

Tibetan and Himalayan Healing

An Anthology for Anthony Aris

Compiled by

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HUNTING FOR THE CURE: A BON HEALING NARRATIVE FROM EASTERN BHUTAN¹

TONI HUBER

In Himalayan and Tibetan Plateau societies, hunting and illness are often negatively associated. The theme is an old one in the region. Narratives preserved in pre-11th century Old Tibetan documents present hunting as precipitating a crisis of health or even death.² The same theme is ethnographically attested in Tibetan and high Himalayan communities, where I have often heard explanations attributing men's misfortunes, including their ill health, to excess hunting, hunting in ritually sensitive places, killing the wrong animal, and so on. Given this general context, positive associations between hunting and healing might not be expected. While undertaking research on a regional religious phenomenon that the inhabitants of eastern Bhutan and the Mon yul Corridor simply call Bon, I recorded a "ritual antecedent narrative" (*rabs*) in which a hunter restores a sick person to health, and does so by hunting. This narrative, called *Sha ba rabs* or *Narrative of the Stag*, describes a "ransom" (*glud*) rite in which the item offered in exchange for restoration of the patient's health is a hunted stag.

In the paragraphs to follow, I will introduce the ethnographic setting of the *Sha ba rabs*, offer a translation of it, comment upon its logics within the culture of narratives and rites to which it belongs, and finally compare it with two Tibetan *glud* traditions that also feature hunting, stags and cures for illness.

The *Sha ba rabs* is an example of ritual antecedent narratives maintained in both oral and written form and chanted in conjunction with related rites by local priests variously named *bon*, *bon po*, *lha bon*, *lha mi*, and the like. These *bon* priests operate in specific communities throughout eastern Bhutan and the Mon yul Corridor. While one can find what are best described as "Bon"-identified community priests throughout this greater region, as well as further afield, those whom I study are specialized in the worship of a group of ancestral and clan deities classed as *Srid pa'i lha*. Priests who mediate with the *Srid pa'i lha* share a set of characteristics that clearly distinguish them from

other village ritual specialists in the same region: They claim no experience of possession, nor do they use "ecstatic" modes of performance; their skill is based upon oral recitation of a substantial repertoire of ritual antecedent narratives, together with appropriate ritual actions; they invoke various tutelary or helper beings who are considered as ancestors or archetypes; their role is mainly hereditary, and their collections of recited texts are primarily transmitted down through lineages of male agnates.

Bon worship of the Srid pa'i lha is, with a few exceptions, fairly exclusive to those highland communities who speak a set of contiguous East Bodish languages, including Dakpa, Dzala, Kurtöp, Khengkha and Bumthap. The *Sha ba rabs* presented herein comes from Khengkha-speaking villages in the Kheng Chikhor district of eastern Bhutan. Four-day community festivals for Srid pa'i lha worship are staged annually in Kheng Chikhor from the 16/17th days of the 9th Bhutanese lunar month on. During the second evening of these events, the *Sha ba rabs* is publically recited by a *bon po* priest in the style of a sung chant. The *bon po* sits in the middle of a circle of "male dancers" (*bro pa*) and chants the *Sha ba rabs*, while the dancers perform their steps around him. This dance includes forms of animal imitation. Dancers place their hands with outstretch fingers at the sides of their heads to represent the stag's antlers, bend over at the waist, and raise their heads up to mimic the gestures of a rutting male animal, or the manner in which a stag passes through the undergrowth so as not to snag its antlers. A second *rabs* entitled *Narrative of Seeking the Peacock's Nest* (*Rma bya'i tshang 'tshol rabs*) is also performed at the same time and in a similar manner.

I recorded the following version of the *Sha ba rabs* from the *bon po* of Nyimshong village, high on the west bank of the Jamkhar Chu river in Kheng Chikhor. Other *bon po* from neighbouring Kheng villages along both banks of the river reported having the same chant. Since a *bon po*'s rites are always public, and because it is essential that *rabs* be chanted for the fulfilment of Srid pa'i lha worship, the language of such *rabs* is best described as being liturgical. Classical Tibetan composed in roughly metered verse is the basic liturgical language of these texts. However, they are frequently inflected to varying degrees by the spoken East Bodish languages of *bon po* priests. The hybrid language often resulting is not only maintained in the form of oral chants, but is also commonly written in manuscripts using the Tibetan script. The *Sha ba*

rabs translated here is a Khengkha-inflected oral version.³ Unusually for a *rabs* from this region, much of the text is in the form of first person narrative. This chanted example is obviously abbreviated from a more elaborate story, the extensive version of which is now no longer entirely or accurately recalled. In the translation to follow, clarifying glosses offered by the *bon po* narrator in response to my questions are set within brace marks { } or explained in the notes, while interpolations to aid a smoother reading occur in square brackets []:

NARRATIVE OF THE STAG⁴

"I, the {king's} son went up and up {while I was out night-hunting}.⁵
 I met with a stag there that was white above and red beneath.⁶
 Due of this, I, the king's {son}, was stricken in life and limb."
 The astrologer perceived the worst omen:
 "The king's {son} is stricken in life and limb
 Because his vital force has been cut off by a stag,
 A stag that is white above and red beneath!"
 The hunter⁷ mGon po rdo rje⁸ was already deceased, however
 {His son} the hunter Me rog sag steng⁹ said,
 "Bring poison {for arrows} from Ngang mda' La Pass!¹⁰
 Bring iron {for arrowheads} from the land of the Monpa!¹¹
 For arrow flights, bring the feathers of the Monal pheasant!¹²
 Bring a bow-string¹³ from Mon yul!
 For a bow, a "strong shoulder bow" from the West¹⁴ is necessary.
 Fetch the arrows from Gangs dkar sha med.¹⁵
 When they have been brought, I, the hunter, will need them.
 I was within the body of my venerable mother {still unborn when my
 father the hunter died},
 So it is said I did not want to leave the house, and was dispirited.¹⁶
 [Departing for the chase.] I crossed over a hill, and entered a valley.
 There I saw a black stag.
 Just as I aimed my arrow at it,
 [It said] "It was not I {who afflicted the prince}, for I am the *bdud*'s stag.
 The stag that is white above and red beneath is behind the hill."
 I crossed over the hill, and descended into another valley.
 There I saw a yellow stag.
 I took aim at it with an arrow,
 [And it said,] "I am the *klu*'s stag.
 The stag that is white above and red beneath is behind the hill."
 I crossed over the hill, and descended into another valley.
 There I encountered a red stag.
 I took aim at it with an arrow,

[And it said,] "I am the *btsan*'s stag.
 I am not the stag that is white above and red beneath you [seek].
 Yet, the stag that is white above and red beneath is behind the hill."
 There I saw hoof prints where it had passed by a few days earlier.
 I then dispatched both the white-mouthed and black-mouthed hunting dogs.
 There they spotted the stag that is white above and red beneath.
 The stag said, "I did not cause the king's {son} to be stricken in life and limb. It was not I."
 The hunter replied, "Both the white-mouthed and black-mouthed hunting dogs know it is you."
 There the hunter shot his lethal arrow into the stag's loins.
 Just then the stag said, "I am the *bdud*'s stag.
 I will go to the floor of the valley to die.
 I am the *btsan*'s stag.
 I will go to the head of the valley to die.
 I am the *lha*'s stag.
 I will go to the land of the *lha* [above] to die.
 When I drink, I sup the blue waters in the rock clefts.
 When I eat, I consume the green grass of the alpine meadows.
 When I sleep, I repose upon the summits of rocky bluffs.
 When I die, I will expire at the boundary between the meadow and the forest."
 He said this, and the hunter suffered {from chasing the wounded stag to such places}.

Finally, the stag died, and so the hunter declared,
 "Its antlers are for the prince.
 The internal organs are the ransom for the prince.
 I will pack them within the narrow tube of my quiver."¹⁷
 He said this and went [to the palace], where the king told him,
 "Because you have arrived at the palace {with the ransom}, the prince has been freed from his illness."

This seemingly modest *Sha ba rabs* is interesting for various reasons. Concerning its possible interpretation and wider significance, here I will merely draw brief attention to three points. To begin with, the narrative clearly once framed an actual *glud* rite for ransoming the lost or stolen "vital force" (*srog*) or "mobile vitality principle" (*bla*) that has caused a patient's affliction. We can be fairly certain of this. At other sites of Srid pa'i lha worship in the region, *glud* rites are indeed still performed together with their own ritual antecedent narratives, and these share similarities with the *Sha ba rabs*. For such rites, animals or animal substitutes are the ransom exchanged for the purpose of reversing a loss of vitality. Due to reasons unknown, an actual *glud* item (*yas stags*) is no

longer used at Kheng Nyimshong, and the *rabs* is only combined with the aforementioned stag dance. This humble dance should not be overlooked. It appears to have formed a component of the overall *glud* rite in the past. A number of animal imitation dances are commonly incorporated into different stages of Srid pa'i lha worship throughout the region. They belong to a particular substratum of practices and themes in the development of the regional cult of the Srid pa'i lha. Furthermore, the stag's chosen place of death, "at the boundary between the meadow and the forest" (*spangs dang nags kyi mtshams su*), is another direct reference to this same substratum of Srid pa'i lha worship. Most traditional festivals are specifically located in "sacred groves" beyond the village perimeter. These are sites where cleared land meets stands of trees—often called *lha shing*—whose felling is prohibited, or at the actual forest boundary above a settlement area. It is precisely at such boundary places that *glud* and other transactions are set in motion, and dispatched to the palaces of the deities to gain favour.

The second point of interest here concerns some implied equivalences in the unfolding of the story; those between the act of hunting and the essential stages of a rite on the one hand, and the hunter and a ritual specialist on the other. The structure of the story has all the typical stages expressed in many ritual antecedent narratives, as well as a sequence of steps for applying an actual rite to solve a problem: i. crisis described; ii. diagnosis of cause and possible solution; iii. searching for a ritual specialist and items required for the rite; iv. performance of rite; v. resolution/cure. The bulk of the *Sha ba rabs* obviously concerns searching. Stories of searches for messengers, priests, ritual ingredients and tools, ransom animals, the "soul" and so on, constitute a fundamental story type in many known cycles of ritual antecedent narratives, be they preserved in ancient documents or chanted today by contemporary ritualists. The act of hunting is essentially a form of search, albeit one often involving a simultaneous chase. In this case, it is the most appropriate form of searching to ensure acquisition of the key ritual item, a wild animal whose body parts must be exchanged for a patient's revival. Yet, prior to the hunt even commencing, the narrative incorporates an abbreviated version of another type of search also found in many ritual antecedent narratives: the primordial search for ritual implements or tools. Such searches are narrated in other *glud rabs* from the region, and are usually undertaken by archetypal *bon po* priests who set off to the different cardinal directions. In the *Sha ba rabs*, this

second search type is condensed into the list of components required for the hunting equipment. These all originate from the cardinal directions surrounding Kheng as an ideal site of the narrative and the rite. The Bhutanese geography in the story is real, while the attribution of each item to a direction of origin is realistic, or at least it would have been in the pre-modern era: poison > Ngang mda' La = north; iron > the Monpa = west; bow-string > Mon yul = east; bow > "west" [meaning *nub brDa gling kha*] = southwest, i.e. ideally south. Even the hunter himself is named after localities in far eastern Bhutan. This implies that he too originates or dwells in, and thus has to be found at and invited from, another place, just as the archetypal *bon po* priests usually are in many other *rabs*. In the *Sha ba rabs*, the hunter is the priest, and the entire procedure for his hunt is that of the rite.

Thirdly, the *Sha ba rabs* shares parallels with two Tibetan *glud* narratives known from completely different contexts. One of these is preserved in the pre-11th century Old Tibetan document classified as IOL Tib J 734, and takes the form of a ritual antecedent narrative. The other occurs together with the formal instructions for a *mdos* rite named *Sha ba ru rgyas*. This latter tradition is recorded in the context of organized g.Yung drung Bon, but versions of it also appear to have been employed by individual Himalayan ritual specialists and community priests with no connections to g.Yung drung Bon.¹⁸ Typical of the *rabs* genre in general, and like the *Sha ba rabs* itself, both texts just mentioned are anonymous and undated. Since several scholars have already studied IOL Tib J 0734 and the *Sha ba ru rgyas*, for the purposes of a brief comparison with the *Sha ba rabs* here I will merely summarize relevant details from their work.¹⁹

In the Old Tibetan narrative, a young man goes to the wilderness to hunt deer and round up wild yak. There he sights, chases and unsuccessfully shoots arrows at three different stags in succession: a white stag of the *lha*, a black stag of the *srin*, and a *spur bu* (?) stag of men. Finally, a very particular stag named Dangs po 'pral gangs appears with antlers of conch, a nose like a bird (*byang* > *bya*?), hair like a yak, and hoofs of tanned leather. The hunter shoots and wounds it with his arrow, yet the stag flees further and the hunter must pursue it cross-country before it finally dies. Just as the hunter butchers the carcass, a 'brog *srin* demon appears to deprive him of his mobile vitality principle (*brla* > *bla*), and he falls into a coma-like state between living and dying. *Glud*, *g.yang len* and other rites are performed by three *bon*

priests in order to restore the hunter to health. There are obvious differences, yet much of the main plot structure of the local *Sha ba rabs* is very close to that of the Old Tibetan story: Young, male and “son”-marked (*bu*, *bu chung*, *sras*) hunters are the main protagonists; they undertake highland bow hunts after four different stags, some colour-coded, each of which is indexed to a different “owner” being, and one of which is unique; no arrows hit/are fired at the first three stags, while the unique fourth is wounded; it must be chased across a topography of cognate features (*mda’* vs. *lung pa’i mda’*; *lha brag dkar po’i rtse* vs. *brag gi rtse mo*; *la’i rgyab na* vs. *la’i rgyab tu*, etc.); the stag dies and is butchered by the hunter; a *glud* finally results; a young hunter is revived. An additional perspective on both of these narratives may be afforded by Nick Allen’s presentation of stories involving animal guides and foundation myths from populations along the “whole Himalayan chain” (Nuristan to highland Southeast Asia). Narratives in Allen’s study which actually feature stags or deer as the animal guides to be followed also involve a king, hunts with bow and arrows and/or dogs, and wounding or near misses with arrows.²⁰ This suggests a much older and widely spread story type with cognate motifs, of which these *glud rabs* discussed here are examples. To be sure, the final foundation of any settlement in these animal guide narratives is completely absent from our *glud rabs*; it is rather the primordial establishment of a rite as a means of restoring health that transpires at the end of the journey.

Concerning the *Sha ba ru rgyas* narrative for the *mdos* rite preserved in g.Yung drung Bon, it occurs together with ritual steps to construct a model stag which serves as the actual *glud* item.²¹ Just as in our local *Sha ba rabs*, the body of this model stag is coloured in a specific manner: “The right flank of the body is to be white above and red beneath. The left flank is to be blue above and yellow beneath, the tail black, the back white, and the belly yellow.”²² The lengthy and elaborate “exposition” (*smrang*) for this rite explains how a king, his minister and their subjects, respectively, are afflicted with the loss of their mobile vitality principles (*bla*) due to demonic forces who demand a ransom in exchange. A bird, a stag and a tree become the respective ransom items. The stag is the specific ransom item for the mobile vitality principle of the minister, who is second in rank and thus parallel to the prince in our local *Sha ba rabs*, whose status is not yet that of a king. The three *gshen bon* who serve as officiants are only said to “collect together” or “arrange” (*bsdebs*) the bird, tree and stag as ransom items. Thus, any

mention of hunting (and indeed, killing of any kind) is completely absent. This seems like a typical editorial gesture towards the morality and soteriology promoted by the organized g.Yung drung Bon religion. When the three *gshen bon* present the *glud* items in the myth, they include a black stag of the *bdud*, a red stag of the *btsan*, and a yellow stag of the *klu*, exactly as appear in the Bhutanese *Sha ba rabs*. The multi-coloured model stag constructed for the *Sha ba ru rgyas* rite thus represents a combination of these different stags in order to address the range of deities within the local cosmos who must potentially receive the ransom. Symbolically, the *Sha ba rabs* is identical since the special stag that is white above and red beneath rhetorically subsumes the identities of the other stags with different colours and deity owners in its final speech before dying.

It seems reasonable to assume that all three “Bon”-identified *glud* narratives discussed herein are somehow related. The question is how? One fairly common response to this question has been to claim continuity between a vaguely defined early “Bon tradition”—the traces of which are assumed to be in pre-11th century Old Tibetan narratives featuring *bon* and *gshen* priests who conduct rites such as *glud*—and the later religion calling itself g.Yung drung Bon. This seems a very limited vision with which to think about an evidently complex past. On the one hand, the closeness of the eastern Himalayan *Sha ba rabs* to the Old Tibetan *glud* narrative simply cannot be explained with reference to g.Yung drung Bon. On the other hand, differences between the *Sha ba ru rgyas* narrative over and against the other two stories are best explained as a result of conscious adaptation by past g.Yung drung Bon redactors whose obligations are towards a cosmology of salvation. In a recent study, I presented another example of continuity between “Bon”-identified cultural references and materials in a collection of *rabs* from an early manuscript and the living traditions maintained by Himalayan priests, such as those specialized in Srid pa'i lha worship.²³ In that case, too, g.Yung drung Bon appears more as a line of aberrant development than one of “unbroken continuity”. A much wider scholarly perspective on the relationship between all things called “Bon” is surely a desideratum in Tibetan and Himalayan studies. All said and done, perhaps more intriguing than a speculative past is the fact that this ancient tradition of hunter, stag, ransom and healing remains alive today.

May the chase be successful!
 May the prince be healed!

NOTES

1 My gratitude goes to Dasho Karmay Ura, Dorji Gyaltsen and The Centre for Bhutan Studies (Thimphu) for supporting my ongoing research in eastern Bhutan.

2 See Stein 1971: 493, 501; Thomas 1958, chapt. IV: 69–70 (text), 87–88 (transl.). The theme is repeated within the story of gTo bu do te's conversion in the fifth chapter of the ca. late 11th- or early 12th century *gZer mig* (dating proposed by Gurung 2011: 3, 32), albeit reframed within the soteriological discourse of g.Yung drung Bon; see Francke 1927.

3 Chanted on 10 March 2012 by *bon po* Rinzin Dorji, transcribed into “*chökay*” script (as Tibetan script is called in Bhutan) by Dorji Gyaltsen, and translated by Toni Huber with clarification of Khengkha idiom by Rinzin Dorji.

4 *Sha ba rabs // bu nga ni yar yar 'gro // sha ba stod dkar stod dmar 'di na 'phrad // rgyal po nga yang tshe nyam lus nyam 'di 'gro // rtsis pas tha ma bltas // rgyal po'i tshe nyam lus nyam // sha ba stod dkar stod dmar // srog ni sha bas bead so // sha rog mgon po rdo rje se se la // sha rog me rog sag steng la // dug ngang mda' la las khur shog // lcags mon pa'i yul las khur shog // sgro ni spang bya'i sgro khur shog // ku'i ni mon yul las khur shog // gzhu ni nub gzhu dpung zhu dgos // mda' ni gangs dkar sha med las // len nas sha rog nga la dgos // nga ni A ma rgas mo'i lus la 'khor // them spang re la U shu re // la gcig brgal na lung gcig thon // 'di na sha ba nag po mthong // 'di nga yi mda' dpag ci // nga ni min la bdud kyi sha ba yin // sha ba stod dkar stod dmar la'i rgyab tu yod // la gcig brgal na lung gcig bab // 'di na sha ba ser po mthong // 'di na nged ni mda' dpag so // nga ni klu'i sha ba yin // sha ba stod dkar stod dmar la'i rgyab tu yod // la gcig brgal na lung gcig bab // 'di na sha ba dmar po 'phrad // 'di na nged ni mda' dpag so // nga ni btsan gyi sha ba yin // sha ba stod dkar stod dmar khyod min pas // sha ba stod dkar stod dmar la'i rgyab tu yod // 'di na nyin 'ga'i sngon du song ba'i rkang rjes mthong // sha khyi kha dkar kha nag gnyis kyang btang // 'di na sha ba stod dkar stod dmar mthong // sha bas nga ni rgyal po'i tshe nyam lus nyam bzo mi nga ni min // sha pas khyod yin sha khyi kha dkar kha nag gnyis kyis shes // 'di na sha pas bsad mda' sha ba'i rked la 'phen // de tshe sha bas nga ni bdud kyi sha ba yin // shi bar lung pa'i mda' lu 'gro // nga ni btsan gyi sha ba yin // shi bar lung pa'i phu la 'gro // nga ni lha'i sha ba yin // shi bar lha'i yul du 'gro // nga 'thung na brag chu sngon mo 'thung // za na spang sing sngon mo bza' // nyal na brag gi rtse mor nyal // shi na spangs dang nags kyi mtshams su shi // zer zhing sha pa sdug tu bcug // miha' ma sha ba shi bas sha pa yis // rwa 'di rgyal po'i sras la yin // nang khrol rgyal po'i sras glud yin // btsugs na so ra'i dong cung nang // zer zhing 'ong ste rgyal po yis // pho brang sleb pas rgyal sras nad las grol //*

5 This comment by the narrator is a joke, comparing the hunt for wild animals with a phenomenon in Bhutanese village life more recently glossed as “night-hunting” but known in Khengkha as *bomena*, literally “[to go] towards a girl”. Dorji Penjore 2009: 1 defined *bomena* as “a custom whereby a boy stealthily enters a girl’s house at night for courtship or coitus with or without prior consultation.” Those who practice *bomena* must climb up to windows or upper entrances to discretely access the middle floor of a traditional Bhutanese house where the inhabitants sleep, but the sexual allusion in *yar yar 'gro* is clear.

6 The narrator clarified the colloquial Khengkha construction *stod dkar stod dmar* (i.e. *stod* + qualifier *stod* + qualifier) and parallel forms here as merely an aberrant version of the common “*stod* + qualifier *smad* + qualifier”. The form *ro stod ro smad* often occurs in the same context to refer to the body of a ransom animal in other *glud rabs* collected from this part of the Himalayas.

7 “*Sharopa*” written *sha rog* means “hunter” in Khengkha; the shortened form *sha pa* is also used here.

8 mGon po rdo rje (alias Khyi ra ras pa) is the most famous hunter in Tibetan Buddhist literature, whom the saint Mi la ras pa converted as a disciple. In the present context, one can note the colour coding of the main animals in the 15th century *Khyi ra ras pa dang mjal ba* narrative, where the stag is black (*sha ba nag po*) and the bitch is red (*khyi mo dmar mo*); see gTsang smyon He ru ka 1981: 430–42.

9 The narrator explained this is the hunter mGon po rdo rje's three year-old son, who was in his pregnant mother's womb when his father died. The son's name is nearly identical with that of the twin "Brokpa" pastoralist and semi-pastoralist settlements of Me rag and Sag stengs in far eastern Bhutan.

10 This pass crosses the range between Langthil in the Mande Chu catchment and Domkhar to the north.

11 The narrator identified this as the so-called Monpa communities who speak dialects of the Black Mountain language in central Bhutan, west of Kheng; see van Driem 2001, II: 918–33, and Pommaret 1999.

12 *sPang bya* (lit. "bird of alpine meadows", variously *bya mda'*, *bye mda'* or *bya mdangs* in written Dzongkha), refers to the Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*) and other closely related species of mountain pheasant whose feathers are highly prized by serious archers throughout Bhutan as the best arrow flights. Cang rDo rje 2000: 55 noted that because the red tail feathers of Himalayan Monal were used as arrow flights by the second king of Bhutan ('Brug rGyal po II 'Jigs med dbang phyug, 1905–1952), who is well remembered as having been a passionate archer (Karma Ura 2011 [1995]: 54–57, 68–69), their use by all other archers was prohibited.

13 *Ku'i* is the Khengkha word for "bow-string" (Dzongkha *skud* and *gzhu thag*).

14 While "*pong[ma] shug*" literally means "strong shoulder" in Khengkha, *nub gzhu dpung zhu* seems to be a premodern proper name for a specific bow type. *Nub gzhu* refers to one of three famous traditional Bhutanese bow types, the so-called *brda li sing thagm* which came from the far western (*nub*, actually south-western) region of Dalikha (written *brDa gling kha* and *brDa li kha* in various Dzongkha sources) which is nowadays part of West Bengal; Cang rDo rje 2000: 51.

15 Unidentified. This name can be read as "Deerless white snow mountain". It recalls somewhat the name *Sha yul gangs dkar* in another old *rabs* concerning a *dri bon* priest who recruits and leads a stag; see the *Sha ru shul ston gyi rabs*, which Karmay 2009: 64 glossed as "Story of showing the way to the deer", in Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus and Glang ru Nor bu tshering 2007: 63, 186 (=f.7, l.1–2), 64, 187 (=8, l.6).

16 *Re* here indicates hearsay in Khengkha, and *them spang* literally means "turned away from the threshold [i.e. the house door]". The narrator interpreted the overall meaning as the despair of the inexperienced hunter's son who had no living father to teach him how to hunt (see note 9 above).

17 *So ra* in Khengkha, *mda'i so ras* in Dzongkha. Old-style quivers in east Bhutan are fashioned from a bamboo tube, and the allusion here is apparently to cooking and serving food. In most areas east of the Mon yul Corridor, hill peoples have cooked certain foods by filling them into bamboo tubes and heating them by the fire or in the hot ashes.

18 Anna Balikci 2008: 15, 353–54 n. 8, 361 reported the performance of an oral version of a narrative named *Bon shwa ba'i rwa bryad* by a ritual specialist termed *pawo* at Tingchim in central Sikkim. This appears to share certain elements in common with the *Sha ba ru rgyas* tradition discussed here.

19 See Thomas 1958, chapt. IV: 69–70 (text), 87–88 (transl.), Stein 1971: 502–503, Blondeau and Karmay 1998, and Nam mkha'i Nor bu 1994: 413–21.

20 See the Dang, Khotan II and IV, and Gurung story summaries in Allen 1997.

21 Compare also the *glud*-like use of a model stag related to healing in the Naxi *dtô*

mbà rite Hâr lâ llü' k'ó'. Rock 1939: caption for plate XIII reported, "the effigy of a stag made of willow twigs. This stag is loaded with gifts given to the demons, as well as with the illness of the family and is then taken out." See also He Limin and He Shicheng 1998: plates on 142, 147.

22 *Sha ba ru rgyas kyi mdos* quoted in Nam mkha'i Nor bu 1994: 414: *gzhogs g.yas stod dkar po / smad dmar po bya / gzhogs g.yon stod sngon po smad ser po / mjug ma nag po / 'phang dkar po / sgab ser po bya /*.

23 See Huber 2013, and my forthcoming book on Srid pa'i lha worship, *Source of Life*.

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