇapati, Mūrdhātaka, and Brahma] that has been set in motion by their adherents, and subjects that power – these deities – to the ends of the [*Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*] practitioner.”¹³³

In one sense there is no “upgrade” or “promotion,” so to speak, of the converted *démon* protector. In other words, there is no significant difference between earlier, pre-tantric Buddhist protectors, and the proto-tantric Yamāntaka. Both are still acting in their “hit man” function as dispensers of karmic retribution. But, on the other hand, there is a big difference between the two, in that the latter is consciously directed and controlled by the Buddhist practitioner in a way that the earlier protectors do not appear to have been. As seen above, the yakṣas of pre-tantric Buddhism were thought to act as automatic, impersonal dispensers of karmic justice. A passage from the Pali *Ambaṭṭa Sutta* perfectly depicts this earlier dynamic. The scene is of a particularly rude young brahmin debating with the Buddha. The Buddha has just asked the young man a question, which he refuses to answer. Again, the Buddha asks him the question and

Again Ambaṭṭha remained silent, and the Lord said: ‘Answer me now, Ambaṭṭha, this is not a time for silence. Whoever, Ambaṭṭha, does not answer a fundamental question put to him by a Tathāgata by the third asking has his head split into seven pieces. And at that moment Vajrapāṇi [Skt. Vajrapāṇi] the yakṣha, holding a huge iron club, flaming, ablaze and glowing, up in the sky just above Ambaṭṭha, was thinking: ‘If this young man Ambaṭṭha

¹³² Wallis 2002: 38.

¹³³ Wallis 2002: 39. For more on the development of Yamāntaka’s iconography in tantric Buddhism see Linrothe 1999: 162-176.

does not answer a proper question put to him by the Blessed Lord by the third time of asking, I'll split his head into seven pieces!’¹³⁴

Ambaṭṭha then sees Vajrapāṇi and is compelled to respond to the Buddha’s question out of mortal terror. What is notable about this passage for our purposes is that there seems to be no direction on the part of the Buddha to Vajrapāṇi. The yakṣa is not in any way ordered or directed to threaten Ambaṭṭha’s life. In fact, he appears to be out of the Buddha’s immediate control, acting on his own volition, and is only responding to the brahmin’s bad deed.

However, this story from Ambaṭṭa Sutta is among the earliest that I know of that portrays a *krodha-vighnāntaka* Buddhist protector *démon*. Indeed, Vajrapāṇi has retained his status as the original Buddhist protector *démon*, and his apotheosis in Buddhist texts (from the Pali-Nikāya and Māhayāna sūtric literature to the tantras) is paradigmatic of the evolving centrality of *démons* within Buddhist thought. In some of the earlier Māhayāna sūtras, such as the Perfection of Wisdom on Eight Thousand Verses, Vajrapāṇi retains his status as kind of “automatic” protector, said to be “the great yakṣa, [who] constantly follows behind the irreversible Bodhisattva.” In other sources from the same period (early first millennium CE) he consistently appears as the most powerful general in command of the yakṣas, but is still only on par with relatively low-ranking deities like the Four Directional Kings and Brahmā; that said, however, he has been promoted to the level of a great bodhisattva.¹³⁵

By the *kriyā tantras*, though, of which the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* is probably the most outstanding example, Vajrapāṇi has become the primary protector and subduer of harmful forces, identified closely, or even exactly, with other *krodha-vighnāntaka* like Yamāntaka, and significantly, as the holder of “essence mantras,” like the important “Om āḥ hūm” mantra mentioned above.¹³⁶ This role as the “Lord of Mantras” is very interesting. In the context of the

¹³⁴ Walshe 1987: 115-116. “Vajrapāṇi,” meaning “Vajra in hand,” is an epithet of Indra, and the two figures are sometimes identified within both Buddhist textual commentary and art depictions as closely related, if not exactly the same *démon*. See Obbink 1949: 137-139.

¹³⁵ Snellgrove 1987: 134-135. It is unclear in the Pāli suttas what position he maintains within the Buddhist soteriological ranking system.

¹³⁶ Wallis 2002: 39. Regarding the *kriyā tantras*, these texts are generally regarded as the earliest and least developed of the tantric scriptures according to the Tibetan bibliographic classification scheme, followed, in order of soteriological effectiveness, by the *caryā*, *yoga*, and *yoginī* (or *anuttarayoga) tantras. This classification system is often somewhat arbitrary and inconsistent, but generally speaking, the rituals described in the lower tantras like the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* are external and more for the purpose of mundane, this-worldly powers (not, primarily, for the attainment of full enlightenment). The “higher” the tantra, the more likely the rituals (at least as interpreted by

Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa, we might consider such “essence mantras” as comparable to magical weapons that, as we have seen, are capable of subduing potentially obstructive laukika deities. But by the yoga tantras, which appear in the bibliographic record about a hundred years after the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, Vajrapāṇi has been promoted even further, now acting not only in the capacity of a *krodha-vighnāntaka* guardian *démon*, but he is also among the highest deities of the enlightened pantheon, essentially a fully awakened Buddha, identified interchangeably with Vajradhara (which has the same meaning as Vajrapāṇi; “Vajra-in-Hand”) and Vajrasattva (“Vajra Being”) and second only to the cosmic *Dharmākaya* Buddha, Mahāvairocana himself.¹³⁷ Interestingly, though, in one of the most important yoga tantras, the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha*, Vajrapāṇi still acts in the capacity of the Buddha’s strong man, though the Buddha figure is now Vairocana instead of Śākyamuni, and Vajrapāṇi is also now portrayed as being, at least on some level, superior to a host of other Buddhas, or at least capable of refusing their commands. Also very interesting for our purpose is that this text calls special attention to the fact that Vajrapāṇi is, in fact, a *yakṣa*, a relatively low-ranking species of *démon* in the Indian cosmos.

This text (unlike the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*) reads like a *sūtra* in that it is mainly a story with a structured plot as opposed to merely a collection of ritual instructions. It begins on Mt. Sumeru with Vajrapāṇi refusing to comply with the requests of a host of Buddhas or bodhisattvas to summon the deities of his clan (*kula*) for the construction of a *maṇḍala* because there still exist “criminals” in the world that require conversion.¹³⁸ This appears to be an acknowledgement of Vajrapāṇi’s (and other *krodha-vighnāntaka*) vital role in clearing obstacles before the performance of a ritual (including the construction of a *maṇḍala*) referred to in texts

Buddhist institutions in India and Tibet) are to be “internalized” and brought to the level of mental visualization and focus largely on soteriological goals. Also, as we shall see, the later tantras emphasize the importance of *démonic* figures. That is to say, figures that began their careers in earlier forms of Buddhism (or Hinduism for that matter) as laukika-level deities end up as *lokottara* figures in the later tantras. For more information on the four-fold tantric classification scheme, see Dalton (2005), Snellgrove (1988) and Eimer (1993). For the gradual “internalization” of Buddhist tantric ritual, see Dalton (2004a).

¹³⁷ Though, as Snellgrove (1987) notes, “later tantric tradition as received by the Tibetans Vajrapāṇi (as Bodhisattva) and Vajradhara (as Supreme Buddha) come to be clearly distinguished iconographically, but at this earlier state there is no such distinction and Vajrapāṇi is frequently referred to as a Tathāgata (viz., Buddha)” (136).

¹³⁸ I am working off of two different translations of this story, (which Davidson notes became very widespread in Buddhist tantric literature, appearing in a number of scriptures in a number of versions), one by Davidson (1991) and one by Snellgrove (1987). Both are describing essentially the same story but with minor variants. Davidson says that Vajrapāṇi is requested by a host of bodhisattvas, Snellgrove, by a host of Buddhas. See Davidson, p. 3, and Snellgrove, p. 136. For the importance of the concept of *kula* (“families” or “clans”) in Buddhist *maṇḍalas* and its political implications see Davidson 2002: 140-142.

like the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. In any case, in response to the assessment that there are a number of deities (most notably Maheśvara, a.k.a. Śiva) that require conversion, the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana, with the utterance of the mantra “Om Ṭakkijjaḥ,” summons these beings by force to Mt. Sumeru so that Vajrapāṇi can convert them.¹³⁹

What follows is actually a rather comical scene in which Vajrapāṇi easily converts all the worldly gods, except for Maheśvara, who is particularly recalcitrant and attempts to fight Vajrapāṇi in his wrathful forms of Bhairava and Rudra.¹⁴⁰ At one point he haughtily declares to Vajrapāṇi: “‘Hey, you’re just a local spirit (yakṣa)! I’m the creator and arranger of the triple world, the master of all spirits, the highest God of gods. Why should I do as you, a local ghost, command?’ So Maheśvara turned to Vairocana, ‘Just who does he think he is, giving orders to a God?’”¹⁴¹ Here we can perhaps see some confirmation of Sutherland’s theory regarding the competing ethical views between Buddhism and Brahmanical cosmology and soteriology. Recall that Sutherland postulated that, in the Brahmanical view, the Buddha’s act of converting a yakṣa would be considered demonic in so far as he would be disrupting the cosmically predestined roles that all beings are supposed to play (that is, the *yakṣa’s dharma*) by converting and “taming” him. The Buddhist author of the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* may have been thinking something similar when he portrayed the highest deity in the Hindu pantheon considering himself automatically superior to Vajrapāṇi based merely on the fact of their difference in *démonic* rank, as it were, and then being humiliated when Vajrapāṇi defeats him due, it is implied, to the yakṣa drawing on the power of the Buddhas.¹⁴²

It is also with the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* that the other facet of Sutherland’s reversed ethos theory finally makes sense. Recall that she claims that, in Buddhist cosmology and soteriology, “demons” (and by this she means such beings as the dangerous yakṣas and asuras) are actually closer to humans than the gods, who constitute the “new demons.” That the gods, specifically Maheśvara, are the antagonists of the piece is blatantly obvious. That the

¹³⁹ Again we see parallels here to the relationship between lokottara Buddha (or bodhisattva) and laukika *démon* in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* where, as we saw, Mañjuśrī directs Yamāntaka to subdue the unconverted deities.

¹⁴⁰ For the theory that tantric texts and tales of important tantric saints (siddhas) are intentionally comical, see Davidson 2002: 277-290.

¹⁴¹ Davidson 1991: 4.

¹⁴² The distinction between different orders of *démons* might here be read as paralleling the Brahmanical caste system, with upper-level gods arrogantly assuming their superiority over, say yakṣas, as brahmins might over untouchables. For more on the significance of the (*Sarva*)*Tathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, and its importance in later Tibetan Buddhism see Weinberger 1991.

“demons” (*démons*, dangerous enemies of the gods, or at least beings traditionally understood to be subordinate to the gods, like yakṣas) have been apotheosized under Buddhism is also clear, not only from the figure of Vajrapāṇi, but also the deity regarded as the supreme Buddha (and fully, without doubt, a lokottara deity), Mahāvairocana.

“Vairocana” is likely a variation of “Virocana” noted above as an asura mentioned in numerous *purāṇic* stories as the rival of Indra and the spreader of the false doctrine that the body is identical with the soul. While it would be a stretch to say that the Buddhist *dharmakāya* Buddha Mahāvairocana and the Virocana of Hindu myth are, somehow, “the same,” it is obvious that Buddhists, when writing scriptures like the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha*, were intentionally drawing on Indian vernacular myth, and consequently intentionally inverting the cosmological scheme of the Brahmanical worldview, recasting old villains as the new heroes and vice-versa. As Fabio Rambelli comments in an article about the central importance of “local deities” in Esoteric (tantric) Buddhism (specifically in the context of Japanese Buddhism but more generally as well):

Perhaps the most striking case of former Indian deities making it to the top of tantric soteriology is Mahāvairocana...the tantric version of Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha of the *Avatataṃsaka sūtra*...Originally, however, Vairocana was a transformation of Virocana, chief of the asuras, according to the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8.7-12), and this deity was criticized in early Brahmanism for identifying the self with the body and for emphasizing earthly pleasures – aspects that came to constitute important features of the tantric [Buddhist] nondualist vision.¹⁴³

Indeed, Buddha Vairocana is commonly associated in Buddhist tantric ritual with the aggregate of the body.¹⁴⁴

Buddhist authors made a similar statement during the next (and final) phase of tantric literature during the twilight years of Buddhism in India, specifically with the figure of Saṃvara.

¹⁴³ Rambelli 2011: 837.

¹⁴⁴ Recall above that “Virocana” appears as an important asura lord in the early Pāli texts, sometimes identified with Rāhu. Indeed, he is a noted enemy of the gods in Hindu literature as well. In the *Hari Purāṇa* he appears as a leader of the asura hordes fighting Viṣṇu along with Rāhu and Hayagrīva (see Bhattacharyya 2000: 143), the latter being another very important *krodha-vighnāntaka* deity (who begins in tantric Buddhism, we could say, as the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara’s personal *démon*) whom Linrothe (1999) highlights as well (pp. 95-130). For the development of the cult of Hayagrīva from India to East Asia, see also van Gulik (1935).

As Davidson notes, Saṃvara begins his mythic career as “Śaṃbara,” a *démon* from the *Ṛgveda* who is the arch-enemy of the two most important gods in that text, Indra and Agni.¹⁴⁵ By the end of the first millennium this deity had been valorized and apotheosized by Buddhist authors as Cakrasaṃvara. In twelfth century Tibetan codifications of the various myths of this deity found in Indian scriptures, he is said to have been emanated by the Buddhas in imitation of Maheśvara (here the epitome of evil) in order to subdue him and his retinue of ferocious, uncontrolled *démons*, including “*bhairavas*,” *yakṣas*, *rakṣasas*, *nāgas*, *asuras*, and theriocephalian charnel-ground female *démons* called *mātr̥kas*.¹⁴⁶ All these various unruly, dangerous monsters have

¹⁴⁵ Davidson 2002: 214. Śaṃbara is also, interestingly, identified with Vepacitti, lord of the asuras, in the Pāli canon (Bhattacharyya 2000: 65).

¹⁴⁶ Davidson 1991: 6-10. That Maheśvara is the main villain of the Buddhist tantras is unsurprising given the competition between Buddhism and Śaivism across India throughout the first and early second millenniums CE. The tantras themselves are very likely, beginning with the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, adaptations of earlier (and more highly developed) transgressive Śaivite scriptures and rituals, in which Śiva is, notably, portrayed as the lord of various types of dangerous *démons*. In fact, this aspect of the god Śiva is well known in various iconographical and literary depictions of him, arguably from his earliest Vedic appearance as Rudra, Lord of the Animals. As Sutherland puts it: Śiva...is the apotheosis of destruction, danger, and death and, as such, is the lord of demons. His cohorts and supporters are a band of ghoulish undesirables” (Sutherland 1991: 58). The figure of Saṃvara, as well as the other *krodha-viḡhnāntaka* meditational deities of the late Buddhist tantras, assimilates the iconography of the non-*purāṇic* Śaivites, such as the *Kāpālikas* and the modern Aghoris who have historically specialized in committing transgressive acts in a ritualized context to gain power over *démons*, in many cases wrathful female deities. Sanderson (2009) systematically examines the various aspects of Śiva iconography that the Buddhists had adopted by the late first millennium. It should be remembered that Cakrasaṃvara and other Buddhist deities are described as possessing the following characteristics as well, but not until, at the very earliest, the eighth century. See pp. 171-172. For more on the Śaiva influence on and competition with Vajrayāna Buddhism see Sanderson (1994). The Buddhist authors of the *mahāyoga* and *yoginī tantras* pretty much admit to copying the Śaivite scriptures when they portray Buddhas as intentionally taking on the forms of the Śaivite deities in order to subdue them. Thus, Maheśvara’s subjugation in the Buddhist tantric stories can be read, on one level, as a mythic metaphor for the Buddhist mimicking (one might say “plagiarizing”) of Śaivite scriptures, rituals, and iconography. Furthermore, the intentional transgression of purity norms depicted in the iconography described above seems to have been the main technique by which “non-*purāṇic*” Śaivites gained spiritual attainment and various worldly “magical” powers, including control of *démons* (for a modern account of the control that Aghorī yogīs are said to be able to exercise over *démons*, see Svoboda 1986: 187-209). By about the eighth century, Buddhists seem to have adopted at least the formal element of these practices. This provides an interesting counterpoint to earlier Buddhist techniques for taming *démons* examined by DeCaroli which consist of ethical purity and sexual abstinence. Nonetheless, just as ascetic control is a longstanding Indic technique for gaining power, so is the controlled violation of ritual purity. Such transgressive rituals appear as early as the Vedas and, as Samuel (2008) notes, a famous royal Vedic horse sacrifice called the *aśvamedha* “includes a notorious sequence where the chief queen simulates intercourse with the sacrificed horse...there would be no point in performing these rather bizarre sequences if they were not felt to be ritually very powerful” (117). Regarding sexual acts more specifically, Davidson (2002) notes the high level of eroticization that characterizes tantric “siddha culture,” commenting that in the late tantric Buddhist literature, Vajrasattva (a.k.a. Vajrapāṇi) “is Eros embodied” (197). But as Samuel (2008) and White (1998) theorize, persuasively in my view, “the initial rationale for the ritual use of sexual substances was that they were extremely polluting, powerful, and therefore effective when used transgressively, rather than because sex as such was seen as a source of spiritual fulfillment” (Samuel 2008:269). For more on the intentionally transgressive nature of Buddhist tantra, see Gray (2005). Furthermore, ascetic practices and sexual practices were not, in the Indian context, necessarily seen as oppositional but as mutually complementary. Śiva, the paradigmatic ascetic, appears in many myths (outside of just the *kāpālika* context) as highly eroticized. Also, it seems to have been a commonly held belief

been produced from the blood and bodies of those slain in terrible warfare.¹⁴⁷ This deity is commonly known as “Heruka,” which is also simply a general epithet for *krodha-vighnāntaka* meditational deities (effectively Buddhas) that become the central figures of the *mahāyoga* and *yoginī tantras*.¹⁴⁸ Heruka is essentially Vajrapāṇi’s *démonic* successor in these late tantras. The myths, however, in conjunction with the continuing ascension of *krodha-vighnāntaka démons* and the inversion (violation) of normative Brahmanical cosmology, become more and more transgressive and brutal, placing greater emphasis on sex and violence.

that among the powers that ascetic practice afforded a yogin was sexual gratification with heavenly nymphs or goddesses as well as great powers of fertility. As Doniger (1973) argues:

By ‘drawing up his seed’, the yogi preserves all his powers, particularly, of course, those that he is explicitly restraining. Even in the *Kāmasūtra*, the textbook of erotic science and hence ostensibly opposed to the ascetic establishment, this concept, so basic to all Hindu thought, emerges: the successful lover is one who has conquered his senses and is not excessively passionate; he obtains his powers by brahmacharya and great meditation. The chaste ascetic is not only sexually attractive; he is sexually active. The Artharva Veda *brahmacārin* carries a great phallus along the earth and pours seed upon the surface of the earth, and ascetics appear throughout Hindu mythology in creative and erotic roles. (55-56)

The sexual practices of the Buddhist and Śaiva tantras must be understood in this context, and clearly by the medieval period, many Buddhists and non-Buddhists had come to consider transgressive techniques as the weapon of choice in the battle against *démons* (both internally and externally conceived), but they do not represent as radical a shift from earlier “ascetic Buddhism” as scholars have tended to argue. Furthermore, there seems to be a direct correlation (as we might expect) between the centralization of *démons* in Buddhist (and Śaivite) scriptures and the rhetoric of embracing afflictive emotions rather than rejecting or suppressing them as in the case of earlier “sūtric” forms of Buddhism. That said, however, it does seem that the sex act itself and the associated experience of bliss did become progressively valorized in Buddhist soteriology so that we see statements, for example in the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary of the *Kālacakra Tantra* (the last major surviving tantra to be produced in India, written in the mid-eleventh century), that in the teachings of scriptures like the *Guhyasamāja* and *Cakrasamvara* Tantras, “the Buddha taught the blissful state that arises from sexual union, but concealed it out of his great compassion for the sake of the spiritual maturation of simple-minded people” (Wallace 2001: 6). The earliest Buddhist text known to have a systemized “typology of ecstasy” is the *Mukhāgama* by Buddhajñānapāda (c. eighth-ninth centuries) founder of the “Jñānapāda school of *Guhyasamāja* exegesis.” (Dalton 2004a: 22).

¹⁴⁷ Thus the link between negative emotions and the *démons* is evident. The warfare component would seem to support Davidson’s contention in *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* that the tantras were produced during, and in response to, the constant warfare of Indian medieval feudalism.

¹⁴⁸ Here I am using the terms “*mahayoga*” and “*yoginī*” more or less interchangeably, but to clarify the bibliographic categories: according to Tibetan traditions of categorizing the tantras, the latest and most advanced tantras (which includes scriptures from the *Guhyasamāja* to the *Vajrabhairava*, *Cakrasamvara*, and *Hevajra* cycles) are “**Anuttarayoga Tantras*” (Tib: *rnal ’byor bla med kyi rgyud*), or “Unexcelled Yoga Tantras.” According to Indian commentarial traditions, however, some of the *tantras* that were classified as *Anuttarayoga* in Tibet were merely considered “*Yoga Tantras*,” and the *Yoginī* were considered the highest and the most soteriologically advanced (the *Guhyasamāja* was considered a *yoga tantra*, while the *Cakrasamvara* and *Hevajra* were classified as *yoginī tantras*). In Tibet the *Guhyasamāja* and *Vajrabhairava* were considered “father” *tantras*, meaning that they emphasize skillful means, and the *Cakrasamvara* and *Hevajra* were considered “mother” *tantras*, in that they emphasize wisdom). It is the *yoginī tantras* that put the greatest emphasis on “*kāpālika*-style” imagery and rituals, as well as explicit sexual practices (though the *yoga tantras* have a good deal of this as well, but notably, as we might expect, goddesses are much more heavily emphasized in the *yoginī tantras*). See Gray 2007: 5. Regarding the word “Heruka,” it is translated into Tibetan as “*Khrag ’thung*,” meaning “blood drinker” but this is “a meaning that cannot be justified etymologically” (Sanderson 2009: 148, n. 340), and at this time its exact meaning is unclear.

For instance, the *Guhyagarbhatattvaviniścaya* retells the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* myth, with different figures and with more graphic imagery. This scripture:

...has Maheśvara spawned as one of the denizens of hell.¹⁴⁹ Heruka, the cosmic policeman, seizes Maheśvara and his entire retinue, rips out their internal organs, hacks their limbs to pieces, eats their flesh, drinks their blood, and makes ritual ornaments from their bones...Having digested all these gods, Heruka excretes them into an enormous ocean of muck, which one of his henchmen, Ucchuṣmakrodha, drinks up. The gods are then revived... Maheśvara and his minions [then] beseech Heruka and the divinities of his *maṇḍala* to accept their wives, mothers, and daughters as ritual consorts while they take their correct places as the seats of the divinities in the *maṇḍala*.¹⁵⁰

While these Heruka deities are usually depicted as being ultimately docetic manifestations of higher Buddhas said to be continuous with ultimate reality (Mahāvairocana, Samantabhadra, Vajradhara, and the like), the myths in *mahāyoga* and *yoginī tantras* and related literature, as well as the associated ritual cycles, make the *krodha-vighnāntaka* deities (that is, enlightened lokottara deities in the form of laukika *démons*) their central focus. Furthermore, in the latest “siddha *maṇḍalas*”¹⁵¹ including the *maṇḍalas* described in the historically very famous (as they have been preserved in Tibet) Cakrasaṃvara and Hevajra cycles, “the circle of vassals [surrounding the central deity of the *maṇḍala*] is constituted by gods/goddesses (or their surrogates), rather than by other Buddhas, as in the *maṇḍalas* preferred in institutional esoterism and the more conservative siddha systems.”¹⁵² Of course, it should be noted that although the

¹⁴⁹ The demonization of the gods is thus complete.

¹⁵⁰ Davidson 1991: 6. Ucchuṣma, the Lord of Impurities, is another fascinating relatively early yakṣa-style (that is, portly, dark-skinned and fierce in appearance) Buddhist protector *démon*. This story in particular shows his proclivity toward and ability to absorb harmful and polluting substances. While this is the special ability of Ucchuṣma, I would argue that all the *démonic* protectors of Buddhism fulfill this function. It recalls a non-Buddhist myth in which Śiva is said to have transferred his grief-induced torment and insanity onto a yakṣa by the name of Pāncālīka because the later was more capable of absorbing and handling it (see Sutherland 1991: 58). Thus it seems that in Indian mythology more generally, despite (or likely because of) their association with negative emotions (both ones they suffer from themselves and those they afflict on humans), *démons* are sin-eaters (so to speak), acting as both poison and cure, capable of afflicting, but when valorized (as in the case of the Buddhist protectors, or Pāncālīka), capable of sublimating negative forces.

¹⁵¹ To use Davidson’s dual classification of Buddhist tantra, “institutional esotericism” and “siddha esotericism.”

¹⁵² Davidson 2002: 332.

retinue deities (just like the central figure) may be in the form of (usually “*kāpālika*-style”) gods/goddesses, they are, in fact, understood to be Buddhas.¹⁵³

Thus it should be blatantly obvious by now that the Buddhist distinction of lokottara versus laukika (transcendent deity versus worldly deity, Buddha versus *démon*) is anything but clear-cut. *Démons*, once converted, ascend to become Buddhas, Buddhas take on the form of *démons* (to subdue unconverted *démons*). David Ruegg argues in his study of the interaction between Buddhism and the other religious systems of India that the laukika/lokottara distinction is not (and does not seem to have been conceived by Buddhists as being) statically dualistic, but consistently dynamic. In fact, Ruegg implies that Buddhist soteriology fundamentally relies upon the assumption that laukika and lokottara are merely two ends of a sliding scale (again we recall Sutherland’s point about the Buddha upsetting Brahmanical dharmic order by converting mundane *démons*) and in fact, “In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, the religious as well as the philosophical has to do with realizing [the] abolishment of duality.”¹⁵⁴ This is explicitly the case

...in Vajrayāna and its art, ritual, and meditation [which] accordingly have a mediating...function, for they serve as a means of establishing communication between the microcosmic Sādhaka [practitioner] in *saṃsāra* and the macrocosmic transmudane, the locus of the tutelary divinity. In short, a fundamental principle in Vajrayāna is that the Sādhaka should visualize, and realize, himself as not different from the supramundane level

¹⁵³Samuel summarizes Linrothe’s three-fold evolutionary scheme of the *krodha-vighnāntaka* deity in Buddhist art depictions paralleling the descriptions of the deities given in the canonical texts, noting:

In the first phase, fierce protective deities (Hayagrīva, Yamāntaka) appear in secondary roles in iconography [i.e. *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*]. In the second phase (around the seventh century CE?), they appear as independent figures: the basic five Tathāgata *maṇḍala* is generally expanded in the texts of this period to include the consorts of the deities and four *krodha-vighnāntaka* guardian deities, but the consorts or the fierce *krodha-vighnāntaka* can also substitute in secondary *maṇḍalas* for the principle deities (the Buddhas and Tathāgatas), and a *krodha-vighnāntaka* may occasionally be found at the centre of the *maṇḍala*. Phase Two texts include the *Mahāvairocanaḥhisambodhi Sūtra* and the *Sarvatathāgatattattvasaṃgraha*. In the third phase, appearing in iconography from the late tenth or early eleventh century, the *krodha-vighnāntaka* deity normally appears, with or without a female consort, at the centre of the *maṇḍala*, often surrounded by an entourage of eight or a multiple of eight goddesses...The *Hevajra Tantra*...and *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* would be representative of this phase. Thus the Buddhist *maṇḍala* model was progressively adapted by the incorporation of the wild goddesses and Bhairava-type deities [simply more ferocious and dangerous versions of the *démons* Buddhists had always been involved in subduing and converting], initially as guardians and protectors at the edges of the *maṇḍala* but increasingly as major figures (Samuel 2008:262).

¹⁵⁴ Ruegg 2008: 86.

of his tutelary, this self-identification being indeed the necessary condition for effecting the required communication, transformation, and trans-valuation between the mundane and supramundane levels.¹⁵⁵

In this context, then, we can interpret the myths and iconography depicting the ascension of worldly *démons* to the center of the *maṇḍala*, so to speak, as functioning as a paradigm or example for the practitioner's own transformation and apotheosis. Furthermore, representations of formally mundane *démons* (such as the yakṣa-style deities so popular in Vajrayāna like Vajrapāṇi and Mahākāla) representing or taking the place of (or “standing in for,” as it were) an enlightened Buddha, can be interpreted as dissolving the binary distinction of *laukika/lokottara* and thus reflects the tantric, or even normative Mahāyāna, rhetoric that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāna* are ultimately identical. In short, the representations of *démons* as Buddhas function as an icon for the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyāta*).

But this is not only a Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna convention. Previously we saw that the tantric Buddhist fixation on the control of *démons* is prefigured by what we can discern of the *saṅgha* since its inception from the earliest Buddhist scriptures, architecture, and archeological evidence. Similarly, there seems to have been a tendency in early Buddhist art to associate the Buddha with yakṣas. In fact, the earliest anthropomorphic depictions of the Buddha were likely modelled after sculptures of yakṣas, and “the Buddha was shown as a yakṣa without his distinguishing turban but with the monk's tonsured head aberrantly endowed with hair in imitation of the yakṣa head.”¹⁵⁶ That is to say, the Buddha was depicted as *lokottara*-ized *laukika démon*. Historically “Hinayāna” Buddhists have regarded the *laukika/lokottara* distinction as dynamic as well, and as Ruegg notes, quoting Bechert, “Though in theory Theravāda Buddhists have always accepted the dualism of a “mundane” and a “supramundane” sphere, in practice they only applied it to a limited degree.”¹⁵⁷ As Sutherland implies (but does not quite state outright) the fundamental

¹⁵⁵ Ruegg 2008: 84.

¹⁵⁶ Krishan 1996:114.

¹⁵⁷ Ruegg 2008: 133. For an example of a *laukika démon*, over the course of an evolving mythology, attaining the status of a *lokottara* deity in Theravādin Buddhism, see the case of Hūṇiyam in Sri Lanka discussed by Gombrich 1988: 112-132.

Buddhist ethos, soteriology, and cosmology necessitate the existence of *démons* like the yakṣas to exemplify the power of the Buddha's Dharma.¹⁵⁸

RĀHU IN THE TANTRAS

It would seem that we have been sidetracked by larger theoretical concerns and neglected our primary *démon* of study. But now that this vital context has been established, we must ask the question, how did Buddhists of the late first millennium in India portray Rāhu within tantric literature and iconography? As an important, consistently and repeatedly mentioned asura king, we might expect Rāhu to be thoroughly valorized in the Buddhist project of mythically overthrowing the gods of normative Hinduism for the likes of figures named “Vairocana” and “Saṃvara.” But, perhaps surprisingly, while Rāhu remains a somewhat important figure in the tantric scriptures, he is still consistently relegated to his role as a relatively secondary retinue deity (never quite transcending his status as a worldly graha), with one very important exception.

As we saw above, in numerous Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as the widely popular *Lotus Sūtra*, Rāhu consistently appears in the list of named *démons* in the Buddha's retinue. This trend seems to continue throughout the various categories of tantric scriptures and associated commentarial and liturgical literature. For instance, the *Niṣpannayogāvalī* describes a *maṇḍala* focused on Mahāvairocana Buddha described in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*, a *yoga tantra*, in which Rāhu appears as “Vajrarāhu.”¹⁵⁹ He is described as being very fierce and in therianthrope form with a human upper-body and the lower-body of a serpent, holding the sun and moon disks. Here he is

¹⁵⁸ It could be easily objected that enlightenment stories of historical (or semi-historical) figures such as the Buddha himself can represent this ascension paradigm just as well. However, it must be kept in mind that the *démon's* function in Indian literature as paragons of (and allegories for, as in the notable case of Māra's daughters in Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita*, for instance) afflictive emotions and dangerous malignancy to a degree not within the capacity of normal humans, makes his conversion and ascension that much more of a powerful (and didactically effective) example.

¹⁵⁹ The *Niṣpannayogāvalī* is an important collection of iconographic descriptions of Buddhist deities compiled in the twelfth century. Sanderson (2009) comments that in many iconographical depictions of deities in Buddhist *yoginī tantras*, the only element that distinguishes them from Śaivite depictions is the pervasive use of the *vajra*, as a symbol, a ritual hand implement, and as an honorific title placed before the names of “Buddhified” Śaivite deities (172). The most notable example of this is in the case of the Buddhist deity Vajra(mahā)bhairava, a Buddhified version of Śiva's wrathful Bhairava form. Thus, in this instance, Rāhu was claimed by the Buddhists as “Vajrarāhu.” Interestingly, the “vajra” prefix is usually applied to deities that are considered to be fully enlightened, but I have yet to encounter another instance in which Rāhu is referred to as “Vajrarāhu,” so this may be an aberration. For the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra*, see Skorupski (1983).

also accompanied (perhaps for the first time) by a female consort by the name of Vajrasurī. She is described as being similar in appearance.¹⁶⁰ Also in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, Rāhu appears in the southwest quadrant of the *maṇḍala* of Bhūtaḍāmara, riding in a chariot, similarly holding the sun and the moon.¹⁶¹

Similarly, in the *Sādhanamālā*, an extremely important twelfth-century compilation of liturgical texts devoted to describing various Buddhist deities, Rāhu appears as an important retinue *démon* for two goddesses (both nominally understood to be female Buddhas, or at least high-ranking bodhisattvas), Mārīcī and Kurukullā. Mārīcī seems to have begun her mythological career as a *yakṣinī*, and was gradually promoted to the status of a warrior goddess, probably at least nominally associated with the very popular Hindu war goddess Durga. In the *Sādhanamālā* (section 134) she is depicted in her well-known form as the goddess of the dawn, riding a chariot pulled by boars, and acting as the queen of the *graha*, holding the sun and the moon in the way Rāhu is commonly depicted doing. As for Rāhu himself, he is acting (in 134) as Mārīcī's charioteer or, alternatively (in *Sādhanamālā* 137, 142, and 146), under the chariot, at the center of his own mini-*maṇḍala* in possibly a position of submission.¹⁶² In *Sādhanamālā* 171 and 172, Rāhu appears in a triad of deities, along with Kurukullā and Kāmadeva.¹⁶³ He appears as the lowest among them, with Kurukullā described as sitting on Kāmadeva and his consort, with Rāhu below (or being sat on by) Kāmadeva. The obvious question that arises here is, why was Rāhu placed in association with two deities particularly related to lust and attachment? Indeed, in

¹⁶⁰ “Surī,” interestingly, is a feminine form of *sūrya*, meaning “sun.” Likely reflecting Rāhu's age-old role as the eclipse *démon*, he is here given a feminized form of the Sun as a consort.

¹⁶¹ Bhūtaḍāmara is a four-armed form of Vajrapāṇi, notably meaning “spirit subduer” (See Beer 2004: 153). However, it should be noted that the word *bhūta* has much more charged associations than the translation of “spirit” would imply. *Bhūtas* are generally considered very dangerous and afflictive ghostly entities that often prey on the living.

¹⁶² See Shaw 2006: 213. For a general discussion of Mārīcī, see pp. 203-223. See also Donaldson (1995) for a discussion of Mārīcī especially in her sow-headed form and related sow-headed goddesses. Also see Bhattacharya 1925: clxiv-clxvi for a discussion of Mārīcī in particular regards to the *Sādhanamālā*. As for Rāhu's *maṇḍala*, this is called the *vāyu-maṇḍala* (Vāyu being the Hindu wind-god) or the *vāyavya-maṇḍala* (“*vāyavya*” being the northwest direction presided over by Vāyu in Hindu mythology).

¹⁶³ Kāmadeva is of course the (in)famous Indian (he appears as early as the Vedas) love (lust) god, often identified with Māra in early Buddhist literature (see, for example, Olivelle 2008: 375). Kurukullā is a goddess who appears in Kāma's retinue in Śaivite texts (see Sanderson 2009: 48, n.15). In the Buddhist tantric context, Kurukullā commonly appears as a female version of Kāma, but understood to be an enlightened, lokottara deity. Furthermore, in the *Sādhanamālā*, Kāmadeva appears subordinate to her (she being trans-valued as a *lokottara* deity), rather than vice-versa. For a general discussion of Kurukullā see Shaw 2006: 432-447. For rituals of control related to Kurukullā see Beyer 1979: 301-310. In Japanese esoteric Buddhism there is a figure known as Aizen Myōō, who is regarded as a lust god very similar to Kāmadeva. Notably he wields a bow and arrow as well, but also he is considered a master over astrological influences, and is often depicted as pointing his bow up at the stars (see Goepper 1993, esp. pp. 43-46).

Tibetan depictions of Rāhula (as we shall see) his weapon of choice is a bow and arrow, the weapon of Kāma (see Beer 2004: 274-276). While the association with Mārīcī makes perfect sense in that she is considered the queen of the planets, the relation with the two love deities may not be so clear. However, it must be remembered that Rāhu is a “grasper,” and, as we saw in chapter one, was mythologically known for his voracious hunger, hence his repeated grasping of the sun and the moon. Not to mention the fact that the root word of his name means “intense attachment.” While “love” does not really enter into the matter, Rāhu is clearly overcome by and, at least in the case of the *Sādhanamālā* depictions seems to have been regarded as a paragon of, the afflictive emotion of attachment.¹⁶⁴

So while Rāhu clearly remains an important *démon* in the Buddhist cosmos (consistently appearing in the *maṇḍalas* of various deities, most notably Mahāvairocana), from the sampling of depictions noted above, he does not seem to have undergone a major trans-valuation within tantric literature that many other *laukika démons* clearly did. There is an instance of a perhaps lokottara-ized Vajrarāhu, but in other late Indian Buddhist depictions he is, at best, Mārīcī’s bondsman, or a powerful *démon* to be brought under control by Vajrapāṇi. At worst he is shown as being trampled (in the style of the paragon of the evil worldly deities, Maheśvara), by not one but two deities, one of them himself *laukika*-level! Nonetheless, Rāhu seems to have been employed in late-tantric rituals as one of the primarily invoked malignant *démons* over which the yogin could first, gain control, and second, set on his enemies. At least, we can infer this by examining certain statements made in the Vajrabhairava and Cakrasaṃvara cycles.

In the opening lines of the “*Kalpa*” (translated by Siklós as “ritual procedure”) in the *Vajra(mahā)bhairava Tantra* cycle, we read:

Now, what is explained here is how to deplete sentient beings – the foremost method for the great accomplishment of turning suffering into liberation, which arises from these secret spells. First is Vairocana, and with him is the Lord of Speech [Mañjuśrī]; they turn the wheel (of doctrine) by means of the vajra. “He adorns the lord of the planets and king of the spirits with two human seed syllables. (He provides) a reliquary along with the burnt relics, otherwise he will not attain knowledge. If he who abides in the sphere of the vajra-wielder

¹⁶⁴ For more detail on the depictions of Rāhu found in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, *Sādhanamālā* and others, see Chandra 1999: 2774-2775. For the *Sādhanamālā* specifically, see Bhattacharya 1925.

recites the syllables a hundred and ten thousand times, all defilements will be cleansed and he will doubtless obtain the ability to pacify, to increase, to control, to suppress, to kill, to drive away, to summon, to separate, to immobilise, to cause downfall and to obtain royal power. He undertakes the meditation wherever he wants – in a cemetery, in a thicket, by a spring, on a riverbank, in a wild place, by a single tree, in an abandoned house, in a desolate place with a single *lingam*.¹⁶⁵

This passage is interesting for a number of reasons, but for our purposes we shall focus specifically on the reference to the “lord of planets” and “lord of spirits.” Siklós comments in a footnote that the “lord of planets” probably refers either to the Sun, or to Rāhu. “The lord of spirits” he identifies as Śiva.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, this is one of the epithets of Śiva, and given that this text is likely an adopted Śaiva text with Buddhist insertions (such as the references to Vairocana, Mañjuśrī and use of the term “*vajra*”), it would make sense that this figure would be considered central to the ritual. But why, if this is a Śaiva text, mention him *second*, after the so-called “lord of the planets” implying that Śiva is subordinate, or at best, on the same level as what we can only presume to be a *graha*? In traditional Vedic/Brahmanical cosmology, this would almost certainly be a reference to the sun. But as Sanderson, notes, Saura-worship was consistently subordinated to or outright absorbed into the cult of Śiva.¹⁶⁷ Especially in a Śaivite tantric context, it makes little sense to reference the sun in this way.¹⁶⁸ However, as we have seen, Rāhu is consistently shown in Buddhist depictions (especially from the late tantric era) as using the sun as a mere hand-implement. To my knowledge Sūrya is never so highly valorized in Buddhist depictions. Hence, if the reference to the “lord of planets” is of Buddhist authorship, I would argue that it is more likely to be a reference to Rāhu than Sūrya.¹⁶⁹ If it is indeed a reference to

¹⁶⁵ Siklós 1996: 51. The list of various powers the *yogin* is said to attain (pacifying, increasing, controlling, etc.) is a standard trope of Buddhist and non-Buddhist tantric scriptures. For more information regarding yogic powers, or *abhicāra*, in Hindu tantras (which were adopted and modified by Buddhists), see Türistig (1985) as well as Bühnemann (2000), and Goudriaan 1978: 251 ff. For a discussion of the central importance of these kinds of superhuman abilities in Vajrayāna Buddhism, see Snellgrove 1987: 235-241.

¹⁶⁶ Since the main deity in this tantra is “Vajrabhairava,” a Buddhified, “Vajrafied” version of Bhairava, a form of Śiva, it is likely that the “lord of spirits” here may actually refer to Vajrabhairava.

¹⁶⁷ Sanderson 2009: 53-58.

¹⁶⁸ Though, admittedly, sun-worship in the manner suggested by the text would make sense in the context of a purification rite, which the passage does seem to be describing.

¹⁶⁹ It should also be noted that Siklós is working off of Tibetan translations of the *Vajrabhairava*, in which case the passage would reference the lord of the *gza*’ (Skt. *graha*), and I know of no instance, in the Tibetan context, where the lord of the *gza*’ is *not* Rāhula.

Rāhu, not only does it appear that the *Vajrabhairava* puts him on the same level or even higher than Śiva (or Vajrabhairava, as the case may be), but then makes the worship of these two side-by-side integral to the success of the yogin, in both a mundane and soteriological sense.¹⁷⁰ If so, it would represent the first case we have examined in which Rāhu is valorized to the level of the *lokottara* deity. Nonetheless, without knowing for sure that the “lord of the planets” indeed references Rāhu, this is inconclusive and will have to remain mere speculation.

The *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, on the other hand, does contain at least one unequivocal reference to the eclipse *démon*. However, it is very minor, appearing only in a list of various abilities (of a generally dark and afflictive nature) that the yogin will assuredly attain if he undertakes the worship of Śrī Heruka (Cakrasaṃvara) properly, including the ability to simultaneously kill one million people (or, alternatively, revive one million people). As we might expect, the practices alluded to in the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* are said to give the yogin control over various types of *démon*. Rāhu is referenced specifically in the context of the yogin’s use of him to kill an enemy: “The name of whomever one writes at night with charnel ground char on a tablet or a mat will be seized by a great astral spirit.”¹⁷¹ The reference to “seizing” implies that Rāhu was thought to cause seizures of the type associated with the planetary *démon* Skanda, mentioned in the first chapter.¹⁷² Graha *démons* are mentioned again (as a general species) in the Cakrasaṃvara, but only in the context of a general list of various afflictive *démons* one can control through various ritual practices.¹⁷³ All in all, Rāhu’s role in Buddhist tantric literature seems disappointingly anti-climatic thus far. And indeed this would have to be our overall conclusion, were it not for the capstone of Indian Buddhism: the *Kālacakra Tantra*.

THE WHEEL OF TIME

Unlike other Buddhist tantras of the *yoginī* class (most of the root texts of which appear to be a haphazard compilation of half-formed ritual procedures, and are not organized in a clear narrative form characteristic of, say, the *sūtric* literature, or even some of the earlier tantras) the

¹⁷⁰ As we shall see, in Tibetan contexts Vajrabhairava and Rāhula are often closely related.

¹⁷¹ Gray 2007: 200. Gray, in a footnote, confirms that this is indeed a reference to Rāhu.

¹⁷² Notably, Skanda was originally the first graha protector *démon* in Buddhism. See McBride 2011: 212, and Filliozat 1937: 218-224 and 255-256.

¹⁷³ Gray 2007: 347.

Kālacakra and its primary commentary, the *Vimalaprabhā*, written in the mid-eleventh century, is highly organized, contains a unique eschatological paradigm in the Buddhist context, and contains treatises on a number of topics, including worldly sciences, most notably for our purposes, astrology/astronomy.¹⁷⁴ The root text itself, but more importantly the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary and other Indian and Tibetan commentaries, go into great detail about the motions of the planets, constellations, and other heavenly bodies. These are not merely encyclopedic-style descriptions of the effects that different planetary movements have on different people (or different natural phenomena, etc.) in the manner of the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*; they include highly detailed mathematical techniques for calculating the movement of planetary bodies, including predicting the movements of Rāhu (that is, predicting eclipses).¹⁷⁵

However, the *Kālacakra*'s emphasis on astronomy and astrology is not merely for its own sake, but is rather part of a highly developed correlative cosmology that envisions the subtle-body of the yogin practitioner as being an exact microcosm of the outer universe. Now, the *Kālacakra* is not the first Buddhist tantra to describe a subtle-body system. The credit for this probably must be given to the *Hevajra Tantra* (and its associated commentaries), the first chapter of which describes “thirty-two named *nāḍīs* (channels) of which the three principal ones are Lalanā, Rasanā and Avadhūti, and four *cakras*...”¹⁷⁶ The *tantra* also describes complex visualization procedures through which the practitioner moves “drops” (*bindu*, often visualized as or associated with the seed syllables of *mantras*) around the channels by means of “winds” (*prāṇa*). Through this, the yogin is believed to be able to manipulate the various psychological, emotional, and physical energies of the body-mind complex. So, for instance, one passage in a *Hevajra* commentary explains:

...when [the] two seed-syllables become one aggregate in the form of a drop within the channel of the vajra gem which is situated in the navel, the Great bliss-filled Fire of Passion

¹⁷⁴ Regarding the end-times doctrine explained in the *Kālacakra Tantra*, the text (written at a time when North Indian Buddhists were coming under attack from Islamic armies invading from the west) envisions an apocalyptic showdown between the army of the faithful (mainly Buddhists) and an army of evil heretics (Muslims). The former is lead by lokottara deities as well as laukika-level gods of the “Hindu” pantheon. See John Newman’s article “Islam in the Kālacakra Tantra” (1998).

¹⁷⁵ The astro-science in the *Kālacakra* (which means “Wheel of Time”) had a profound impact on Tibetan calendrical systems, once the tantra was brought to that region in the eleventh century. See Henning 2007. Regarding the calculation of eclipses, see especially 95-140.

¹⁷⁶ Samuel 2008: 285. The subtle body system is also alluded to in the *Mukhāgama* commentary on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, dating from around the same period (early ninth century) (Dalton 2004a: 23).

blazes. This fire burns the Five Buddhas who are the Aggregate of the Five Components of Phenomenal Awareness, Locana and the others who are the earth element etc., as well as Ham [a seed syllable]. Then from the center of Great Bliss flows the Moon.”¹⁷⁷

Of all the channels in the body it was held that the central channel, the Avadhūti *nāḍī*, was by far the most important and these yogic practices usually mainly focus on this channel, specifically in attempting to draw the various energies of the body into it. Furthermore, it is believed that if the yogin is able to do this successfully, he will obtain various realizations and ultimately, enlightenment.¹⁷⁸ All the major elements of these practices including the three main channels, the cakra system, and so on consistently appear in Śaiva texts of the same period, with minor variations (the Śaiva cakra system usually lists five of these energy centers in the body, as opposed to four mentioned in the Hevajra Tantra). Thus it is likely that Buddhist authors adopted these Śaiva innovations as they did the wrathful and sexualized imagery of the Śaiva tantras (though it is less certain that they did so in the case of the subtle-body systems).¹⁷⁹

In any case, the *Kālacakra* cycle, as mentioned above, uses the same basic structure of the *Hevajra Tantra*'s subtle-body system, but complicates it massively by associating the various aspects of the subtle-body and movements of various bodily and mental energies with the movements of the celestial spheres. The system is highly analogical, linking multiple microcosmic and macrocosmic elements together by association. As Vesna Wallace explains it:

Since the transmigratory wheel of time is nondual from the body of the cosmos and the body of the individual, it is of the nature of the elements and their modifications. For example, Capricorn is of the nature of the space-element and the aggregate of consciousness (*viññāna-skandha*); Aquarius is of the nature of the wind-element and the aggregate of mental factors (*saṃskāra-skandha*); Pices is of the nature of the fire-element and the aggregate of feelings (*vedanā-skandha*); Aries is of the nature of the water-element and the aggregate of

¹⁷⁷ Farrow and Menon 1992: xxix. Regarding the Hevajra Tantra see also Snellgrove (1959).

¹⁷⁸ Thus the externalized rituals of the Vajrabhairava and Cakrasaṃvara become internalized with the introduction of the subtle-body system. This is somewhat comparable to the Upaniṣadic internalization of Vedic ritual sacrifice over 1000 years earlier. It should be noted, however, that (at least in the Tibetan tradition) the practices of the Vajrabhairava and Cakrasaṃvara cycles also include subtle-body manipulation, even though they are not at all mentioned in the root texts themselves.

¹⁷⁹ For more information on the subtle-body system within Indian yogic practice more generally, see White 1996: 218-262.

discernment (*saṃjñā-skandha*); Taurus is of the nature of the earth-element and the aggregate of form (*rūpa-skandha*); Gemini is of the nature of the gnosis-element and the aggregate of gnosis (*jñāna-skandha*); and the remaining six zodiacs, beginning with Cancer, are of the same nature as the aforementioned six but in reverse order.¹⁸⁰

To a certain extent this is not a new innovation on the part of the Buddhist authors. One of the key (one might even argue defining) features of the Buddhist tantras from the earliest stages is the proclivity toward analogical associations.¹⁸¹ But the *Kālacakra* Tantra adds to this basic structure an unprecedented emphasis on celestial bodies (planets, stars, zodiac signs, etc.) as well as divisions of time (e.g., days of the week).

So, what is Rāhu’s role in the *Kālacakra* tantric cycle?¹⁸² Given this text’s increased emphasis on, specifically, the graha, we might expect him to play a bigger role in this particular cycle of tantric literature than we have seen thus far, and indeed, this is the case. According to the *Kālacakra*, the four most important planets are the sun, moon, Rāhu, and Kālāgni.¹⁸³ The first three are associated specifically with the three most important channels in the subtle-body, namely the Lalanā, Rasanā, and Avadhūti *nāḍīs*. The Lalanā and Rasanā are, elsewhere, associated with the moon and sun (on the left and right sides of the body) respectively. To my knowledge, however, only in the *Kālacakra* is Rāhu associated with the central channel, practically and soteriologically the most important element of the subtle body.¹⁸⁴ The yogin practitioner is enjoined to “control the vital breath” by arresting its motion in the left and right (moon and sun) channels and moving it into the central, or Rāhu, channel (also referred to in the *Kālacakra* as “The Darkness,” and envisioned as black, likely invoking the image of an

¹⁸⁰ Wallace 2001: 102-103.

¹⁸¹ For instance, the earliest Buddhist *maṇḍala* mentioned in the *Golden Light Sūtra* associates four Buddhas with the four directions, a common trope in Māhayāna/Vajrayāna ritual, iconography, and literature. However, this analogical association becomes far more prevalent in the *yoginī tantras* where certain deities, classes of *démon*, directions, colors, sacred charnel grounds, parts of the body, aggregates, and so on are all grouped together in various numbered lists. See Gray 2007: 58-60, table 1.

¹⁸² Here this refers, not to just the root text, but also to a massive body of commentarial literature (Tibetan and Indian) written over the centuries on the root text that explain in much greater detail various ritual initiatory and visualization procedures. For example, one text I will be quoting from in the following paragraphs (translated by Gavin Kilty: 2009), is by Changkya Rölpa Dorjé, an eighteenth century Mongolian Dge lugs pa figure. Other sections come from an explanation of the “Six Vajra-Yogas of Kālacakra” by Tāranātha (1575-1634). See Henning: 2009.

¹⁸³ Another name for Ketu, again, usually understood to be Rāhu’s tail.

¹⁸⁴ Kālāgni is associated with the “*śaṅkhini*” channel, which is the “tail” of the central channel that extends below the navel (Kilty 2009: 147).

eclipse).¹⁸⁵ This practice thus symbolically mirrors an eclipse; the internal Rāhu channel devours the vital essence of the right and left channels as the external one devours the sun and moon. In other words, yogic attainment is associated with the malignant astrological portent. Furthermore, elsewhere in the *Kālacakra* cycle, Rāhu is specifically associated with the meditator’s transmigratory consciousness (while the sun and moon are associated with uterine blood and semen respectively, all three elements understood to come together at birth to form the body-mind complex of a person).¹⁸⁶ Similarly, on another level, there are particular *bindus* (drops of energy) associated with the four main *graha*, which are located in the four *cakras* and “At the heart is the wind-drop, the nature of rāhu, mind.”¹⁸⁷ It is understood that the goal of the manipulation of these subtle energies in the body is to reveal the innate purity of the various elements of both the subtle and gross body. There are other various analogical associations made to Rāhu that are superfluous for our purposes. It should be noted, however, that elsewhere it is said that a vision of Rāhu in the form of a blazing black *vajra* is one of the ten most important signs of yogic accomplishment in the *Kālacakra* system.¹⁸⁸

In short, it seems that Rāhu finally comes into his own with the *Kālacakra Tantra*. While it is possible that later Tibetan commentarial works valorized Rāhu in a manner not seen in the root text, the *Sekoddesaṭṭippanī* commentary (one of the earliest Indian commentaries on the root text) clearly identifies Rāhu with the central channel (and consequently, the yogin’s consciousness). Thus, Rāhu is, at the very least, as the text’s most important *graha*, the most important *démonic* figure in the tantra. I have argued above that the *démons* of India (as they were in Greece) are particularly liminal figures in the sense that they are neither fully external, independent entities, nor wholly subjectively internal. As we have seen based on textual and archeological evidence, Buddhists in India seem to have regarded the *démons* as real beings, but ones that were in some sense continuous with or connected to, internal states (such as afflictive emotions). The *Kālacakra* makes this link explicit with its correlative cosmology between various aspects of the personal body-mind complex and the *démons* of the external universe. But, as the goal of the yogic practice is to purify the various elements of the body (that is, purify the *démons*), the practitioner’s own trans-valuation and ascension from the *laukika* to the

¹⁸⁵ Arnold 2009: 62.

¹⁸⁶ Wallace 2001: 194.

¹⁸⁷ Henning 2009: 246. Just to reiterate, Rāhu is here regarded as equivalent to the nature of mind.

¹⁸⁸ Henning 2009: 240.

lokottara level is prefigured by, or dependent upon, a similar trans-valuation and transformation of the *démons*.¹⁸⁹ In the *Kālacakra* system, Rāhu, as the *démon* of the central channel and of consciousness itself, would seem to have been identified as the lord of all the laukika *démons*, and, in some sense, a stand-in for Māra (DeCaroli’s paradigmatic “spirit-demon”).

That the “Lord of the Eclipse” should have this role makes sense on three different levels. First, the *Kālacakra*’s focus on the graha generally makes Rāhu a likely candidate. Secondly, the malignancy associated with an eclipse (far greater than the negativity associated with any of the other individual grahas) becomes the perfect “literal-metaphor” for a practitioner’s unenlightened, afflicted consciousness. And finally, as in the case of the Buddha’s renunciation of the house-hold life (or attainment of enlightenment) on the night of an eclipse, the “swallowing” of the moon and sun (like the absorption of the vital breath in the right and left channels into the central channel) is a sign of the defeat of the mundane powers of the cosmos. The “world rulers” (to go back to the Gnostic comparison) of the sun and moon are “defeated” by Rāhu (also the harbinger of the destruction of worldly kings), thus allowing transcendence of their influence.

It is this Rāhu, lord of the *démons*, yet simultaneously the symbol of enlightenment, that entered Tibet with the *Kālacakra Tantra* the same century it was written. He would consequently undergo further transformations and valorization there, becoming one of the most important enlightened protector deities in one school of Tibetan Buddhism. It is to this Tibetan Rāhula that we shall now turn our attention.

¹⁸⁹ Which, as I argued above, is likely one reason why *démonic*-style deities like Vajrapāṇi (and ultimately figures like Heruka) become so valorized in Vajrayana Buddhism.

CHAPTER FOUR

RĀHU IN TIBET

As we have seen, Buddhism as it developed in India consistently relied upon *démons* for a variety of reasons, most importantly as representatives of the worldly, laukika-level of existence that could ultimately rise to the level of a Buddha. Rāhu, as an enduring aspect of pan-Indian cosmology, was firmly a part of this trend in Buddhist philosophy, soteriology, and cosmology. However, while Rāhu arguably becomes a centrally important figure in the *Kālacakra Tantra*, as part of an esoteric subtle-body and correlative cosmological system, in India he never seems to have gained the status of a popular cultic figure.¹⁹⁰ As far as I am aware, Rāhu does not appear to have been worshipped much in India except within the context of *grahapūja* along with the other navagraha, or as a relatively minor retinue deity in, say, Mahāvairocana's *maṇḍala*.

In Tibet, however, Rāhu(la) is transformed into a ferocious, in some contexts fully enlightened, *dharmapāla* (Tib. chos skyong), on a level with the most powerful and popular (and earliest) dharma protectors in the Buddhist pantheon.¹⁹¹ Like the *démons* of India, those of Tibet are subject to pervasive and rampant “mythological contagion,” with different species of *démons* and various individual deities blending together or being distinguished from one another in a dizzying array of multivalent aspects, depending on highly localized variant traditions.¹⁹² Consequently, the Tibetan Rāhu takes many forms and has many names depending on the lineage or context under discussion. Generally speaking, however, he is one of the most prevalent emissaries used by yogins to kill their enemies, as well as (like the Indian Skanda and the *grahīs*) the cause of brain disorders, most notably stroke and epilepsy, while simultaneously he is the source of the cure of these diseases.¹⁹³ In Tibet he has many names and many forms

¹⁹⁰ As many *krodha-vignāntaka* *démonic* deities did, such as Vajrapāṇi, Hayagrīva, Yamāntaka, and Trailokyavijaya, not to mention the former asuras who became identified with *dharamkāya* Buddhas, like Vairocana.

¹⁹¹ Such as Mahākālā, another yakṣa-style deity in the vein of Vajrapāṇi.

¹⁹² Just as there are hosts of sometimes mutually incomprehensible dialects from one valley to the next, so local pantheons often vary wildly from one village to the next.

¹⁹³ In Indo-Tibetan religion, and in Asian religions more generally, disease-causers are very often simultaneously healers of the very same disease. In India, perhaps the most famous example of this is in the figure of Śītālā, goddess of smallpox (see Misra 1969). Sørensen 2000: 167 calls this “‘*coincidentia oppositorum*’ which is so prevalent in

depending on what text or iconographical representation one examines, sometimes appearing as a minor retinue deity, other times appearing at the center of his own *maṇḍala* with his own retinue. He is called Rāhula, The Supreme King of Planets; Rāhula, the Great Planetary Demon Dharma Protector; Rāhu the Poison Razor; Grasping Rāhu, the Planetary Demon Sage; The All Pervading Grasping Rāhu; All Pervading Master of the Sky-Lake; Rāhula, Planetary Demon, Lord of the Cannibal Demons; Long Tail of Planet Smoke (or “Comet,” also a name for Ketu); and The Black Companion.¹⁹⁴

One of Rāhula’s most common Tibetan epithets is Khyapjuk (Khyab ’jug), which means “all-pervading one.” This is also the Tibetan name of Viṣṇu, who in Hindu mythology is understood to pervade the entire universe. But according to certain Tibetan understandings, Viṣṇu is merely a form of Rāhula. Sutherland’s inversion theory is thus clearly proved, at least in this instance. The mythology has come full circle, as it were, and Rāhu has overthrown his old enemy from the *Mahābhārata*. But more commonly, however, Rāhula is known simply as Za (*gza*’), the Tibetan translation of both *graha* and Rāhu.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, for the Tibetans, Rāhu and the *za* more generally are, in certain contexts at least, virtually indistinguishable. For instance, chapter eight of *Clarifying the Meaning of Chöd, A Complete Explanation of Casting Out the Body as Food* provides a fascinating, relatively in-depth, encyclopedic discussion of various kinds of *démons* that may cause obstacles as well as various visions or dreams. There are eleven types listed, which Harding explains are a combination of ancient Tibetan “spirits” and “newer

exoteric [sic?], Tantric mystic thought.” In other words, this is yet another example of the paradoxical nature of the *démons* in Indian (and Tibet) thought generally, but tantric Buddhism specifically, where they can act simultaneously as afflictors and helpers, unenlightened demons and awakened Buddhas.

¹⁹⁴ Names provided by Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 259. Translations are my own. Notably this list of monikers shows that Rāhula is associated not only with the *gza*’ but several other species of Tibetan *démons*, including the *bdud*, *srin po*, and *drang srong*. Nebesky-Wojkowitz also points out that he is counted among the *dregs pa*. Not all of these have Sanskrit equivalents (or antecedents). *Bdud* is usually translated as “Māra,” either in the singular or plural. *Srin po* is the term used to translate the Sanskrit “*rākṣasa*.” The term *drang srong* is the equivalent of the Sanskrit “*rṣi*,” or “sage.” To call Rāhula a “*rṣi*” is rather odd, though as we shall see, he is known in Tibet to take on the form of a sagely older man. It should also be noted that, in Indian mythology, the *rṣis* abide on a plain above the earth, closer to the planets, and thus this might explain the association. Also Jupiter, or Bṛhaspati, is considered a sage and the teacher of the *devas*. Nebesky-Wojkowitz identifies the *dregs pa* as a type of “pre-Buddhist” Bonpo *démon*, but I am somewhat skeptical of this and consider it simply as a general Tibetan term for *laukika* (and potentially hostile) *démons*.

¹⁹⁵ Recall that both mean “grasper,” “seize,” or, in certain cases, “seizure,” with the dual meaning of, for example, Rāhu seizing the sun and moon as well as seizing a person and afflicting them with seizures. Thus, it seems that the Tibetans interpreted Rāhu as the paradigmatic *graha*, and gave both the same appellation. Khoo and Martse note that ‘*gza*’ is related to the word ‘*dzin*’ which also has the dual meaning of “seizure” (Khoo 1999: 246-247).

Indian migrants.”¹⁹⁶ One of these classes is the “rāhulas,” essentially the za, with all the planetary *démons* identified as being effectively identical to the eclipse *démon*. Only now, Rāhula (and by extension the other za) has been mutated into a much more ferocious entity than he ever was in India. Machik describes the rāhulas thus:

[They have] frog bodies, human heads, and serpent tails. For one head there are nine faces. For hair, bunches of seven snakes twisted together lie between the faces and reach to the shoulders. Each of the nine faces has nine (pairs of) jackal-like ears. The nine faces, then, have a (third) eye each...The segments of the limbs have one eye each, and there is a central eye in the belly. The nails are like the nails of great birds. The black head of a long-winged raven with meteorite-metal beak and talons is on top of their head. Red lightning shoots out of their mouths, and red clusters of sparks fly out from their eyes like a blacksmith smoldering...In their hands they hold a lightning lasso and a meteorite plowshare, or else a triangular stove and a bag of various diseases, or else a makara lasso blazing with fire and a bow and arrow made of meteorite metal that slices fierce spirits, or else a three-cornered dagger...made of boiling molten metal and a boiling light ray lasso with red-black sparks. They sit in a terrifying manner riding on the necks of blue dragons, or stay inside black toxic wind, or rest upon black clouds, or ride on the horse of the lightning light wheel, spreading out in innumerable emanations to carry harm to all the beings in the world. Some of them are in the form of jackals, breathing out boiling molten metal like a black cloud that billows out from their mouths...The clamor of extreme movement accompanies them. Blazing tongues of fire cover them below the hips...Some of them are in human form, blazing with light. A multitude of lights in different colors, such as blue and red, shoot out of their sense organs and pores like arrows.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ In Buddhist texts in both India and Tibet a standard trope is an eight-fold list of the different classes of *démons*, in Tibetan called the lha srin sde brgyad (“the eight classes of gods and demons” or, perhaps better, “the eight classes of god-demon”). This is merely a convenient rounding off, however, and as we have seen, in India there are far more than simply eight species of *démon* in Indian mythology more generally. The same holds true in Tibet. Consequently the eight-fold list varies, often wildly, from text to text. The list of eleven given here is fairly unusual. According to one Tibetan myth recorded by Tshal pa kun dga’ rdo rje (1309-1364) in his Red Annals, there are nine classes of native Tibetan *démon* who originated from the nine Ma sang brothers, the first offspring of the progenitors of the Tibetan race, and the original rulers of Tibet (Beyer 1978: 293). For more on the “eight classes” of *démons* in Tibet see Tucci 1949: 717-730, Beyer 1978: 292-301 and Dollfus (2000).

¹⁹⁷ Harding 2003: 241-242. Regarding the Clarifying the Meaning of Chöd text, this is perhaps the single most important scripture to the Tibetan tradition of gcod or “severing” practice. This practice is [in]famous for its grisly

The description of these “rāhulas” in this text closely matches most Tibetan artistic depictions and textual descriptions of Rāhula as a single being, though the number of eyes, heads, arms, and various accoutrements tends to vary. Trungpa describes the general form of the Tibetan Rāhula thus:

He strikes the enemies of the teaching with epileptic fits and madness and the mouth in his belly consumes them. He is covered with eyes signifying that no thought can escape his knowledge. His nine wrathful heads see everywhere. They are surmounted by the head of a croaking raven. He has the lower body of a snake indicating he possesses the power of transmuted passion. He is coiled on the corpse of ego. He is surrounded by animals since he manifests in animal form. His four animal-headed messengers dance in the four corners...¹⁹⁸

He also is usually shown carrying a bow and arrow, a makara-headed banner, and a makara-headed whip or noose.¹⁹⁹

Clearly, within the Tibetan context, Rāhula was morphed into elaborate forms not at all seen in the Indian context (that I am aware). Besides the snake tail and the bow and arrow, every aspect of Rāhula’s Tibetan iconography is new. Martin makes the rather strained argument that these Tibetan/Indian discrepancies are due to Middle Eastern influence on the Tibetan cultural sphere.²⁰⁰ He speculates, in part, that Rāhula’s main weapon comes from Sagittarius’s bow, that the makara-headed banner comes from the occasional depiction of Sagittarius with a head on his tail, and that Rāhula’s nine heads come from the nine divisions of the Islamic zodiacal sign.²⁰¹ I believe, however, that it is much simpler and much more logical to regard these iconographical elaborations as internal Buddhist ones. Numerous other deities in the Tibetan Buddhist

visualizations in which the yogin or yoginī practitioner cuts apart his or her own body and feeds it to various classes of *démon*. This particular text purports to be the oral explanation by the yoginī founder of the tradition Ma gcig Lab sgron (1055-1179) of how, when, and where to properly engage in the practice, including extensive explanations of various visions or dreams one may have due to the practices, or that may indicate obstacles to practice. The text itself, though, was actually written and/or compiled by Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (b. 1370), the eighth member of Machik’s lineage. For more on gcod, its development and philosophical basis, as well as the life of its founder, see Orofino (2000) and Edou (1996).

¹⁹⁸ Trungpa 1975: 118-119.

¹⁹⁹ The makara is a mythical Indian animal somewhat similar to a crocodile. For the use of this image in Indian art, see Darian (1976).

²⁰⁰ To be fair, Martin acknowledges he is merely speculating on possible Middle Eastern influence.

²⁰¹ Martin 1982: 70, n.43.

pantheon are depicted wielding makara-headed victory banners, which originally seems to have been the standard of Rudra-Śiva, and also said to have been wielded by Kāmadeva as Māra during his assault on the Buddha during the night of the latter's enlightenment.²⁰² Consequently, Rāhula's two main hand implements, the bow and banner, have firm Indian antecedents which have nothing to do with astrology originally, but rather with Rāhula's tantric association with the "world-ruling" (in the Gnostic sense) *démon* of desire, Kāmadeva.²⁰³ Furthermore, the nine heads more likely simply represent the nine planets of Indian and Tibetan cosmology and also, I have been told, represent the seven days of the week, plus the planets Rāhu and Ketu.²⁰⁴ Furthermore I believe that Rāhula's multiple heads are, in certain depictions at least, meant to communicate his dominion over the multiple realms of *samsāra* and the species of *démons* that dwell there. As Nebesky-Wojkowitz notes:

According to [one] source the three lowest heads of *Rāhu* have the dark-green faces of the *gshin rje* [death lords, minions of Yama]: their nine very angry looking eyes are cast downward. The middle row of the three heads has the blue-red faces of the *bdud* [*māras*], and their nine blood-shot eyes look into the space lying between the earth and the sky. The three uppermost heads have the faces of the *lha* type [devas]; one of them is green, the other red, and the third white. Their nine peaceful-looking eyes are turned skyward.²⁰⁵

Thus Rāhula represents the *démons* that control hell, the space between the earth and heaven, and heaven. This distinctly threefold cosmological scheme is actually more common in the Tibetan context than the Indian one, and may explain why the deity is given three levels of heads in Tibet. Regarding Rāhula's eye-covered body, the simple explanation of this is that it represents Rāhula's ability to see everywhere at all times, but I believe that this aspect of the

²⁰² Beer 2003: 173. It was a common military practice in Tibet, Mongolia, and India (as well as elsewhere) to mount a defeated enemy's severed head on one's battle-standard.

²⁰³ Beer (2004) explains that Rāhula's serpent noose symbolizes the binding of the five afflictive emotions (296) and that the makara-victory banner symbolizes victory over the four maras (129).

²⁰⁴ Ven. Lama Rinchen Phutsok, personal interview, 11/28/2011. In this context, the "Rāhu" of Indian astrology is merely a docetic manifestation of the Buddhist *dharmapāla*. Regarding the days of the week, the Tibetan word for "day" is also "gza'." The association of the planets with time generally and the days of the week specifically goes all the way back to the earliest Vedic astrology. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 262-263 for Tibetan descriptions of deified days of the week. In Tibet (as in India and, indeed, the rest of the world), the days of the week are named after the symbols used to represent the planets. For instance, *gza' mig dmar* ("red eye day/planet") refers to Mars and Tuesday, while *gza' phur pa* ("ritual dagger day/planet") refers to both Jupiter and Thursday.

²⁰⁵ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 260.

iconography represents a case of mythological contagion, in which Rāhula was blended with certain iconographical aspects of the Hindu gods Varuṇa and Indra. As quoted above, according to some myths the stars were seen as the thousand eyes of Varuṇa, and Indra is said to have had one thousand eyes all over his body as well.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, both these deities were sky-gods in Vedic myth, and Indra had the ability to control weather. Rāhula is effectively a sky-god in the Tibetan context and, as we shall see, is the foremost weather-making deity. Indra is also associated with rainbows, and Rāhu, too, was thought to cause certain kinds of rainbows during the period of an eclipse as far back as the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*. Furthermore, the primary weapon of both Rāhula and Indra is the bow.

The raven head is more of a puzzle, but Rāhula is not the only deity in the Buddhist tantric pantheon to have a small animal head protruding from his crown.²⁰⁷ The raven is a very common carrion bird in Tibet and northern India, and is associated, likely due to its color, with the paradigmatic *dharmapāla* Mahākāla, being one of four black animals in Mahākāla's retinue, as well as considered one of the eight messenger birds of the lord of death; according to one Buddhist version of Rāhula's origin myth, after his decapitation, his head transforms into a raven.²⁰⁸ In his classic study on bird divination in Tibet, Berthold Laufer identifies the raven as

²⁰⁶ There are multiple stories explaining how Indra got these eyes. In one version, he finds his two eyes insufficient for enjoying the beauty of the celestial nymph Tilottamā, and consequently multiplies his eyes (Mani 2010: 789). In another version of the story, Indra is cursed by the sage Gautama for having intercourse with his wife Ahalyā, and a thousand vulvae appear all over Indra's body. Gautama eventually shows mercy, however, and cures Indra's humiliating appearance, transforming the vulvae into eyes instead (Feller 2004: 146-147).

²⁰⁷ Vajravārāhi (Tib. rdo rje phag mo), who has a miniature sow head, and Hayagrīva (Tib. rta mgrin) who has a miniature horse head, are probably the two most notable examples of this.

²⁰⁸ Beer 2004: 77, 88, 110. It should also be noted that Mahākāla has a raven-headed form, called *Bya rog gdong can*, who is the patron protector of the kingdom of Bhutan, and the Bhutanese kings wear a crown with a small raven head protruding from the top. While there seems to be no direct connection here between the crown and Rāhula, the iconographic similarity is striking (see Aris 1998: 56-57). Aris also notes that 'Jigs med rnam rgyal (1825-1881), a descendent of the famous Rnying ma pa treasure discoverer Padma gling pa (1450-1521), wore the raven-crown as a battle helmet in his 1864-1866 war against British colonial forces and, interestingly, had an astrologer on hand to invoke Rāhula to aid him in battle (62). Also regarding the raven's head, there is an extremely fascinating cross-cultural association between this particular animal symbol and eclipses, specifically in pre-modern European alchemical traditions. As Boria Sax (2003) notes in his study of crows and ravens in world mythology and legend:

The Englishman Robert Fludd, writing in the early seventeenth century, called the dark sediment left in...the bottom of a retort after distillation 'raven' or 'raven's head'. This, Fludd believed, was the primal material out of which the cosmos had once been created. This was the dwelling of the Devil, yet it was also the starting-point of the ascent to God. In the intricate allegories of the alchemists, a raven might be identified with the grave or with the sun under eclipse. The raven eating carrion, even the dead bodies of human beings, signified the transformation of all things as the world, slowly but inexorably, moved toward perfection. (79) [Emphasis added]

being one of the main birds used in these practices. He also translates a text that describes this bird as “the protector of men,” effectively a *dharmāpala* in its own right, and the messenger of the gods, explaining how different raven cries portend different things, either good or evil.²⁰⁹ The raven is thus clearly associated with foreknowledge and omens. Now, Rāhula is understood to be able to see all actions with the thousand eyes covering his body; a crown topped by a raven would underscore this foresight and wisdom aspect of his nature. Secondly, Rāhula, as the causer of eclipses (and ultimately, in Tibet, all astrological signs) is, like the raven, associated with portent and prediction. With these associations in mind, then, it is only logical that the raven would be Rāhula’s animal vehicle.

Laufer notes a number of interesting symbolic associations with the raven in Tibet and across the world, including associations with battle, which are logical given that the raven is a carrion bird, and crows and ravens have an international reputation for following armies in anticipation of the slaughter. But, for our purposes, the most interesting information he cites regards an interview with a lama, who refers to a “raven staying near the head of Viṣṇu.”²¹⁰ The deity in question is also referred to as a “sage” (*drang srong*). Now, recall that the Tibetan word for Viṣṇu – *Khyapjuk* (which is the word the lama likely used) – is also Rāhula’s most common name, and that he is commonly referred to as “sage.” Laufer, not understanding why Viṣṇu is referred to as “sage,” comments that the lama was probably confused. Actually, it is probably Laufer who was confused, not realizing that the lama was referring specifically to Rāhula, not Viṣṇu, though it makes little difference, given that these two are conflated by the Tibetans. Laufer, however, seems to know nothing of Rāhula, though he discusses the raven-headed form of Mahākāla. In any case, Laufer goes on to attempt to explain this Viṣṇu-raven connection. He argues that the raven appears to be, in certain contexts at least, a Tibetan transformation of

While the symbolic association between the raven’s head and the eclipse in these two very different cultural contexts is likely coincidental, it again might be heuristically useful to consider the raven in the Tibetan Buddhist context in light of the European alchemical tradition (to my knowledge, Rāhula is not particularly significant in Indian or Chinese alchemy, nor is the raven, though astrological timing in general is). The raven’s role as carrion bird likely has symbolic significance in both cases, and carrion birds have a special place in Tibetan culture and religion as symbols of death and rebirth due to the famous sky-burial practice. On this practice see Wylie (1965) and Martin (1996).

²⁰⁹ The raven, in Tibet and across the world, seems to have been generally regarded as a particularly intelligent bird, and thought to be possessed of special insight and wisdom. Most famously in this regard are the two raven servants of Odin in Norse mythology, who are said to fly around the world gathering information for their master. According to Laufer, the Tibetans seem to have had similar understandings of the raven, at least in its capacity as a divine messenger.

²¹⁰ Laufer 1914: 37. See also pages 3; 9, n. 3; 14, n. 1, 3; 22, n. 1; 30, n. 1; 33; 35-37; and 45 for various information on raven symbolism in and outside of Tibet.

Viṣṇu's famous animal vehicle, Garuḍa, which in India is usually depicted as a giant eagle. His evidence for this is fairly weak, however. He comments that both birds appear to be solar, heavenly birds, and that in Tibetan masked dances (*'chams*), in which ravens sometimes appear as characters, their masks look very little like actual ravens and more like Indian depictions of Garuḍa.²¹¹ Also, in one Indian account that he cites, the raven is a messenger of Garuḍa. This is not particularly convincing on its own, but given that Rāhula is conflated with Viṣṇu in the Tibetan context, and given that both have bird vehicles, I find it likely that, in this context at least, the raven acts as a Tibetan version of Garuḍa, with a divinatory bent.²¹²

Interestingly, Laufer also cites a Hindu myth in which Garuḍa steals the elixir of immortality. Indeed, in the *Mahābhārata* there is a story in which Garuḍa defeats all the devas, including Indra and the sun and moon, in order to steal the pot containing the *amṛta*. Garuḍa is eventually tricked and loses the pot, but in the meantime Viṣṇu, impressed with the bird, makes him his vehicle animal as a reward.²¹³ Thus, both Rāhu and Garuḍa, in the *Mahābhārata*, are depicted as managing to steal the elixir of immortality; Laufer, in connection with this story, also notes that ravens have a reputation as thieves.²¹⁴ Of course, all these associations are highly tenuous, and as Laufer points out, there is no clear textual evidence in Tibetan that would show mythological contagion between Garuḍa and the raven. However, barring evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to speculate that Rāhula's raven-head is related to Viṣṇu's Indian animal vehicle. If this is the case, it is especially interesting especially given Rāhula's *nāga* associations. Garuḍa is consistently depicted in Indian mythology as the arch-enemy of the *nāgas* (obviously reflecting the fact that birds of prey will feed on snakes). In some stories Garuḍa is depicted as indiscriminately killing *nāgas*, and famously fights the powerful *nāga* Kāliya.²¹⁵ Also, in Tibetan depictions of *garuḍas*, they are always shown clutching *nāgas* in their claws or holding them in their beaks. Garuḍa, as Laufer notes, is primarily associated with the sky and sun. *Nāgas*, on the other hand, are associated with low places, bodies of water, or subterranean

²¹¹ For more on masked dances, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1976), Kohn 2001: 185-235, and Schrempf 1999: 198-224.

²¹² The Tibetans do not usually seem to have conflated the two birds, however, and have separate words for them, *po rog* ("raven") and *'khyung* ("garuḍa" or "eagle").

²¹³ Mani 2010: 282.

²¹⁴ Laufer 1914: 45-46.

²¹⁵ Mani 2010: 283.

realms. Thus, it seems likely that Rāhula's raven head and snake tail represent his dominion over both the lower and upper realms.²¹⁶

In any case, now that we have possibly solved the mystery of the raven head, let us return to the symbolism of the makara-banner. I have further been told that it denotes Rāhula's status as a general or commander over lesser, laukika-level *démons*.²¹⁷ Indeed, one variant form of Rāhula called Rokti Khyapjuk (Rog ti khyab 'jug) Rāhula, depicted in full humanoid form (with legs instead of a snake tail) riding on the back of a dragon (as per Machik's description above), is identified as the eleventh of the thirty "chieftains" (sde dpon sum cu) of worldly *démons*.²¹⁸ These are the main deities propitiated in the "worldly deities offering and praise" ('Jig rten mchod bstod) section of the the eight-fold Nyingmapa (Rnying ma pa) *Mahāyoga* canon. But more than this, he is also recognized as one of the three most important Nyingma protectors, along with Ekajāti and Dorjé Lekpa (Rdo rje legs pa), considered to be fully enlightened and regarded as an eighth-level bodhisattva.²¹⁹

While Rāhu was a consistently well-known figure in Indian Buddhism, with the possible exception of the *Kālacakra* cycle, he was, in the final estimate, little more than a stock cosmological character; one of the great lords of the asuras to be sure, but practically speaking, in Indian Buddhist literature, art, and ritual, simply one among a host of laukika *démons* to be pacified and controlled. The Tibetans, specifically those of the Old Tantras sect, however, appear to have seized upon this deity (forgive the pun) with great enthusiasm, transforming him into a complex, multifaceted figure that was used as one of the main weapons in the tantric sorcerer's (Tib. sngags pa) repertoire. What accounts for this transformation? And what accounts for the Tibetans' almost gleefully elaborate descriptions of Rāhula's fearsome appearance and qualities (the above citations being merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg)?

²¹⁶ There is another notable indirect connection between *gza'* and Garuḍa, namely the so-called *gzi* stones. *Gzi* stones are elongated black and white patterned stones, said to occur naturally in Tibet, that are highly prized as good luck charms. They are worn as beads or amulets to ward off ill fortune, in particular *gza'* disease, including stroke and epilepsy. According to legend, these stones are the droppings of Garuḍa (Beer 2004: 212-214).

²¹⁷ Ven. Lama Rinchen Phutsok, personal interview, 11/28/2011.

²¹⁸ Chandra 1999: 2778, Kaschewsky 1998: 98-99.

²¹⁹ Ven. Lama Rinchen Phutsok, personal interview, 11/28/2011. Regarding this triad of Rnying ma protectors, they are especially considered to be protectors of Rnying ma gter ma or treasure texts. Rāhula's role as treasure protector will be discussed below. For an extensive traditional explanation of the Rnying ma "treasures" (which are usually, but not necessarily, religious texts) which were believed to have been originally composed and hidden for future generations to discover by the eighth century saint and founder of the Rnying ma school, Padmasambhava, see Tulku Thondup (1986).

Rāhula is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an isolated case. In fact, Tibetan Buddhists, from the earliest historical period in the mid-first millennium forward extensively adopted, doctrinally elaborated upon, and enhanced the ritual and iconographical curriculum of a massive host of various *krodha-vighnāntaka*-style deities, continuing the trend within late Indian Buddhist tantra of developing elaborate ritual technologies geared primarily toward subduing and apotheosizing *démons*, to a degree unmatched in the Buddhist world.²²⁰ Part of this has to do with the time during which Buddhists first made significant headway in popularizing their religion in Tibet. The first spread of Buddhism into Tibet (that can be historically verified) occurred when the yoga tantras were “in vogue,” so to speak. The second spread, a couple centuries later, brought the *yoginī tantras*, scriptures which seem to have taken root only to a relatively minor degree in other Buddhist countries.²²¹ But it also has to do with what seems to be a particular Tibetan proclivity for the *démonic* (or outright demonic). There are, in fact, popular Tibetan legends that explain that the Tibetan people are descended from malignant *démons*.²²² Indeed, Tibet, in the earliest historical records (and especially in Buddhist texts), had the reputation as a particularly dangerous *démon*-haunted territory, in which the *démonic* inhabitants and the human inhabitants were considered virtually indistinguishable. With this reputation, coupled with Tibet’s military dominance of its neighbors in the mid-first millennium, Tibet appears to have been seen as something of a Central Asian Mordor. As Gyatso puts it:

“Land of the Bad Ones”; “Land of the Red-faced Flesh-eating Demons”; “Tibet, Land of the Hungry Spirits.” These epithets reflect what seems to be an ancient conception of the country of Tibet as being filled with spirits, mostly malevolent, that needed to be appeased and controlled in a complex variety of ritual ways. Such concerns are attested in some of the earliest Tibetan documents available. But the Tibetans not only refer to the animistic

²²⁰ It should be noted, however, that Buddhism seems to have become associated particularly with *démon*-subjugation in every Asian region into which it spread. See DeCaroli 2004: 143-171. I would say, in fact, that Buddhism’s success in these cultures was largely due to its advanced ritual technologies for subjugating hostile *démons*. However, with all due respect to the *démonic* pantheons of South-East Asia, China, and Japan, Tibetan literature of every type, religious and “secular,” is populated with an array of every kind of *démon* imaginable, associated with every aspect of nature and human experience imaginable, most of them, by default, hostile and malignant, as well as a pantheon of lokottara deities of the *krodha-vighnāntaka* type which is more extensive than that found in any other Buddhist country.

²²¹ There are interesting exceptions to this general rule, however. For a possible *yoginī* tantra-style practice in Japan, see Sanford (1991).

²²² The most famous example is the legend of the monkey and rock ogress, who are said to have been the Adam and Eve equivalent for the Tibetans. For this story, see Gyaltzen (1996).

character of their religion in such epithets; they are simultaneously expressing a proclivity to characterize themselves, or at least their ancestors, the human inhabitants of Tibet, and indeed the basic nature of their national race, as being savage, uncivilized, and demonic.²²³

Gyatso goes on to discuss in detail that this proclivity is to such a degree that the entire physical land of Tibet was conceptualized as one giant, hostile female *démon*. We will have occasion to examine this myth in greater detail below. However, I submit that Buddhists in Tibet intentionally emphasized the malevolently *démonic* character of Tibet and its people as part of a general project of conversion beginning in the early second millennium. This can be seen in the legends of Padmasambhava, the paradigmatic tantric yogin and exorcist, and his wrathful subjugation of various Tibetan *démons*.²²⁴ In subsequent hagiographical literature of Tibetan Buddhist saints, it is a consistent trope that the figure in question necessarily subdues, (re)converts, and (re)binds under oath various laukika-level *démons*.²²⁵ This is a standard (and necessary) activity for the saint in question once he (or occasionally she) has become enlightened. Casting Tibet as a land of darkness and unremittingly hostile *démons* that are just barely kept under control by the wrathful subjugations of skilled tantric practitioners would be in the interest of Buddhists, in order to missionize their religion. As Samuel succinctly puts it in his discussion of za disease (epilepsy and stroke) in Tibetan exile communities in Northern India:

²²³ Gyatso 1987: 33.

²²⁴ As we shall see in more detail below, Dalton (2011) argues that these narratives, dating from around the first couple centuries of the second millennium, reflect Buddhist missionizing concerns during this period. For more on Padmasambhava's legendary career, see Dalton (2004b) and Tsogyal (2004), especially 62-64.

²²⁵ The Tibetans preserved the Indian laukika/lokottara (worldly/enlightened, mundane/transmundane) distinction of classifying deities, specifically protector deities, distinguishing between *'Jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma, krodha-vignāntaka* deities that have “passed beyond the worldly spheres” and are upper-level bodhisattvas (eighth-tenth level), and *'Jig rten pa'i srung ma*, which are unenlightened and fully capable of “backsliding” as it were (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 3-4). The latter thus are generally understood to be constantly in danger of reverting to their originally unconverted state as wholly malignant obstructers. Consequently, there are many protectors that require subjugation and conversion multiple times. The very common Tibetan ritual practice of propitiating the *'Jig rten pa'i srung ma* (a.k.a. dregs pa, or “haughty ones”) can be seen as keeping these *démons* in check. Once again, the *démons* provide a potent “literal metaphor” for the constant pacification and subjugation necessary to keep the practitioners' own afflictive emotions in check. As we might expect, however, just as the laukika/lokottara distinction in the Indian context is extremely hazy, the *'Jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma/'Jig rten pa'i srung ma* distinction is often just as blurred, with deities originally regarded as worldly *démons* in certain contexts being considered by their devotees as fully enlightened. This has in certain cases led to extremely contentious sectarian arguments and even violence (see Dreyfus: 1999). For his part, Rāhula seems to have been commonly regarded as a dregs pa, except in certain Rnying ma contexts where he is regarded as a *'Jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma* deity.

[The] immediately identifiable syndromes are part of a bedrock of support for a world view in which there are dangerous and threatening spirits which have to be countered and against which the community has to be defended. In this respect there is a close relationship between the spirit world and Vajrayāna Buddhism...a significant part of what Vajrayāna Buddhism offered to early Tibetans at the level of the village community was the promise of effective protection against the spirits active in the environment, thus taking over from the older spirit practices and providing new and more impressive techniques.²²⁶

I agree with this assessment for the most part. However, there are several points in this passage that are somewhat problematic. First of all, as we have seen, there is more than simply a “close relationship” between the “spirit world” and Vajrayāna. As I have tried to show, “spirits” and the myths, cosmology, rituals, and doctrines of Buddhism generally and Vajrayāna specifically, at least as they have historically developed, are virtually inseparable. Samuel here is essentially recapitulating the same attitude found in Coomaraswamy and others that the “spirit world” is the purview of the village, and Buddhism’s involvement with “spirits” is simply a case of pandering to ignorant peasants. This rests, again, on a radical dichotomy between monastic and lay Buddhists, and implies that the more learned monks would certainly never be concerned with disease because they know better. This is as faulty and over-simplistic in the Tibetan context as it was in the Indian.²²⁷ Finally, I would suggest that, while it is almost certain the Tibetan worldview recognized hosts of *démons* before the advent of Buddhism in the region (just as was the case in India), Buddhists consistently promoted a cosmological scheme heavily populated with *démons* needing subjugation.²²⁸

In any case, Rāhula seems to have been often regarded as one of the *démons* needing repeated subjugation, as he is named as being among the converted *drek pa* (“haughty ones”) in the hagiographical accounts of multiple saints. According to one Nyingma tradition, Rāhula was subjugated in India by Padmasambhava before he came to Tibet.²²⁹ Also in the hagiography of

²²⁶ Samuel 2007: 222.

²²⁷ See the Kohn (2001) passage cited above. See also Cuevas 2008b: 6-11 for a nuanced discussion of the problems of these kinds of “two dimensional” models in Tibet.

²²⁸ Again, though, this was likely not due to a cynical effort on the part of Buddhist missionaries (either Indian or Tibetan) to “sell” a system that they themselves did not believe. Rather it was because the assumption of such a cosmology was embedded in the texts, art, and rituals transmitted from India to Tibet.

²²⁹ Ven. Lama Rinchen Phutsok, personal interview, 11/28/2011. Actually, “subjugated” is incorrect here, because, in this story, Rāhula was already an eighth level bodhisattva. Rather he came to Padmasambhava and offered to

Yeshé Tsogyel (Ye shes mtsho rgyal, c. 757-817), the consort of Padmasambhava, Rāhula is the implied leader of the “powerful gods and spirits of Tibet” who come to offer their life-force to her.²³⁰ Another hagiography of the infamous Ralo Dorjé Drakpa (Rwa lo rdo rje grags pa, b. 1016), mentions that he too subjugates Rāhula, among a number of other high-ranking protectors, most notably Mahākāla.²³¹ In fact, Sørensen cites Ralo’s story as “the first historically documented pacification of Rāhula.”²³² Sørensen, however, seems to assume that Ralo’s hagiography was written when he lived, during the eleventh century. However, the purported author of Ralo’s primary hagiographical account lived about a century later, and the text itself seems to have been redacted even later than this.²³³ Consequently, it would be highly problematic to use Ralo’s hagiography as evidence for Tibetan awareness of Rāhula in the eleventh century. All of this begs the question: when exactly was Rāhula first known in Tibet?

Several scholars (including Sørensen) have argued that Rāhula likely first entered Tibet with the *Kālacakra Tantra* in the eleventh century.²³⁴ According to tradition, this scripture was originally translated into Tibetan around the year 1027 by Gyijo Dawé Öser (Gyijo Zla ba'i 'od zer) with the help of the Indian master Bhadrabodhi.²³⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, Rāhu plays a centrally important soteriological role in the *Kālacakra*’s subtle-body and correlative cosmological system, and undoubtedly the recurrence of this figure in this particular tantra was crucial to the Tibetan adoption of the deity. However, I think it overly convenient to give the *Kālacakra Tantra* entire credit for introducing Rāhula to the Tibetans. As we saw, numerous other scriptures, both *sūtras* and tantras, at least mention the asura lord, and it seems likely to

become the leader of the unenlightened *gza*’, who were threatening to destroy the world, in order to control them. He then took the form of a *gza*’ himself. Hence, Rāhula is not actually a planetary *démon*, he merely docetically appears as one. Interestingly, this story appears to consciously acknowledge Rāhula’s Indian origins.

²³⁰ Changchub1999: 89. I interpret Rāhula as their leader because he is one of only two named deities, and he is listed first. It is unclear here whether or not Rāhula is considered an enlightened deity. I tend to think not because it is a common trope in this kind of literature that unenlightened *dregs pa* offer up their life-force to the saints who subjugate them. Also, he is counted here among the “gods and demons” (*lha srin*), which are usually understood to be mundane, worldly *démions*. It seems that here, in true *démonic* fashion, Ye shes mtsho rgyal’s subjugation of the “outer” *démions* is concomitant with her attainment of “inner” enlightenment. This hagiography, it should also be noted, is a treasure text “discovered” in the seventeenth century by Bsam gtan gling pa c. 1655(?).

²³¹ Sørensen 2000: 168. For Ralo’s colorful career, see Davidson 2005: 129-141, Decler (1992), and Ra Yeshé Sengé (forthcoming).

²³² Sørensen 2000: 168.

²³³ See Ra Yeshé Sengé (forthcoming).

²³⁴ See Sørensen (2000: 168) and Chandra (1999: 2776).

²³⁵ Davidson 2005: 43. Stearns 2010: 327, n. 98. For a succinct history of the *Kālacakra* in India and its introduction to Tibet, see Newman (1991).

me that Tibetans would have known about the figure during the first spread of Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century.

At the very least they would have been quite familiar with the graha (Tib. *gza*). The *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi Sūtra*, one of the most significant scriptures associated with Mahāvairocana, for instance, while it does not mention Rāhu by name, repeatedly mentions rituals through which the practitioner propitiates and purportedly gains control over the planets (*grahapūja*),²³⁶ and as mentioned above, Rāhu appears in other scriptures centered on Mahāvairocana as “Vajrarāhu.” This is significant because, as Matthew Kapstein and others have noted, Mahāvairocana seems to have become an imperial icon in Tibet (as well as other countries into which Buddhism spread in the mid-first millennium, such as China and Japan) during the reign of the last Yarlung kings, most notably Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, c. 755-797). Kapstein argues that the *maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana may have provided the model for Samyé (Bsam yas), Tibet’s first monastery, and notes numerous iconographical depictions of Vairocana in first millennium Tibet, including several Vairocana murals at Dunhuang.²³⁷ There is also a letter to King Trisong from Buddajñānapāda himself describing the latter’s teaching of the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi* scripture to Tibetans, and other sources confirm that Tibetans visiting him translated this text, as well as the important *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* Tantra in which the practitioner is enjoined to draw the planets, including Rāhu, who is specifically named, in the *maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana.²³⁸ The *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* (The Elimination of All Evil Destinies) was probably the earliest and most popular yoga tantra in Tibet during the first period of Buddhist transmission into the region and only became more established as the centuries progressed, widely used in funerary rituals.²³⁹ Thus it seems highly likely that Tibetans would have known about the eclipse *démon* from this text, over two hundred years before the

²³⁶ Giebel 2005: 83, 117, 127. The *sūtra* makes references to planets in other contexts as well, including the injunction that these teachings should only be taught to those who were born under auspicious planets (203). For the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi Sūtra* see also Buddhaguhya (2003).

²³⁷ Kapstein 2000: 63-64. See also Heller (1994). There is also a letter to King Khri srong lde btsan from Buddajñānapāda himself describing the latter’s teaching of the *Mahāvairocanābhisambodhi* scripture to Tibetans, and other sources confirm that Tibetans visiting him translated this text as well as the important *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* Tantra (Germano 2002: 229) in which the practitioner is enjoined to draw the planets (including Rāhu) in the *maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana (Skorupski 1983: 56).

²³⁸ See Germano 2002: 229 and Skorupski 1983: 56.

²³⁹ Cuevas 2003: 36-38. For more on the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* transmission in Tibet, see van der Kuijp (1992). For more on its role as a popular funerary text, see Bjerken (2005). Notably, Viṣṇu riding on the back of Garuḍa also appears in the *maṇḍala* of Mahāvairocana in the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*. Consequently, Tibetans would have been aware of this deity by at least this time as well. The reason why Viṣṇu and Rāhula were conflated by the Tibetans, however, remains an open question.

first Tibetan translation of the *Kālacakra Tantra*. Also, as we shall see, traditional lineage histories of the Nyingma school hold that Rāhula-centric treasure revelations that employ the deity in hostile sorcery were discovered at approximately the same time as the first Tibetan translation of the *Kālacakra*. If these chronologies are accurate, it is likely that Tibetans were aware of this deity in a wholly different context prior to the introduction of the *Kālacakra* because this scripture is concerned with Rāhula, not as an agent of black magic, but as part of its system of correlative cosmology.

The Tibetans may also have had their own “non-Buddhist” version of the graha, called the *te’u rang* (*the’u brang*).²⁴⁰ These beings, considered to be afflictive, at least in certain circumstances, were said to roam in the atmosphere and be lead by “nine brothers.”²⁴¹ In fact, Nyatri tsenpo (Gnya’ khri btsan po, c. 127), the legendary progenitor of the Yarlung Dynasty, is said to have been the youngest of these brothers.²⁴² Regardless of the Tibetan familiarity with the graha (or their own local versions of the graha), however, there is no solid evidence that I am aware of that Rāhu himself was a well-known deity in Tibet until, at the very earliest, the eleventh century.²⁴³ However, that dating depends mainly on legendary, hagiographical accounts of certain saints which were written several centuries after the events in which they are said to occur. Consequently, Rāhu’s firm establishment in the popular Tibetan religious imagination as a

²⁴⁰ I regard the term “non-Buddhist” as highly problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, by the time of the first written documents in Tibet, Buddhism had already at least nominally established itself in the central Tibetan imperial court, and had been well established in the surrounding regions for centuries. For this difficulty in using the term “non-Buddhist” in the Tibetan context, see Walter 2009: 6. Walter also points out that some supposedly “non-Buddhist” Tibetan texts were actually composed by Buddhists (Walter 2009: 39).

²⁴¹ While it is tempting to identify these with the navagraha, I know of no evidence that the Tibetans made this connection. However, much of the supposedly pre-Buddhist Tibetan mythological worldview has striking similarities with certain elements of Indian mythology. For instance, both the Vedic and Tibetan creation stories involve a cosmic egg from which all the elements of the universe emerge. For the Tibetan version of this myth see Tucci 1949: 711-713. Consequently, it is easy to read the Tibetan *the’u brang* as local adaptations of the graha. Other species of supposedly pre-Buddhist Tibetan *démons* also bear an almost identical resemblance to Indian counterparts. This is the case most notably with the *klu*, who are serpent *démons* usually said to live in large bodies of water, and are virtually the same as Indian *nāgas* (Tibetan Buddhists translate *nāga* as *klu*, and in fact I find it likely that the concept of the *nāga/klu* first came into Tibet with Buddhism).

²⁴² Haarh 1969: 216-219. Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956) describes some outstanding characteristics of the *the’u rang* as they appear in Tibetan legends and ritual texts, noting that they are said to have originated from the fat of the cosmic tortoise (see the Tucci reference above) and are of an evil nature, causing bad weather, especially hailstorms, and disharmony, and sicken children. According to one account of the purported founder of Buddhism in Tibet, the eighth century North Indian tantric specialist Padmasambhava, is said to have subdued the *the’u rang* in Kham, southeastern Tibet (283). In Clarifying the Meaning of Chöd, the *the’u rang* are described as usually taking the form of ten-year-old children wielding various weapons and wearing goat skins and/or riding on goats (Harding 2003: 245-246). Notably, in this text, the *the’u rang* are distinguished from the “rāhulas.”

²⁴³ Some scholars have speculated that there existed a pre-Buddhist version of Rāhu with approximately the same qualities that “merged” with the Indian deity. However, this is essentially pure speculation.

well-known *dharmapāla* may not have occurred until as late as the thirteenth century, perhaps later. Interestingly enough, this is approximately the same time that the *Kālacakra Tantra* began to be popularized under Mongol patronage, up until then having been generally passed over by Tibetan lineages in favor of other *yoginī tantras* like the *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Hevajra*.²⁴⁴

Whether or not there is direct correlation, it is around the same time as the rise of the *Kālacakra Tantra* (approximately the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries) that we see Rāhula appear as a significant and consistent trope in Tibetan Buddhist literature (notwithstanding treasure revelations dated before this era which may or may not be legendary attributions). We saw in the first chapter that in Indian mythology (and related astrological materials, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist) Rāhu appears in roughly two different ways, the first being as an impersonal astrological phenomenon, and second as a literary character. This distinction persists to some degree in the Tibetan context, but is significantly modified based on tantric Buddhist paradigms. The first paradigm is that of the yogic subtle-body and correlative cosmology found specifically in the *Kālacakra Tantra*, in which Rāhula appears as an impersonal internal and external force. This Kālacakra Rāhula, so to speak, is mentioned in Tibetan yogic literature, usually in terms of various visions a yogin has based on the state of his inner channels due to his practice (the vision may be regarded as positive, negative, or neutral). The second way Rāhula is commonly represented in Tibetan religious literature is based, alternatively, on the paradigm of the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*. Recall that, in this *tantra*, Rāhula is depicted as being one (of many) potential instruments of the yogin's will, specifically in his *abhicāra* rituals to kill an enemy. Thus, in Tibet the "Cakrasaṃvara Rāhula" is the protector called upon to punish various enemies of the Buddhist teachings. Note that both these types of Rāhula, the yogic and the "black magic" Rāhula, are both very "practical" and neither correlate with the "personal" or "character" Rāhu that appears repeatedly in Indian Buddhist and Hindu mythic literature. Indeed, Tibetan literature in general does not appear to have a genre comparable to the *purāṇic*-style myths of India (at least, not one that has been properly examined by Western scholarship), but there is at least one extremely important exception to this rule, in which Rāhula reappears as a somewhat personalized character, which we will examine in detail below.²⁴⁵ First however, I would like to

²⁴⁴ Davidson 2005: 43-44.

²⁴⁵ It should be noted, however, that this mythological Rāhula is depicted as being continuous with the so-called yogic and black magic Rāhulas.

examine a sampling of the other forms (yogic and ritually invoked protector) that Rāhula takes in Tibetan literature.²⁴⁶

Among the greatest and most well-known cycles of literature in Tibetan Buddhism revolve around the eleventh century yogin-saint Milarepa (*Mi la ras pa*, c. 1052-1135).²⁴⁷ Milarepa is regarded as one of the most important founders of the Kagyüpa (*Bka' brgyud pa*) lineage or school of Tibetan Buddhism. His biography (*Tib. rnam thar*) and the collections of his songs of realization represent one of the most popular genres, or sub-genres, in Tibetan literature both inside and outside Tibetan culture up to the present day. As we shall see, Rāhula plays a significant role in the early part of Milarepa's career, which is discussed in some detail in his biography. In fact, the biography begins with a refuge prayer addressed to Milarepa as guru, the opening verse of which mentions Rāhula: "In the sphere of the reality body, a celestial realm primordially free from the clouds of ignorance, your full form body, the sun and moon, radiates enlightened activities, limitless light rays of wisdom and love blazing with splendor, beyond the reach of the demon Rāhu."²⁴⁸ Rāhula is here depicted as being the paradigmatic fetter, consistent with his role in Indian literature. As we shall see, this is a common image in Tibetan hagiographical literature, though it is particularly charged in Milarepa's case, given Rāhula's role in Milarepa's sinful early career, prior to his enlightenment.

Rāhula is also mentioned several times in the so-called Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa (*Mi la ras pa'i mgur 'bum*), which is a compilation of various popular stories of the saint said to take place after his enlightenment. Each short story provides the context of one or more of Milarepa's songs of literature.²⁴⁹ Both this collection and Milarepa's biography were compiled by Tsangnyön Heruka (*Gtsang smyon He ru ka*, "The Madman from Tsang," 1452–1507), an extremely important figure in the history of Kagyüpa literature, who wrote or compiled

²⁴⁶ On the various genres of Tibetan literature see Cabezón (1996) and Stein 1972: 248-288.

²⁴⁷ These are the dates given in Milarepa's biography. Other sources, however, give his dates as 1040-1123 (see Roerich 1976: 427).

²⁴⁸ Tsangnyön Heruka 2010: 3.

²⁴⁹ While the stories and the songs within them are more generally didactic, expounding basic tenets of Buddhist morality and philosophy, many of them also are encoded with references to more esoteric yogic practices, including subtle-body and deity yoga that seem directed at a more specialized audience. It should also be noted that a significant portion (almost half) of the tales in this collection describe Milarepa's encounters with and subjugation of various types of *démons*. For more on the genre of "songs of realization" in Buddhist tantric literature, see Jackson (2004).

numerous biographical accounts of a number of early Kagyü lineage masters.²⁵⁰ In any case, the recurring trope of Rāhula in the *Hundred Thousand Songs*, as well as the importance of the *démon* in Milarepa's biography, probably tells us more about Rāhula's importance during Tsangnyön's time than it does necessarily about his importance in Milarepa's era.²⁵¹

In any case, Rāhula is mentioned several times in the collection, used as a poetic trope in several of Milarepa's songs in much the same way, for example, that Aśvaghōṣa refers to the figure in the *Acts of the Buddha* written in India over a thousand years earlier, but the references are laden with a different kind of philosophical significance. In one story, during a confrontation with a hostile *sinmo* (*srin mo*) *démon*, Milarepa, in part, sings:

In the midst of the blue sky,
The blessing of moon and sun brings affluence.
From the marvelous Palace of Heaven
 shines the ray of light
By which all sentient beings are illumined and seen.
[I pray] the planet Chamju will not rival
The sun and moon as they circle the Four
 Continents.²⁵²

Notably, this verse is part of Milarepa's initial attempt to drive the *sinmo* away, and is one of several verses that metaphorically compares the mind to something conventionally auspicious, in this case, the sun and moon, that Milarepa prays will not be overtaken by something inauspicious, in this case represented by the eclipse *démon*. However, this attempt to drive away the *sinmo* fails, as she turns out to have a good deal of wisdom of her own, and what follows is a debate between the yogin and the *sinmo*, in which she gives a verse-by-verse rebuttal of Milarepa. To the verse quoted above she replies:

²⁵⁰ For more on this fascinating figure, see Smith 2001: 59-79. For "Golden Rosary" biographical literature so prevalent in the Bka' bgyud tradition, see 39-52.

²⁵¹ There exists another version of this same collection of tales compiled by the third Karma pa, head of the Karma bka' bgyud lineage, Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339), which has discrepancies with the Tsangnyön version. In fact, there has been a longstanding doubt among Tibetans themselves that this collection was actually originally authored by the saint himself (Martin 2001: 118, n. 5).

²⁵² Chang 1962: 39. Rāhula is here referred to as "Chamju," a name I have not seen applied to Rāhula anywhere else.

Rays from the Measureless Palace of the Gods
Dispel the darkness in the Four Continents,
While moon and sun circle the Islands Four,
With ease they give out beams of light;
Were they not dazzled by their glowing rays,
How could Rāhu afflict them?²⁵³

The implication here is that the auspicious thing (sun and moon) metaphorically represents the yogin’s mind, while the inauspicious thing (Rāhu) represents the afflictive thoughts and emotions, ultimately represented in the story by the sinmo.²⁵⁴ Milarepa, in the opening verse, prays that the mind will not be afflicted, and the sinmo responds by basically pointing out that the sun and the moon are asking for it; being attached to their luminosity they suffer when Rāhu eclipses them. It is only after Milarepa sings a series of verses describing metaphors in which the mind and the afflictions are ultimately seen as non-dual (i.e., waves on the surface of the ocean), that the sinmo is converted and becomes Milarepa’s disciple. The deeper philosophical implications of this debate are many, and the story seems to be drawing upon Dzokchen (Rdzogs chen) and Mahāmudra doctrine. But for our purposes it should be noted in particular that, in this context, Rāhu is used as an example (what I have been calling a “literal metaphor”) for afflictive mental states – mental states that the yogin ultimately cannot, and should not, reject. This is a theme that is repeatedly brought up in the tales of the Hundred Thousand Songs.

Philosophical subtleties aside, in these kinds of saintly hagiographies Rāhu is referenced merely as a poetic trope, synonymous with obstruction, obscuration, and hindrance, just as he is in much Indian literature. In the hagiography (rnam thar) of Drukpa Kunlé ('Brug pa kun legs, 1455-1529), an important and (in)famous figure in the Bhutanese Drukpa Kagyü lineage, Rāhu is referenced in one of his songs thus:

Way up in the vast vault of the young night sky
The strong light of the white full moon
Extinguishes creatures’ darkness.

²⁵³ Chang 1962: 41.

²⁵⁴ Hence, once again, we see the continuity of outer *démon* with inner states.

But surely the Dragon Planet is jealous.
Say he is free from envy and jealousy
And let me remove the gloom of the Four Continents.²⁵⁵

Here Rāhu is understood to be paradigmatic of spiritual darkness, the antithesis of enlightenment. Similarly in the autobiography of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdröl (Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, 1781-1851), who is considered to have been an emanation of Milarepa, we find verses like this:

Well-carried by the wind-chariot,
The twofold accumulation and prayers
 you made during long kalpas,
The sun of your manifest body,
Free from all obscuration—Rahu’s
 abysmal maw—
Emanates in a hundred directions...²⁵⁶

Indeed, these literary references reveal that Tibetans generally seem to have considered eclipses as much of a malignant threat as the Indians.²⁵⁷ Among Tibetan communities to this day

²⁵⁵ Dowman 1998: 48. For more on the Drukpa lineage generally and Drukpa Kunlé specifically see Dargye (2001).

²⁵⁶ Ricard 2001: 378. For more on Shabkar see also Ricard 2007.

²⁵⁷ Khoo and Martse note that the eclipse is regarded as so dangerous because it disrupts the regular cosmological order:

In eclipses, we have examples of anomalous cosmological events, the portents of which are heightened if we consider them within the ordered cosmology found in Tibet. Tibetan models of the cosmos are complex symmetries, many-layered, and interwoven. They are often divided into four quarters in each of the cardinal directions; and they are sometimes further subdivided into six, nine, twelve, thirty-six, or three hundred and sixty parts. They reproduce, in the terrestrial realm, the perfection apparent in the celestial realms, where all the stars wheel through the sky about a single point, celestial north. (242)

On the relative, terrestrial level, however, the tradition understands that this theoretically ordered cosmos is under constant threat of spinning widely out of control due to unenlightened beings, specifically afflictive *dāmons* like Rāhula, who must be repeatedly ritually brought under control. For a detailed commentary on three distinct but interlocking systems of Tibetan Buddhist cosmology (based on the Abhidharma, Kālacakra, and Dzokchen systems) see Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé (1995). See also Zelensky (1984). For older, perhaps “pre-Buddhist,” Tibetan cosmology, see Hoffman (1977).

it is common to spend the day of a solar eclipse inside and not engage in any significant activity, except for devoted *grahapūja*. One modern Tibetan legend explaining the eclipse states that:

... at the time of an eclipse, there is a war between the gods and the demi-gods or titans. Rahu wants to see this battle, but cannot, because the light of the sun is too bright, so he obscures the sun with his hand, to make everything dim. This battle is why it is important to offer prayers at the time of an eclipse, for the souls of all the gods and titans who have been killed in battle.²⁵⁸

Interestingly, this story seems to be a slightly different version of an ancient one cited in the first chapter, only in this context Rāhula desires to watch a cosmic battle rather than the heavenly nymphs. There also may be a connection in this story with the concept of “planetary warfare,” of which an eclipse is an example, according to the *Bṛhat Samhitā*.

At any rate, to return to the Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, Rāhu appears again in the collection, most notably during the chapter on Milarepa’s foremost disciple and traditionally the next in line of the great Kagyüpa masters, Gampopa (Sgam po pa, 1079–1153).²⁵⁹ This is one of the longest stories in the collection and is essentially a miniature hagiography of Gampopa on its own, detailing the tragedies of his early life, his seeking out Milarepa and his training under the great master. A good percentage of the story is concerned with relating Milarepa’s guided practice instructions given to Gampopa, which the latter follows rigorously for many months. Not long after he begins these practices (which are only alluded to, not described in any detail) he begins to have a series of visions, all of which Milarepa interprets in various ways, usually explaining that the visions are caused by the shifting winds and energies in Gampopa’s subtle-body. What follows seems to be a catalogue of various visions (and their causes) that it was believed a practicing yogin might experience. One of Gampopa’s visions is of Rāhu:

One day he saw both the moon and the sun, covered by the (dragon) Rāhu which had two thin tails. The Jetsun [Milarepa] commented, “This was because the Prāṇas in Roma [Idā]

²⁵⁸ Khoo 1997: 249. This article also provides an excellent ethnographic account of a modern Tibetan community’s response to a solar eclipse, as well as a discussion of an astrological handbook predicting the eclipse. For more on the importance of Tibetan astrology and astrologers on the village level, see Khachupa (1992).

²⁵⁹ For this figure’s hagiography, see Stewart (1995).

and Jhunma [Piṅgalā] are now entering the Central Channel [Avadhūtī]; it is neither good nor bad.” Then Milarepa repeated thrice: “He is a mighty vulture, now is the time, now is the time.”²⁶⁰

Note that this passage references the absorption of the wind energy from the left and right channels (identified with the moon and sun) into the central channel (identified with Rāhu) described in the *Kālacakra* system.²⁶¹ Milarepa’s statement that “it is neither good nor bad” may at first seem puzzling in this context, since the *Kālacakra* system holds that the movement of the energies into the Rāhu channel is indeed a sign of accomplishment. However, it needs to be recognized that this is simply one of many visions that Gampopa has during his practice, and Milarepa’s response is the same in every case, likely meaning that Gampopa should not be distracted by the visions and simply keep practicing.

The same kind of visionary experience also appears in the biography of Tokden (Rtogs ldan) Shākya Shrī (d. 1919), a yogin affiliated with the great non-sectarian or Rimé (Ris-med) movement in eastern Tibet in the nineteenth century. The description is also given in the very famous White Beryl (*Vaiḍūrya dkar po*).²⁶² This great astrological treatise was written by Desi Sangyé Gyatso (Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653-1705), regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and founder of the Chakpori (Chags po ri, “Iron Hill”) Medical and Astrology College in Lhasa.²⁶³ According to Martin, this text also retells the *Mahābhārata* Rāhu creation story (of

²⁶⁰ Chang 1962: 478. The curious statement “He is a mighty vulture, now is the time, now is the time” is rather baffling. It may be a reference to Gampopa or Rāhula, and may have any number of meanings. One is tempted to interpret it as a “*deu*,” an ancient Tibetan “riddle-language” that uses symbols to encode information. See Norbu 1995: 21-35.

²⁶¹ Recall also that Rāhu is one of the ten most important visions indicating accomplishment in the *Kālacakra* system. Neither the deity nor the scripture of *Kālacakra* appear in the Hundred Thousand Songs, however, with Hevajra being the only named meditational deity mentioned in the text. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that by Tsangnyön Heruka’s time in Tibet, the *Kālacakra* subtle-body and correlative cosmological system was part of the general yogic “repertoire” as it were, associated with various cycles of practices, no longer particularly associated with just the *Kālacakra* cycle.

²⁶² Martin 1982: 70-71, n. 43.

²⁶³ Generally speaking, Tibetan astrology (rtsis, literally “calculation”) is divided into two relatively distinct systems: nag rtsis (“black astrology”) and dkar rtsis (“white astrology”). The latter is based in Indian astrology, while the former is based in Chinese systems. The dkar rtsis system is heavily influenced by the cosmological and calendrical systems found in the *Kālacakra* cycle, and has to do with divination based on the movements of the planets. Nag rtsis, on the other hand, is the calculation of how the elements of traditional Chinese cosmology correspond and interact in various configurations at any given period of time. The White Beryl discusses both systems. Not suprisingly, Rāhula is mainly a part of the dkar rtsis system, but he also is related to a class of earth *démon* known as the sa bdag, which are significant in the nag rtsis system, and have a kind of royal court complete with kings, queens, ministers, and even jesters somewhat in the vein of Kirk’s Secret Commonwealth. In any case, the various members of this *démonic* court shift direction year to year and cause different effects on a particular

which there are several Buddhist versions, one of which we will examine below.²⁶⁴ In any case, it should be noted that in the technical yogic context, as in the poetic context, Rāhula, as eclipse, appears not as a sign of accomplishment (as in the normative *Kālacakra* system) but rather as the sign of an obstacle or, alternatively, the lack of a vision of Rāhu is taken as a sign of accomplishment. For instance, Clarifying the Meaning of Chöd gives a list of visions that indicate that the yogin or yoginī has “attained the path to liberation,” which includes seeing that the “sun and moon recover from being captured by Rāhula.”²⁶⁵

This has been a brief examination of Rāhula as cosmological and yogic principle in Tibet (also as a literary trope, but here again his aspect as the cosmological phenomenon of the eclipse is what is important). This constitutes what I have loosely dubbed the “Kālacakra Rāhula.” Now I want to turn my attention to the similarly dubbed “Cakrasaṃvara Rāhula,” the Rāhula of black magic.²⁶⁶ In this context, Rāhula is a high-profile dharma protector often called upon by the

person based on how they relate to the arrangements of the court on his or her natal year. These beings are popularly thought in Tibet to effect construction, and when building any structure, especially a religious one, great care is taken so as not to injure the local sa bdag, the location of which “depends on the day of the year, such that the spirit gradually spins underground, turning one degree each day to arrive full circle back where she began every 360 days, or one year” (Dalton 2011:74). Given the calendrical nature of these *démons*, they seem to often be understood as Rāhula’s earthly manifestations. For more on both forms of rtsis see Cornu (1997). See especially page 251 for reproductions of sa bdag drawings in the White Beryl, as well as Gyurme Dorjé (2001) for an extensive discussion of the elemental divination system in this text, remarkable and unmatched reproductions of the manuscript’s paintings, and divination tables and depictions of various classes of *démons*, including the sa bdag. For a discussion of the Tibetan natal horoscope, see Childs (2000).

²⁶⁴ Cornu (1997) gives one version of the story, which is virtually identical with the *Mahābhārata* story with some minor changes. First, it is the Buddhas (and the Buddhas alone), not the devas and asuras, who create the elixir of immortality, and they do it, not for themselves but out of compassion for beings afflicted by sickness in the world. Vajrapāṇi is given Viṣṇu’s role, cutting off Rāhula’s head when he steals the elixir. One detail is added here – Vajrapāṇi is described as drinking the poisonous urine of Rāhu to keep it from harming living beings, which causes his body to turn black (in the original myth, Śiva drinks a deadly poison that emerges from the milky ocean along with the elixir of immortality, turning his throat blue). Rāhu, however, is immortal now, and transforms himself into a monstrous being with nine heads. His eyes are said to be transformations of his wounds (145). In another slightly different version of the story, Rāhula is punished by the Buddhas and transformed into his horrible form by them. Vajrapāṇi, too, is punished because he was commanded to guard the elixir and fails. Thus his punishment is to drink Rāhula’s urine. See Farkas 2002: 44. See page 45 for a traditional deity card painting of Rāhula.

²⁶⁵ Harding 2003: 227. Other visions indicating liberation including “get[ting] out of sinking in a foul black bog” and being “bailed out of prison.”

²⁶⁶ I do not mean to imply here that the two were generally conceptualized as being radically separate. I recognize that this is merely a heuristic category I myself have invented, and not one Tibetans themselves seem to have employed. On the contrary, the Rāhula of sorcery is intimately connected with his role as an astrological deity, and he derives his perceived potency from that role. Given the power that *gza’* were generally understood to possess over the lives of humans, and given the horrific damage that specifically Rāhula could cause to the yogin, could he be properly controlled and directed, he would make an ideal weapon in any wrathful tantric sorcery practice. Some readers may object to my repeated use of the terms “magic,” “black magic,” and “sorcery” in this context. While there is not space here to engage in a discussion of the loaded and divisive history and connotations of these terms in Western (specifically anthropological) scholarship and Western culture more generally, there are, generally speaking, several Sanskrit and Tibetan words which roughly approximate Western concepts of “black magic” and

tantric *yogin* to accomplish killing rites, but he is only one of many, and as we might expect given the Tibetan proclivity toward *démons* and *démon*-subjugation, wrathful magic aimed at destroying enemies has a long history in Tibet. In order to properly understand these kinds of rites into which Rāhula was incorporated, we must take a broader look at Tibet's political, military, and sectarian history.

ARMY REPELLING

By the early eighteenth century, the Mongols, with varying degrees of success and intensity, had politically (and on more than a few occasions) militarily meddled within Tibet. Of course, this was often with the support, or outright behest, of Tibetan political and religious factions, beginning with the Sakyapa (Sa skya pa) alliance with Khublai Khan in the thirteenth century. Arguably, in this instance and others, Mongol armies had acted as a force for stability within Tibet, for the first time enabling a functional central government to coalesce since the collapse of the line of central Tibetan kings of the Yarlung dynasty a few hundred years before. Fascinated and impressed by the Sakya hierarchs such as Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251) and Chögyel Pakpa (Chos rgyal 'phags pa, 1235-1280), who combined impeccable scholarship on a host of topics (particularly logic and Buddhist doctrine) with powerful tantric rituals, the Mongolians eagerly solidified a political relationship with the Sakyapa school and its “well-run monasteries, which had by then completely embodied the symbiosis between aristocratic clan [namely the Khön, one of the oldest and most powerful families in central Tibet] and late Indian Buddhism”²⁶⁷ With the aid of Mongol military might, the Sakya/Khön complex was able to, for a time at least, tame the low-level (or not-so-low level, as the case may be) clan and sectarian warfare that had plagued Tibet since the Yarlung dynasty's collapse.

But by 1717, the Mongols were doing anything but helping to suppress sectarian warfare. Quite to the contrary, not only were they fanning the flames of it amongst various Tibetan factions, but now two Mongolian groups, the Qoshots and the Dzunkars, were using central Tibet

“sorcery”: specifically *māyā*, *abhicara*, *mthu*, and *las sbyor*. As Cuevas (2010) notes: “Tibetans...have an understanding of “magic” as a definitive category of knowledge and expertise, and...their understanding does not differ all that greatly from the definitions of anthropologists and intellectual historians beginning with James Frazer (1854-1941).” (168-169). For further discussion of Tibetan notions of “magic” and “sorcery” generally see 170, 174-175.

²⁶⁷ Davidson 2005: 375. Also, it should be noted, it seems that the astrological expertise of Buddhist monks, in part, helped them win patronage among Mongol rulers (see Beckwith 1987).

as a chessboard (or perhaps a more fitting metaphor would be a rugby field) for their own power struggle. By November of 1717, the Qoshots, commanded by Lazang Khan, were holed up in a heavily fortified Lhasa, Tibet's capital and largest city. Surrounding them on all sides was a massive Dzungkar invasion force which had just recently penetrated central Tibet in a bid to overthrow the Qoshot control of Tibet (and, more than this, likely utterly destroy the clan). Both armies also commanded smaller Tibetan contingents, which included warrior monks from the monasteries surrounding Lhasa, who often acted as effective and fierce fighting forces in their own right. When Qoshot forces had, years earlier, kidnapped the Sixth Dalai Lama, a contingent of monks from Drepung monastery successfully ambushed the Mongol force and rescued the Dalai Lama, albeit temporarily.²⁶⁸ By and large, because of this perceived abuse of power and many others, Lazang and the Qoshot seem to have overstayed their welcome in the eyes of most Tibetans. Lazang's overwhelming unpopularity with the local Tibetans in and around Lhasa would prove to be his undoing when Lhasa residents betrayed the Qoshots, opening the gates of the city from the inside to allow the Dzungkar invasion force to spill in. The Qoshots and their allies were utterly destroyed, with a few exceptions. Lazang Khan himself was run down and killed trying to flee the city.²⁶⁹

The residents of Lhasa quickly learned, however, that the new Mongol occupation force was no better (in fact, distinctly worse) than the old one. The Dzungkars, drunk with victory, seem to have behaved in stereotypical Mongol horde fashion, looting, burning, and pillaging Lhasa and the surrounding areas, killing almost indiscriminately. After slaughtering the Qoshots, they turned their swords and bows on many Tibetans as well. A particular target of their wrath was anyone or anything associated with the Nyingmapa sect. Nyingma monasteries were stormed and pillaged, Nyingma monks and lamas killed, Nyingma texts, statues, and paintings destroyed. This anti-Nyingma pogrom shocked the Tibetans and as Petech comments, "Religious persecution was till then little known in Tibet; the struggle between "Reds" [referring to the Nyingmapa, Kagyüpa, and Sakyapa schools] and the "Yellows" [meaning the Gelukpa] had been of a purely political nature."²⁷⁰ This is somewhat hyperbolic, and Petech does note exceptions to this general rule, but his point is taken. The Dzungkar attack on the Nyingmapas was a relatively

²⁶⁸ Schaik 2011: 135

²⁶⁹ For more on this tumultuous period, see Petech 1972: 8-65. See also Shakabpa 2010: 381-430.

²⁷⁰ Petech 1972: 53.

rare example of one sect (the Dzungkar being fervent devotees to the Geluk order) attempting a wholesale purge of another.

Why did the Dzungkar so ferociously attack the Nyingmas? After all, historically, the Kagyü order had been more of a rival to the Geluk and since the Fifth Dalai Lama (who came from a powerful Nyingma family), the Gelukpa had been closely allied with the Nyingmapa. Most notably the Fifth had supported and helped establish Nyingma monasteries near Lhasa, such as the famous Mindroling (Smin grol glin), which was one of the major Nyingma centers sacked by the Dzungkars. One possible explanation is that the Dzungkars, who were Geluk reformists (one might even say “puritans” or “fundamentalists”), saw the Nyingma as corrupt, degenerate, and even dangerous. Historically the Nyingma have been associated specifically with violent sorcery and war magic. Nyingma terma texts are often filled with violent rituals aimed at killing one’s enemies, even entire enemy armies.

For example, one text by a sixteenth century Nyingma *tertön* (*gter ston*, “treasure revealer”) Zhikpo Lingpa (Zhig po gling pa, 1524-1583) entitled *Twenty-Five Ways of Repelling an Army* (Dmag zlog nyi shu rtsa lnga las spyi ru zlog thabs kyi rim pa sde tshan du byas pa) describes various techniques for defending against enemy troops, either by inducing magical invisibility in order to hide a region from marauders, or by outright destruction of the antagonistic force.²⁷¹ Some of the techniques described are quite benign. In one section, the practitioner is simply enjoined to recite certain scriptures in the direction of an invading force and this, the text assures, will be enough to drive them back. Similarly another technique calls on one to raise ritually empowered prayer flags over one’s house or village and this will be enough to ensure the place’s protection. Many of the techniques described, however, are somewhat more actively wrathful. For instance, one section reads:

Repelling by means of throwing tormas [offering cakes]: Imagine all those tormas of whatever yi dam [meditation or tutelary deity] you have accomplished as being the nature of weapons. Wherever their gods are [the protector deities of the enemy force] imagine a flaming pit in front of them; take aim and throw [the torma]. By that, destroy all their strength and capacities. Imagine some are paralyzed, some faint, but all of them cannot

²⁷¹ Zhig po gling pa appears to have been a rather contentious figure, “revealing” purported prophecies made by Padmasambhava that condemned or criticized certain sects during his time, most notably the Dge lugs. This led the Fifth Dalai Lama to reject and suppress his teachings. See Akester (2001 a and b) for the politics of this figure. Also see Ehrhard (2005).

move. Imagine all the spirits on your side having blazing radiance. Imagine that some eat the flesh [of the enemy soldiers], some drink their blood, some eat their hearts and some bind their hands and feet; and strike! Since by this even an army of asuras can be destroyed, a mere human army poses no difficulty.²⁷²

Another technique calls on the practitioner to build a kind of statue of Vajrapāṇi made in part from the freshly harvested hearts, blood, and bones of various carnivorous animals.

While the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism also have their own wrathful rituals aimed at slaying enemies, the Nyingma have a particularly broad array of wrathful practices and fierce deities, and Nyingma tantric sorcerers (*ngakpa*, *sngags pa*) have had (and even today have) a reputation of being particularly powerful and dangerous.²⁷³ These *ngakpa* and the war sorcery terma texts they employed, like the *Twenty-Five Ways of Repelling an Army*, often specifically singled out Mongol forces as targets of their wrath. Indeed, many terma texts (including *Twenty-Five Ways*) “discovered” from the thirteenth century on contain prophecies that describe a Tibet under siege; a degenerate age of the Dharma when the Buddha’s teachings would be in danger of being overwhelmed and ultimately destroyed by foreign invaders.²⁷⁴ Consequently, it is thus stated or at least implied in these texts that it is the duty of the practitioner to save Buddhism by destroying Tibet’s enemies. As James Gentry has succinctly explained it:

²⁷² MDRT: 62.

²⁷³ For a discussion of how tantric Buddhists in Tibet justified violence, see Meinert (2006). Suffice to say here that in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, “compassion can overrule any other Buddhist precept that prohibits killing. Thus a murder motivated by compassion can be a bodhisattva act for the benefit of beings” (111). This basic principle undergirds the violence prevalent in tantric Buddhist literature in India and Tibet from the middle of the first millennium forward.

²⁷⁴ Cuevas, in his study of the history of war magic in Tibet, comments:

The extremes of violence and terror that mark this period and the magical assaults and countersorcery that were initiated in the midst of all the turmoil occurred at precisely the time when a great number of prophecies – some old, some new – began to gain prominence in Tibetan writings with apocalyptic visions of the end of the Buddha’s teaching in Tibet. Prophecies of this sort first appeared in the literature in the late thirteenth century, not long after the Mongols had initiated their first military campaigns against the Tibetans. In these prophecies, Tibet’s foreign invaders were consistently identified as Mongol antagonists...and reference to the invading hordes very quickly became a defining trope of Tibetan prophetic writing. Also consistent in the prophecies was the notion that the happiness and well-being of Tibetans was fated to be short lived. Warnings to this effect are almost always placed in the mouth of Padmasambhava... (Cuevas 2008a: 8).

With the emergence of a shared Tibetan ethnic and cultural identity rooted in Tibet's imperial past,²⁷⁵ foreign armies threatening Tibetan territories were often interpreted in terms analogous to demonic possession. To confront such martial threats, Tibet's ritual specialists frequently performed countrywide exorcisms, thus giving rise to the ritual subgenre of army expelling rites, or *makdok (dmag zlog)*.²⁷⁶

The “prophecies” about the threat of foreign armies in these terms was no pious hyperbole. At the time of their discovery, roughly from the thirteenth century up to the eighteenth, Tibet was subject to constant incursions by invading forces on nearly every side, which often resulted in political instability and factional infighting in which these war sorcery texts were often employed to supplement conventional military tactics.

Combined with the Islamic invasion of North India, the loss of Central Asia to Islamic armies, the rise of the Mongol powers, and the conflagration at its borders, Tibetans developed a perception of orthodox Buddhism under duress, a perception that was fundamentally correct.²⁷⁷

In his recent study of tantric violence in Tibetan Buddhism, Jacob Dalton examines the significant shifts in the myths and legends found in Nyingma treasures over time. In particular, he notes that hagiographies of Padmasambhava “discovered” in the twelfth century, in particular Nyangrel Nyima Özer's (Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer, 1136-1204) *Copper Island* biography of the Great Guru, portray the land of Tibet and its people as untamed, demonic, and in desperate need of conversion. Dalton argues that this reflected the missionary concerns of Buddhists in Tibet at this time. Some two centuries later, however, once Buddhism had been institutionally and culturally established in Tibet, treasure biographies of the same figure, specifically Orgyen Lingpa's (O rgyan gling pa, 1323-1360) *Padma Chronicles*, describe Tibet in almost polar opposite terms:

²⁷⁵ Treasure literature, most notably the Mani Kabum cycles, often also contain mythic histories of Tibet, which speak of Tibet in a kind of “proto-nationalistic” sense, glorifying Tibet's imperial past. For more on the concept of Tibetan “proto-nationalism” see Dreyfus (1994). For myths of Tibet's imperial past, see Kapstein 2000: 141-177.

²⁷⁶ Gentry 2010: 131.

²⁷⁷ Davidson 2005: 375.

No longer was Tibet a mere borderland filled with darkness and demons; it had become a major center in the Buddhist world, an enlightened land under threat from its own barbaric neighbors...The Mongols were unraveling the work of Padmasambhava and Tibet's other tamers and threatening to return the land to its original state of darkness.²⁷⁸

Twenty-Five Ways of Repelling an Army makes reference to so-called “Duruka,” which has the connotation of “demon.” This word comes from the Sanskrit “Turuṣka,” a generic term for Turks that was frequently used to refer to Muslim invaders who had destroyed Buddhism in India by the thirteenth century, or sometimes Mongolian armies. For all intents and purposes, though, while Muslims were generally considered a dread, ever-present threat, over the years no other foreign force (in pre-modern times at least) did as much damage, made nearly as many incursions, or penetrated as deep into Tibet as the various Mongol clans.²⁷⁹

Since the thirteenth century, Mongol armies frequently posed the most dangerous military threat to Tibetan survival. Outnumbered and overpowered, Tibetan political leaders often commissioned ritual specialists to supplement more conventional means of national defense with the magical protection promised by *makdok* rites.²⁸⁰

Gentry profiles one very (in)famous ritual specialist, a Nyingma *ngakpa* by the name of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (Sog bzlog pa Blos gros rgyal mtshan, 1552-1624), who was especially renowned for his purported skill at magically killing Mongols. The student of Zhikpo Lingpa, the discoverer of the *Twenty-Five Ways of Repelling an Army*, Sokdokpa's name literally means “repeller of Mongols,” and his autobiography gives a detailed chronicle of the history of Tibetan campaigns of magical warfare against Mongol forces (which Sokdokpa claims have always been ultimately successful in expelling the invaders). Furthermore, he describes his personal 32-year campaign of magical, anti-Mongol resistance, which he also claims was wildly

²⁷⁸ Dalton 2011: 129.

²⁷⁹ The fact that they were often fighting at the behest of Tibetan allies, and were themselves usually Buddhist (at least superficially so), would have been small comfort when they were razing monasteries, pillaging towns and cities (such as Lhasa itself), killing monks and destroying religious paraphernalia, as during the anti-Rnying ma pogrom by the Dzungkar forces in 1717.

²⁸⁰ Gentry 2010: 132.

successful.²⁸¹ While his accounts may simply be pious revenge fantasies, it seems that Sokdokpa did indeed have a fearsome reputation and was popularly credited with wiping out Mongol contingents in a variety of ways, such as burying one group in an avalanche of snow. “His spells were [also] credited with sending one Mongol chieftain mad, and calling down lightning which darted around the ranks of his soldiers.”²⁸²

Again it should be stressed that in war-torn medieval Tibet, all schools of Tibetan Buddhism employed *makdok* rituals, and tantric Buddhists in India, judging from the *Cakrasaṃvara* and *Vajrabhairava*, likely engaged in similar killing rituals. That said, however, the Nyingma canon is particularly filled with a broad array of sorcery texts, and the other schools seem to have, in certain instances, drawn on their repertoire when needed. Indeed, one of the reasons that the Fifth Dalai Lama seems to have so allied himself with the Nyingma school, and had many Nyingma teachers, was that he wanted to employ their wrathful rituals for the sake of state consolidation and defense.²⁸³ When Gushri Khan and the Qoshot Mongols were in the process of conquering an enemy stronghold, the Fifth (in an ironic twist) had a Nyingma sorcerer perform *makdok*-style rites in support of the Mongols. The Fifth Dalai Lama’s liberal attitude toward the Nyingma, however, caused the “chagrin of Gelug lamas of a more sectarian bent.”²⁸⁴ As I mentioned before, the Fifth was from a powerful Nyingma family, whose patron deity (we might, at the risk of stirring up controversy, use the term “totem” deity) was none other than Rāhula. In the Fifth’s secret autobiography, in which he describes a host of vivid visionary experiences in which he sees, interacts with, or becomes various deities, he purportedly has two encounters with Rāhula. The first time is in 1642 when the Dalai Lama was twenty-six years old. There is little detail about this particular vision, except that it apparently occurred right after he

²⁸¹ For more information on Sog bzlog pa, and in particular the ways in which he “sells” himself and his practices, see Gentry(2010).

²⁸² Schaik 2011: 120.

²⁸³ That is not to say that the Fifth’s motivations in allying himself with the Rnying ma school were entirely (or even primarily) motivated by a desire to exploit their mag dog rites. As mentioned, Losang Gyatso was himself from a Rnying ma family and was a practitioner of the Rnying ma “Great Perfection” (dzogs chen) soteriological system, as well as performing rituals to and having visions of specifically Rnying ma deities, such as Vajrakīla and various forms of Padmasambhava such as the wrathful Rdo rje gro lod. Also, as Schaik points out “Both the fifth Dalai Lama’s own record of the teachings he received, and those of later Nyingma lamas such as Jigme Lingpa, show just how important he was to the continuing transmission of Nyingma received teachings (known as kama) in Central Tibet” (Schaik 2011: 281, n. 34).

²⁸⁴ Schaik 2011: 128. Not to say that the Fifth accepted Rnying ma in a wholly unbiased fashion. For instance, as noted above, he rejected and suppressed some of Zhig po gling pa’s prophecies, as well as other texts and authors, most notably, perhaps, the Jo nang pa scholar and historian Tāranātha. For more on this and book banning in Tibet generally, see Smith (2004).

had received a painting of Rāhula from one of his Nyingma teachers. The next vision of Rāhula comes decades later, in which, after a retreat, the Dalai Lama sees a miniature, foot-tall Rāhula appear, and then disappear into the western direction.²⁸⁵ This tiny Rāhula is rather interesting, and contrasts sharply with the deity's usual descriptions as being a titan of truly gargantuan proportions. That he appears so small by comparison to the Fifth is reminiscent of the story in which Śakyamuni Buddha subjugates the *asura* by making himself a tremendous size, enough to dwarf Rāhu.²⁸⁶

In any case, while the Fifth's advisors may not have necessarily had a problem with his relationship with protectors like Rāhula, they did apparently object to other, primarily Nyingma, *yidam* deities associated with wrathful *makdok*-style rites, particularly Vajrakīla (Tib. Rdo rje Phur pa).²⁸⁷ As noted above, the Gelukpa school was formed as a kind of reform sect that emphasized monastic discipline, institutional learning, and soteriological, doctrinal knowledge over and above (and against) the kind of lay tantric-priest-performed black magic that characterizes much of Nyingma practice.²⁸⁸ While apparently many Geluk had pro-Nyingma sympathies, and few advocated supported repression of the old school within Tibet itself, it seems that the more zealous Mongols felt differently, and from 1718-1720 they continued a policy of Nyingma persecution.

The Dzungkar occupation of Tibet was mercifully short-lived, however, when the Manchu-ruled Chinese Qing dynasty (who spent much of the eighteenth century warring with the Dzungkar) intervened and drove out the Mongols, with the help of local resistance led by Tibetan

²⁸⁵ Karmay 1988: 30, 60.

²⁸⁶ I make no judgment regarding the veracity or ontological reality of the Fifth's purported visions. However, this vision (among many) seems to clearly reflect the Fifth's project to valorize himself, and his reincarnation lineage, as the de-facto political and spiritual leaders of Tibet. This is also the context in which the Fifth employed war sorcery rites for state defense. Cuevas notes:

The magical warfare and countersorcery deployed between the years 1637 and 1642 occurred at precisely the time when the Fifth Dalai Lama was beginning to elaborate his belief that he was the embodiment of Avalokiteśvara on earth who would secure Tibet's final victories. The Dalai Lama's activities as Avalokiteśvara, bodhisattva of compassion, were inspired by a confidence derived from millenarian prophecy, which in turn justified the destruction of opposing groups, the demonic hosts of Māra, the anti-Buddhists, who seemed to be proliferating at a troubling rate as the beginning of the end approached. (Cuevas 2008a: 21)

Rāhula appears to have been used as one of the Dalai Lama's many weapons. For a *sādhana* and propitiation ritual of the "Dharma Guardian Gza' Demon Rāhula who can grind even cliff-faces of Vajra to dust" by the Fifth Dalai Lama, see CWLG.

²⁸⁷ For a history of this deity see Boord (1993).

²⁸⁸ In fact, the Dge lugs and Rnying ma have often been stereotypically interpreted as representing two poles of Tibetan Buddhism, institutional and "shamanic." For this bipolar theory, see Geoffrey Samuel (1993).

nobles, most notably Polhané Sönam Topgyé (Pho lha nas bsod nams stob rgyas, 1689-1747), who would go on to help suppress a near invasion by yet another Mongol clan and lead one of the factions in very bloody civil war in 1728-1729 against a coalition of power-hungry Tibetan local rulers, escaping multiple assassination attempts in the process. Polhané would soon thereafter be given the title of “Miwang” (*mi dbangs*) or “ruler of men,” and “Mipham” (*mi pham*) or “Invincible One,” and became the de-facto king of central Tibet until his death in 1747.²⁸⁹

Before Polhané’s reign, however, when he was still one of several mutually competing (and at times outright hostile) ministers in the court of the Seventh Dalai Lama, for the entirety of the 1720s, Tibet was a political mess, a powder keg ready to explode at any time. Its borders were unsecure and porous, so that the region was under a near-constant threat of incursion by Chinese and Mongol forces from the north and east, and later, Bhutanese from the south during that kingdom’s own civil war. Furthermore, the feuds between various central Tibetan governors made any stable central government, such as the one formed by the charismatic Great Fifth, impossible, and eventually lead to a civil war that devastated the Ü-Tsang (Dbus gtsang) region. New York attorney George Templeton Strong’s characterization of the state of the Union at the onset of the United States’ civil war in 1861 could readily describe Tibet’s situation about a hundred forty years earlier: “The bird of our country is a debilitated chicken disguised in eagle feathers,” Strong wrote. “We have never been a nation; we are only an aggregate of communities, ready to fall apart at the first serious shock...”²⁹⁰

Besides this general instability, the 1720s were further marked by anti-Nyingma persecution when Qing officials decided to zealously support the Geluk ruling sect at the expense of the Nyingma. A proclamation issued by the emperor in 1726 reads, in part:

...the followers of the religious system of the earlier translations [Nyingma], who dwell in their monasteries, not only their pride must be repressed, but it is inexpedient for them to plunge into irregular practices pretending to work for the welfare of the creatures by initiating converts, explaining the tantras, teaching the moral precepts, etc. They shall not perform the repression of demons, the burnt offerings (*homa*), the throwing of the

²⁸⁹ For more information on Pho lha nas’s exploits, see Petech (1972), who uses the biography of Pho lha nas as one of his main primary sources. See also Norman 2008: 301.

²⁹⁰ Goodheart 2011: 154.

magical weapons (*gtor-zor*), all of which are illicit exorcisms (*abhicāra*)...From now on, those who wish to become monks shall not have it in their power *ad libitum*, but shall enter only the teaching community of the Yellow Bonnets [Gelukpa].²⁹¹

Interestingly, but unsurprisingly, the Nyingma practices particularly targeted by this proclamation are the wrathful *makdok*-style rites, and it could be read as being part of the Chinese effort to disarm and disband Tibetan military units after Lhasa had been retaken from the Dzungkar in 1720. The proclamation also gives the sense, however, that (either because of or in addition to their proclivity for “black magic”) the Nyingma teachings are spurious, they are morally corrupt, and thus should not be allowed to explain the tantras or have the ability to ordain monks.²⁹²

Among the array of these so-called “spurious practices” that fill Nyingma treasure literature (we might call them “grimoires”) are a great number of *za* cycles directed toward invoking and propitiating Rāhula, either simply as a general protector of the teachings, or more specifically as part of a ritual to rain down death and destruction on one’s enemies, either by afflicting them with stroke or epilepsy or raining hail down upon them. Indeed, among Nyingma *ngakpas* even to this day, Rāhula is the premier weather-making deity (whether or not he is being controlled by a tantric priest), the weather in question usually being destructive, with the *ngakpa*’s intention being to destroy crops, or even kill his enemies with storms.²⁹³ The most famous weather-making *ngakpa* of Tibetan legend is none other than Milarepa himself who, before his enlightenment at least, was known as a great sorcerer, capable of casting hail at will. According to Milarepa’s biography, he had two, presumably Nyingma, teachers, though Martin (1982) suggests the practices used may have been Bönpo in origin. In any case, after the practices of his first sorcery teacher prove inadequate, Milarepa is sent to a second teacher, known by several names but identified by Martin as a figure called “Doctor Gnubs chung,” named Nüpchung Yönten Gyatso (Gnubs chung yon tan rgya mtsho, c. tenth century) in the biography itself. He teaches Milarepa a ritual of Zadong Marnak (*gza’ gdong mar nag*, Dark

²⁹¹ Petech 1972: 106

²⁹² It is unclear how strictly these measures were enforced, but by and large they seem to have been met with general disapproval by Tibetans.

²⁹³ For more information on Tibetan weather-makers, both human and *démonic*, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996:467-480. For a discussion of Tibetan weather-makers in the context of broader Tibetan assumptions regarding weather phenomena, see Huber (1997).

Red-faced Za) “that, when cast, kills with the syllable *hūm* and causes unconsciousness with the syllable *phaṭ*.”²⁹⁴ Milarepa proceeds to practice this ritual, and on the fourteenth day of continuous practice, a number of *dharmapālas* (presumably Zadong Marnak’s retinue *démons*) deliver to Milarepa thirty-five bloody human hearts and severed heads, thus indicating that the practice has killed that number of people.²⁹⁵ Indeed, as Milarepa finds out, his practice summoned a giant scorpion which massacred the wedding party he was targeting.²⁹⁶ By examining various histories, specifically the Treasury of Precious Termas (Rin chen gter mdzod) of Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé (‘Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, 1813-1899), Martin concludes that this ritual of Zadong Marnak either is a rite called Fiery Razor of Magical Redeflection (*Yang bzlog me’i spu gri*), or is appended to it. Notably, Sokdokpa mentions this text in his Collected Works. This text also is part of a larger cycle of Yamāntaka rituals either handed down to, and/or “rediscovered” by the good Doctor Nüpchung. The cycle seems to have originally been revealed by Nüpchung’s spiritual predecessor, Nüpchen Sangyé Yeshé (Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes, d. 982), who also writes in the Secret Moon Grimoire (*Zla gsang be’u bum*) attributed to him that Rāhula is a minion of Yama (hence possibly explaining Rāhula’s prominent place in this Yamāntaka cycle).²⁹⁷

Further, Kongtrül writes that this Fiery Razor of Magical Redeflection ritual was eventually passed down to the head of the Drikung (’Bri gung) Kagyü lineage, Rigzin Chökyi Drakpa (Rig ’dzin chos kyi grags pa, 1595-1659) in the early seventeenth century and “under the personal guidance of Yamāntaka, spread the teaching which is known as the Redeflection of the ’Bri [Dri] School.”²⁹⁸ The Drikung Kagyü lineage, somewhat unique in that it is a combination of Sarma and Nyingma lineages, is well known for being a fierce opponent of the Sakyapa

²⁹⁴ Tsangnyön Heruka 2010: 32.

²⁹⁵ This recalls the Fifth Dalai Lama’s vision of a protector deity swallowing a sack full of severed heads.

²⁹⁶ The scorpion motif is very interesting in this context, and Martin again speculates a Middle-Eastern zodiacal origin for it, assuming that Rāhula is specifically identified with scorpions. However, I find no evidence of this in either Indian or Tibetan sources. I do have unverified information that, at least in one Rnying ma lineage Rāhula’s primary minion has a scorpion head. Also, there is at least one temple painting in which Rāhula is depicted wearing a crown of scorpion claws (Olschak 1979: 104). However, Tibetans (and Rnying mapas specifically) seemed to have associated scorpions (Tib. *sdig pa*, which also means “sin” or “defilement”) with wrathful deities, both yidams and protectors, more generally. For an interesting story of another giant scorpion (this one made of iron with nine heads and wielding a golden sword) associated with the cycle of the deity Mahottarakīla, see Boord 1993: 112. See Beer 2004: 277 for a discussion of scorpion-hilted swords often wielded by wrathful deities. For more on the symbol of the scorpion in Tibet more generally see Heller (1997).

²⁹⁷ Martin 1982: 66, n. 31. This seems to replicate the Indian understanding of the eclipse as a Messenger of Death. For more on *be’u bum* texts, see Cuevas (2010), who mentions the Secret Moon text specifically and provides reproductions of illustrations from it (173). For more on Gnubs chung, see Dalton (forthcoming).

²⁹⁸ Kong sprul, quoted in Martin 1982: 57.

during that school's ascension to political dominance in central Tibet in the thirteenth century, and later of the Geluk in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁹⁹ In fact, Chökyi Drakpa's predecessor in the line of Drikung lineage holders, Gyelwang Rinchen Püntsoq (Rgyal dbang rin chen phun tshogs, 1509-1557), who was himself a treasure revealer, is said to have used za sorcery (possibly from the same "Razor" cycle) to kill multiple throne holders of the Geluk Ganden (Dga' ldan) monastery, forcing the Gelukpas to employ protective za charms to stop the slaughter.³⁰⁰ Chökyi Drakpa himself did compile a fairly extensive collection of za rituals entitled *A Compilation of the Pure Razor Scriptures of the Venomous Planetary Demon for the Vajra-Suppression of the Enemies of the Teachings* (*Gza' bdud dug gi spu gri'i las byang ngag sgrig bstan dgra 'joms pa'i rdo rje*), which is sixty-four folios long in his *Collected Works*.³⁰¹

Appended on the end of this collection is another text entitled the *Action Sādhana of the Wind Wheel of the Planetary Demon*. The term "Wind Wheel" referred to here is probably a Tibetan translation of the "Wind Maṇḍala" associated with Rāhu in the *Sāadhanamālā*. In any case, this is a ten-page liturgical invocation/visualization of the deity in which Rāhula is treated effectively as a *vidam* (in fact, the practitioner is enjoined to view the Rāhula as inseparable from his *vidam*), but the main goal of the practice is, not to attain enlightenment, but to placate the deity with various offering substances and exhort him to destroy the enemies of Buddhism (the two goals of the practice are interrelated since the offering substances are, in large part, the dismembered pieces and bodily fluids of enemies). The ritual begins with visualizing Rāhula emerging from a massive black cloud:

...in the center of a raging [storm] of hot and cold appears a dense, vast black cloud like a dark sphere, swirling like a blizzard of thunder, lightning and hail...In the center [of this]

²⁹⁹ Though, largely, they were ultimately unsuccessful in their resistance. In 1290, for instance, their resistance was crushed by the armies of the pro-Sa skya Khublai Khan, who destroyed 'Bri gung monastery and killed most of its monks (Schaik 2011: 81).

³⁰⁰ Sørensen 2000: 169, n. 5. Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 681. Again, this anecdote underscores the fact that Rāhula was considered an important deity in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, even if he is particularly associated with the Rnying ma. It was also common, despite common and notable instances of sectarian biases and conflict, for the different schools to incorporate teachings and textual cycles from other lineages like this. The Dalai Lamas, for instance, have consistently had teachers from and incorporated teachings from all schools, even the heretical Jo nang pa sect, from which the Dge lugs received the *Kālacakra*. It was also not uncommon to have treasure revealers in Gsar ma lineages (though Rin chen phun tshogs himself was originally Rnying mapa), particularly among the Bka' bryud. But there are even instances of Dge lugs treasure revealers (see Dargyay 1981). Chos kyi grags pa himself, later in his life, was imprisoned by Dge lugs pa authorities commanded by the Fifth Dalai Lama, though later released (see Khenpo Tsültrim Tenzin 2008: 62).

³⁰¹ See RCGB, ff. 307-372.

resounds an unendurable, raging voice of booming thunder...on top of a cushion of [the bodies of] arrogant male and female *rudras*, suddenly appears the Supreme Za, Heruka Blood-Eye, composed of the five elements. His body is colored red-black, and his hair made of lightning sweeps upwards. He is endowed with intense wrath, courage and ferocity, sparks shooting from his eyes. The sound of thunder resounds from his ears. A dust storm swirls from his nose. He bares his fangs, and wears a flayed human torso of an enemy; together with the enemy's heart and lungs...In his lap is his consort, a demoness named Blood-Eye Exhaustion Demon. Her dark red hair swirls like a storm. From her eyes, tears of blood shower the triple world. From her nose, a purple mist of diseases spews forth. She bares her fangs and wears the flayed lower body of an enemy, together with his bowels.³⁰²

Here, Rāhula (or “Heruka Blood-Eye”), is presumably fully anthropomorphic, and is described as being in union with a consort, both of which are relatively rare in Tibetan (and Indian, for that matter) depictions and descriptions of him.³⁰³ The various aspects of these two deities (the mist of diseases, the flayed skins, etc.) are all fairly standard in Tibetan wrathful deity depictions, as is the storm imagery, although this may be particularly highlighted here, given Rāhula's role as a weather-making deity. The cushion of *rudras* is also standard, referring to the foundational *Mahāyoga* myth of Rudra's subjugation.³⁰⁴ The moniker of “blood-eye” is interesting, and Nebesky-Wojkowitz notes a Kagyü text which identifies the queen of the *sinmo* as “frog-head blood-eye.”³⁰⁵ The frog head reference will be significant when we examine Rāhula's parentage below. Rāhula seems to have a particular connection with the *sinmo* since, besides *za*, as we shall see, they are his most commonly depicted retinue *démons*.³⁰⁶ Lastly, I wish to highlight the “red-black” coloration of Rāhula described in the passage above. This may possibly link “Heruka Blood-Eye” with Milarepa's “Dark Red Za,” or it could be purely coincidental.

³⁰² RCGB: 374.2-376.3.

³⁰³ That said, Rāhula is, in certain contexts, consistently understood to have a consort, even if she is rarely depicted. Nebesky-Wojkowitz notes another name given for her as Sa yi 'phung bye nag mo, who is described as an earth goddess, black and hideous in appearance, wielding a sickle and a sack of diseases (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 260). He also notes a story in which a Sikkimese princess, (who murdered her half-brother) in the early eighteenth century, is regarded as the incarnation of this goddess.

³⁰⁴ We have already examined several Indian versions of this myth. For an elaborate Rnying mapa retelling of this myth, see Dalton 2011: 159-206.

³⁰⁵ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 280.

³⁰⁶ See Fig. 3 for a painting depicting Rāhula with a retinue consisting of *gza'* and *srin mo*.

What is notably absent in the above description is Rāhula's standard serpentine or draconic appearance. However, later in the text the author explains that his mount is a nine-headed dragon:

The Supreme Za Rāhula subjugates enemies and hindrances, his vicious countenance blazing like the fire at the end of time...from his body he emanates all the myriad spirits of demons, with a roaring voice bringing down epilepsy³⁰⁷ as swift as lightning. With mind emanations he sends forth various miraculous manifestations.³⁰⁸ He moves riding on a poisonous serpent with nine blazing heads. With the speed of lightning he circles the entire 3000-fold world systems instantaneously. He rains down great epilepsy on all enemies. He is in blissful union with his consort, the Supreme Mother Blood-Eye. He completely commands the arrogant black sorcerers.³⁰⁹

The text, it should be noted, repeatedly implies Rāhula's retinue consists of all the multitudes of *démons* in existence, and he is their supreme ruler. Like Māra, he is the paradigmatic "spirit-deity," and propitiating him is, in some sense, equivalent with propitiating (and controlling) all *démons*. Interestingly, though, he is also here referred to as the lord of arrogant black sorcerers, presumably ngakpas, and thus it is implied that he ultimately controls them, rather than vice-versa. Also the epithet "Heruka" implies that he is considered to be enlightened, this again being the common title for enlightened wrathful deities. Thus, once again, the laukika/lokottara distinction is dissolved, and the paradigmatic *démon* is apotheosized as a Buddha.

In any case, however, the goal of this practice is primary to "rain down epilepsy on all enemies."³¹⁰ If this was Rāhula's primary function for the Drikung Kagyü, for the Yazang (G.ya' bzang) Kagyü lineage (which no longer exists) his primary role seems to have been as a healing deity.³¹¹ As Sørensen discusses, the founder of this lineage, Yazangpa Chökyi Mönlam (G.ya'

³⁰⁷ Literally "gza' disease" which can also be stroke or general paralysis.

³⁰⁸ May refer to the symptoms of gza' disease.

³⁰⁹ RCGB: 380.5-381.3

³¹⁰ Hail is also referred to. It should be noted that the ritual is relatively vague in general, though there are references made to linga, tormas offerings, as well as several mantras that the practitioner is enjoined to recite.

³¹¹ The G.ya' bzang lineage seems to have had a very close relationship with Rāhula, and in many ways he seems to have been their patron protector. Sørensen notes that this lineage has a Rāhula oracle, and Rāhula seems to have "mythologically merged" with the *démon* believed to dwell in Mount Sham po, near which the G.ya' bzang sect and their affiliated clan were based. See Gyalbo (2000).

bzang pa Chos kyi smon lam, 1169–1233) is credited with having a number of visions of Rāhula in a peaceful, fully human form:

Once when the Precious Lord...g.Ya'-bzang-pa sat in strict meditative retreat in a mountainous recluse in Rong-kha³¹²...he clearly beheld how [Rāhula], having transformed [himself] into a white man holding in his hand a crystal-white staff, moved to and fro in space in front of [the meditating g.Ya'-bzang pa]. He outspokenly said [to the white man]: “You have inflicted sundry maladies upon the sentient beings. Causing the infliction of such unbearable vicious sufferings [upon beings] is very sinful indeed, so do not perform so much magical displays [any more]!” He [i.e., the white man] responded: “[Alas!] Perforce of former prayers, I do not possess the power to prevent causing [harm] like that! They occur perforce of my karmic disposition!”³¹³

Yazangpa goes on to demand that Rāhula help those that he has and will afflict with suffering, and the *démon* agrees to teach Yazangpa the methods for curing the diseases that he causes. This story is noteworthy for a number of reasons, the first being how Rāhula is portrayed. While there are other stories where he appears in human form (a common trope in Buddhist legends for a number of deities), he is usually depicted as wearing black, as befits his status as a wrathful *dharmapāla*. This is the only story I am aware of that depicts him as associated with the peaceful color of white.³¹⁴ More interesting here, though, is Rāhula's character. In the depictions and stories we have examined of Rāhula thus far, he is shown as being more or less simply a mindless engine of destruction, overcome by passions of anger and desire. In the Buddhist understanding he is little more than a monstrous expression of afflictive emotions to be ritually tamed, controlled, and pacified through propitiation or, in the context of the tantric sorcerer's black magic, directed. Or else this dangerous appearance is merely that – a docetic manifestation

³¹² Or “Yar stod,” which is to the south-east of Lhasa in central Tibet.

³¹³ Sørensen 2000: 171. All brackets are Sørensen's additions.

³¹⁴ According to Buddhist tantric ritual there are four types of magic (phrin las rnam bzhi): pacifying (zhi), increasing or augmenting (rgyas), magnetizing or attracting (dbang), and destroying (drag) (see Cuevas 2010). Each type of magic is associated with a different color, respectively white, yellow, red, and black. Rāhula is usually invoked (as in the Wind Wheel *sādhana*) in the context of *drag* rites. Despite certain symbolic associations with high-profile *dbang* deities like Kurukullā, I am unaware of a ritual in which Rāhula is called upon to perform this activity (which is usually used in the context of love magic). Healing, however, falls under the purview of *zhi*, or white magic.

of an enlightened being for the purposes of subduing unenlightened beings who need to be controlled. In either case, he is effectively a weapon, a tool to be employed.

The Yazangpa story puts a human face on the figure, painting the picture of a being trapped by karma (clearly he is understood in this story to be a mundane, worldly protector), unable to keep himself from afflicting beings with stroke and epilepsy. Like the yakṣas in various Indian stories (for instance, Vajrapāṇi in the *Ambaṭṭa Sutta*), he merely acts in response to karmic law, like a force of nature, due to “former prayers.” We are not told what the former prayers were (though we shall have occasion to examine a different story that explains what they were), but in any case, it is implied that now Rāhula is ethically realigned (presumably because of the Buddha’s teachings) and wishes to help the beings that he automatically afflicts due to his previous karma. This may seem like a rather bizarre scenario, and perhaps could be read as counter to one of the theoretical models we began this study with, namely, Sutherland’s contention that, very simply and generally put, in Vedic cosmology *démons* must know their place and perform their dharmic duty to maintain the order of the universe, while in the Buddhist rethinking of the cosmos, various beings can choose to act as they wish; a yakṣa can (and perhaps should) overthrow the gods. However, the Yazangpa story is not fatalistic in the Vedic cosmological sense (as Sutherland understands it), but is simply a lesson in Buddhist notions of free will. While in *saṃsāra* one is limited by causes and conditions due to past actions, but within a limited range of options, one is free (relatively) to make a choice. These choices affect one’s future within *saṃsāra* and if (and when) one achieves liberation.

In any case, the story is primarily meant to explain the origin of Yazangpa’s extensive cycles of medical rituals aimed at curing *za* disease which are, according to Sørensen, perhaps the Yazang lineage’s only enduring contribution, and among the teachings received by the Fifth Dalai Lama, being further transmitted from there.³¹⁵ Sørensen describes one of these rituals, and interestingly, the tantric officiant healer presiding over the ceremony is directed to visualize himself, not as Rāhula, but as Vajrapāṇi in order to expel the *za* disease from the patient’s body.³¹⁶ This is due to the consistent association (hitherto not noted) of Rāhula with Vajrapāṇi in ritual and mythological literature in the Tibetan context. This is nothing particularly unique; as we saw, Vajrapāṇi is essentially the first *krodha-viḡhnāntaka* deity and paradigmatic

³¹⁵ For a modern text intended to cure *gza*’ disease, see NBBG.

³¹⁶ Sørensen 2000: 170.

apotheosized *démon* in tantric Buddhism. Consequently, he is often considered to be the overlord of all *dharmapālas*, and is commonly propitiated as such among all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. With regards to Rāhula specifically, when Rāhula himself is not understood to be an enlightened bodhisattva, he is generally understood to be the docetic manifestation of Vajrapāṇi.³¹⁷ We shall see this motif used in the myths examined below.

THE GREAT PERFECTION

The cycles and their authors thus far discussed are merely a drop in the proverbial bucket of Rāhula-oriented teachings and ritual cycles. Numerous treasure revealers (from the tenth century on) are credited in various histories with “rediscovering” *za* related texts. Among them are Bönpo Draktsel³¹⁸ (Bon po Brag tshal, eleventh century, “Auspicious Teaching on Rāhula”), Guru Hungbar (Guru Hung 'bar, eleventh century, “Rāhula Keta Cycle”), Druptop Darcharwa (Grub thob 'dar phyar ba, twelfth century, “Rāhula’s Instructions on Protection and Healing”), Dugu Rinchen Sengé³¹⁹ (Du gu rin chen seng ge, twelfth century, “Binding Wheel of Rāhula”), Sherap Mebar³²⁰ (Shes rab me 'bar, fourteenth century, various Rāhula instructions), Pema Künkyong Lingpa³²¹ (Padma kun skyong gling pa, 1396-1477, unnamed Rāhula Cycle), Nyangtön Sherap Drakpa³²² (Nyang ston shes rab grags pa, dates unknown, “Profound Means of Entrustment to Rahula”), Nakchang Wangchen Zangpo³²³ (Sngags 'chang dbang chen bzang po, dates unknown, “Black Puri Entrustment to Rāhula”) and Lama Drüm (“Exorcism Pit of the Sky: The Forceful Mantra of the Razorlike Wild Planet”).³²⁴ Most of these figures are quite obscure, and the latter is a particularly mysterious figure about whom little is known, but his *za* sorcery

³¹⁷ Other sources hold that Rāhula is a manifestation of Mañjuśrī. This is due to Mañjuśrī’s role in Tibet as the lord of worldly sciences (since he is understood to be the bodhisattva of relative as well as ultimate wisdom), including, or especially, *rtsis*. According to one treasure biography of Padmasambhava, the Buddha directed Mañjuśrī to teach beings the science of astrology (Cornu 1997: 39). Notably, there is another wrathful form of Mañjuśrī named Nāgarakṣa who is depicted as being nearly identical to Rāhula, with the exception of many more arms than Rāhula’s usual four.

³¹⁸ See RCTZ: 430-431.

³¹⁹ RCTZ: 552-553.

³²⁰ RCTZ: 569-571.

³²¹ RCTZ: 493-497.

³²² RCTZ: 710.

³²³ RCTZ: 710.

³²⁴ Also see these figures’ entries in Jamgön Kongtrül (2011).

cycles were purportedly employed by Kumārādza (fourteenth century), none other than the root guru of the most famous Dzokchen philosopher in Tibet's history, Longchen Rapjampa (Klong chen rab 'byams pa, 1308–1364), a.k.a. Longchenpa.

Dzokchen (“The Great Perfection”), also called *Atiyoga*, is considered the highest form of Nyingma philosophy and practice. As Germano (1992) argues, it likely began as part of the perfection stage practices associated with Nyingma *Mahāyoga* practices, specifically the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, in which the deities of a visualized *maṇḍala* are dissolved into emptiness. By Lonchenpa's time, however, this latter stage of *Mahāyoga* practice had become its own independent category of doctrine and philosophy, equivalent with the *Mahāmudra* practices of the Sarma schools, but developed primarily by Tibetans. While Padmasambhava is considered to be the origin or transmitter of later Great Perfection teachings, earlier lists of tantric texts said to be translated by Padmasambhava are all highly ritualized in nature and focus on deity invocation and visualization, concerned primarily with violent exorcistic activity. By Lonchenpa's time, however, Great Perfection treatises (usually in the form of “mind treasures”) used consistent language of negation and emptiness to seemingly undercut all aspects of, specifically *Mahāyoga* and *Anuyoga*, and generally all levels of the Buddhist path (ranked in nine distinct, successive categories according to the Nyingma system of doctrine). As Germano puts it:

The Great Perfection emerged by detaching the gnostic orientation out from its complex web of tantric ritualism while converting the wrathful antinomianism into a sublimated rhetoric of simple negation turned back upon *tantra's* own antinomian instincts as much as the conventional world *tantra* attempted to invert.³²⁵

In other words, Dzokchen does to tantric ritual what *Mahāyāna Madhyamaka* philosophy did to *Abhidharma* classification schemes: undercuts them by declaring them ultimately and fundamentally empty. However, while Dzokchen thinkers like Longchenpa may have rhetorically rejected ritualism, they did not do so in practice, and it was commonly understood that the Dzokchen view is one that is held by an already enlightened being after they had gone through the various stages of tantric practice.³²⁶ Consequently, Dzokchen thinkers still wrote

³²⁵ Germano 1992: 233-234.

³²⁶ In this, Rdzogs chen is somewhat comparable to Japanese “Original Enlightenment” (Jp. Hongaku) thought, which developed at roughly the same time. See Stone (2003).

Mahāyoga texts and commentaries, performed deity practices and, most importantly for our purposes, propitiated *dharma* protectors, most commonly the three main protectors of the Dzokchen teachings; Rāhula, Ekajati, and Vajrasādhu. There are many legendary accounts of great Nyingma Dzokchen masters' interactions with these three deities, particularly when “extracting” treasures from their concealed location.³²⁷

One of the most successful strands of Dzokchen philosophy was the so-called *Nyingtik* (*snying thig*, “seminal heart essence”) system, of which Lonchenpa is the most important figure, but not the founder. As mentioned above, Lonchenpa's root guru was a wandering *ngakpa* by the name of Kumaradza, who introduced Lonchenpa to a text called *The Seminal Heart Essence of the Dākinīs* (*Mkha' 'gro snying thig*). After reading this text, and after a number of purported visionary experiences, Longchenpa would go on to begin his career as a prolific expounder of *Nyingtik* thought, writing numerous Dzokchen commentaries and treatises, most importantly those compiled in the *Seven Treasuries of Longchenpa* (*Klong chen mdzod bdun*). Much of this text was written while Longchenpa was in exile in Bhutan, and according to popular Bhutanese legend, Rāhula took the form of Lonchenpa's human servant, only later revealing his true identity.³²⁸

Rāhula's status as a Dzokchen protector is quite interesting, and begs the question, why would Great Perfection thinkers have been drawn specifically to this deity? Why would Rāhula be generally associated with Dzokchen teachings in the popular imagination? I believe there are several symbolic associations with this deity that make him ideally suited for this role. First, and more speculatively, Rāhula is commonly depicted as having a face in his belly (his eleventh face,

³²⁷ Perhaps the most well-known legend of Rāhula acting as a treasure guardian is in the case of O rgyan gling pa (1323-1360?), who extracted various texts that had been hidden at Bsam yas from a large statue of Rāhula, including those of both *Mahāyoga* and *Atiyoga* orientation. Interestingly, the types of texts he found in the upper parts of the Rāhula image's body (the upper heads) were higher Rdzogs chen teachings. Those from the lower heads were *Mahāyoga* texts relating to, for instance, the *zhi khro* (“peaceful and wrathful”) deities of Rnying ma tantra, and those from the tail were medical texts and *dharmapāla* propitiation rituals (see Dargyay 1998: 124). To underscore my point, the most well-known Tibetan religious text in the world, the so-called Tibetan Book of the Dead (actually called Great Liberation upon Hearing in the Bardo, *Bar do thos grol chen mo*) which is part of a larger cycle of teachings on the one hundred Peaceful and Wrathful deities, is based on Rdzogs chen systems of thought. While these deities (along with all phenomenal reality) are understood ultimately to be emanations of a base “ground of awareness,” the Great Liberation upon Hearing text was in part used as a kind of invocation and praise liturgy of the hundred deities. See Cuevas (2003), especially 57-68, regarding the Rdzogs chen basis of the bar do concept.

³²⁸ See Pejore (2005), especially 64-65. Rāhula is also famously said to have helped mix the ink for Klong chen pa while he was writing his Rdzogs chen works. In return for Rāhula's help, Klong chen pa built a temple dedicated to the deity, which Rāhula helped design (68-69). See also Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé 2005: 105 for other legends of Rāhula's interactions with Klong chen pa.

including the raven head). It is with this face, it is said, that Rāhula devours the entire cosmos.³²⁹ Recall also that the associated *Kirtimukha*, a.k.a. *Kālāmukha*, is known as the devouring head of time. This annihilative motif in Rāhula's iconography matches well with Dzokchen's rhetoric of negation. Secondly, and more importantly, Rāhula is the premiere sky-deity in Tibet. He rules the planets that move through the atmosphere and causes the storms that fill the sky with clouds and bad weather. Notably, in Great Perfection literature, the clear, cloudless sky is by far the most common metaphor for the enlightened mind. In the cosmic emanation doctrine of Dzokchen, the sky becomes conceptually linked with the ground of reality, and the fundamentally, originally awakened mind.

Envisioned in the context of the three-body principle [of a Buddha], the reality body (*dharmakāya*) manifests above like a cloudless sky, while directly in front the Pure Lands of the enjoyment body (*saṃbhogakāya*) pervade the expanse of the sky. Just below them are the manifestations of the emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*) and further down, the six-fold world system (*rigs-drug*).³³⁰

Thus, the rarified Great Perfection concepts are mapped onto traditional Tibetan and Buddhist cosmological schemes.³³¹ A few quotations from the writings of Longchenpa will, I think, suffice to show the prevalence of the sky metaphor in Dzokchen thought:

In the single great expanse, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*
Appear variously due to conditions. So they are adventitious,
Like the sky and clouds and rainbow colors in the sky.

Another passage states:

³²⁹ Ven. Lama Rinchen Phutsok, personal interview, 11/28/2011. See also the myths quoted below.

³³⁰ Cuevas 2003:59-60.

³³¹ It is easy to understand the importance of sky imagery in Dzokchen thought (arguably a native Tibetan philosophy) when we consider the importance of the sky in traditional Tibetan cosmology and legend. As mentioned above, the first king of the Yarlung dynasty came from the sky and the first Buddhist texts are said to have fallen from the sky onto the roof of the castle stronghold of the King Lha tho tho ri (Dalton 2011: 44, 226, n. 1).

“...whatever appears, like the stars and planets in the sky, is the display of the self-appearing attributes of the intrinsic awareness in the vast expanse of ultimate nature, *Samantabhadrī*... As the space for arising as the door of primordial wisdom (Dag-Pa Ye-Shes) (i.e. *Nirvāṇa*) does not cease, the appearances of originally pure essences, the cloudless sky-like appearances, appear above.”³³² [Emphasis added]

There are many other examples that could be cited, and the metaphors of sky and atmospheric phenomena like the sun and clouds are referred to with consistent regularity. Since the planets and clouds were, in these metaphors, considered to be the adventitious appearances of the sky, often metaphorically related to afflictive thoughts and emotions, it is no wonder, then, that Dzokchen practitioners would have valorized and worshipped a deity like Rāhula, master of the sky (the mind) and all meteorological and astronomical phenomena that fill it (the appearances of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*). In fact, seen in this way, Rāhula can be interpreted as a paradigmatic Dzokchen practitioner, and the logical patron of such a philosophy. No wonder then that it is said even the great Lonchenpa prostrated before Rāhula.³³³

Now, let us turn our attention back to the text that inspired Longchenpa in the first place, namely *The Seminal Heart Essence of the Dākanīs*. This was a treasure revelation, discovered by the thirteenth century figure Pema Ledrelsel (Padma las 'brel rtsal).³³⁴ According to his legend, Pema Ledrelsel during his teenage years was beset with visions that eventually lead him to make a number of treasure teachings which he claimed were originally given by Padmasambhava and by King Trisong Detsen, as well as by the king's daughter, Pemasel, who, according to one famous story, died at a young age and was brought back to life by Padmasambhava to alleviate the grief of the king. Ledrelsel, in fact, claimed to be the reincarnation of the princess. When he was twenty-three years old, Ledrelsel discovered *The Seminal Heart Essence of the Dākinīs*, which was supposedly the highest teaching that Princess Padma Sal received from

³³² Longchenpa Drimé Özer 1996: 47, 50, 53.

³³³ Penjore 2005: 65. It should also be noted that, as we shall see below, Rāhula is specifically understood to have a so-called thod rgal aspect. Thod rgal, which means “leap over” or “direct transcendence,” is one of two major practices specific to the Heart Essence Dzokchen system. See Germano 1994: 286-296 for a general description of these practices.

³³⁴ There is some discrepancy among the sources as to Las 'brel rtsal's dates. According to some sources he was born in 1248 and died just a few years before Longchenpa as born in 1308. However, others puzzlingly state he was born in 1292 and died in 1316. Furthermore it is generally agreed in the sources I have seen that he died at the age of 25, thus matching the latter dates.

Padmasambhava. Ledrelsel had numerous visions and miracles of *dākinīs* associated with him, and his sporting with them seems to have been his downfall; he is said to have slept with numerous married women and, at the age of twenty-five, he was fatally poisoned by a jealous husband. During his cremation, it is said a blue woman wearing bone ornaments (presumably his consciousness) flew out of his skull and into the sky.³³⁵ It is said that Longchenpa was his next incarnation.

The Seminal Heart Essence of the Dākinīs was not Pema Ledrelsel's only attributed treasure revelation, by far. In fact, he was astonishingly prolific for being so short lived. Among the other cycles of texts he is said to have revealed are a great number of *za* scriptures. In fact, it seems that Pema Ledrelsel was the most important and extensive revealer of Rāhula-related texts and rituals. According to one story, while the main practice that Padmasambhava gave to Princess Padma Sal was the Great Perfection teachings of the *The Seminal Heart Essence of the Dākinīs*, the main supporting protector deity that he gave her instructions for was Rāhula, explaining Ledrelsel's apparent proclivity for this deity.³³⁶ According to the catalogue of texts currently stored in the library of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, the number of *za* texts attributed to Pema Ledrelsel is no less than seventy-six, with titles like *The Clear Visualization of Glorious Vajrapāṇi* and *the All Pervading Sage Rāhula* (*Dpal phyag na rdo rje dang drang srong khyab 'jug ra hu la'i mngon rtogs*), *The Razor Practice of the Planetary Demon with a List of Ingredients* [presumably ingredients for the ritual] (*Gza' bdud dug gi spu gri'i las byang dang rdzas tho bcas*), and my personal favorite, *Monkey Skull Magic from the Razor Scriptures of the Poisonous Rāhu* (*Gza' rgod dug gi spu gri las cho 'phrul sprel thod ma*).

So prevalent and well known do Pema Ledrelsel *za* scriptures seem to have become, that Lelung Zhepé Dorjé's (*Sle slung bzhad pa'i rdo rje*, 1697-1740) *Biographies of the Oathbound Protectors* (*Dam can bstan srung rnam par thar pa*) mainly cites him in this master collection of mythology related to (at least what Lelung considered) the most important *dharmapālas* in the Tibetan pantheon. This text includes a chapter specifically on Rāhula and is, as far as I am aware, the most complete account of the deity ever compiled in Tibet, or anywhere else for that matter. It is to Lelung, and this text, that we shall now turn our attention

³³⁵ Schaik 2011: 94. Jamgön Kongtrül 2011: 116-117. For an in-depth analysis of the legend of Princess Padma Sal, see Kapstein 2000: 38-50.

³³⁶ Ven. Lama Rinchen Phutsok, personal interview, 11/28/2011. It is said that each of Padmasambhava's main disciples received both a main deity practice and a secondary protector deity practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE OCEAN OF OATHBOUND PROTECTORS

Thus far we have surveyed the significant trends of Rāhula's mythological, iconographical, literary, and ritual aspects, as they developed over the course of more than a millennium, from India to Tibet. The Rāhula chapter in Lelung Zhepé Dorjé's collection of protector deity "biographies" in many ways sums up these developments, and thus is the centerpiece of this study. But before I turn to an analysis of the contents of this text, I would like to briefly examine the history of its author and situate both him and his work in the socio-political context of the early eighteenth century. We examined some of this above, but let us now return to this period in Tibetan history with its civil wars, border invasions, and religious conflict. The religious response to these various political, military, and sectarian pressures can be in part understood by examining the career of Lelung, so-called because he was the fifth member of the Lelung reincarnation lineage of Drepung monastery, and who grew up deeply embedded in the Geluk institutional system that dominated the Tsang region in central Tibet, where he was born. At age fourteen he is said to have been given his novice monastic vows by Losang Yeshé (Blo bzang ye shes, 1663-1737) himself, the Panchen Lama (*Pan chen bla ma*) at the time,³³⁷ becoming a monk in Ngari (Mnga' ris) Monastery a few miles to the south east of Lhasa before later moving further east to Namdroling (Rnam grol gling), an apparent Nyingma center, where he presided over the consecration of a new monastery there.³³⁸

A number of fascinating interlocking elements characterize Lelung's career, one of these being his role in discovering hidden lands, so-called *beyül* (*sbas yul*), most significantly the famous Pemakö (Padma bkod) Valley.³³⁹ Considered to be earthly paradises protected by terrible dangers (harsh climate and terrain, hostile tribes, and protector deities), *beyül* seem to have become somewhat of an obsession for Nyingma adepts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many Nyingma writers at this time, including Lelung, characterize the *beyül* (or point to prophecies by Padmasambhava which characterize them) as refuges and places of spiritual

³³⁷ The Pan chen bla ma being a reincarnate office in the Dge lugs order of near equal importance to the Dalai Lama.

³³⁸ KDMZ: 1797-1799.

³³⁹ For information regarding the history of the search for, and the recent discovery of, this supposedly entirely legendary place, see Baker (2004).

renewal, but importantly these places and their protective deities require taming and conversion. Dalton describes the paradoxical Tibetan romance of hidden borderlands during a period of near constant foreign invasion and border warfare thus: “Simultaneously dark ravines and hidden paradises, the borderlands and their violent inhabitants operate as both poison and cure for Tibet. They constitute both a terrible threat to Buddhism and a wondrous therapy for Tibet’s lost spiritual values, offering hope for regeneration in dark times.”³⁴⁰

Lelung seems to have undertaken the challenge of finding, “opening,” and taming their local spirits, turning them into dharma protectors. Lelung was a prolific writer on a number of religious topics, but most significantly, his collected works are full of writings on *beyül* as well as an array of protector deity propitiation rites, both to enlightened protectors and unenlightened, potentially dangerous local ones.³⁴¹ While such protector rituals are not necessarily designed to act like *makdok* rituals, protector propitiation often involves a command to the deity to destroy enemies of the Buddha’s teachings. Furthermore, wrathful protectors are often depicted in tantric Buddhist *maṅḍalas* as border security agents, so to speak, acting as a fence of fiery weapons, claws, and fangs between the unenlightened outside the *maṅḍala* and the higher deities within it.

The geopolitical implications of Lelung’s interest in protector deities become clear when we consider his role as the sometime spiritual advisor and diplomat for Polhané Sönam Topgyé, with whom he met several times (first in 1726, the same year as the unpopular Chinese anti-Nyingma edict), and to which he transmitted a number of empowerments and teachings. He also recognized Polhané as the incarnation of the leader of the *tšen (btsan)*, a class of war demons, and Khangchené (Khang chen nas, one of Polhané’s political allies) as the emanation of another local protector spirit.³⁴² While Khangchené was assassinated in 1727, Polhané’s success and luck in politics and on the battlefield indeed give the impression that he had divine aid.

In any case, Lelung’s apparent life-long interest in protector deities would eventually lead him, in 1734 just before Polhané had consolidated his rule in central Tibet, to compile a collection of hagiographical accounts on eighteen different protector deities (we can presume

³⁴⁰ Dalton 2011: 154

³⁴¹ Dge lugs and Rnying ma protectors are both well represented in Sle lung’s cycles of practices, reflecting his non-sectarian attitude.

³⁴² Ehrhard 1999: 244-247. Ehrhard also notes that Sle lung advised Pho lha nas on the “purity and continuity of the teachings of Padmasambhava, Atiśa, and Tsong-kha-pa” (the latter two being foundational figures for the Dge lugs school), arguing that Lelung here has the “aim of dissolving the polarization between” the two schools. However, this was likely an example of merely preaching to the choir, so to speak, as Pho lha nas himself was from a Rnying ma family.

Lelung considered these eighteen to be the most important and powerful within the Buddhist pantheon) in a collection entitled the *Biographies of the Oathbound Protectors* (*Dam can bstan srung rnam par thar pa*). Lelung is relatively vague, in his introduction, when explaining his motivations for compiling this text, which is unique in Tibetan Buddhist literature.³⁴³ He writes in standard Buddhist tropes, explaining, for example, that hearing about the lives of these protectors is a source of great merit, and his main motivation in compiling the collection is, of course, to help all sentient beings. More specifically, however, Lelung also writes that the purpose of the collection is to clear away misconceptions that some people have regarding certain protectors. He claims that abandoning or rejecting these protectors is tantamount to abandoning the Buddha's teachings.³⁴⁴ Given the sectarian prejudices in central Tibet the decade or so prior to the writing of *Biographies of the Oathbound Protectors*, we can speculate that Lelung here is reacting against anti-Nyingma sentiments. This can be further supposed when we examine certain statements in the author's colophon where Lelung rails against those blinded by "intense prejudice" and refers to the "genuine kama and terma" of the Nyingma canon.³⁴⁵ That Lelung is acting as a Nyingma apologist seems clear. As we might expect, Nyingma deities are well represented within the text itself, including Rāhula. His main sources for the Rāhula chapter are various terma texts, particularly those said to have been revealed by Pema Ledreltsel who discovered his wrathful *za* cycles of *makdok*-style sorcery right at the time of the first Mongolian incursions into Tibet.

Undoubtedly the terrible, thanatotic (yet empowering) invocations of Rāhula (and other protectors) produced during the dark times of the thirteenth century would have strongly resonated with Lelung and his contemporaries during the equally uncertain eighteenth century:

[Your] lower body of a poisonous snake churns the eighteen hells...While you reside on Mount Sumeru you pervade all one billion worlds with wrathful waves of intense energy. When you wander in the atmosphere, you aggressively devour³⁴⁶ the sun, moon, planets and stars. When you exhibit miracles in the world, you shoot the poisonous arrows of thunder and lightning in the ten directions, and send contagious vomit disease to the places of enemies

³⁴³ I know of no other example of the genre of "rnam thar" or "biography" being applied to deities in Tibetan literature.

³⁴⁴ DSNT: 2-3.

³⁴⁵ DSNT: 549.

³⁴⁶ Or "gulp down"

and obstructers. Whose body is unsurpassed in this world-system, please approach from the Dharmadhātu!³⁴⁷

Whether or not the *dharma* protectors heard these summons and responded, Lelung's recognized lord of the *tse*n deities, Polhané Miwang Sönam Topgyé, was ultimately able to, for almost two decades, maintain sovereignty and relative stability in central Tibet, securing its borders and freeing the region, for the most part, from foreign incursions. As for the issue of sectarian divisions, Lelung's writings have been regarded by some as a syntheses of Geluk, Nyingma, and Kagyü teachings, and Lelung can be interpreted as a forerunner of the ultimately very successful Rimé (*Ris med*) or nonsectarian movement which developed in eastern Tibet about a century later.³⁴⁸

RĀHULA IN THE OCEAN OF PROTECTORS

As we might expect, then, Lelung's masterwork on the mythology of Tibetan Buddhist protectors is deeply sourced, compiled from across many denominational lines. He repeatedly notes discrepancies in the stories of various protectors, drawing together many separate rivers of stories into one great ocean (to use Somadeva's metaphor). Lelung begins his book with a compilation of stories about the subjugation of Rudra, several versions of which we have briefly examined above, and which, we have noted, provides the foundational philosophy of all protector invocation and, indeed I would argue, all of tantric Buddhist ritual. Kapstein notes in his study of the Rudra myth that Lelung "has in fact assembled much of the required background" to trace the incremental development of this myth through the centuries, from India to Tibet.³⁴⁹ Notably, in the Rāhula chapter (the tenth of the book), Pema Ledrelsel is one of Lelung's two sources. In fact, he appears to be the main source cited throughout the chapter, likely indicating that in Lelung's time, Ledrelsel's texts were considered the foremost authority on Za. Ledrelsel provides much of the "practical" information on Rāhula, related to his movements through the sky at different times of the month, as well as when he emanates certain types of *dāmons*. This section, which actually makes up the bulk of the chapter, provides a kind

³⁴⁷ DSNT: 287.

³⁴⁸ Smith 2001: 245.

³⁴⁹ Kapstein 2000: 165.

of farmer's almanac for a ngakpa, as well as the general reader, with Lelung noting specific times that it is auspicious to do certain activities, common in Tibetan astrological guidebooks. This is so-called "elective astrology that is concerned with determining the auspicious or inauspicious qualities of a given day."³⁵⁰

Ledrel's treasures give certain myths and lineage information about Rāhula (his *demonic* parentage and so on) as well. However, in my opinion, the most interesting part of the chapter occurs at the beginning which includes a Jataka-style origin story about his previous life as a Buddhist monk, his parentage, and several key myths about him including a Buddhist retelling of the stealing of the *amrīta* nectar story. This information is drawn from what Lelung calls "authentic past oral traditions, [and] it is recorded like it appears in Chakhyungpa Ngawang Pema's (Bya khyung pa ngag dbang padma) Instructions for Rites Skillfully Curing Epilepsy."

Who is this Jakhyungpa Ngawang? And how is it that his information on Rāhula was notable enough to be cited by Lelung alongside Ledrel's? Ngawang Pema is a relatively obscure figure in his own right, but part of a very important Nyingma lineage. He was born in the Kongpo region to the southeast of Lhasa, the son of Pelbar Wangchuk (Dpal 'bar dbang phyug), and grandson of a Pelden Sengé (Dpal ldan seng ge).³⁵¹ Now, there was a Pelden Sengé (1332-1384) who was part of the Wangchuk lineage from which the royal family of Bhutan is descended. The patron saint and master treasure revealer Pemalingpa (Padma Gling pa, 1450-1521) was his great-grandson. Given that his son's name is listed in my source is "Wangchuk" we may presume this is the same Pelden Sengé.³⁵² In any case, this Pelden Sengé was based at Jakhyung Ling (Bya khyung gling) monastery in southern Tibet, and was the chief disciple of another extremely important treasure revealer, Sangyé Lingpa (Sangs rgyas gling pa, 1340-1396), also from the Kongpo region (which notably borders the Tsangpo river near the Pemakö Valley). Jakhyungpa Ngawang Pema apparently wrote numerous commentaries on Sangyé Lingpa's treasures, which are incredibly extensive, and include a number of topics, from

³⁵⁰ Cornu 1997: 232. Cornu notes that there are a number of factors that Tibetan astrologers take into account when determining the "tone" of a particular day, whether it is generally favorable, unfavorable, or neutral; favorable, unfavorable, or neutral for a specific person (based on their natal chart); and favorable, unfavorable, or neutral for specific activities such marriage, building a house, doing religious practice, undergoing a medical procedure, cutting the hair, going to war or even committing highway robbery or burning the corpse of a leper. These factors include the date on the Tibetan lunar calendar, the day of the week and its ruling planet (Rāhu is considered to rule the whole week), the lunar house that the moon is in on a particular day, the daily combination of elements (based on the nag rtsis system) and more. See pages 232-244.

³⁵¹ NDCJ: 285.

³⁵² Though "Dpal 'bar dbang phyug" is not the successor of Dpal ldan seng ge in the Dbang phyug lineage.

dzokchen to astrological treatises.³⁵³ But most notably among Sangyé Lingpa’s treasures is the famous *Summary of the Guru’s Intention (Bla ma dgongs ’dus)*. This massive collection includes, in its sixth volume, a text entitled Lamp of the Mind Za Protection, the Third of Six Cycles of the Lamp Benefitting Others (*Gzhan don sgron me drug skor gyi gsum pa gza’ srung thugs kyi sgron me*).³⁵⁴ This is a short-to-medium length text discussing methods for protecting against *gza’* attack, including an elaborate protection “wheel” (*’khor lo*) overlaid on an image of Rāhula, with Vajrapāṇi depicted in the center at Rāhula’s heart, presumably indicating that Rāhula is an emanation of Vajrapāṇi (see Fig. 2).³⁵⁵ But this text is primarily ritual in nature and probably is not the direct source for Ngawang Pema’s lineage information, which Lelung says is based on “past oral traditions.”

In any case, without further ado, let us examine some excerpts from the Rāhula chapter in the Biographies of Oathbound Protectors. The chapter begins with the *jātaka*-style story, mentioned before, which describes how Rāhula came to be, and reads as follows:³⁵⁶

Regarding the great all pervading Rahula, he manifests as a form of the haughty spirit Lord of Secrets, Vajrapāṇi. Regarding the common lineage, long ago the father, Drang song Zamita (Drang srong dza mi ta)³⁵⁷ and the mother Trülmo Pöding (*’Phrul mo phod sding*), in the first half of life, did not have a son. Later in life, on the evening of the eighth day of the

³⁵³ One in particular that deals with astrology is titled the Black Tortoise Divination Chart (*Gtad khram rus sbal nag po*) (Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 786).

³⁵⁴ LGDP

³⁵⁵ For more on Sangs rgyas gling pa see Jamgön Kongtrül 2011:158; Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 784-788; Bradburn 180-182. Notably, another one of Sangs rgyas gling pa’s students was Rin chen chos kyi rgyal po, 1448-1504, the fifteenth *’Bri gung pa*. Recall that the seventeenth in this lineage, Rgyal dbang rin chen phun tshogs, purportedly used *gza’* magic to kill several throne holders at *’Dga ldan*. However, I doubt there is a direct connection to Sangs rgyas gling pa here because, at least in the *Bla ma dgongs ’dus*, the Lamp of the Mind text is the only Rāhula-centric text, and it is prophylactic in orientation. I also wish to note here that most of the major figures we have examined thus far in relation to Rāhula cycles were all from approximately the same region in Tibet (south-central, to the southeast of Lhasa) and all date from approximately the same three-hundred-year time span. It seems reasonable to presume that this area, during this period, was a major center for Rāhula practice. Sle lung also spent much of his career near the Kong po region. Interestingly, the *Bla ma dgongs ’du ’khor lo* is extremely similar to one depicted in Douglas 1978: 154. In fact, the outer deity holding the wheel appears to be Rāhula, with his usual nine heads, four arms, snake tail, etc. Hand implements are the same as well, with the addition of a sword. The wrathful figure in the center at the outer deity’s heart is also apparently Vajrapāṇi. However, Douglas identifies this *’khor lo* as belonging to Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa, more well known as Ācala, a wrathful *krodha-vighnāntaka* deity that became especially popular in East Asia. If Douglas is correct in his identification here, this may be yet another wrathful deity with which Rāhula was particularly associated (or vice-versa). For more on Ācala in Tibet, see Heller (2001).

³⁵⁶ See the appendix for a complete translation of this chapter.

³⁵⁷ Recall that *drang srong* is the Tibetan term translating “sage.” Thus, the current story seems to contain trace elements of the Indian *purāṇic* story that explains that Rāhu is the son of the sage Kaśyapa.

first spring month, Drang song za dreamed of a golden sunrise made from a fiery mirror on a [mountain] peak of crystal,³⁵⁸ which immediately diminished. In the mother's dream, rays of light radiated in every direction from her own belly and, for a moment, a rain of meteors came forth. In the morning, they explained the dreams to each other and anxiety ate at them. Then they asked a diviner who said:

“The golden sunrise on the pure white crystal cliff is a premonition of the birth of a boy. That it is the color of gold is a sign that he will act in accord with the Holy Dharma. That it suddenly decays is a sign of a short life. The light emanating from the belly of the mother is a sign he will act for his own benefit in this life, that it pervades all directions is a sign of harm to all living beings.” Thus he spoke.

Not long after that statement [the mother] gave birth to a son, named Lalar Chuzhi (La lar bcu bzhi). When he turned ten years [of age] he took monastic vows. At about twenty, he completed novice-hood, and he remained in single-minded *samādhī* in the Forest of Shing laksha (Shing glag sha) near the town called Sharchok Norzang (Shar phyogs nor bzang). The king of the nearby town was called King Ratna Siddha. One day, a female servant of the king named Prajña Kulu arrived to draw water. That morning, some snow had fallen, making the earth white. After passing through some of those woods, she was amazed to see lotuses growing. Chasing after them, she beheld a body of emanation in the guise of a monk, residing with discontented mind destroyed³⁵⁹ in the cool shade of the trees of Laksha. Involuntarily stunned, having prostrated, she said: “Your honor, emanation body, there are no other priests of honor attending to the Great King Ratna Siddha. Who is going to be his priest? I humbly ask that you go.”

The monk replied: “Base woman, what are you talking about? To assume a female body is an evil rebirth. You have too small an accumulation of merits to meet with me. Go home right now; don't say that you have been near a man. To explain [our meeting] will become an obstructive condition.”

The girl quickly went to the king and said: “Listen to me lord! Because of your three queens³⁶⁰ something phenomenal happened to me: I saw for sure a holy monk for you!”

³⁵⁸ Or “The peak of Shel dkar po”

³⁵⁹ That is, a contented mind.

³⁶⁰ A literal translation of the grammar, this suggests that the queens were responsible for sending the girl on her errand to fetch water which led to her meeting the monk.

The king did not accept the woman's story. "Since what you saw may be true, lead the way and show me. If it is true, I will make a queen of you." Having spoken thus, the girl did lead the way and the king with his retinue came near to the monk.

Then the king, having seen the emanation body in accordance with the girl's report, asked: "Lion of men, protector of wandering beings, guide me, the king, on the path. Have compassion for the six classes of beings! In order to work as a glorious protector of sentient beings, I pray that you come be my holy chaplain."

The monk replied, "I practice the Holy Dharma properly. I do not protect kings."

The king was angry and said: "In Eastern India there is no one not in my power. If you don't accept to become my chaplain, I will cause the further dissolution of the Buddha's Teachings!"

In the mind of the monk he reflected, thinking: "Even if I am killed I will not be frightened, but how sad it would be if this king was involved in evil deeds!" [So] he agreed to act as chaplain for awhile. Then the king and servants invited the monk to the palace. He devotedly paid homage and dwelt there as a chaplain. Because he felt grateful to that girl from before, the king also made her his queen.

Then, because that woman, greatly empowered, spoke carelessly, the ministers were displeased. "That girl and the chaplain of the king are plotting together."³⁶¹ Thus they lied and told this to the king. The king thought: "This woman was herself also the discoverer [of the monk] to begin with. This woman is greatly deceitful; it is certainly possible [these allegations] are true." Angry, he therefore ordered the ministers thus: "Burn the monk with a fire of sandalwood." The ministers piled up many pieces of sandalwood and prepared to burn the monk. Then the monk was brought to the burning. He said, "Allow me to make three aspirational prayers." The king and ministers listened.

The monk continued: "Witness all gods and demons in existence! If I touched the body of the queen, may I wander through the eighteen hell realms and experience the suffering of immediate retribution. If I did not touch the body of the queen, in the next life, having taken on the body of a poisonous *nöjin* (gnod sbyin),³⁶² may I devour the king and his ministers in seven days. After that, passing consecutively into the underworld, pressing into service the

³⁶¹ Or "in cahoots." Seems to have the connotation that they are having an affair.

³⁶² Skt. *yakṣa*

eight classes of gods and demons, may I rule above, below, and in between.³⁶³ Furthermore, unto the end of the kalpa, may demons rain down on unrighteous kings, monks with degenerate vows, loose women, and so forth. In the degenerate kalpa, from the exalted pinnacle of cyclic existence, may I steal the life breath of other agitated sinpo (srin po).³⁶⁴ My aspirations will not degenerate.

“This is not the fault of the queen. This is retribution for the king’s viciousness and the ministers’ sinful thoughts. These four queens of yours, may they accompany me and may they obey my commands in every situation.” Thus he made this aspiration.

Then the ministers burnt the monk in the fire and his life was cast away. All four of the king’s wives, the first three together with the later girl, went insane and, seeing these actions, asked why in the presence of the men. “Has a demon entered the mind of the king?! Now what’s the use of living?!” Simultaneously they all jumped in the fire. The servants threw water on the fire but could not extinguish it and all four of the queens were also burnt up.

Then, on the peak of Mount Sumeru, there arose a blazing fire of hatred called Sinpo Raksha Lokgi Trengwa (Srin po raksha glog gi phreng ba), Nyönkha Nakpo Tiparatsa (Snyon kha nag po ti pa ra tsa, or Jampel Nāga Raksha (’Jam dpal nā ga raksha). In the depths of the sea on the south side of Sumeru dwelt a wave of lust called Lumo Belgo Trakmikma (Klu mo sbal mgo khrag mig ma). The lu (klu)³⁶⁵ woman looked up and the sinpo looked down and in the mind of the sinpo was desire and he thought: “How nice it would be if I attained as a wife the beautiful and charming lu woman below and one night united with her.” Because the lu also had such thoughts, the sinpo, with a mind of desire, drooled. Because the lu woman was drunk with passion, after nine months and fifteen days, she developed a terrifying [swollen] iron belly. Because that was extremely ferocious and the father and mother were not able to control it, they begged Vajrapāṇi [for help]. Vajrapāṇi, threw a nine-pronged vajra from his right hand [into the womb]. From inside of the burst belly [came] a horrifying, dreadful serpent spirit. It had the upper body of a sinpo and the lower body of a snake, twisted at the end, its head and body covered with eyes. In its belly was a gaping mouth which devours the three worlds. It had nine heads and above the heads was the head of crow. Then Vajrapāṇi commanded him, conferred empowerment and bound

³⁶³ The three levels of traditional Tibetan cosmology.

³⁶⁴ Skt. *rakṣasā*

³⁶⁵ Skt. *nāga*

him under oath. He awarded him a secret name, and he became endowed with unimaginable sorcery and magical powers.

In the meantime, the four queens from before were also driven by the power of karma, and having become sisters, were born as the four, Sinzorwe Dongchen (Srin zor wa'i gdong can),³⁶⁶ Bamsin Drekyi Dongchen (Bam srin dred kyi gdong can),³⁶⁷ Kongsinwa Langi Dongchen (Kong srin ba lang gi gdong can),³⁶⁸ and Droksin Chusingyi Dongchen ('Brog srin chu srin gyi gdong can).³⁶⁹ [Rāhula] emanates from his body: Göza Vishnu Rāja (Rgod gza' bishnu ra dza).³⁷⁰ From his speech: Zadü Khyapjuk Chenpo (Gza' bdud khyab 'jug chen po).³⁷¹ From the mind: Zadü Jangön (Gza' bdud ljang sngon).³⁷² From his qualities: Tsaraka.³⁷³ From his activities, Drangsong Rāhula (Drang srong Rā hu la),³⁷⁴ as well as Bikṣiptatra (Biksti pa tra),³⁷⁵ Duwa Jukring (Du ba mjug ring),³⁷⁶ Düpo Rok (Bdud po rog.)³⁷⁷ Drachen Zin (Sgra gcan 'dzin),³⁷⁸ and so on, the eight great planets and the eight classes of spirits.³⁷⁹

There are a number of aspects in this account that we could highlight, but what we have here is essentially an origin of evil, or rather an origin of half evil and half good, as indicated by the dream-interpreting seer before the birth of Lalar Chuzhi. The future Rāhula begins as a good Buddhist monk, and it is implied that he even attains full enlightenment since he is referred to as an “emanation body” (Skt. *nirmānakāya*, Tib. Sprul sku). But as circumstance or bad karma

³⁶⁶ Lit. “Tiger *rākṣasī* with a face of blades.” According to a description of a Rāhula *maṇḍala* given by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996), she is yellow-white, dwells in the east and is armed with a hook and a flogging stick. (261) The following descriptions of these deities are drawn from the same source.

³⁶⁷ “Putrid *rākṣasī* with the face of a bear” who is dark-yellow, dwells in the south and holds a skull-topped staff and a snake snare.

³⁶⁸ “Warped *rākṣasī* with a face of a cow” who dwells in the west and carries a hatchet and snare. Color not given.

³⁶⁹ “Wilderness *rākṣasī* with the face of a crocodile (makara)” who dwells in the north, is dark green and lifts Mount Sūmeru.

³⁷⁰ “Savage Planet Lord Viṣṇu,” who dwells in the east, is smoke-colored and carried two banners, one topped by the head of a makara and the other topped with a tiger head.

³⁷¹ “Great All-Pervading Planet Demon” who dwells in the south, is dark-yellow, and holds a snake snare and makara-headed banner.

³⁷² “Blue-green Planet Demon” dwells in the west, is dark-green, and holds a snare and chain.

³⁷³ “Cakra.”

³⁷⁴ Lit. “Sage Rāhula”

³⁷⁵ This *dāmon* dwells in the southwest, is red, and holds a snake and a razor.

³⁷⁶ Ketu, who dwells in the northwest, is dark blue, and holds a razor and a skull-cup.

³⁷⁷ Who dwells in the north, is dark-blue, and hold a snake-snare and a demon-snare.

³⁷⁸ Translates directly as “Rāhula.” He dwells in the northeast, is smoke-colored, and holds a makara-headed banner and a flogging stick.

³⁷⁹ DSNT: 278-282.

would have it, though, the enlightened being is forced to enter worldly life in order to prevent King Ratna Siddha from oppressing the teachings, though it is stated that Lalar’s main motivation, as we would expect from a good bodhisattva, is to prevent the king from committing bad karma. In any case, this story clearly reflects a longstanding tension within Buddhist (specifically monastic) communities between the ideal of ascetic withdrawal and the pursuit of *nirvāṇa* (represented by the lovely forest), and the realities of being forced to kowtow to worldly interests by, in this instance, serving kings.³⁸⁰ The court of the king, where everything immediately goes from bad to worse, is likely meant to represent this *saṃsāric* reality.³⁸¹

When things do turn bad and the innocent monk is lead away to be executed, his virtuous, enlightened calm, clearly on display during the first confrontation with the king, appears to crack under the pressure and he swears revenge. Not only does he vow to destroy the king and his ministers, but also to become a monstrous avenging *démon* to punish everyone remotely like them, as well as causing the queens to commit what could be interpreted as a symbolic *satī*.³⁸² What results is the birth of a horrific monster to two parents that are described as being paradigmatic, even allegorical, symbols of hatred in the case of the rakṣasa father and lust in the case of the *nāga* mother. And yet, these two are implied to be devotees of Vajrapāṇi whom they call upon to perform the gruesome cesarean section during the mother’s difficult pregnancy. What is represented in the case of the enlightened monk who becomes the *démon*, and the *démon* parents of intense afflictive emotion who are apparently Buddhists, is Sørensen’s

³⁸⁰ Something which, as I noted above, Buddhism has done since its inception, for without patronage by rulers from India to Japan, the religion would not have survived, let alone flourished, in these countries.

³⁸¹ The fact that the ethically dubious female servant is the cause of the whole situation should be noted as well. The idea that women are the root of *saṃsāra* is a common trope in Buddhist literature and consequently are often rhetorically denigrated for that reason (see Wilson 1996). However, that her name is “Wisdom” is interesting, and perhaps reflects the tantric valorization of women (at least symbolically) and *saṃsāric* reality. After all, she is the reason for Rāhula’s coming into being, though the story takes a neutral stance as to whether that is a good or bad thing.

³⁸² This is the traditional Indian practice, still occasionally performed today, of widows sacrificing themselves at their dead husband’s funerals to display their devotion and loyalty. The story seems to be saying that the queens consider the monk their true husband (or symbolic husband) who trumps the non-virtuous king whom the monk completely emasculates by taking the queens with him. This symbolism is further borne out by the fact that they become his main retinue *démons*, and effectively his wives. These four are commonly depicted surrounding Rāhula in paintings, and what the Nebesky-Wojkowitz descriptions do not tell is that they are all shown as being theriocephalian, each having a different animal head. Such female *démons* of this time are common in late Buddhist tantric literature from the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* onward, and are commonly depicted in the retinue of various forms of Śiva. The “four sisters” motif is somewhat unique, and may possibly be connected with the *démon* Tumburu, best among the celestial musicians the *gandhārvas*, who has a similar retinue of four sisters and is mentioned in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (Sanderson 2009: 51, n. 1). Or the central deity of Rāhula surrounded by deities in the four directions may simply be a recapitulation of the standard Buddhist five-direction *maṇḍala*. For more on Tumburu see Mani 2010: 798-799.

coincidentia oppositorum, so common in tantric (and Dzokchen) Buddhist thought, and Buddhism more generally. As I have noted repeatedly with special reference to Sutherland and Ruegg, the Buddhist distinction of *laukika* verses *lokottara* is a fluid one, and, for Buddhist soteriology, must be. This principle is quintessentially expressed in the figure of the enlightened *démon*.³⁸³

In the next excerpt I wish to examine, Lelung discusses other versions of Rāhula's parentage, apparently trying to synthesize and reconcile multiple sources. Then he relates a tale of Rāhula and his consort who is identified here as none other than Pelden Lhamo (Dpal Idan lha mo) herself.

“[The parents are] Yapchik Yaksha Dzala Dang (Yab gcig yaksha dzwa la dwang) and Yumchik Dorjé Lokkhyung (Yum gcig dorje glog 'khyug).³⁸⁴ With their non-dual mind they emanated the supreme son Zadü Chenpo” and it is also said “your father was named Sinpo Dhashagriva (Srin po dha sha ghri va)” and “your mother was called Lumo Hamshama (Klu mo ham sham ma).” Thus it is said. In the visions from invocation³⁸⁵ it is said: “They are also called Yap Dorjé Sinpo (Yab rdo rje srin po) and Yum Dorjé Logyü (Yum rdo rje glog 'gyu).” There is an enumeration of names. Regarding Dhashagriva, in a past life his consort was Pelden Makzorma (Dpal Idan dmag zor ma).³⁸⁶ He was the elder brother of the sister Nalartsé. These are not thought to be contradictory; these show up in many compilations to accord with the perspective of those to be trained.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ The *démon* here understood to be principally characterized by afflictive emotion, and thus theoretically opposed to enlightenment.

³⁸⁴ Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996) describes these two deities as part of Rāhu's retinue: “...the following deities [are] the companions of *Rāhu*: the place on the right side is occupied by the Yab gcig yakṣa dzwa la. He is dark-red, has nine heads and two hands and two feet. His attributes are a staff and the *khrag mtsho* [lit. blood ocean]. On the left side resides the black Yum gcig klu mo klog khyug ma; she had nine frog-heads, her eyes are gory, and the lower part of her body is the coiled tail of a snake. Her two hands hold a *klu shing* [lit. Naga tree] and a *khrag mtsho*.” Nebesky-Wojkowitz notes this information is taken from a text of propitiation rituals to a deity called Rgyal po li byin ha ra, a form of Pe har. (260-261)³⁸⁴ “Glog” means lightning, likely meaning that Rāhu's mother is understood to be one of the class of *démons* who cause lightning (see 467-468).

³⁸⁵ An odd statement. It may imply that these were spontaneous visions that devotees had of the deity during invocation practice.

³⁸⁶ Probably a form of Dpal Idan lha mo.

³⁸⁷ This is the language of skillful means (Skt. *upāya*), which is commonly used in Buddhist literature to explain why the same deity appears in multiple forms to different people.

It is said in the Secret Tantra of Zagö Nyimatrö³⁸⁸ that Shinjé Döpé Gyelpo (Gshin rje 'dod pa'i gyal po)³⁸⁹ and Sinmo Lokcham Barma (Srin mo glog lcam 'bar ma), produced from their union a son called Zagö Nyima (Gza' rgod nyi ma). He is the same as Shinjé Takki Rāja (Gshin rje takki ra dza)³⁹⁰ from the retinue of Gönpo Chakdruk (Mgon po phyag drug).³⁹¹ He dwelt in the side of the Nyashingzin (Gnya' shing 'dzin) mountains,³⁹² and to the northeast of Sūmeru dwelt the ruler of the desire realm, Pelden Lhamo Rematī. They had mutually desiring minds. When the time of love came, the goddess made a move to the north of Sumeru, but he did not come. Having adorned a nöjinmo³⁹³ called Nadong (Sna gdong),³⁹⁴ the daughter of Pakpa Za (Phag pa gza'),³⁹⁵ in the dress of the goddess, she dispatched her.³⁹⁶ Then Zagö Nyima and the nöjinma had intense sex all night. In the morning, when it was time to go their own ways, the daughter of the pig showed her true form and Zagö Nyima perceived her loathsome ugliness and became angry. He cursed, “With all eight classes of gods and demons, let them destroy this Goddess Rematī! Because this goddess has deceived me, may it rain on my enemy the harm of the mamos!”³⁹⁷ Because of that all the worlds were disturbed. Having brought together all the malevolent spirits, the za and mammo danced side by side. They performed like that every time they met every year. Because they both settled on Sūmeru abiding there, they damaged the crops and life force of the world in all places

³⁸⁸ Lit. “Savage Planet Sun Wrath”

³⁸⁹ “Yama, the King of Desire.” Thus, here, Rāhula is directly identified as the son of the Lord of Death.

³⁹⁰ Takkirāja, who seems to have been one of the earlier *krodha-vighnāntaka* deities depicted in the Buddhist tantras. He may have begun his mythological career as Tāraka, who appears in a Hindu myth as an asura who oppresses the devas (Sanderson 1995: 93). Tucci (1949) argues that he was originally a local deity from the Punjab region (616, n. 275). Dalton notes his role in the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* where he appears as a subjugating *krodha-vighnāntaka*. He also mentions a Dunhuang text where Takkirāja is described as the punisher of vow breakers. It is possible that by Lelung's time, Rāhula had come to be identified with this deity and to have “replaced” him, so to speak (Dalton 2011: 240, n. 53).

³⁹¹ Six-armed Mahākāla

³⁹² “Yoke holder” mountains. One of the seven mountain ranges surrounding Mt. Sumeru in Buddhist cosmology.

³⁹³ Skt. *yakṣī*

³⁹⁴ “Pig snout”

³⁹⁵ “Pig planet”

³⁹⁶ That is, Dpal ldan lha mo disguised “Pig snout” in her clothes, or appearance, and sent her off to Gza' rgod nyi ma.

³⁹⁷ Skt. *matṛka*, highly dangerous female charnel ground *démons* who are regarded in Tibet as causing general disease and suffering.

[until they were?] [R4 633] bound under the oath of Pelchen Drekpa Kundül (Dpal chen³⁹⁸ Dregs pa kun 'dul).³⁹⁹ [Thus it is] said.⁴⁰⁰

Here we have a short but significant myth that purports to explain the affliction of beings by Rāhula and his rival/consort, Pelden Lhamo. The latter is a Tibetan transformation of the Hindu goddess Śrī Devī, and she is usually depicted in Tibetan Buddhism as being extremely wrathful, with iconography likely drawn from the goddess Kālī. In fact, the scene at the end of the story when the two engage in a furious dance competition is reminiscent of Hindu myths and art depictions in which Kālī and Śiva dance furiously together in implicit conflict, inciting one another.⁴⁰¹ Given Pelden Lhamo's status as one of the main protectors of the Geluk school, and specifically the Dalai Lamas, it is tempting to read this myth of the conflict between Rāhula and this goddess as reflecting sectarian struggles between Geluk and Nyingma. But this is likely not the case, especially given the fact that Lelung is citing a story that was purportedly “revealed” centuries before the Geluk sect was formed.⁴⁰²

The figures of so-called “Pig snout” and “Pig planet” are rather mysterious. I have not been able to find information on these figures specifically. However, recall that the goddess Marīcī, an astrological divinity and in India associated with Rāhula, is commonly depicted with either a chariot drawn by boars, or the head of a boar herself. However, the name “Pig planet” has the masculine particle “pa,” indicating that this *démon* is male. But, “Pig snout” is female and specifically said to have the countenance of a pig (hence Rāhula's disgust). Consequently, I think it logical to assume that this “Pig snout” is a transformation of Marīcī.

Before we examine the final significant myth cited by Lelung in the Rāhula chapter, let I wish to consider some of the descriptions of Rāhula's movements, and the effects he is said to have on environmental conditions, which are discussed in the second half of the chapter. In fact, most of the chapter is concerned with elaborating Rāhula's movements, which seem to be rather

³⁹⁸ “Heruka”

³⁹⁹ “Great Glorious one” “Tamer of Spirits.” Possibly epithets of Padmasambhava, but could just simply be a reference to the ubiquitous Heruka of the *Mahāyoga* and *Yoginī tantras*.

⁴⁰⁰ DSNT: 284-285.

⁴⁰¹ Hawley 1998: 79.

⁴⁰² Dpal ldan lha mo also has great significance in the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism as well. For instance, Sørensen notes that the G.ya zang Bka' bgyud had a strong tradition of Dpal ldan lha mo propitiation. For more on this goddess, see Shaw (2009). Regarding the four most prominent protectors of the Dalai Lama lineage (one of which is Dpal ldan lha mo) see Heller (2003).

arbitrary and not based on any actual astrological observation. In fact, the lists of Rāhula's various movements at various times in various aspects become rather tedious.⁴⁰³ But there are a few passages of this that I wish to consider.

As for Khyapjuk Chenpo's power and movement in the eight classes of consciousness in the eastern continent: He moves at sunset, grasping part of both day and night, from the southwest to the northeast, having manifested the storehouse consciousness (kun gzhi) as sinpo. At midday, he moves from the north to the south, having manifested the eye consciousness as dū. He moves from the southeast border from the northwest border around early morning, having manifested the afflicted consciousness as the Queen of the enemy gods (dgra lha).⁴⁰⁴ He moves from the west to the east at noon, having manifested the ear consciousness as ma mo. He moves from the north to the southwest in the evening, having manifested the mental consciousness as za. He moves from the south to the north in the afternoon, having manifested the nose consciousness as shinjé (gshin rje). He moves from the northwest to the southeast after midnight, having manifested the body consciousness as lu-tsen (klu btsan). He moves from the east to the west at midnight having manifested the tongue consciousness as mu (dmu). These move in a counter-clockwise circle.⁴⁰⁵

This is one of several passages that describe Rāhula's various movements when he is shedding (i.e., emanating) various kinds of *démons* from different parts of his body, as well as different types of consciousness and different objects of consciousness. Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996) mentions this in conjunction with his discussion of Rāhula, noting that it is called “the eight classes of emanation” (sprul pa sde brgyad), but only gives examples of the eight classes of *démon* coming from eight parts of the physical body (shoulders, lips and teeth, head, back, hands and eyes, heart and liver).⁴⁰⁶ The text continues on, however, and describes the various types of consciousness as described in *Yogacāra* philosophy transforming into different kinds of (afflictive) *démons*. The text is unclear whether these different consciousnesses that are manifesting in different forms belong to Rāhula himself or to beings in general. However, while

⁴⁰³ One of these is the so-called thod rgal, or “leap over,” aspect mentioned above.

⁴⁰⁴ That is, enemy subduing deities. I am unclear as to the identity of this queen.

⁴⁰⁵ DSNT: 287.

⁴⁰⁶ In our current text the list replaces eyes, heart, and liver with “bladder.”

there is no mention of the subtle body systems that characterize the *Kālacakra*, it seems likely that this association between Rāhula and the various types of consciousness are a further elaboration of the connection made between Rāhula and the meditator's consciousness explained in the *Kālacakra* cycle.

Now let us turn our attention to the effects that Rāhula's movements are said to have on atmospheric and weather phenomena.

After noon of the fourth day [of the month], the Za exhales his breath. Smoke and a cloud the color of smoke arise in the sky and a stain of pollution arises on the earth. On the eighth day, red colored water scattered with black scum and agitated appears. Dense fog pollution appears in the sky. The color changes and the water swirls and is heaped. Regarding earth signs appearing in the sky, on the eleventh, the grey sky is the color of ash. Regarding sky signs appearing on earth, from the earth dampness arises in the four directions. Regarding sky signs appearing in the water, on the thirteenth a piercing rainbow appears in the water. Regarding signs in the sky, a rainbow similar to a spear appears. On the fifteenth the breath of the Za comes forth purple. On the eighteenth, gloominess appears as a sky sign. Purple appears as an earth sign. The water swirls and sits still. On the twenty-second a hidden grey⁴⁰⁷ appears on the earth. As to the sky, thunder arises, but no rain falls. On the twenty-fourth, in the grey sky a kind of green stain appears. On the twenty-fifth a turbulent storm appears in the sky. On the twenty-ninth, in the sky appears a very dense overcast.⁴⁰⁸

I wish to highlight this passage to note the continuity between the Ledrelsel scripture and the much earlier astrological treatises of India. While the exact details are different, the accounts of strangely colored and shaped clouds as well as phenomena such as rainbows could have been taken straight from the *Bṛhat Saṃhita*'s chapter on eclipses, cited above.

Now that we have some insight into Rāhula's movements from a "practical" standpoint, let us return once more to the myths, and examine one last story purporting to explain Rāhula's origins. It begins with a slightly different version of Rāhula's birth.

⁴⁰⁷ sbas skya – possibly meaning "overcast"

⁴⁰⁸ DSNT: 295.

In the last month of summer in the year of the cow, the *sinpo* from the top of Mount Sumeru called “*ke’u!*” The *lumo* from the depths of the sea supplied the sign “*kam kam!*” Then the *Ki kang’s*⁴⁰⁹ parents, overcome with aversion and desire, coupled on the peak of Mount Sumeru [and?] the peaks of the Seven Gold Mountains. In thirteen months the *sinmo’s*⁴¹⁰ body was not comfortable. On the seventh month of the tiger year, a son was born. His upper body was human-like and in his hand he held a sword. Because his father was a *srin po* he enjoyed rotten meat and blood. Because his mother was a *lumo* his lower body was that of a snake and he enjoyed milk and sweets. Because the eight classes of gods and demons were complete in his body, there arose nine hearts in him. Right after birth he said “*ki’u kang!*” and became *Kikang Phungjé Chenpo* (*Ki kang ’phung byed chen po*), cutting the life force of living beings, eating the meat which he craved and drinking the blood of beings. The mother was not able to keep him close and he went up. The mother rubbed and squeezed her breasts and four clots of blood came forth. She was not afraid and sent for a maidservant, having the clots of blood buried in the four continents around Mount Sumeru.⁴¹¹

Afterwards, *Singpo* (“brother”) *Rāhula*, in the land of the gods, having stolen the essence of the ambrosia of the gods, ran away with all their subtle energy that gives rise to sheen and luster. [Thus] he is renowned as *Nyingkūn* (*Nying rkun*). Then *Jampel Shinjé Shepo* (*’Jam dpal gshin rje’i gshed po*),⁴¹² having become enraged, threw a golden eight-spoked dharma wheel at *Nying kun*. Because of this, his body was cut into eight pieces. Then the eight body parts [fell] in the eight directions around Mount Sumeru and eight hearts, having been buried, remained there. As for one heart that was not controlled and escaped, it is the planet *Ketu*. As for the prayer made at the burial [by *Jampel Shinjé Shepo*, he said:] “When the enemies of the teachings are spreading, may the eight body parts come together and protect the teachings!”

In a year’s time each body part of *Rāhula* arose and each *Kikang* joined with a class of *démon*.⁴¹³ From the four directions around Mount Sumeru came Tiger-headed *Taksin* (Stag

⁴⁰⁹ “Raven Head” an epithet for *Rāhula*.

⁴¹⁰ Here we see the fluidity of different names for different types of *démon*, with *Rāhula’s* mother being referred to as a *klu* in one line, and then as a *srin mo* the next.

⁴¹¹ This is a rather bizarre detail. It appears to be a foreshadowing of something, but the plot strand is never tied off. One possibility is that these blood clots feed *Rāhula’s* pieces for the year that they are buried (see below).

⁴¹² *Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka*.

⁴¹³ This is a loose translation. The basic sense of it seems to be that each of *Rāhula’s* body parts resurrects and then each part is joined by one of the eight classes of gods and demons.

srin stag mgo can) from the east, Bear-headed Bamsin (Bam srin dred mgo can) from the south, Cow-faced Kongsinwa (Kong srin ba lang gdong can) from the west, and Crocodile-faced Draksin ('Brag srin chu srin gdong can) came from the north. Kikang [with his] sisters,⁴¹⁴ having been joined by the eight classes of gods and demons, steals away the breath of sentient beings, the essence of crops and roams about reversing the planting.⁴¹⁵ That is the reason the eight classes of gods and demons joined with the eight sections of the body of Kikang and Nyingkūn.” So it was said.⁴¹⁶ [R2 12]

Thus what we are presented with here is the tantric Tibetan Buddhist version of the *Mahābhārata* origin myth of Rāhu. Literarily speaking it is far less complex, as we might expect. We are not told how or why Rāhula steals the amṛta nectar from the devas (who are purely background characters in this version of the story), only that he does. Also, Yamāntaka (who, as we saw Lelung explain, is Rāhula’s father in some accounts), who takes the role of Mahāviṣṇu in this story, seems to come to the defense of the gods which would seem to be a rather odd thing for a tantric Buddhist *krodha-vighnātaka* deity to do. Again, we are not told why. The story appears to be merely a rather simplistic adaptation of the *Mahābhārata* myth with Buddhist elements inserted into it. That said, however, in other ways the story is more complex; for instance, Rāhula not only loses his head, but is cut into eight parts, all of which then crash to earth, later to ascend, not alone, but commanding hosts of *démons*, and accompanied by his four “sisters.”

The story also purports to explain the “eight classes of emanation” concept, cited above, in which each of the eight pieces of Rāhula’s body are identified with a class of *démon*. In fact, it is implied that the *démons*, to begin with, reside inside his body: “Because the eight classes of gods and demons were complete in his body, there arose nine hearts in him,” presumably his own heart, or perhaps here better translated as “mind,” or the mind that later becomes Ketu, and eight minds corresponding to each of the eight classes of *démons*. At the risk of reading too much into the story, the narrative seems to suggest that the different classes of *démons* are born from the pieces once Yamāntaka dismembers him. Given this motif, it may be that the Tibetan

⁴¹⁴ Literally “Ki kang brother and sisters.” Again, these are just slightly alternate names for Rāhula’s sin mo attendants.

⁴¹⁵ That is, they interrupt the planting season, probably with bad weather. Alternatively, it could be a reference to the idea that Rāhu moves in reverse direction in relation to the other planets (see Henning 2007: 95).

⁴¹⁶ DSNT: 285-287.

authors of this story were also inspired by the myth of Puruṣa, the cosmic giant of Vedic mythology, whose body pervades the universe, notably just as “Khyapjuk’s” (“All pervading one”) is said to.⁴¹⁷ In the Puruṣa myth, the gods create the universe and all the beings in it by sacrificing and dismembering him. From the various pieces of his body, the various beings in the universe are born.⁴¹⁸

There is another, much more popular Tibetan Buddhist myth that Dalton (2011) argues draws upon the imagery of the story and ritual associations of Puruṣa. This is the famous *sinmo* myth found in the treasure text known as the Pillar Testament (Bka' 'chems ka khol ma) that, in part, purports to be a history of Buddhism’s arrival into Tibet during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (Srong bstan sgam po, c. 609-650), the region’s first Buddhist king. In one of the most famous stories from this history, the land of Tibet itself is anthropomorphized as a giant, malignant, *sinmo/rākṣasī démoness*, which must be tamed by nailing it down with Buddhist temples. Dalton argues that this motif stems from a longstanding Indian architectural tradition of laying down the so-called *vāstupuruṣa-maṇḍala* at the site of the building’s foundations, a part of a ritualized “breaking ground” ceremony which then anchors the building to the body of Puruṣa (conceptualized here as being under the earth) and vice-versa, thus empowering and stabilizing the structure.⁴¹⁹ The Tibetans, however, recast this concept in *Mahāyoga* Buddhist terms, so that the Puruṣa figure is reconceptualized as a hostile, Rudra-like figure who is trampled on and tamed. As Dalton puts it:

For Buddhists, of course, the Vedic god Puruṣa had to be replaced, and the substitution was accomplished in two ways. In a general sense, Rudra took the place of Puruṣa as the idealized victim of a primordial sacrifice, so that Rudra in his demonic mandala, his fortress of rotten flesh populated by his demonic attendants, is pinned beneath the pure Buddhist mandala...

⁴¹⁷ “When he shows his face in the southeast, his tail is in the northwest, his belly on the northeast border, eyes to the southwest. When he shows his face in the south, his tail is in the north, his belly in the east, his eyes on the west. When he shows his face in the southwest, his tail is in the northeast, his belly in the southeast, his eyes on the northwest...” and so on (DSNT: 297).

⁴¹⁸ See O’Flaherty 1981: 29-34.

⁴¹⁹ Dalton 2011: 119. Notably, Dalton points out that instructions for laying down the *vāstupuruṣa-maṇḍala* are primarily drawn from none other than the *Bṛhat Saṁhita*. Consequently, then, the Indians seem to have viewed this architectural practice within the larger framework of astrological science. It should also be noted that tantric rituals of the *Kriyā* and *Caryā* class, such as those found described in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, begin with the laying down of physically constructed *maṇḍalas* to “tame” the site of the ritual before the main practice is actually undertaken. See also Kramrisch 1976: vol. 1, 6, 39. For more on the *sin mo* myth, see Gyatso (1987).

Rudra and his demonic horde thus continue to dwell below the mandala, as subterranean shadows of the Buddhist deities above, their invisible presence empowering the mandala palace even as they threaten it. On the more specific level of local ritual practice, however, the Vedic Puruṣa could also be replaced by whichever mundane spirit happened to live at the construction site.⁴²⁰

Dalton goes on to point out that this practice is merely a continuation of Indian Buddhist traditions of building *stūpas* on top of sites believed to be the abodes of powerful local *dāmons*, of which DeCaroli gives numerous examples.⁴²¹ The sinpo myth of the Pillar Testament simply nationalizes the subjugation motif, “uniting its audience around memories of the early empire and creating a new Buddhist landscape with Lhasa at its heart.”⁴²² Consequently (as Dalton implies) Buddhist authors and missionaries intentionally populated Tibet’s landscape with *dāmons* to be sacrificed, revived, and apotheosized, simply adapting a logic that was fully formed in Indian Buddhism to a new local environment. No wonder then that Tibetan Buddhist literature seems to revel in the *dāmonic*, the Buddhist authors drawing on a dizzying array of figures to be imagined and re-imagined in constantly shifting contexts.

One of the most common types of *dāmons* that must be dealt with on a local level, specifically with regards to building, are the *sadak*, noted above as a type of earth *dāmon*, that are nonetheless linked to astrological movements (as the earth Puruṣa seems to have been in the Indian context). Lelung’s chapter explains that there are actually three main lords of the *sadak*, only one being in the earth, the other two being in the “middle” and “above.” They are all implied to be yet more emanations of Rāhula. When the *sadak* of the earth, named *Sadak Tōjye* (Sa bdag lto phye), is described, the reader (or rather practitioner in this case, since we are in the section of the chapter that gives practical advice) is told:

⁴²⁰ Dalton 2011: 120. See Gardner (2006) for a discussion of these earth-taming rites *sa chog*, including a translation of a ritual text also written by ’Bri gung pa Rig ’dzin chos kyi grags pa. See also Schrempf (1999).

⁴²¹ For instance, the case of Ajaṅṅā monastery cited in chapter one, which was named after the *nāga* king believed to dwell at the site. Another example is a *stūpa* built in Sri Lanka over the site of a popular *yakṣa* temple (DeCaroli 2004: 44). Once again, this lends credence to the idea that Buddhism has been (primarily) oriented toward *dāmon* subjugation since the earliest historical period, and the tantras merely make this ongoing (mythically eternal) war more explicit.

⁴²² Dalton 2011: 121.

In the three spring months, his head looks to the southwest. In the three summer months he looks to the northwest. In the three autumn months he looks to the northeast. [Use] a gold substitute (?) apply focus and circumambulate to the right of the earth lords suppressing *maṇḍala*...if you dig from behind, you will die. If you dig from the head your son and wife die. If you dig from the tail, you die. If you dig from the belly, you will accomplish all conceivable wishes.⁴²³

Thus what we appear to have here is a brief reference to a Tibetan version of the *vāstupuruṣa-maṇḍala* rite. While there is no direct reference to building, the “suppressing *maṇḍala*” of the *sadak* seems to link it to this ritual. This, coupled with the dismemberment story, suggests that Rāhula was regarded (at least in certain contexts) as being the Buddhist adaptation of Puruṣa. In fact, the association appears even stronger than with the *sinmo* of the Pillar Testament, who Dalton himself admits is not sacrificed or dismembered (as Rāhula is), merely nailed down. Nor is it explained that various types of beings spring from the *sinmo*’s various parts as in the Rāhula story.

Thus, in the stories of Rāhula cited in Lelung, we can identify at least three major mythic strands. First, the story recapitulates the Rudra subjugation myth, which of course is the paradigm for all oathbound protector deity myths. Secondly, we see a Buddhafied version of Rāhula’s *Mahābhārata* origin story, which is conflated with the Rudra-subjugation motif, which is further conflated with the Vedic Puruṣa sacrifice story, the third strand. Ultimately, this is a very interesting and notable case of “mythological contagion,” centered on an originally minor stock character in Indian legend who was enantiodromically apotheosized as part of the broader Buddhist project of (conceptually) inverting the cosmos.

⁴²³ DSNT: 300. This passage seems to be explaining that the *sadak*’s body rotates under the earth as Rāhula’s does in the sky, and one must divine where exactly the various parts of the body lie at any one time in order to know where is the right place to dig. “Digging” here implies, I believe, breaking ground for new construction.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to be a modern scholarly version of Lelung Zhepé Dorjé's biography of Rāhula, and has been an examination of the mythological career of just one Buddhist protector deity among many. While we have only just scratched the surface for this particular figure, there are a number of conclusions about this deity that I believe we can make. In the first chapter, we saw that Rāhu was an important, and recurring, figure in pan-Indian mythology and cosmology. While the roles he plays in the mythological literature are relatively minor, and he is most commonly mentioned as merely a poetic trope, he is the *démon* of the eclipse, which seems to have been considered among the most malignant natural phenomena, signaling natural disasters, and deaths (particularly the death of kings). As such, his mythological character reflects this heraldic role, and in many of his myths he acts as the catalyst for universal disharmony. Rāhu himself, as we can conclude from his name and his role in chasing and "grasping" the sun and moon, seems to have been regarded as a paragon, even an allegory, for the afflictive emotions of craving and attachment. In the Buddhist context, this makes him theoretically opposed to the Buddha's enlightenment and transcendence of the powers of "world rulers" like Rāhu and the graha, and the karmic bonds they represent. And yet, as we saw, in several tellings of the Buddha's life story, the eclipse heralds either the Buddha's renunciation of palace life, or his enlightenment. This, I believe, is reflective of the longstanding Buddhist (as well as Jain and Śaivite) project of embracing, converting, controlling and ultimately valorizing the marginalized villains of mainstream Hindu mythology and cosmology.

If DeCaroli is correct such a project was developed in Indian Buddhism by the early common era. This mythological and ritual control over *démons* would, arguably, become one of the central projects of Buddhism in the tantric era of the mid to late first millennium CE. As we saw in chapter three, tantric Buddhism consistently employed converted *krodha-vighnāntaka* *démons* to mythologically and ritually overthrow the deities of mainstream Hinduism, disrupting normative cosmic order which Buddhists equated with the suffering and entrapment of *saṃsāra*. Converted *démons* were thus weapons in the arsenal of the Buddhist tantric yogin, to be used against other *démonic* forces (including humans). The authors of the *Cakrasaṃvara* cycle

employed Rāhula in this manner. But more than this, worldly, laukika *démons* by being converted and “Buddhafied” in the tantric context represented the necessary dynamism between the laukika and lokottara levels of reality, upon which Buddhist soteriology logically rests. Thus, the apotheosis of *démonic* beings, paragons and allegories of afflictive emotions that they are, seems to have become a model for Buddhists’ own soteriological goals. Rāhu becomes such a model figure in the *Kālacakra* cycle, when the authors of these texts employed him as a “literal metaphor” for the a person’s very consciousness, which is by default afflicted, but is to be transformed into an enlightened Buddha consciousness.

These two distinct, but interrelated, roles that Rāhula played in Indian tantric literature (yogic weapon on the one hand and symbol of afflicted, as well as transformed and ultimately already enlightened consciousness on the other) were further (greatly) elaborated in Tibet by the mid-second millennium. The so-called “Cakrasaṃvara Rāhula” was developed into figures like the Supreme Za, Heruka Blood-Eye, who were ritually called upon by Tibetans in makdok black magic rites during the bloody warfare that wracked the region off and on for most of the second millennium. At the same time, the “Kālacakra Rāhula” was placed at the pinnacle of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, associated with the most profound practices of the Great Perfection. Lelung’s chapter on Rāhula, drawing on several sources in the Nyingma School’s vast treasure literature, discusses both of these main aspects, complete with a narrative history of the deity, and a number of associations that show significant mythological contagion between Rāhula and several deities of mainstream Hinduism. As we saw in chapter three, and his suggested in Lelung’s chapter, Rāhula appears to have been conflated by the Tibetans with Viṣṇu, Indra, Puruṣa, and possibly Varuṇa. In a sense, he usurped their thrones in the Buddhist campaign of inverting the *saṃsāric* cosmos and conquering its oppressive world rulers.

Much textual work still remains to be done to examine specific scriptures and authors in India that may have specifically discussed or valorized Rāhula. In Tibet, there is still a need to concretely examine transmission lineages of za sorcery and healing rituals. Furthermore, given that Rāhula was apparently the special protector deity of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s clan, future research is called for to determine how socio-political factors may have had an impact in the popularizing of Rāhula himself and his ritual cycles among various, specifically Nyingma, lineages.

I believe Rāhula's role in Chinese and Japanese cosmology should be examined as well, since these regions, like Tibet, were deeply influenced by general Indian cosmology as astrology. In China, Rāhu is known as Lo hou hsing, an unlucky star that causes eclipses, and, as in the Indian context, was understood to cause misfortune for kings. In Japanese esoteric Buddhism, Rāhu appears as well, notably in the Mahāvairocana-centric Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala, and in certain cases is depicted as a fully humanoid *vidyārāja* (Jpn. *myōō*), wrathful protector deities that are ubiquitous in Japanese esoteric Buddhism.⁴²⁴ I believe it also may be fruitful to investigate a possible connection or mythological contagion between Rāhu and East Asian thunder deities.

But for now, we have at least thoroughly introduced this deity who, in Tibet at least, becomes a paradigm for the ambiguous, mercurial nature of the *démons*. His iconography, and the way in which Tibetans have employed him throughout the second millennium (and perhaps earlier), show him as the embodiment of the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*, symbolically represented by his snake tail and bird head, and his control over the various levels of existence and the *démons* in them. He is the afflicter and curer of disease, protector and destroyer, the leader of the “haughty ones,” the arrogant, barely controlled unenlightened protectors, and an enlightened bodhisattva. Ultimately, I believe, Buddhists used him, like they did with all the converted beings that made up the *démonic* milieu of ancient India and Tibet, to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gap between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, using them to “exemplify the potential for immanent rectification” as Davidson puts it. Beyond simply tracing the fascinating career of this single deity and the shifting tides of mythological contagion that affected him, I hope that I have also clarified some theoretical approaches to the future examination of Buddhist protector deities, and shown why such research is important.

In his study of Dzokchen Rudra and Samantabhadra myths, Matthew Kapstein comments:

The myth of Samantabhadra as told by Longchen Rabjampa, and that of Rudra as told by Orgyen Lingpa, are thus seen to be constructed so as to convey, among other things, a number of apparently philosophical messages concerning eternity and temporality,

⁴²⁴ See Chandra 1999: 2775-2776, 2778. For a description of Rāhu in the Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala, see Snodgrass 1988: 473-474.

enlightenment and bewilderment, understanding and the rebellion of the will in ignorance. It is clear that both of these authors have deliberately incorporated these messages into their mythmaking...Must the message be mythic? From the vantage point we've reached here, it becomes difficult to see how it could be otherwise.⁴²⁵

Every constituent part of Buddhism that we could care to identify – cosmology, iconography, doctrine, soteriology, ritual praxis and so on – rests on and was, through the centuries, communicated by Buddhists through mythic stories and figures like Rāhula, just as the Buddhist tantric *maṇḍala* rests on and is empowered by Rudra and his court. It would behoove us to examine this neglected underbelly in far more depth.

⁴²⁵ Kapstein 2000: 177.

APPENDIX

THE OCEAN OF OATHBOUND PROTECTORS, INTRODUCTION, CHAPTER ON RĀHULA, AND COLOPHON

[1]⁴²⁶ Herein is the “Well Explained, Unprecedented Discussion of Merely One Part of the Ocean-like Stories of Liberation of the Oath-Bound Protector Deities.”

First: Invocations and pledge to complete the composition.

All the victorious ones of the ten directions and three times, although your enlightened intention is of one taste in the expanse of dharma, by means of an infinite, ocean-like assembly of manifestations, you bestow even now whatever good fortune to train beings. By means of the instructions of the lama, the one sufficient king of teachings, the one thing that liberates all is condensed into the quintessential instructions. Grasp the truth, which appears as many, as a singularity. Homage to the Lord of the Single, All-Pervading Self-Awareness! If you understand the essential point, all is perceived as pure. When there is no recognition all appears as an addition of misery. If there is a dividing line between recognition and non-recognition of awareness, objects of reverence appear as pleasing sights (?). How exactly (do we?) apprehend the size of the field of entry into the inconceivable activities of the conquerors? From the ocean-like life stories of the great holy noble ones. To grasp or disseminate (“scatter”?) only a few drops [from the ocean of rnam thar], even if one does not understand it exactly, it is of profound benefit. Having awareness of just a portion of it oneself and to tell a suitable, marvelous story, why would that provoke shame from someone learned? Because of that, action and wisdom is a form of arrogance. Apprehend [2] “The Well Explained, Unprecedented Oral Legends of the Ocean-Like Oath-Bound Protectors of the Three Lineages.” Attend to these activities which are praiseworthy. Moreover, oh Nyi ma gzhon nu (“youthful sun”) do the activities of perfecting the composition and from that increase the merit of wandering beings and become the cause of joy for the Ocean of Conquerors.

With respect to that, [I compile this] for the sake of clearing away the ignorance of the tantras, wrong views and all stains of doubt from beings; also, having appreciated the authentic

⁴²⁶ DSNT.

vital point, [may they] put the meaning of that into practice, perfect immensely the two accumulations [of merit and wisdom] and become advanced in the general and particular precious teachings; from the *sūtras* and *tantras* in accordance with my own realization, I desire to narrate from a compiled portion of the life stories of the ocean-like oath-bound protectors.

Second: A general explanation of the necessity of compiling the treatise.

At present here in Tibet, by means of Buddha Vajradhara, according to all the authentic precious *tantras* which explain the oath-bound protectors, which are said to be equal in enlightened intention with (him)self (Vajradhara?). As to the extraordinary oath-bound protectors which are described in those (*tantras*), they are lauded by some and blamed by some, are understood to be all equal or great and low, and some people accumulate the severe sin of utterly abandoning the *dharma*. Moreover, due to having a conviction of what is or is not a great excellent superior protector, they come to forsake all good qualities of scripture and learning of those *tantras*. Abandoning that, they come to abandon the three jewels. [3] Therefore, this will become a very heavy body of ripened karma. Because of that, I [I write this] in order to give an eye of intelligence which produces clarity regarding the oath-bound protectors, by means of these words.

[278]⁴²⁷ Khyab 'jug Chen po Rāhula.

Regarding the Khyab 'jug chen po Rāhula, he manifests as a form of the haughty spirit Lord of Secrets, Vajrapaṇī. Regarding the common lineage, long ago the Yab drang srong dza mi ta and the Yum 'phrul mo phod sding, in first half of life, did not have a son. Later in life, on the evening of the 8th ⁴²⁸ day of the first spring month, [R4 617] Drang srong dza dreamed of a golden sunrise made from a fiery mirror on a [mountain] peak of crystal, which immediately diminished. In the mother's dream, rays of light radiated in every direction from her own belly

⁴²⁷ Begins on page 2 of volume 2 in *Sle lung rje drung bzhad pa'i rdo rje*. Dam can btsan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar pa cha shas tsam brjod pa sngon med legs bshad. Leh: T.S. Tashigang, 1979, 2 Vol. Henceforth referred to as "R2." Begins on folio 340.2 of *Sle lung rje drung bzhad pa'i rdo rje*. Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar pa cha shas tsam brjod pa sngon med legs bshad. Thimphu, Bhutan: Kunzang Topgey, 1976. Henceforth referred to as "R3." Begins on folio 616.4 Vol. 1 of *Sle slung rje drung bzhad pa'i rdo rje*. *Dam can bstan srung rgya mtsho'i rnam thar pa cha shas tsam brjod pa sngon med legs bshad*. Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup and Sherap Drimay, 1978, 2 vol. Henceforth referred to as "R4."

⁴²⁸ Since much of this text deals with various dates, dates will be written as numerals to highlight them.

and, for a moment, a rain of meteors came forth. In the morning, they explained the dreams to each other and anxiety ate at them. Then they asked a diviner who said:

“The golden sunrise on the pure white crystal cliff is a premonition of the birth of a boy. That it is the color of gold is a sign that he will act in accord with the Holy Dharma. That it suddenly decays is a sign of a short life. The light emanating from the belly of the mother is a sign he will act for his own benefit in this life, that it pervades all directions is [R4 618] a sign of harm to all living beings.” Thus he spoke.

Not long after that statement [the woman] gave birth to a son, named La lar bcu bzhi. At the start of ten years [of age] he took monastic vows. [R3 341] At about twenty, he completed novice-hood, [279] and he remained in single-minded samādhī in the Forest of Shing glag sha near the [R2 3] town called Shar phyogs nor bzang. The king of the nearby town was called King Ratna Siddha. One day, a female servant of the king named Prajña ku lu arrived to draw water. That morning, some snow had fallen, making the earth white. After passing through some of those woods, she was amazed to see lotuses growing. Chasing after them, she beheld a body of emanation in the guise of a monk, residing with discontented mind destroyed in the cool shade of the trees of Glag sha. Involuntarily stunned, [R4 619] having prostrated, she said: “Your honor, emanation body, there are no other priests of honor attending on the Great King Ratna Siddha. Who is going to be his priest? I humbly ask that you go.”

The monk replied: “Base woman, what are you talking about? To assume a female body is an evil rebirth. You have too small an accumulation of merits to meet with me. Go home right now; don’t say that you’ve been near a man. To explain [our meeting] will become an obstructive condition.”

The girl quickly went to the king and said: “Listen to me lord! Because of your three queens something phenomenal happened to me: I saw for sure a holy monk for you!” [R2 4]

The king did not accept the woman’s story. “Since what you saw may be true, lead the way [R4 620] and show me. If it is true, I will make a queen of you.” Having spoken thus, [R3 342] the girl did lead the way and the king with his retinue came near to the monk.

Then the king, having seen the emanation body in accordance with the girl’s report, asked: “Lion of men, protector of wandering beings, guide me, the king, on the path. Have compassion for the six classes of beings! In order to work as a glorious protector of sentient beings, I pray that you come be my holy chaplain.”

The monk replied [280] “I practice the Holy Dharma properly. I do not protect kings.”

The king was angry and said: “In Eastern India there’s no one not in my power. If you don’t accept to become my chaplain, I will cause the further dissolution of the Buddha’s Teachings!”

In the mind of the monk [R4 621] he reflected, thinking: “Even if I am killed I cannot be frightened, but how sad it would be if this king was involved in evil deeds!” [So] he agreed to act as chaplain for awhile. Then the king and servants invited the monk to the palace. He devotedly paid homage and dwelt there as a chaplain. Because he felt grateful to that girl from before, the king also made her his queen.

Then, because that woman, greatly empowered, spoke carelessly, the ministers were displeased. “That girl and the chaplain of the king are plotting together.” Thus they lied and told to the king. The king thought: “This woman was herself also the discoverer [of the monk] to begin with. This woman is greatly deceitful; it is certainly possible [these allegations] are true.” Angry, he therefore ordered the ministers thus: “Burn the monk with a fire of sandalwood.” [R2 5] The ministers [R3 343] piled up many pieces of sandalwood [R4 622] and prepared to burn the monk. Then the monk was brought to the burning. He said, “Allow me to make three aspirational prayers.” The king and ministers listened.

The monk continued: “Witness all gods and demons in existence! If I touched the body of the queen, may I wander through the eighteen hell realms and experience the suffering of immediate retribution. If I did not touch the body of the queen, in the next life, having taken on the body of a poisonous gnod sbyin, may I devour the king and his ministers in seven days. After that, passing consecutively into the underworld, pressing into service the eight classes of gods and demons, may I rule above, below, and in between. Furthermore, unto the end of the kalpa, [281] may demons rain down on unrighteous kings, monks with degenerate vows, [R4 623] loose women and so forth. In the degenerate kalpa, from the exalted pinnacle of cyclic existence, may I steal the life breath of other agitated srin po. My aspirations will not degenerate.

“This is not the fault of the queen. This is retribution for the king’s viciousness and the ministers’ sinful thoughts. These four queens of yours, may they accompany me and may they obey my commands in every situation.” Thus he made this aspiration.

Then the ministers burnt the monk in the fire and his life was cast away. All four of the king’s wives, the first three together with the later girl, went insane and, [R3 344] seeing these

actions, [R4 624] asked why in the presence of the men. “Has a demon [R2 6] entered the mind of the king?! Now what’s the use of living?!” Simultaneously they all jumped in the fire. The servants threw water on the fire but could not extinguish it and all four of the queens were also burnt up.

Then, on the peak of Mount Sumeru, there arose a blazing fire of hatred called Srin po raksha glog gi phreng ba, Snyon kha nag po ti pa ra tsa, or ’Jam dpal nā ga raksha. In the depths of the sea on the south side of Sumeru dwelt a wave of lust called Klu mo sbal mgo khrag mig ma. The klu woman looked up and the srin po looked down and in the mind of the srin po was desire and he thought: “How nice it would be if I attained as a wife the beautiful and charming klu mo below and one night [R4 625] united with her.” Because the klu also thought like that, the srin po, with a mind of desire, drooled. Because the klu mo was drunk with passion, after nine months and fifteen days, she developed a terrifying iron belly. Because that was extremely ferocious the father and mother were not able to control it. [282] Because they begged Vajrapāṇi [for help], Vajrapāṇi, with a nine-pronged vajra in his right hand threw it [into the womb]. From inside of the burst belly [came] a horrifying, dreadful serpent spirit. It had the upper body of a srin po and the lower body of a snake, twisted at the end, its head and body covered with eyes. In its belly was a gaping mouth which devours the three worlds. It had nine heads and above the heads was the head of crow. Then Vajrapāṇi [R4 626] commanded him, [R3 345] conferred empowerment and bound him under oath. He awarded him a secret name, and he became pervaded with unthinkable sorcery and magical powers.

In the meantime, the four queens from before were also driven by the power of karma, and having become sisters, were born as the four, Srin zor wa’i gdong can, Bam srin dred kyi gdong can, Kong srin ba lang gi gdong can, and ’Brog srin chu srin gyi gdong can. [R2 7] He emanates from the body Rgod gza’ bishnu ra dza, from the speech, Gza’ bdud khyab ’jug chen po,⁴²⁹ from the mind, Gza’ bdud ljang sngon, from the qualities, Tsa ra ka, from the activities, Drang srong Rā hu la, as well as Biksti pa tra, Du ba mjug ring, Bdud po rog, Sgra gcan ‘dzin and so on, the eight great planets and the eight classes of spirits.

When he moves from the southwest to the northeast (this is one system, though it is usually explained that these movements are accompanied by the srin po) he is accompanied by all eight [classes of spirits]. When he moves from the west [R4 627] to the east he acts as the

⁴²⁹ “Great All Pervading Planet Demon”

warlord of ma mo. When he moves from the east to the west, he acts as the warlord of dmu bdud. When he moves from the northwest to the southeast, he acts as the warlord of the klu-btsan. When he moves from the southeast to the northwest he acts as the warlord of the dgra lha. When he moves from the north to the south he acts as the warlord of the gshin rje. When he moves from the south to the north he acts as the warlord of the klu. When he moves from the northeast to the southwest he acts as the warlord of the sman mo. (This is one system, though it is usually explained that this movement is accompanied by the eight classes of spirits such as Bi na ya ga⁴³⁰)

Moreover, on the 4th day [of the month] he manifests his left shoulder as ma mo, [283], moving from the west to the east. On midday of the 8th he manifests his right hand as dgra lha and gyal po, moving from the southeast to the northwest border. At midnight of the 11th, having manifested his [R3 346] bladder as bdud, he moves from the north to the south. At midnight on the 15th, having manifested his head [R4 628] as srin po, he moves from the southwest to the northeast. After midnight on the 18th, having manifested his tail as dmu, he moves from the east to the west. At noon on the 22nd, having manifested his left hand as klu-bstan, he moves from the northwest to the south. At dawn on the 25th, having manifested his right shoulder as gshin rje, he moves from the south to the north. At sunset on the 25th,⁴³¹ having manifested the heart of his eyes and three fangs (?) as bgegs he moves from the northeast to the southwest. [R2 8] In short, it is said that it is difficult to fathom the power, magical strength and miraculous illusions he performs at all times in the three worlds. He protects the teachings of the Buddha and acts for the benefit of beings.

As such, from the Gza' expiation rites of the treasure discoveries of Las 'brel: "From the vast expanse of the unborn Dharmakaya, by means of the unimpeded, naturally expressive Sambhogakaya, [R4 629] manifesting as the display of the various types of Nirmanakaya, the terrifying foremost Gza' Rāhula emerges from the Dharmadhātu. This night, come to this place [and fulfill your] commitment," and "The lower body of a poisonous snake churns the eighteen hells," and "While you reside on Mount Sumeru you pervade all one billion worlds with wrathful waves of intense energy. When you wander in the atmosphere, you aggressively devour the sun, moon, planets and stars. When you exhibit miracles in the world, you shoot the poisonous arrows

⁴³⁰ Ganesha

⁴³¹ Likely should read "29th" as it does in R2

of thunder and lightning in the ten directions, and send contagious vomit disease to the places of enemies and obstructers. Whose body is unsurpassed in this world-system, please approach [R3 347] from the Dharmadhātu!” Regarding the blood-line which was explained: depending on authentic past oral traditions, it is recorded like it appears in *Bya khyung pa ngag dbang padma’s* [R4 630] *Instructions for Rites Skillfully Curing Epilepsy*. [284]

From the evocation cycle of the Savage Gza’ of Las ’brel’s treasure discoveries:

“[The parents are] Yab gcig yaksha dzwa la dwang and Yum gcig dorje glog ’khyug. With their non-dual mind they emanated the supreme son Gza’ bdud chen po” and it is also said “your father was named Srin po dha sha ghri va” and “your mother was called Klu mo ham sham ma.” Thus it is said. In the visions from invocation it is said: [R2 9] “They are also called Yab rdo rje srin po and Yum rdo rje glog ’gyu.” There is an enumeration of names. Regarding Dha sha ghri va, in a past life his consort was Dpal ldan dmag zor ma. He was the elder brother of the sister Na la rtse. These [R4 631] are not thought to be contradictory, these show up in many compilations to accord with the perspective of those to be trained.

[From the *Secret Tantra of Gza’ rgod nyi ma khros*]

It is said in the *Secret Tantra of Gza’ rgod nyi ma khros* that Gshin rje ’dod pa’i gyal po and a Srin mo glog lcam ’bar ma, produced from their union a son called Gza’ rgod nyi ma. He is the same as Gshin rje takki ra dza from the retinue of Mgon po phyag drug. He dwelt in the side of the Gnya’ shing ’dzin mountains, and to the northeast of Sumeru dwelt the ruler of the desire realm, Dpal ldan lha mo re ma tī. They had mutually desiring minds. [R3 348] When the time of love came, the goddess made a move to the north of Sumeru, but he did not come. Having adorned a gnod sbyin mo called [R4 632] *Sna gdong*, the daughter of Phag pa gza’, in the dress of the goddess, she dispatched her. Then Gza’ rgod nyi ma and the gnod sbyin ma had intense sex all night. In the morning, when it was time to go their own ways, the daughter of the pig showed her true form and Gza’ rgod nyi ma perceived her loathsome ugliness, like the daughter of a pig, and became angry. He cursed, “With all eight classes of gods and demons, let them destroy this Goddess Re ma ti! Because this goddess has deceived me, may it rain on my enemy the harm of the ma mo!” [285] Because of that all the worlds were disturbed. Having brought together all the malevolent spirits, the *gza’* and *ma mo* danced side by side. They performed like that every time they met every year. Because they both settled on Sumeru abiding there, they

damaged the crops and life force of the world in all places [until they were?] [R4 633] bound under the oath of Dpal chen Dregs pa kun 'dul. [So the text] says.

From *Removing the Poison of the Gza'* in the treasure discoveries of Las 'brel

“Yab gcig Yamantaka [R2 10] and Yum gcig dzwa la 'bar ba, with one pointed attitude emanated the eight great gza' demons.” So it says. Like I mentioned above, Yab rdo rje srin po or Raksha glog phreng and that 'Jam dpal nā ga raksha are the same and are, it is said, in reality 'Jam dpal gshin rje, who caused that.

[From the Precious Bright Lamp]

Also, from the questions and answers which Bai ro⁴³² asked the Great Teacher⁴³³ [R3 349] in Precious Bright Lamp: “E ma ho. Great teacher, sir, what is the reason these five sisters and brother Gza' ki kang 'phung byed⁴³⁴ control the skies above; [what is the reason that] [R4 634] when there is lightning, thunder and hail falling they wander in backwards direction; [what is the reason he] is the master of winds and crops; [what is the reason he is] called Ki kang and Nying rkun and [what is the reason] the Gza' moves in eight body parts?” The Great Teacher replied “Bai ro tsa na, listen! I will explain the Bdud ki kang 'phung byed brother and the sisters. Previously, at the boundary limit without becoming,⁴³⁵ from the peak of Mount Sumeru, living in a blaze of fury, was a srin po called Raksha nag po glog gi phreng ba can. At the depths of the sea, living in churning waves of desire was a klu mo called Yaksha nag mo sbal mgo khrag mig ma.

In the last month of summer in the year of the cow, the srin po from the top of Mount Sumeru called “ke'u!” The klu mo [R4 635] from the depths of the sea supplied the sign “kam kam!” Then the Ki kang's parents, [286] overcome with aversion and desire, coupled on the peak of Mount Sumeru [and?] the peaks of the Seven Gold Mountains. In thirteen months the srin mo's body was not comfortable. On the seventh month of the tiger year, a son was born. His upper body was human-like and in his hand he held a sword. Because his father was a srin po he enjoyed rotten meat and blood. Because his mother was a klu mo his lower body was that of a snake and he enjoyed milk and sweets. [R2 11] Because the eight classes of gods and demons were complete in his body, there arose nine hearts in him. Right after birth he said [R3 350] “ki'u

⁴³² Vairocana, one of Padmasambhava's 25 disciples.

⁴³³ Padmasambhava

⁴³⁴ Perhaps “Gza' raven-headed destroyer.” The statement seems to be referring to Rāhu and the four srin mo as a group of five siblings.

⁴³⁵ “sngon srid pa ma bye ba'i mtshams su”

kang!” and became Ki kang ’phung byed chen po, cutting the life force of living beings, eating the meat which he craved [R4 636] and drinking the blood of beings. The mother was not able to keep him close and he went up. The mother rubbed and squeezed her breasts and four clots of blood came forth. She was not afraid and sent for a maidservant, having the clots of blood buried in the four continents around Mount Sumeru.

Afterwards, Sing po Rāhula, in the land of the gods, having stolen the essence of the ambrosia of the gods, ran away with all their subtle energy that gives rise to sheen and luster. [Thus] he’s renowned as Nying rkun. Then ’Jam dpal gshin rje’i gshed po, having become enraged, threw a golden eight-spoked dharma wheel at Nying rkun. Because of this, his body was cut into eight pieces. Then the eight body parts [fell] in the eight directions around Mount Sumeru and eight hearts, having been buried, remained there. As for one heart that was not controlled and escaped, it is the planet Ketu. As for the prayer made [R4 637] at the burial [by ’Jam dpal gshin rje’i gshed po, he said:] “When the enemies of the teachings are spreading, may the eight body parts come together and protect the teachings!”

In a year’s time each body part of Rāhula arose and each Ki kang joined with a class of spirits. From the four directions around Mount Sumeru came Stag srin stag mgo can from the east, Bam srin dred mgo can from the south, Kong srin ba lang gdong can from the west and ’Brag srin chu srin gdong can came from the north. Ki kang [with his] sisters, [287] having been joined by the eight classes of gods and demons, steals away the breath of sentient beings, the essence of crops and roams about reversing the planting. [R3 351] That is the reason the eight classes of gods and demons joined with the eight sections of the body of Ki kang and Nying rkun.” [R4 638] So it was said. [R2 12]

[Consciousnesses, objects, afflictive emotions and body parts]

Also, Bai ro asked: “E ma ho. Great Teacher, sir, this Gza’ khyab ’jug chen po, if he collects the life force of beings and roams about reversing the planting, how does his eight classes of consciousness move in the eastern continent? How do his eight objects [of consciousness] move in the northern continent? How do his eight afflictive emotions move in the western continent? How do the eight sections of his body move in the southern continent?” Thus he asked.

The Great Teacher replied “Listen Spa gor!⁴³⁶ As for Khyab ’jug chen po’s power and movement in the eight classes of consciousness in the eastern continent: He moves at sunset, grasping part of both day and night, from the southwest to the northeast, having manifested the kun gzhi (“storehouse”) consciousness as srin po. At midday, he moves from the north to the south, having manifested the eye consciousness as bdud. He moves from the southeast border from the northwest border around early morning, having manifested the afflicted consciousness [R4 639] as the Queen of the Dgra lha. He moves from the west to the east at noon, having manifested the ear consciousness as ma mo. He moves from the north to the southwest in the evening, having manifested the mental consciousness as *gza*’. He moves from the south to the north in the afternoon, having manifested the nose consciousness as gshin rje. He moves from the northwest to the southeast after midnight, having manifested the body consciousness as klu-btsan. [R3 352] He moves from the east to the west at midnight having manifested the tongue consciousness as dmu. These move in a counter-clockwise circle.

The eight objects [of consciousness] move in a clockwise circle in the northern continent; having manifested the object of kun gzhi consciousness as dmu in the morning, he moves from the east to the west. [288] Having manifested the object of eye consciousness as klu-btsan in the evening, he moves from northwest to southeast. [R2 13] Having manifested the object of defiled consciousness as gshin rje in the early morning, he moves from the south [R4 640] to the north. Having manifested the object of ear consciousness as *gza*’ himself in the late afternoon, he moves from the northeast boundary to the southwest. Having manifested the object of mental consciousness as ma mo in the afternoon, he moves from the west to the east. Having manifested the object of nose consciousness as the Queen of the Dgra lha at midnight, he moves from the southeast to the northwest. Having manifested the object of body consciousness as bdud in the afternoon, he moves from north to south. Having manifested the object of tongue consciousness as srin po at midnight, he moves from the south to the northeast.

Circling counter-clockwise he emanates the five poisons in the western continent. Having manifested anger as srin po, he moves from the southwest to the northeast in the early morning. Having manifested jealousy as bdud, he moves from north to south at dusk. Having manifested pride as the Queen of the Dgra lha [R4 641] around early morning, he moves from the southeast to the northwest. Having manifested desire as ma mo at noon, he moves from west to east.

⁴³⁶ An epithet for Vairocana

Having manifested all pervasive ignorance as Khyab 'jug, he moves from the northeast to the southwest. Having manifested the object of hate as gshin rje at midnight, he moves from south to north. [R3 353] Having manifested the object of desire as klu-btsan at sunset, he moves from the northwest to the south. Having manifested the object of ignorance as dmu after midnight, he moves from east to west.

Circling clockwise he manifests the eight parts of the body in the southern continent. Having manifested the left shoulder as ma mo in the evening, he moves from the east to the west. Having manifested the right hand⁴³⁷ as the Queen of the Dgra lha at midday, he moves from the southeast to the northwest. Having manifested the bladder as bdud [R4 642] at midnight, he moves from north to south. Having manifested the head as srin po at noon, he moves from the southwest to the northeast. Having manifested the tail as dmu after midnight, he moves east to west. [R2 14] Having manifested the left hand as klu-btsan [289] in the afternoon, he moves from the northwest to the southeast. Having manifested the right hand as gshin rje in the early morning, he moves from south to north. Both day and night, having manifested the three fangs and the center of the eye as Bi na ya ga at sunset, he moves from the northeast to the southwest.” Thus he said.

[Outer, inner, secret, thod rgal, most profound, father, mother, manifestation, and messenger aspect]

Also, Bai ro tsa na asked: “E ma ho! Great Spiritual Master, what are his movements in the outer, inner and secret aspects? What are his movements in the thod rgal⁴³⁸ aspect? What are his movements in the most profound aspect? The father aspect? [R4 643] The mother aspect? The manifestation aspect? What are the movements of his messenger aspect?” Thus he asked.

The master said: “Listen monk!

Regarding the movements in his outer aspect:

[These are on], in any month, the 4th, 8th, 11th, 15th, 18th, [R3 354] 22nd, 25th and 29th days.

Regarding the movements in his inner aspect

[These are on] the 5th, 9th, 12th, 16th, 19th, 23rd, 26th and 30th days of the month.

Regarding the movements in his secret aspect

⁴³⁷ Probably should read “shoulder”

⁴³⁸ “Leap over.”

[These are in] the four hours of the tiger, horse, monkey and rat.⁴³⁹

Regarding the movements in his thod rgal aspect

[These are on] the 1st, 13th, 16th and 23rd of the month.

Regarding the movements in his most profound aspect: [these are on] the 8th of the waxing moon, [R2 15] the 16th of the waning moon, the 4th of the waxing moon, the 24th of the waning moon, [R4 644] the 8th of the waxing moon, the 18th of the waning moon, and finally the 22nd. On those [times] whatever actions of harming that you do will be accomplished.

Regarding the movements in his father aspect

He moves on the 30th in the father guise on top of Mount Sumeru.

Regarding the movements in his mother aspect

He moves on the 1st of the month in the evening, in the mother guise in the depths of the sea. On these days in the world, causing hail and thunderbolts to fall, homa rites, waging war, [290] and also actions of harm will be accomplished.

Regarding the movements in his emanation aspect

In the spring season Khyab 'jug, having manifested as the Gshin rje'i rgyal po,⁴⁴⁰ from the mouth of the Yoke Holder Mountain range expands 4,000 fold.⁴⁴¹ Winds and storms arise. On the 2nd day he moves his head and black rainclouds arise. Implore Chos kyi rgyal po.⁴⁴² [R4 645] Throw the zor⁴⁴³ of Chos kyi rgyal po at the head of a ling ga. Do the homa of Ral pa tshar gu.⁴⁴⁴ In the middle spring month, Rāhula moves, having transformed into a klu. He tears the center of Mtsho ma dros pa⁴⁴⁵ and raises up nine *klu 'jog po*.⁴⁴⁶ He stirs the warmth of malevolent klu. Heat⁴⁴⁷ like a yak bull descends from the sky. Having consulted with all the klu in [R3 355] the depths of the vast lake, he gives the increase of the four kinds of ba su ta.⁴⁴⁸ [This] explains his movements on the second day of the Earth Rabbit.⁴⁴⁹ In the last spring month,

⁴³⁹ Dawn, noon, evening, and midnight. See Cornu 1997: 213.

⁴⁴⁰ The Lord of Death

⁴⁴¹ That is, he multiplies his size that much.

⁴⁴² Dharmaraja

⁴⁴³ A wrathful tormo used like a magic bomb.

⁴⁴⁴ "a dark-blue god holding a khram shing and a snake-snare; he has nine locks of iron, poisonous wind issues from his mouth, and he rides a poisonous snake" Nebesky-Wojkowitz p.250

⁴⁴⁵ Lake Manasarovar

⁴⁴⁶ According to Jim Valby, a "class of klu called taksaka"

⁴⁴⁷ Also meditative warmth. This odd sentence may have some yogic meaning.

⁴⁴⁸ "ba" can mean cow. Su ta can refer to a region in Tibet. Possibly kinds of cows from this region.

⁴⁴⁹ Could mean a year or month,.

Rāhula transforms into a ma mo and having split open⁴⁵⁰ the great cemeteries⁴⁵¹ and having consulted with all the ma mo, he expands 4,000 fold. Storms arise from the four directions. On the second day he moves his head.

Regarding the movements in his messenger aspect:

He also moves his eyes on the 26th day of the spring boundary month. [R2 16] [R4 646] On the 9th day, he moves his right shoulder. On the 11th he moves his left shoulder. On the 13th he moves his heart. He moves his eyes on the 6th day of the middle spring month. He moves his head on the 9th. He moves his heart on the 11th. He moves his left shoulder on the 13th. On the 19th he moves his right shoulder. Calculate like that on most months. When he moves his heart, he moves his fangs, and moves from barren glaciers.⁴⁵² A cloud like the belly fat of a sheep appears. This appears like the teeth of a tiger. When he moves his right hand, he moves his hand implement and a red cloud [appears] like the drawn tip of a lance. When he moves his head his hair moves and having entered the middle of the sky, the sky becomes dark blue. When he moves his eyes his eyelashes move, and from the sharp mountain spur comes a rising storm. At that time, it is auspicious to do whatever wrathful activity. During the waxing moon he cuts off life force. During the waning moon he moves in his messenger aspect. [R4 647] The klu, btsan, dmu and the entire lower part of the body move and [291] whatever wrathful activity is auspicious.

Regarding the movements in the attendant aspect:

In the three months of autumn, he moves with a comet at the outermost of the seven golden mountain [ranges]. Similarly, the four gdong mo⁴⁵³ move at the outermost of the seven golden mountains. The four gdong mo are established. The comet [R3 356] is established. The comet moves, for instance, causing harm in the world like frost by means of damp and cold wind. I've arranged instructions which are suitable for whatever autumn month. At noon of the 15th day, Bi tra pa tra,⁴⁵⁴ having transformed into a ma mo, moves from the center of the sky. He arises in the blue-black sky and moves from the northeast to the southwest. At midnight of the

⁴⁵⁰ Likely meaning he forcefully enters the cemeteries.

⁴⁵¹ Possibly a reference to the eight great charnel grounds of India.

⁴⁵² Literally "empty of snow"

⁴⁵³ Rāhu's srin mo "sisters"

⁴⁵⁴ Probably "Bikṣīpatra," one of the forms of Rāhu mentioned on page 282, and on 261 of Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996)

11th having transformed into a sman,⁴⁵⁵ Bi tri pa tra moves from the barren glaciers. [R4 648] A cloud like fat arises in the dark blue sky. It arises like the face of a tiger. [R2 17] He moves from south to north. In the early morning of the 18th day, having transformed into a bdud, Bi tri pa tra, moves into the atmosphere. A grey cloud like a swirling pillar arises. He moves from the southwest to the northeast. On the frightening night of the 4th day, Bi tri pa tra, having manifested as a gnyan, moves into the sky with the sound of rushing wind and then he takes a cursed form which fulfills the activities of the great Gza' bdud. At just the hottest point at midday on the 11th, Bi tri pa tra, having transformed into btsan, moves to all the mountain spurs raising up a storm. He moves from the northwest to the southeast. At the quickening of the day on the 22nd, Bi tri pa tra, having transformed into a dmu, moves to all three mountain peaks,⁴⁵⁶ similarly raising a hail storm, [R4 649] moving from east to west. At dusk on the 25th, Bi tri pa tra, having transformed into a srin po, agitates local gods and moves from the glacial trenches.⁴⁵⁷ A storm arises with an intense roar. He moves from north to south. Then he dispatches the egg messengers.⁴⁵⁸ Entrust crops of this region to the srin po messengers.” This was said for the purpose of instruction. [R3 357] “At the quickening of the sun on the 29th day, Bi tri pa tra, having transformed into gshin rje, moves from within Lake Manasarovar, [292] and a form similar to a rainbow arises in the sky. Plant a phur ba in the middle of the earth of the local god. At midnight of the 7th month, Bi tri pa tra moves pervading the world, inseparable with the four great ladies of witchcraft, and a red cloud like a drawn spear blade arises. Then, if you present offerings of rituals and homa, [R4 650] whatever actions you do will be accomplished without difficulty or doubt.

Regarding the movements of his commander⁴⁵⁹ aspect:

In the evening of the 4th day of the first month of spring, he moves from west to east. By means of his commanding even⁴⁶⁰ the sky, there arises hail on the 4th day of the seventh month. From the southwest on the 8th day, accompanied by crooked btsan, he is the leader⁴⁶¹ of hail. On the 8th day of the seventh month, [R2 18] hail arises. At about dusk of the 12th day, he goes with Stag sman zor gdong lho of the north. Because of that, from the 12th day of the seventh month

⁴⁵⁵ A type of demoness.

⁴⁵⁶ Lit. “three top”

⁴⁵⁷ Probably similar to those that climbers have to cross by ladder-bridge on Mt. Everest.

⁴⁵⁸ An odd sentence. Possibly a reference to egg-born spirits.

⁴⁵⁹ Lit. “nose leader” as in to lead someone around by the nose.

⁴⁶⁰ thes – “including”

⁴⁶¹ causer?

until the 15th, there is hail. Hail arises on the full moon day of the middle spring month. From noon up to midnight on the 18th day of the middle spring month, he is the leader of the movements of hailstorms of btsan and dmu. Because of this, hail arises on the 18th day of the eighth month. From the 22nd until the 23rd day of the third month, [R4 651] from the quickening of the sun until midday, he goes from north to south, the leader of Sna brag srin ma,⁴⁶² and causes a hail of klu and btsan. Hail comes on the 22nd and 23rd day of the ninth month. In the third month from the 22nd until the 25th, [R3 358] meeting with the Thang lha⁴⁶³ of the Pure Azure Expanse, a hail of ma mo arises. Because of this, on the 25th of the ninth month, hail comes. On the third month, at the crack of dawn and the last part of the night, from the northeast border, accompanied by ma mo and brtan ma as well as Brahma with the Conch Topknot, he moves to the southwest. From the 28th to the 29th of the ninth month hail comes. From the 4th to the 8th in the first/second month of summer, [R4 652] klu-btsan rush from west to east. [293] Because of that, on the evening of the 8th day of the first month of winter, he goes from the southeast to the northwest border. Hail arises, which endangers the crops of Tibet. From the 8th day to the ninth of the middle month of winter, subsequently hail descends. If you avoid those times, it is impossible for hail to fall on people.⁴⁶⁴ Thus he said.

[Movement, entering, abiding and wrathful reversal]

Again the monk Bai ro tsa na asked: “E ma ho. Great Guru, sir, what is the movement, entering, abiding and the wrathful reversal of the Gza’?” Thus he asked. The Guru said: “Bai ro tsa na, listen! Moving, entering and abiding [R2 19] is three, reversing wrath is the fourth: In the southwest he abides in emptiness on the 4th day from sunset to dark. He moves to the east at dusk. [R4 653] He abides on the 5th in the east. On the 8th he enters the southeast at sunrise. He moves at forenoon to the northwest. He abides in the northwest on the ninth. On the 11th he enters the north at dusk. He moves from the north to the south in the middle of the evening. On the 12th he abides in the south. On the 15th he enters the southwest in the morning. He moves to the northeast at noon. He abides on the 16th in the northeast. On the 18th, he enters the east at midnight, moving to the west after midnight. He abides on the 19th in the west. [R3 359] On the 22nd he enters the northwest at noon. He moves to the southeast at daybreak. On the 23rd he

⁴⁶² “Nose rock ogress”

⁴⁶³ The deity of a mountain range

⁴⁶⁴ A loose translation. “It is impossible for hail not to fall” seems to work better, but doesn’t fit with the proceeding phrase.

abides in the southeast. He enters the south on the 25th at midnight. He moves to the north from the south at dawn. On the 26th he abides in the north. He enters the northeast on the 29th [R4 654] just after noon. He moves as far as the peak of the sun in the southwest.

As for the reversing force:

Having moved quickly to the east on the 4th he abides in the east three days. He reverses revolutions to the west on the 6th day after sunrise. Then, do the inciting black⁴⁶⁵ homa and actions of wrathful hail. On the 8th, having moved quickly from the southeast to the northwest, he abides in the northwest for three days. In the late evening of the 9th day, he reverses rotation from the northwest to the southeast. At that time, use secret essential power substances. On the 11th [294] he moves from the northeast to the south. He abides in the south for three days. On the 14th at noon he reverses rotation from the south to the north. At that time, do actions of causing hail. On the 15th, having moved from the southwest to the northeast, he abides in the northeast for three days. At midnight of the 16th [R2 20] he reverses rotation from [R4 655] northeast to southwest. At that time, do actions of powerful thunder and hail. On the 18th, having moved from the east to the west, he abides for three days in the west. At noon of the 19th, he reverses rotation from east to west. At that time, do fierce actions. On the 22nd, he moves from the west to the southeast. He abides in the southeast for three days. On the afternoon of the 23rd he reverses rotation from the southeast to the northwest. At that time, do actions of sending lightning down. On the 25th, having gone from south [R3 360] to north, he abides in the north for three days. Unstable on the evening of the 26th, he reverses rotation from north to south. At that time, make offerings to and exhortations of Khyab 'jug chen po. On the 29th, having gone from the northeast to the southwest, he abides in the southwest for three days. [R4 656] At day break of the 30th, he reverses rotation from the southwest to the northeast. At that time, do actions of precipitation by means of hail zor.” Thus he spoke.

[Ten great times of movement and their signs]

Also, Bai ro tsa na asked: “E ma ho! Great Teacher, sir, what are the ten great times of movement of the Gza? What are the signs?” Thus he asked. The Guru spoke: “Listen Spa gor, Regarding the ten great times of movement for the Gza’

On any month, he moves in ten directions. At dusk of the 4th day he moves from west to east. On the 8th, in the morning, he moves from the southeast to the northwest. In the middle of

⁴⁶⁵ nag spar ba – a deity name?

the night of the 11th, he moves from north to south. At noon of the 13th he moves from the center of the sky⁴⁶⁶ to the depths of the sea.⁴⁶⁷ At noon of the 15th, he moves from the southwest to the northeast. On the 18th, at the edge of midnight, he moves from east to west. On the 22nd [R4 357] after noon, he moves from the northwest to the southeast. On the 24th he moves from the depths of the sea to the peak of Mount Sumeru. On the 25th [295] at dawn, he moves from south to north. [R2 21] On the 29th during the quickening sun, he moves from the northeast to the southwest.

Regarding the signs on those

After noon of the 4th day, the Gza' exhales his breath. Smoke and a cloud the color of smoke arises in the sky and a stain of pollution arises on the earth. On the 8th day, red colored water scattered with black scum and agitated appears. [R3 361] Dense fog pollution appears in the sky. The color changes and the water swirls and is heaped. Regarding earth signs appearing in the sky, on the 11th, the grey sky is the color of ash. Regarding sky signs appearing on earth, from the earth dampness arises in the four directions. [R4 658] Regarding sky signs appearing in the water, on the 13th a piercing rainbow appears in the water. Regarding signs in the sky, a rainbow similar to a spear appears. On the 15th the breath of the Gza' comes forth purple. On the 18th, gloominess appears as a sky sign. Purple appears as an earth sign. The water swirls and sits still. On the 22nd a hidden grey appears on the earth. As to the sky, thunder arises, but no rain falls. On the 24th, in the grey sky kind of green stain appears. On the 25th a turbulent storm appears in the sky. On the 29th, in the sky appears a very dense overcast.

Regarding secret signs

On the 4th day at the southwest border the so-called ko skam drud⁴⁶⁸ thunder-dragon occurs. A dark brown cloud appears. On the 8th day on the southwest border occurs three thunderclaps in short succession, together with a rainbow. On the 11th in the north thunder [R4 659] occurs together with a cold wind rising. On the 13th in the west thunder occurs like a circle at a great distance in the four directions.⁴⁶⁹ On the 15th straight north occurs the three thunderclaps in short succession. On the 18th thunder occurs in the southeast. On the 22nd there in

⁴⁶⁶ that is, the zenith

⁴⁶⁷ the nadir

⁴⁶⁸ "skinned hide"

⁴⁶⁹ In other words, thunder sounds from all directions

the south, thunder occurs with a grey path.⁴⁷⁰ On the 24th thunder occurs like a distant circle. [R2 22] On the 25th thunder occurs. On the 29th in the southwest [R3 362] thunder occurs with a grey path.” Thus he said and [296]

[The Planets]

[R2 29.13]⁴⁷¹ also Bai ro tsa na asked: “E ma ho! Great teacher, sir, what are the eight external planets? What are the eight internal planets? What are the eight secret planets?” Thus he asked.

The Great teacher said: “Bai ro tsa na, listen! The eight external planets are the Sun, Moon, Mars,⁴⁷²[R4 660] Mercury,⁴⁷³ Jupiter,⁴⁷⁴ Venus, Saturn and Pi tri pa tra. The eight inner planets are Rokti nag po, Rāhula, Sgra gcan ’dzin, Du ba mjug ring,⁴⁷⁵ Khyab ’jug chen po, Bī nu rā dza, Tsa ra ka and Ljang sngon chen po. The eight secret planets are the Ma mo srid pa’i rgyal mo,⁴⁷⁶ the Dgra lha’i rgyal mo, Ndud nag mo ’dzum med,⁴⁷⁷ Srin po [R2 30] Yakṣa Siddha, Dmu bdud nag po ha li ka,⁴⁷⁸ Klu btsan rol pa glog ’gyu,⁴⁷⁹ Gshin rje ya ma rā ja,⁴⁸⁰ and Bgegs bi na ya ga.⁴⁸¹ These are the eight outer, inner and secret planets.” Thus he spoke.

Also, Bai ro tsa na asked: “E ma ho! Great teacher, sir, regarding Sgra gcan ’dzin, with regards to his changes in life, what directions [R4 661] does Sgra gcan have power? What are his power times? What are the actual movements of Sgra gcan? What of the eight great planets?” Thus he asked.

[Rāhu’s power days]

The Great teacher said: “Bai ro tsa na, listen! Regarding the days Sgra gcan has power over life: The planet called Du ba mjug ring as well as Gza’ ’jug phod chen po⁴⁸² from about sunrise today to the same time tomorrow, moves through the four main directions and four

⁴⁷⁰ Literal translation of “skya lam”

⁴⁷¹ There are about seven pages of extra material in R2 before this section begins, that appear to deal mainly with various planetary positions and elective astrology.

⁴⁷² Lit. “army commander”

⁴⁷³ “hand”

⁴⁷⁴ “phurba”

⁴⁷⁵ Ketu

⁴⁷⁶ “Ma mo Queen of Cyclic Existence”

⁴⁷⁷ “Unsmiling Black Demoness”

⁴⁷⁸ “Black Dmu Demon Ha li ka”

⁴⁷⁹ “Klu-btsan Lightning Display”

⁴⁸⁰ “Death Lord Yama Rāja”

⁴⁸¹ “Obstructing Spirit Bi na ya ga”

⁴⁸² Also presumably a name for Ketu

intermediate directions. At sunrise, [R3 363] he moves half a period⁴⁸³ in the northwest. Before noon he moves from the northwest to the south. At noon he moves to the north. At just about evening, he moves from north to west. Before sunset, he moves to the southeast. At about the period of late evening, [R4 662] he moves from the southeast to the north. At midnight, he moves from north to south. At dawn, he moves from the southwest to the northeast. [297]

Regarding Sgra gcan's power in the directions

In the first month, Ki kang moves at the eight times. Moreover, in the period of the moon's waxing light on the 4th day in the east, Sgra gcan abides. Thus, it is impossible for him to go east. On the 8th, because he abides in the south he cannot go south. On the 11th, Sgra gcan abides in the west, so he cannot move to the west. On the 15th Sgra gcan abides in the north, so he cannot go there. On those dates of the waxing moon, Ki kang abides in the four main directions, [R2 31] establishing power there. Do not cause hail to fall, send troops, fight foes, quarrels, rob and [R4 663] wrathful activity. Behind and on the right, any work of virtue and vice is auspicious.⁴⁸⁴

In the waning period of the moon, on the 18th, Sgra gcan abides in the southeast, so he cannot move to the southeast. On the 22nd, he abides in the southwest, and cannot move to the southwest. On the 25th he abides in the northwest, so he cannot move there. On the 29th, Sgra gcan abides in the northeast, so cannot move there. Like that, on the 1st month, in the four main directions and four intermediate directions, Sgra gcan ki kang abides establishing his power in those places. Bringing down hail, homa sacrifice, throwing wrathful tormas, giving thread-cross offerings, waging war, [R3 364] virtue and vice are also not to be done. Behind him and on the right, whatever action is auspicious.

Regarding Sgra gcan's actual movements

[R4 664] Gza' khyab 'jug, when he shows his many heads in the east, his tail is in the west, belly in the north, his eyes look to the south. Regarding the eyes of Khyab 'jug, they look behind and forward. He shows his right [eye] below⁴⁸⁵ he circles backwards.⁴⁸⁶ When he shows his face in the southeast, his tail is in the northwest, his belly on the northeast border, eyes to the southwest. When he shows his face in the south, his tail is in the north, his belly in the east, his

⁴⁸³ Half a day?

⁴⁸⁴ An odd statement, it possibly references Rāhu's position in the houses (and consequently directions) on one's natal chart in a daily astrological reading.

⁴⁸⁵ He looks down?

⁴⁸⁶ "phyi 'gros su 'khor." Could mean his retinue is in an "outer aspect."

eyes on the west. When he shows his face in the southwest, his tail is in the northeast, his belly in the southeast, his eyes on the northwest. Showing his face in the west, his tail is in the east, [298] belly in the south, eyes looking north. When he shows his face in the northwest, his tail is in the southeast, his belly in the southwest, his eyes looking to the northeast. [R2 32] When he shows his face in the north, [R4 665] his tail is in the south, his belly in the east, eyes looking west. When he shows his face in the northeast, his tail is in the southwest, belly in the southeast, his eyes looking to the northwest. In the [direction] of the belly of Gza' Khyab 'jug accomplish powerful and destructive actions of hail, starting war, fighting foes, and wrathful activities. [In the presence] of the belly of Khyab 'jug, good deeds [such as] taking a wife, obtaining a house, worshiping the gods and also whatever actions are good are auspicious. Also, whatever virtuous and negative actions are bad in the presences of Gza' khyab 'jug's head, eyes and tail. As for four of the eight great planets, the Sun, Mars, Saturn and Ketu: [R4 666] if they are in front or to the left of foes, [R3 365] the foes die. If they are behind and to the right of oneself, you are victorious. With regard to those four planets, destructive actions of power and wrathful actions such as starting wars are auspicious. If the Moon, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus are on the right of foes, it is bad for oneself. Also, with those planets one should not perform but turn away from whatever wrathful activity." Thus he said.

[Body, movement, and position]

Also, the monk Bai ro asked: "E ma ho! Great teacher, sir, regarding the size of the body of Sgra gcan, what is it's [size] approximately? In what manner does he orbit (?). How does that planet's head and tail abide?" Thus he asked. The Great teacher said: "Bai ro tsa na, listen! The size of the body of that grasping Gza' sgra gcan [R4 667] covers the six continents of the desire realm. As for the system of rotation, when the back of the eye has rolled backwards (?). [R2 33] The body is similar to a snake. When the black head is present at the time he grasps the sun and moon⁴⁸⁷ clearly (?) [299] on the evening of a lunar eclipse. Grasping the moon, the unblemished planet, he grasps from the east that evening. In case of having an association such as with (?) the moon and the Pleiades (?) where the Pleiades is, [R3 366] there is the head of Gza' khyab 'jug. Moreover, wherever Lag mo (one of the lunar mansions, Alpha Orionis?) is, there is Khyab 'jug's tail. Khyab 'jug's belly is in both constellations. In this manner, he proceeds. On the night of a lunar eclipse, [R4 668] his tail is in half of the twenty-eight lunar mansions. Also (on?) the

⁴⁸⁷ Obviously a reference to solar and lunar eclipses.

evening of joining with whatever star, on the earth arises having associated with whatever sun star (?) is the head of Khyab 'jug.

Secondly, in thirteen [constellations, about?] one half of the lunar mansions, is Khyab 'jug's tail. Khyab 'jug's belly is within both. Moreover, regarding the reason for the eclipse of the sun and the moon: the sun goes into the mouth of the Gza'. Sunlight leaks from the throat of the Gza' until it is [completely] contained in the mouth of the Gza' and [when] nothing leaks out of the throat, [the sun's light] dies. When it is entirely in the back of the smoke-colored hole, having gone in completely, the sun and moon die. In this way they are half-dead. [R4 669] In the belly of the Gza' khyab 'jug,⁴⁸⁸ do black magic and engage in making hail and starting wars, fighting enemies and accomplishing wrathful activities. Do not take up virtuous actions [such as] obtaining a house, praying to the gods and so forth. In the places where Gza' khyab 'jug's face, eyes and tail abide, any positive and negative actions are bad. Regarding the system of rotation of Gza' khyab 'jug, he revolves in the same way as the stars⁴⁸⁹ and if you recognize this [you know] he is the great lord [over] the action of the planets and stars. The other [stars and planets] are his troops on the right and left-hand sides." Thus he said.

[The Sa bdag]

Also, Bai ro tsa na asked: "E ma ho! Great teacher, sir, who [R2 34] is the sa bdag⁴⁹⁰ of the sky? Who is the sa bdag below? [R4 670] Who is the sa bdag of the middle? [300] What is the way of abiding of these three and their auspicious way of moving?" Thus he asked. The Great Teacher said: "Bai ro tsa na, listen! Regarding the sa bdag of the sky, he is Gnam khyi nag po, and in the three spring months faces south. In the three summer months [R3 367] he faces west. In the three months of autumn he faces east. He rotates having proceeded below the left-hand side (?). Moreover, when facing south, he moves to the southwest in the evening. At midnight he moves to the west. He moves to the north before daybreak. At noon he moves to the east. When he faces to the west, in the evening he moves to the west. At midnight, he moves to the north. At daybreak he moves to the east. At noon he moves to the south. When facing to the north, in the evening he moves to the north. At midnight he moves to the east. At daybreak he moves to the south. [R4 671] At noon he moves to the west. When facing east, in the evening he moves to the east. At midnight he moves to the south. At dawn he moves west. At noon he

⁴⁸⁸ Likely meaning when the sun and moon are the in the belly.

⁴⁸⁹ This would indicate Rāhu is thought to not move retrograde in relation to the other heavenly bodies.

⁴⁹⁰ "Earth lord"

moves north. At those [times] having joined with his [power], accomplish wrathful actions of evil spells and hail. When he is in front [facing one, these actions are] unsuitable.

Regarding the earth lord below, this is Sa bdag lto phyé. In the three winter months his head looks to the southeast. The left sleeps (?). In the three spring months, his head looks to the southwest. In the three summer months he looks to the northwest. In the three autumn months he looks to the northeast. Apply the gold substitute and circumambulate to the right the earth mandala of suppression.⁴⁹¹ [The sa bdag?] having fallen asleep, if you dig behind (under?) the mandala, you will die.⁴⁹² If you dig from the head, son and wife die. If you dig from the tail, [R4 672] you die. If you dig from the belly, you will accomplish all conceivable wishes. [R2 35]

Regarding the sa bdag of the middle: Gnyen 'khrol bu, he is the planet Bi tri pa tra. Having assumed the outward appearance of a horse approximately the size of a human thumb (?), in the winter months he moves on the 8th and 28th days. In the three summer months [R3 368] he moves on the 3rd and 25th days. In the three autumn months he moves on the 1st, 11th and 22nd days. In the three spring months [301] he moves on the 9th and 29th days. At sunrise he moves from east to west. Before noon, he moves from the northwest to the southeast. At noon he moves from south to north. Quickly he moves from the northwest to southwest. He moves from the southwest to the northeast in the evening. He moves from the northeast to the west at midnight. He moves from west to east towards dawn. At these times, all action are bad. If you meet with them [R4 673] your ability to cope will collapse and [you will become?] mute and rats will eat your bones and the planets behind (?).” Thus he said.

There are teachings like this on the Gza' bdud chen po from many general Vajrayana tantras, particularly spoken in the tantra of Bya rog mgo brtsegs ki kang rog ti and when the Great Teacher dwelt in the charnel ground “Dense Wilderness,” he saw a rocky black serpent with fire and a tempestuous dust storm [coming] from its gaping mouth (?). He dug a concealed copper box from inside the serpent (?), from this came the means of achievement. Then, by means of the solitary man's bloody hands, having directly mounted a red wolf, he, the Great Glorious Siddha removed the life essence and bound the demon under oath. [R4 674] He [Rāhula] said: “I receive your words and will protect the teaching, great teacher!” The great teacher also [said]: “I Padma 'byung gnas [say]: In the last 500 years there will arise the teaching

⁴⁹¹ In all likelihood this is referring to some kind of ritual instructions for pacifying or suppressing the sa bdag.

⁴⁹² If you disturb the suppressing maṇḍala, you will die?

of the Gza' sage. At that time, [R3 369] endeavour to make offerings. Like a son, request protection. [R2 36] Become like a shadow [to] the body (?). Listen like a servant entrusted with whatever activities. This is the best bestowal of outer tantric initiation. He is established as a heart-son." Thus he said, and this was concealed as a profound treasure of sādhana cycles. Thus, he [Rāhula] has been established as a principle guardian spirit of meditation lineages such as those of Dharma King Gter bdag gling pa and Rdo rje 'dzin pa che mchog 'dus pa rtal. [R2 36.6] [R3 369.2] [R4 674.6]

[548] Fourth, the author's colophon.

To conclude: mind of innately changeless great bliss, primordial Buddha Dpal chen he ru ka (wrathful Samantabhadra). The size of the mandala of all pervading space is infinite, reveling with the display of various illusory emanations. Moreover, as for the realm of the sky, it is expansive. Like that, the trainer's (Buddha's) realm is also endless. In that are the plays of antidotes for trainees. (?) How are we able to apprehend its size? Course, fleeting thoughts are not to be stopped. In the endless play of those magical arrogant demons, everything is distinguished by highest and lowest. How to even speak of the oceans of kalpas [that are?] exhausted? (?)

Nevertheless, regarding the life stories of the great noble ones: although with the mind of a childish being, not realizing how it actually is, by writing merely a part [of all there is] I do not obtain very great merit. I don't possess the wisdom of innate awareness and moreover very little learned knowledge. Because of that, my power to analyze the meaning of religious texts is also inferior. I take joy in speaking of casual things. Nevertheless, I offer just these eye letters.⁴⁹³ Regarding the great noble ones who take up vulgar forms, clear away the stains of wrong views and have unchanging extensive pure perception, this ocean of oath-bound protectors is exactly like that. Make invocation and activities of offering and praise and also, on those occasions, keep in mind some [of their] major marks. From the force of faith obtain even greater siddhis (spiritual accomplishments). This is the essential key that by knowing liberates all. Simultaneously (one will obtain?) in a hundred ways an ocean of siddhis. Having distinguished the glory of the sky-treasury of two benefits (benefits for oneself and others) [549] there is no doubt that you will definitely come to attain this. Because of intense prejudice, people are

⁴⁹³ Literal translation, which is a remark about their superficiality.

forever blind. Even though I explained as best I could the [methods of?] connecting with the definitive source, who will grasp the well explained crucial point? Nevertheless, by means of the Buddha's words, all the haughty ones are like that.

All those genuine kama and gter ma have their own means of understanding and with pure mind, if you are intelligent, investigate them carefully and there is in them the well explained profound meaning. Because of that, Rgyal kun ngo bo he ru ka ("all victorious essence heruka") assumes the form of the ocean of oath-bound protectors and all the attendant followers of them. I have little power for proclaiming their life stories. May the vajra-blessings of the body, speech and mind of the Ocean of Noble Ones fulfill all one's wishes and ensure the liberation of countless wandering beings. Having become undifferentiated with all the Buddhas, they transform into empty space.

All beings dwelling in this Land of Snows (Tibet), do not lose devotion for the oath-bound protectors and from whatever blessing enters one's own being, may all that is desired be enjoyed in the Ocean of Buddha Activity! By means of the ocean-like display of pure emanations, which resembles the nature of beings and thoughts, as well as the host of methods of dharma teachings, may they enter and abide in the all-pervasive mandala! In short, moreover, let all objects of aspiration, by whatever true power of the three jewels and the impartial, all-pervasive dharmadhatu, be completed for all beings.

As for this work describing merely a portion of the Biographies of the Ocean of Oath-Bound Protectors, said to be unprecedented and well-explained. It was set forth by one born into a family whose parents were mantra practitioners at Zangs ri khra tshal gsang sngags gling monastery in Ngam shod along its northern banks, the fourth holder of the seal of Rje drung rin po che bearing the name "Knowledge Holder"—set forth by me, the one called Bzhad pa'i rdo rje, [550] in the 'all-joyful' year of the wood male tiger [1734] in 'Ol dga' (in the Lokha district) at the foot of Mt. Meru by one commonly called Sle lung. [I] began this composition because of the exhortation of the ocean of supreme *dākinīs* at Rnam dro gling [Monastery] during the festival of Saga Dawa. After making extensive outer, inner and secret offerings and performing a *gaṇacakra* feast before statues of the Great Teacher Padma, who is a combination of the Ocean of Conquerors of the Three Times who liberates upon seeing, and the Queen of the Dakinis Ye shes mtsho rgyal, I accomplished this work. May it be supreme medicine and cause uninterrupted

prosperity for all beings. Mangalam! May it be auspicious! Listen here! This was written by the old monk 'Brug don 'grub.

FIGURES



Fig. 1: Rāhu, sun and moon in hand. Made of stone (schist). Thirteenth century, Orissa, India. The British Museum (1951,0720.2AN170839). © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 3. Rāhula with za and sinmo retinue. Tibet, 1800 – 1899. Nyingma Lineage. Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton. Courtesy of Jeff Watt and the Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 169).



Fig. 4. Rāhula mural at Tengyeling (Bstan-rgyas-gling) Monastery in Lhasa. Photo courtesy of Christopher Bell (2007).



Fig. 5: Rāhula on dragon mount, with *za* and *sinmo* retinue. Tibet, 1700 – 1799. Nyingma Lineage. Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton. Courtesy of Jeff Watt and the Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation (item no. 65081).

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Fig. 1

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Figs. 3 and 5:

Dear Bryan,

Your student, Cameron Bailey, is welcome to use both images. The first image #169 belongs to the Rubin Foundation and the second belongs to me. Both paintings now belong to the Rubin Museum.

All the best.

--- Jeff

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