



Ventures into virgin territory: initial findings from the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud* and other exorcistic texts

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Fifty years ago, several hundred editions of the rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum (NGB) existed. Today, only seven are known to have survived. Of the approximately 1,000 surviving NGB texts, less than ten have so far been systematically studied within the modern academic tradition, and even fewer of these on the basis of critical editing. Yet given the considerable differences often found between the versions of texts in different NGB editions, and their frequent textual corruption, studies that lack a genuinely critical editorial basis can prove quite misleading. The NGB texts are also comparatively unknown to the Tibetan tradition, since NGB collections existed more as religious objects than as texts for study. Nevertheless they potentially provide a rich source of data on many aspects of Tibetan history, culture and religion.

In an attempt to examine this data, we began a research project, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board, to systematically edit NGB texts, and examine them for clues to the historical and cultural conditions in which they were produced. Our project entails rigorous philological analysis, combined with contextualising studies of contemporaneous materials from outside the NGB with a view to sociological and anthropological enquiry. One feature of the NGB collections is the enormous quantity of exorcistic materials they contain. What can we learn from this?

In this paper, I present initial findings arising from my study of some NGB exorcistic texts, in particular the *rDo rje khros pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*.