

The Hungry Bandit: The Ballad of Yidak Kela

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During 2008 and 2009 as a D.Phil. candidate I had the privilege of collaborating with Wim van Spengen on *Studies in the History of Eastern Tibet*.¹ I was taken aback yet delighted when Wim approached me to be his co-editor of a volume of collected papers presented at the 11th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies held in Königswinter in the autumn of 2006. I jumped at the offer, and it turned out to be a rewarding decision. I am indebted to him for his composure and thoroughness as well as the scholarly vigour that made our editorial collaboration effortless and taught me so much.

Wim showed a keen interest in my own contribution to this volume, a modest effort to draw attention to a neglected aspect of Tibetan social history in the form of "Banditry in Traditional Amdo: The Story of Yidak Kela".² When he learnt of the existence of a popular ballad of Yidak Kela and my desire to attempt an English translation someday, he knew it would complement my paper and encouraged me to translate it immediately. He was acutely aware of its significance as an illuminating supplementary source, given the dearth of written accounts surrounding Tibetan banditry. Unfortunately, I failed to carry out a translation of the ballad for our original volume. However, I am glad to be able to present an English rendering of it here and dedicate it to the memory of our late colleague Wim van Spengen.

Prelude

The simplicity of *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* (*Yi dwags ske la'i bstod ra*) makes it widely accessible even in its English translation, but a few comments are offered here as a preface with a view to providing contextual illumination. This ballad is an orally transmitted narrative song that relates a single incident derived from the adventurous life of a famed bandit who roamed widely in Northeast Tibet during the 1940s before the arrival of the Chinese Communist state on the Tibetan plateau. Yidak Kela (*Yi dwags ske la*) was from Sokpo in Amdo which, according to the current People's Republic of China (PRC) administrative system, corresponds to Henan Mongol Autonomous County in Qinghai Province. His real name was Samdup Gyatso (*Bsam grub rgya mtsho*) but he has always been better known by the nickname Yidak Kela, meaning the Long-necked or Scrawny-necked Hungry Ghost, thus confirming the general truth of the Tibetan saying: "A great man is known by his nickname/ And a great horse by its speed."³

This hungry ghost-like brigand undertook numerous petty robberies of itinerant tradesmen and carried out retributive raids on families within his own tribe as well as those of neighbouring tribes. He also rebelled against local authorities, even raiding his own king with the result that he was temporarily banished. Like most bandits, Yidak Kela had no respect for borders and he was highly mobile, venturing beyond his immediate pastoralist area and carrying out attacks in far-flung territories, even preying upon traders plying their business across the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. In fact, he lost his life while robbing the caravan of a rich tea merchant in Shar Khog (Songpan County in Sichuan).⁴ Yet Yidak Kela was both feared and admired during his life time as a 'noble robber'. He was and still is regarded as "a hero who subdued the fierce and supported the meek".⁵

The author of *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* is unknown although the "I" in the ballad assumes the identity of the famed bandit, who is reputed to have had an amazing voice and to have been given to singing.⁶ There are no verbatim records of the ballad in its oral variants. Spontaneous oral performances of it vary slightly from one another in terms of length and minor detail, but the central theme, formulaic phrases and metaphorical expressions remain the same.⁷

Here I have selected for translation the first printed reproduction of the ballad, which initially appeared in a Tibetan literary journal called *Moonlight (Zla zer)* in 1985.⁸ This would also be the most widely distributed version of several. Apart from appearing in this popular journal, it also featured in an anthology of ballads as well as in an album by the famous Dunglen singer Dubay (Bdud bhe).⁹ Even though this particular rendering includes a few mis-transcriptions and clear omissions, it accords broadly with most of the oral versions that I heard as a young boy. Obvious mistakes are corrected in the body of the translated text with corresponding explanations provided in the footnotes, including the initial mis-transcriptions. When it is irrefutably apparent that a line is missing, it is inserted in square brackets with an accompanying footnote presenting it in Tibetan. These corrections and additions are made possible thanks to the memory of several Sokpo people who encountered *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* in their childhood.¹⁰ I am particularly indebted to Lobsang Gyatso (Blo bzang rgya mtsho) who shared with me his as yet unpublished article on Yidak Kela, which includes a noteworthy rendering of the latter's ballad in the local pastoralist dialect.¹¹

One of the central features of the ballad genre is to single out a particular event for narration. Out of the many adventures of our brigand - "Whose tale is endless to tell/ Whose deeds are never done" - *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* selects a stereotypical theme of outlaw lore: horse stealing. This might be a stock theme but it also reflects the fact that it was a recurring and important social issue during the time of Yidak Kela and within the communities where he operated. Horse theft and livestock rustling remain a serious problem in Tibetan pastoralist

areas, hence the resonance of this topic in today's Tibet.

One summer's day Yidak Kela thinks of "something unthinkable", a dangerous and impermissible plan of action. As he smokes his gazelle horn pipe, an ingrained hunger for adventure surges up within him. An irresistible urge to steal horses takes hold of him and he decides to raid a neighbouring tribe. He travels fast on his fine horse along the secret bandit path, armed with a "red lightning-like gun". Upon reaching the destination, he tightens the girth of his horse and surveys the nomadic settlement with "sharp eyes". He makes away with a herd of mares at the speed of "a swooping brown eagle". Pursuers are hot on his heels with all guns blazing and they catch up with him. "Amid the flowers of the White Meadow" Yidak Kela turns around to face them. With much regret he is forced to shoot dead a foolhardy man bent on sacrificing his life for the horses. When he makes it to the bank of the Machu River (Yellow River), a hail of bullets greets him and his mount is killed. In this tight spot he is at his wits' end and calls upon his birth deity to assist him.¹² One of the stolen horses (finer than his dead mount) recrosses the river and comes to his side. With a sense of triumphant joy Yidak Kela makes it safely across the Machu River to his own tribal land. This plot is bracketed between emphatic statements mentioning the birth deity and the tribal land of Yidak Kela that are integral to his identity.

The salient presence of Yidak Kela's birth deity-cum-warrior god, Sichok Dorjee (Sras mchog rdo rje) injects into his ballad a supernatural element that is characteristic of many outlaw legends around the world.¹³ More importantly, it reveals the vital role of mountain deity worship in the lives of lay people in nomadic communities that at first sight might appear to have undergone 'Buddhicisation'.¹⁴ Yidak Kela is known for his fierce loyalty to a single territorial deity and a single lama. It is said that even if he had only a fistful of 'tsampa' to spare he would offer it to his deity.¹⁵

This undying allegiance to and perpetual worship of his birth deity is borne out in the ballad and the unique mention of routine animal sacrifice. When Yidak Kela invokes divine protection in the ballad he stresses that he has never failed to make daily *bsang* offerings¹⁶ or ceased to sacrifice a sheep a month and a yak a year. The ballad emphasises that he was miraculously delivered from the jaws of death and this divine favour was secured through a non-Buddhist ritual. The practice of animal sacrifice (*dmag mchod*)¹⁷ sits uncomfortably with the pacific tenets of Buddhism, yet Yidak Kela had no qualms about it and his ballad promotes it.¹⁸ This is so even though he was a former monk and was pointedly conscious of his Buddhist identity.

Alongside his constantly worshipped territorial deity, Yidak Kela revered a local Buddhist cleric, Lama Shingza.¹⁹ As a sign of total devotion, he had even presented a pillow horse (*sngas rta*)²⁰ to the lama well before his actual death. A

pillow horse is usually given to a lama after a person's death, but this offering had been dictated by the bandit lifestyle, characterised by precariousness and premature death.

Yidak Kela also gave his last horse to Lama Shingza. Just before setting off to raid the Shar Khog merchant, he told his niece that it would be his last robbery and he was going to renounce this way of life as advised by his lama. When he was fatally wounded, his dying wish for the fellow bandits was to offer his horse and gun to the lama on his behalf. His companions obligingly did what they were asked.²¹



Figure 1.

An impression of Yidak Kela by Lobsang Samten (Blo bzang bsam gtan). 2013.

Courtesy of the artist.

These parting
as a renunciation
accumulate some
shes) and make
aggression.

Dual loyalty
deity (*gshi bdag*)
of the last offering
Buddhist religio
powerless in the
“organising ou
coexistence of
Thus the story
samsara, but at
to aid one in thi
two seemingly
experience of

In addition
Ballad of Yida
gun. The first
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These parting gifts function as dedication offerings (*bsngo ba*)²² as well as a renunciation of violence. With this last act Yidak Kela wanted to accumulate some spiritual merit for his departing consciousness (*rnam shes*) and make sure that his horse and gun were never again used in aggression.

Dual loyalty results from contrasting sources of spiritual authority, local deity (*gzhi bdag*) and local lama, but the tension is reconciled by the narrative of the last offerings being made to the lama. The final reverence is shown to a Buddhist religious figure rather than to a worldly god who is himself caught powerless in the cycle of death and rebirth. Narrative as a principal way of "organising our experience of the world"²³ is employed to portray the coexistence of different spiritual power centres in the lives of many Tibetans. Thus the story of Yidak Kela favours the lama regarding deliverance from *samsara*, but at the same time it praises the magical abilities of the local deity to aid one in this world. As far as acting persons and communities are concerned, two seemingly conflicting spiritual traditions are fused into one in their experience of quotidian existence.

In addition to the adulation of horses and loyalty to the local deity, *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* celebrates a crucial piece of modern technology—the gun. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the outbreak of armed conflicts—such as the British invasion, Guomindang-backed incursions and the Chinese Civil War—on the Tibetan plateau and territories surrounding it. In Tibetan pastoralist areas, guns became one of the most sought-after foreign products for protecting cattle against wolves and robbers and for guaranteeing personal and tribal security. By the 1940s, when Yidak Kela was active, the gun had well and truly entered Tibetan material culture. The Tibetan term for a gun is either 'me-da' (*me mda*'), literally the fire arrow, or 'wu' (*bo'u*), an onomatopoeic name derived from the sound a gun makes. The highly valued status of the gun in tribal communities can be seen in the epithets that usually precede its name such as "my red lightning-like gun" or "my shining rifle". As apparent in *The Ballad of Yidak Kela*, the possession of a gun and marksmanship help to shape one's heroic identity. It also indicates the admirable social stature of a specific man and his ability to provide security. The prevalence and status of the gun can be heard in the following traditional love songs:

My rifle is a shimmering copper mirror²⁴
As sunrays reflect it gets more beautiful

My horse is a wisp of mountain-top mist
As the mist swirls it gets more beautiful

My young lover is a lakeside flower
As showers fall she gets more beautiful²⁵

My lover in the distant land
Do not despair in your heart
I have a horse for travelling far
And a gun for the enemy along the way²⁶

These love songs describe journeys that “end in lovers meeting”.²⁷ They are short oral poems that paint in words the Tibetan practice of nocturnal courtship entailing a horseman in search of his lover. This is descriptively known as “roaming men” (*pho nyul*) or “beating the dog” (*khyi rdung*) because it consists of men wandering about at night and fighting with guard dogs to get entry into their lovers’ or a girl’s place.²⁸ It was and is a dangerous venture and hence the prominent motif of the gun. Moreover, this recurring image of the gun in vernacular speech shows the existence of a vibrant gun culture in traditional Tibet that has received little scholarly attention. As can be detected in *The Ballad of Yidak Kela*, this culture displays a violent masculine worldview that jars with the sanitised image of a pacific Tibet.

Like many outlaw legends, *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* expresses and inculcates collective values and attitudes such as loyalty, bravado, rebelliousness, fair play, horsemanship and tribal bonds. What makes it such an effective vehicle of socialisation is its simplicity, brevity and its use of a memorable poetic language easily accessible to a particular people with a shared cultural understanding. As Putter (2004: 70) argues: “What allows the ballad to be told briefly, without authorial explanation regarding motivation, cause and effect, and so on, is its participation in a shared world of understanding. The ballad is short because so much is understood.” *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* is short but it is compact, with expressive set phrases and recurrent images that open a window onto a Tibetan pastoralist world. For instance, a formulaic expression like young *dris* possessing “supple and full udders” might sound peculiar to foreign ears, but for a Tibetan nomad it contains the quality of the pastureland, the standard of the herdsman and his wealth and the delight of the milkmaid resulting from a light workload and plentiful milk.

Likewise *The Ballad of Yidak Kela* makes use of many images that occur with great frequency in Tibetan oral poetry. These images might seem formulaic and overused but they are concentrated, precise and evocative when depicting action and emotion simultaneously. The exhilarating pace of the horses and the rush of adrenalin in the raid are captured by the simile of “the swooping eagle.” Other avian motifs like “clipped wings” and “broken

collarbone" encapsulate immobility and a sense of powerlessness in the face of mortal danger. The visual description of the pursuers as "swirling mist" and rolling "mountain boulders" conjure up the multitude and ferocity of the chasing horsemen, their billowing anger and vengeful intentions. These figurative expressions also demonstrate a familiarity with—and heightened sensibility towards—the natural environment. No detailed explanation or description of actions and emotions are needed because the distilled images convey all by appealing to a shared poetic language and "a shared world of understanding."

Readers should be aware of this broad cultural reference when reading my translation of *The Ballad of Yidak Kela*. In a way the following translation is a variant of the ballad in a foreign tongue. As such it regrettably fails to capture in English some of the cadence, rhythm, alliterations and the visually descriptive onomatopoeic phrases of the Tibetan original.²⁹ However, it is hoped that the following rendition is able to convey its general meaning, its heroic yet at times plaintive tone, as well as its imagistic expressions and overall poetic language.

The Ballad of Yidak Kela

Beneath the celestial stars, moon and sun³⁰
 Lies Tibet where high mountains compete³¹
 Looking up, beholding that mountain
 There in that misty mountain
 Reside I, the famed Yidak Kela³²
 Whose tale is endless to tell
 [Whose deeds are never done]³³

And another mountain seen beyond it³⁴
 The beautiful mountain Luchok Mudzong³⁵
 [On its right gods and goddesses]³⁶
 On its left male and female nagas
 It's a mountain rich in diversity
 A richness that I adore

[And another mountain seen before it
 The white birth deity of my birth
 The great protector deity – Sichok Dorjee
 On its right, deer and does
 On its left, crags and juniper

It's a mountain rich in diversity
A richness that I adore]³⁷

And another mountain seen on its right³⁸
The beautiful mountain Amnye Lhachen³⁹
Its peak resembles a silver stupa
Its midriff an elaborate tapestry
Its base an eight-petalled lotus

On this eight-petalled lotus land
A shimmering tribe can be seen
It's the flourishing tribe - Little Wessi⁴⁰
Below Wessi - this tribe of mine
A brimming blue river can be seen
It's the beautiful river - Blue Machu

When the months of April and May arrive⁴¹
It's a place where the fleece of young sheep comes clean
Where grey horses moult and change their colour
Where young *dris* have supple and full udders
Where mothers and daughters have pure hearts
Where sons and nephews grow up fast and strong
[A place endowed with all kinds of happiness]⁴²

Last year, on a summer's day
I again thought of something unthinkable
[From the dragon-adorned tobacco pouch⁴³
I took out the gazelle horn pipe
And dragged on it slowly
As I dragged on I pondered
And felt like running off with mares]⁴⁴

I rode my mountain wolf-like horse⁴⁵
And carried my red lightning-like gun
I hastened along the bandit path amid crags
And reached the plains of the Golden Valley
There I encountered the tribe of Ngulra Lhade⁴⁶
Circling the tribe once I jumped off
And fastened the girth of my horse
And surveyed around with sharp eyes

I rode past the upper encampment
 And went to the lower encampment
 There rounding up a herd of mares
 I galloped like the swooping brown eagle
 I hastened along the secret bandit path
 And reached the plains of the White Meadow
 There the chasing pursuers caught up
 [War cries filled up the mountain valleys]⁴⁷
 Brave men rolled down like mountain boulders
 Fast horses came flying like white vultures
 [Out of the guns bullets poured down like hail
 And their smoke came belching out like mist
 I galloped like the swooping brown eagle
 And galloped like the leaping brown musk-deer]⁴⁸

Amid the flowers of the White Meadow
 Turning my horse around I jumped off
 I loaded my shining rifle with six bullets
 And fixed its bipod into the ground
 Keeping my mind poised, I looked
 Through the sights of my shining rifle
 My eyes fell upon a short-lived man
 "Stop! You short-lived man!"
 Yelled I, with a gallant roar
 The sharp-tongued, valiant man retorted:
 "I've no regrets whatsoever
 To give up my life for my wealth!"
 And came charging without hesitation
 [What a loss is the Machu pebble-like man]⁴⁹
 Sitting on top of the peacock-like horse!
 Before others say what a loss he will be,
 What use is there for me to say so!]⁵⁰

Out of the rifle I was clutching
 A noise resounded like thunder
 A bolt streaked out like lightening
 Hitting the life force of that man
 A father's walking stick broke,
 And a mother shed tears.⁵¹

Then from there I headed downward
 When I reached the bank of the beautiful Machu
 From those in pursuit of me
 Bullets came pouring down like rain
 And killed my fine mount
 [And I was stranded alone on the bank]⁵²
 Like a bird with snapped wings fallen to earth
 Like a brown eagle with a broken collarbone

Then I pondered my next move
 And couldn't think what to do
 "The white birth deity of my birth
 The great protector deity – Sichok Dorjee
 I've worshiped you as my warrior god
 [I've never ceased to offer you a *bsang* a day]⁵³
 And have never ceased to offer you a sheep a month
 And have never ceased to offer you a yak a year
 My unceasingly worshipped warrior god
 Please assist me in this fight today!"
 Saying this, I let out three war cries
 It must have been deliverance by this deity
 For from the herd of horses I was driving
 [A steed finer than my own mount]⁵⁴
 Cut across the Blue Machu River
 And came right next to me
 [Lowering its head it neighed three times]⁵⁵
 There and then I saddled and harnessed it
 My white snow-mountain of a heart was joyous
 And bravery coursed throughout my body
 By the power of the god-driven steed
 I cut across the Blue Machu River
 And made to the uplands of White Ling
 Thanks to my birth-warrior deity
 I escaped the threats of the chasing pursuers

My birthplace is the uplands of White Ling
 My body a six-jointed straight bamboo shaft
 By the cruel orders of a cruel king
 I was expelled from my own tribe

And driven to live amongst another

Well, young men of today⁵⁶
Please don't be roaming foreign lands
And don't admire me, Yidak Kela⁵⁷
[I don't say this without reason]⁵⁸

When one is faced with the bitter enemy
One needs a loving and caring son
When one is hounded by chasing pursuers
One needs brothers and friends by one's side⁵⁹
When cold wind drives one from behind
One needs one's beloved mother before
Let me tell why these three are needed
To use the simile of a wild white vulture
For a wild white vulture no place is better
Than a red rocky mountain to circle around
[To use the simile of a golden-eyed fish,]⁶⁰
For a golden-eyed fish no place is better
Than a pristine river to dart about
For a single son no place is sweeter
Than one's own tribe to wander around

For the ears of the wise sons
[Who listen, this is my advice
For those who don't, it's fireside ash
Of course, one doesn't tend to stir ash]⁶¹

Notes

1. van Spengen and Lama Jabb (2009).
2. Lama Jabb (2009: 209-22.) For a selection of essays on hitherto unexplored aspects of Tibetan social history using archival material see Ramble, Schwieger and Travers (2013).
3. *Myi bo grags na mtshang gis grags/ rta bo grags na bang gis grags*. An alternative translation of this proverb would be: A great man's fame spreads through his nickname/ And a horse's through its speed.
4. It is difficult to ascertain if Yidak Kela was indeed killed in Shar Khog, but

all oral accounts concur that he died during a raid on a merchant caravan from Shar Khog in a forested place many days' ride away from Sokpo. Before the Chinese Communist takeover there was an established trade route between Shar Khog and Sokpo in Amdo which was frequented by brigands (Samten Karmay 2009: 524-25). For oral sources of Yidak Kela's story see Lama Jabb (2009: 216, Footnote 25).

5. Blo bzang rgya mtsho (Forthcoming): *Btsan po gnya' nas gnon zhing gnyom chung mtha' nas skyong ba'i dpa' rgod*. For a contemporary eulogy of Yidak Kela in the style of classical Tibetan verse see Nub rlung (2013).
6. However, it must be noted here that some—including Yidak Kela's fellow bandit Gontho Tolkar (Mgon tho stod dkar)—attribute the authorship to Yidak Kela himself (Interview with Gontho Tolkar: August 1st – 2nd, 2003, Sokpo).
7. This lack of a verbatim version is a general phenomenon observed in oral traditions, but it does not mean an absence of transmission. As David C. Rubin notes, an oral piece can be recollected in its general meaning and form rather than in exact words. He goes on to state: "It is not just that verbatim memory is absent: What I claim, and what is more intriguing, is that one specific variant of a song is not being transmitted at all. Rather what is being transmitted is the theme of the song, its imagery, its poetics, and some specific detail" (Rubin 1995: 6-7).
8. 'Brug thar (1985: 55-55).
9. 'Brug thar (1995: 47-54). I have selected this printed version as the basis of the Tibetan original provided in Appendix. It contains spelling corrections reflecting the local dialect and the restoration of obvious missing lines. Unfortunately, I did not manage to obtain the discography of Dubay's album before the publication of this paper.
10. Special thanks to Thupten Gyatso (Thub bstan rgya mtsho), Chapdak Lhamokyab (Chab brag lha mo skyabs) and Gedun Passang (Dge 'dun dpal bzang).
11. Blo bzang rgya mtsho (Forthcoming).
12. *Skyes lha*, birth deity, is a territorial or mountain deity assigned to one at the point of birth. It usually resides at the sacred mountain nearest to one's birthplace.
13. For supernatural protection and other central motifs and themes of the outlaw lore see Cashman (2000: 205-209).
14. For the concept of 'Buddhicisation' of Tibetan mountain deities see Buffetrille (1998: 18-34).
15. 'Tsampa' (*rtsam pa*) is the Tibetan staple diet usually made of ground roasted

- barley. It is used in many religious offerings including *bsang*, the purification ritual of smoke and fire.
16. *Bsang*, an explanation of this popular ritual of purification associated with the worship of local deities can be found in Samten G Karmay (2009: 380-412).
 17. *Dmar mchod*, literally red offerings, entails the propitiation of worldly gods with the flesh and blood of either dead or live animals.
 18. Animal sacrifice is rarely practised in contemporary Tibet, but it has by no means been totally renounced. Reliable sources have informed me that they have witnessed such rituals performed secretly by certain individuals given to gambling, stealing and smuggling.
 19. This is none other than a young Shingza Kelsang Chokyi Gyaltzen (Zhing bza' skal bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan: 1925-1998), who grew up to be an erudite lama scholar and a highly respected practitioner of Tibetan medicine. He was a self-effacing lama who played an active role in the Tibetan cultural revival following the Cultural Revolution especially regarding the revival of Tibetan medicine. For his biography see Ldong yon tan rgya mtsho (2001).
 20. *Sngas rta*, a pillow horse, is a horse offered to lamas by a dying person or by a dead person's relatives so as to ensure his or her consciousness a smooth journey to the next life.
 21. This account was confirmed by Yidak Kela's fellow bandit Goncho Tolkar (August 1st and 3rd, 2003, Sokpo) and his niece Dojo (August 8th and 11th, 2005) in interviews conducted with them.
 22. *Bsngo ba* is a funerary practice in which prayers are said and offerings are made in the name of the deceased. Any merits accumulated by such acts are dedicated to the welfare of all sentient beings so as to ensure the smooth journey of the consciousness (*rnam shes*). It is also hoped that these will contribute towards a spiritually positive form of rebirth.
 23. Peter Brooks cited in Ryan (2007: 22).
 24. *Khra mkhar me long* is ambiguous in that it can also be a shimmering castle top mirror. Either meaning shows that the rifle and its bipod are polished to a dazzling sheen.
 25. *Bo'u khra ring khra mkhar me long red!*
Dgung nyi rtse rgyab na je yag red!
Rta 'do ba rdza mgo'i smug chung red!
Smug lang long 'thib na je yag red!
Rogs chung lo mtsho kha'i me tog red!
Char bsil ma babs na je yag red!
 26. *Sa kha thag ring gi dga' lol!*

Sems kho thag chad nas ma 'dugl

Thag ring la 'gro na rta yodl

Dgra lam gi thug na bo'u yodl

27. Phrase from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Act 2, Scene 3.
28. For a cinematic portrayal of this practice see Tsedup Karko's 2005 film *Hornig: Beat the Dog*.
29. For those who are versed in Tibetan language I have provided the original in the Appendix.
30. This line can also be rendered as: "Beneath the trinity of stars, moon and sun".
31. In Drukthar's ('Brug thar) transcription *ri gang mtho* is misspelled as *ri gangs mtho* (high snow-mountains). This translation reflects the former.
32. Drukthar's spelling *Yi dwags ske ring* is dropped here in favour of the bandit's popular name *Yi dwags ske la*.
33. *Las dang na 'grub rgyu med ki*.
34. In Drukthar's transcription this line is preceded by five lines that do not occur in any of the oral variants that I have come across. These lines are omitted from the main body of the translated text but they are as follow:

De'i yan na rdza zhig rig nol
De'i g.yas zur rma chen gangs ril
De'i g.yon zur gzer kyi gzhong bal
Rdza yin rung 'dzom gsum 'dzom yodl
Nga 'dzom no zhe re chags yodl

And another mountain seen beyond
 On its right the Machen Snow-mountain
 On its left a golden platter of a meadow
 It's a mountain rich in diversity
 A richness that I adore

35. *Klu mchog dmu rdzong*, Fearsome Fortress of the Supreme Nagas.
36. In place of this line Drukthar has *De'i g.yas zur brag dang shug pa*, On its right crags and junipers.
37. These seven lines are missing in Drukthar's version, but they feature prominently in the oral variants:

De'i sun na rdza zhig rig nol
Nga skyes ba'i skyes lha dkar bol
Lha yi dam sras mchog rdo rjel
De'i g.yas zur shwa ra yu mol
De'i g.yon zur brag dang shug pal
Rdza yin rung 'dzoms gsum 'dzoms yodl

Nga 'dzoms no zhe re chags yod/

38. Drukthar diverges from most oral variants of the ballad and transcribes this line as: *De'i yan na rdza zhig rig no*, Another mountain seen beyond it.
39. A myes lha chen, The Great Ancestral God.
40. Drukthar misspells the name of this tribe as Besichu ma, Riverside Wessi.
41. Drukthar has this line run as: *Zla gnyis pa gsum pa tshes dus*, When months of February and March arrive.
42. *'Di yul gyi skyid gsum 'dzoms sa* is a formulaic phrase, and in Drukthar this line is transcribed as *'Di yid kyi skyid gsum 'dzom s*, A place where all kinds of happiness endow the heart.
43. This tobacco pouch is made of *ther ma*, fine woollen material like worsted. A more literal translation of this line might be: "From the dragon emblazoned woollen tobacco pouch."
44. *'Drug ther ma'i dud khug nang nas/*
Ngas gtsod rw'i ra tse blangs nas/
Ngas dal mor do zhig 'then zhor/
De'i zhor la 'dang zhig brgyab nil
Rta rgod ma 'ded la bsams dal
45. *Rta ri spyang 'dra bo*. Instead of this local epithet Drukthar uses *Rta ri rkyang 'dra mo*, wild ass-like horse.
46. Dngud rwa lha sde, Divine Tribe of the Silver Horn, in today's Machu county.
47. Drukthar renders this line as *Smug long gis rdza ri gang gang*, Like swirling mist filling up mountains.
48. *Bo'u rde'u char rde'u 'bab 'bab/*
Bo'u do du smug 'thibs 'thibs/
Glag rog mo gzhol gzhol byas nil
Gla rog po lding lding byas nil
49. *Rma rde'u*, Machu pebbles or pebbles found on the banks of the Machu River are renowned for their smoothness, beautiful colours and spherical shape and as such they are used as a metaphor of beauty and perfection.
50. Drukthar misinterprets local nomadic patois and transcribes these four lines as follows:

Rta 'brug chung 'dra bo'i gong gil
Bu rma bya 'dra bor dpe bzha/
Sdes dpe red ma zer gong lal
Ngas dpe red zer nas 'chad pal

Atop the young dragon-like horse
 This man can be likened to a peacock
 Before others say no such likeness
 I'll declare that it is a likeness

51. Drukthar uses the word *mig chung* instead of *mig chu* here. In this case the line would translate as: "A mother's eyes fell out."
52. *Nag sgur re chu khar lus thal.*
53. *Ngas nyin rer bsang re ma chad.*
54. *Ngas zhon gi rta bo'i yan zhig.*
Drukthar has this well-known line as *Rta rkyang rkyang de yi yan zhig*, A chestnut finer than the horse or A horse finer than the chestnut.
55. *Mgo sgur nas thengs gsum'tsher ki.*
56. Drukthar uses the term *gzhon nu*, youths, instead of *gsar ru*, young men.
57. In Drukthar's version these three lines precede the last four lines of the ballad.
58. *'Gangs ma skyo bzes ni min ra.*
59. *Spun spun zla* can also be rendered as siblings and bosom friends.
60. *Nya gser mig zhig la dpe 'jog.*
61. *Nyan shes na kha ta 'di yin/*
Nyan ma shes go kha'i thal yin/
Thal yang yang gtsub ki che 'dug/

Drukthar ends the ballad with these lines:

Bu rig bzang can gyi rna bar/
Tshig gtam gyi snying bo 'di yin/
Nyan shes na rna ba'i bdud rtsil/
Nyan ma shes ske ring kha lab/

For the ears of the wise son
This is the essence of my speech
An ear nectar for those who listen
And just Kela's boast for those who don't

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Appendix

ཡི་དྲགས་སྒྲི་ལའི་བསྟོད་ར།

དགུང་ཉི་ཟླ་སྐར་གསུམ་འོག་གི།

རི་གང་མཐོ་བོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་ནས།

ཡར་བལྟས་ན་རྩ་ཞིག་རིག་གི།

རི་སྐྱུག་པ་ཅན་པོའི་ནང་ན།

ང་ཡི་དྲགས་སྒྲི་ལ་ཟེར་བ།

བཤད་དང་ན་ཆར་རྒྱ་མེད་གི།

ལས་དང་ན་འགྲུབ་རྒྱ་མེད་གི།

དེའི་ཡན་ན་རྩ་ཞིག་རིག་ཅོ།

རྩ་ཡག་པ་ལྷ་མཆོག་དཔུ་རྩོང་།

དེའི་གཡས་ཟུར་ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་མོ།

དེའི་གཡོན་ཟུར་ལྷ་དང་ལྷ་མོ།

རྩ་ཡིན་རུང་འདྲོམས་གསུམ་འདྲོམས་ཡོད།

ང་འདྲོམས་ནོ་ཞེ་རེ་ཆགས་ཡོད།

དེའི་སྐུན་ན་རྩ་ཞིག་རིག་ནོ།
 ང་སྦྱིས་བའི་སྦྱིས་སྦྱ་དཀར་རོ།
 སྦྱ་ཡི་དམ་སྦས་མཆོག་དོ་རྩེ།
 དེའི་གཡས་ཟུར་ལྷ་ར་ཡུ་མོ།
 དེའི་གཡོན་ཟུར་བྲག་ར་ཤུག་པ།
 རྩ་ཡིན་རུང་འདྲོམས་གསུམ་འདྲོམས་ཡོད།
 ང་འདྲོམས་ནོ་ཞེ་རེ་ཆགས་ཡོད།

དེའི་གཡས་ན་རྩ་ཞིག་རིག་ནོ།
 རྩ་ཡག་པ་ཨ་སྦྱིས་སྦྱ་ཆེན།
 དེའི་རྩ་མགོ་དཔུལ་གྱི་མཆོད་རྟེན།
 དེའི་རྩ་སྦྱེད་བ་བ་བ་སྦྱེད།
 དེའི་རྩ་འདབ་པད་མ་འདབ་བརྒྱད།

ས་པད་མ་འདབ་བརྒྱད་སྦྱེད་ན།
 བྲ་ལམ་མེ་སྦྱེ་ཞིག་རིག་ནོ།
 སྦྱེ་དར་རྒྱས་བེ་སི་རྒྱུང་བ།
 ངའི་རང་སྦྱེ་བེ་སིའི་སྦྱེད་ན།
 སྦྱོ་ལམ་མེ་རྒྱ་ཞིག་རིག་ནོ།
 རྒྱ་ཡག་པ་མ་རྒྱ་སྦྱོན་མོ།

ཟླ་བཞི་བ་ལྟ་བུ་ཆོས་དུས།
 ལྷག་ཆོ་རིས་རྒྱལ་པགས་དག་ས།
 ཏྲ་ཤོ་རིས་སྤྱ་མདོག་བརྩེ་ས།
 འབྲི་བྱལ་མའི་རྒྱ་ཚ་ལྟོད་ས།
 མ་བྱ་མའི་སེམས་ཚད་ཀར་ས།
 བྱ་ཚ་བོ་ཁོ་ལག་རྒྱས་ས།
 འདི་ཡུལ་གྱི་སྦྱིད་གསུམ་འདྲོམས་ས།

ངས་ན་ནིང་དབྱར་ཁ་ཞིག་ལ།
 ཡང་མི་བསམ་རྒྱ་ཞིག་བསམས་ད།
 འབྲུག་ཐེར་མའི་དུད་ཁྲག་ནང་ནས།
 ངས་གཙོད་རྩེ་ར་ཙེ་བླངས་ནས།
 ངས་དལ་མོར་དོ་ཞིག་འཐེན་ཞོར།
 དེའི་ཞོར་ལ་འདང་ཞིག་བརྒྱབ་ནི།
 ཏྲ་ཤོད་མ་འདིད་ལ་བསམས་ད།

ཏྲ་རི་སྤྱང་འདྲ་མོར་ཞོན་ནས།
 བོའི་སློག་དམར་འདྲ་བོ་ཁྲར་ནས།
 ང་ངག་པའི་བྲག་ལམ་བརྒྱད་ནས།

ས་གསེར་ལུང་ཐང་ལ་ཐོན་དུས།
 ཡུལ་དདུལ་རུ་ལྷ་སྒྲིལ་བྱུག་ད།
 སྒྲིལ་བསྒྲོར་ནས་ཐང་ལ་སྒྲིལ་ནས།
 ཏྲ་འདོ་བའི་སྒྲོ་ཐག་འཐེན་ནས།
 བྲི་ལ་ཁ་རྒྱུང་སོ་བ་བྱས་ནི།
 ང་རུ་སྒྲིལ་གོང་མ་བྱད་ནས།
 ང་རུ་སྒྲིལ་ཞོལ་མར་སོང་ནས།
 ཏྲ་གོད་མ་དུ་མ་ཞིག་དེད་ནས།
 སྒྲིག་རྒྱུ་མོ་གཞོལ་གཞོལ་བྱས་ནས།
 ང་ཐག་པའི་གསང་ལམ་བརྒྱད་ནས།
 ས་སྒྲིལ་དཀར་ཐང་ལ་ཐོན་དུས།
 རྒྲིལ་ར་མདའ་གཞུག་ནས་འབྱད་ཀྱི།
 ཀྱི་ལོང་གིས་རྒྱ་ལུང་བཀང་ཀྱི།
 བྱ་དཔའ་བོ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་ཆད་ཆད།
 ཏྲ་བྱང་མ་ཐང་དཀར་འཕུར་འཕུར།
 བོ་བྱ་རྒྱུ་ཆར་རྒྱུ་འབབ་འབབ་
 བོ་བྱ་དོ་དུ་སྒྲིག་འཐིབས་འཐིབས།
 སྒྲིག་རྒྱུ་མོ་གཞོལ་གཞོལ་བྱས་ནི།
 སྒྲིག་རྒྱུ་མོ་སྒྲིལ་སྒྲིལ་བྱས་ནི།

ས་སྤང་དཀར་མེ་ཉོག་དགྱིལ་ནས།
 ཏྲ་བསྐྱོར་ནས་ཐང་ལ་སྤྱིང་ནས།
 བོ་ཕུ་ཁ་རིང་བུ་ག་ཚོང་ས་བྱས་ནས།
 རུ་འི་སྤྱི་མོ་ས་ལ་བཙུགས་ནས།
 བེམས་གནད་དུ་ཕབ་ནས་བཞུས་དུས།
 བོ་ཕུ་ཁ་རིང་མིག་ལེན་ནང་ལ།
 བུ་ཆེ་ཟད་མིག་ལ་ཤར་གྱི།
 བུ་ཆེ་ཟད་ཁྲོད་སྤྱོད་བཟེས་ནས།
 དཔའ་ཆེན་པོས་ངར་སྐད་བསྒྲགས་དུས།
 བུ་ཁོད་པོ་ཁ་བཙན་ཅན་གྱིས།
 ང་རང་རྒྱུ་འི་ཆབ་ལ་རང་སྟོག།
 འཆོར་དགོས་རུང་འགྲོད་མེད་བཟེས་ནས།
 དཔའ་ཆམ་ཆོམ་མེད་ལ་ཤོར་ཡོང་།
 ཏྲ་མ་བུ་འདྲ་བོའི་གོང་གི།
 བུ་མ་དེུ་འདྲ་བོའི་ཉེ་རན།
 སྤྱིས་ཉེ་རན་མ་ཟེར་གོང་ལ།
 ངས་ཉེ་རན་ཟེར་ནས་ཅི་བྱེད།
 ངས་ཁྱར་བའི་བོ་ཕུ་རིང་ནང་ནས།
 སྐད་འབྲུག་སྒྲུ་འདྲ་ཞིག་གྲགས་ནས།
 ཐོག་མྱོག་སྤྱི་འདྲ་ཞིག་འཐེན་ཐལ།

བྱ་གན་སེའི་སྒྲིག་ལ་བབས་ཐལ།།

ཕ་ཞིག་གི་ལག་རྟེན་ཆག་ཐལ།།

མ་ཞིག་གི་མིག་ཚུ་ལྷུང་ཐལ།།

ང་དེ་ནས་མར་ལ་བྱད་ནས།།

ཚུ་ཡག་པ་མ་ཁར་ཐོན་དུས།།

ངའི་གཞུག་གི་ར་མདའི་ནང་ནས།།

མདའ་ཆར་བ་འབབ་འབབ་བྱས་ཐལ།།

ངས་ཞོན་པའི་འདྲོ་བ་བསད་ཐལ།།

ནག་སྒྱར་རེ་ཚུ་ཁར་ལུས་ཐལ།།

བྱ་གཤོག་ཆད་ཐང་ལ་ལྷུང་བ།།

སྒྲིག་རོག་མེའི་དང་རུས་བཅག་འབྲ།།

ངས་དེ་ནས་འདང་ཞིག་བརྒྱབ་ནི།།

ཅི་བྱེད་དགོས་ཆོད་ཀྱིས་མ་བྱག།

ང་སྐྱེས་བའི་སྐྱེས་ལྷ་དཀར་རོ།།

ལྷ་ཡི་དམ་སྤྱད་མཆོག་དོ་རྗེ།།

ང་དག་ལྷའི་སྐུ་ལ་བརྟེན་ས།།

ངས་ཉིན་རེར་བསང་རེ་མ་ཆད།།

ངས་ཐུ་རེར་ལུག་རེ་མ་ཆད།
 ངས་ལོ་རེར་སྐམས་རེ་མ་ཆད།
 ངས་མ་ཆད་མཆོད་པའི་དག་ལྷ།
 ཏུས་དེ་རིང་སྤོངས་གྲོགས་མཛོད་ཅིག།
 དེ་བེར་ནས་ཀི་གསུམ་བཏབ་ནི།
 ལྷ་དེ་ཡིས་བསྐྱབས་ནི་ལོས་ཡིན།
 ངས་དེད་པའི་རྟ་བྱའི་ནང་ནས།
 ངས་ཞོན་གི་རྟ་བོའི་ཡན་ཞིག།
 མ་སྤོན་མོ་ཐད་གྱིས་བཅད་ནས།
 མོ་ངེད་སའི་རྩིབ་ལ་ཐོན་ད།
 མགོ་སྐྱར་ནས་བེངས་གསུམ་འཆར་གི།
 ངས་དེའི་ཆོ་སྐྱ་ཆ་བཞེས་ནི།
 མེམས་གངས་དཀར་ཡིད་ནི་དགའ་ནས།
 ལུས་ཀྱི་ལ་བོར་དཔའ་རྩལ་རྒྱས་ཐལ།
 ལྷས་རྟ་མཆོག་བསྐྱལ་བའི་རྩལ་གྱིས།
 ངས་ཞོན་གི་རྟ་བོའི་ཡན་ཞིག།
 མ་སྤོན་མོ་ཐད་གྱིས་བཅད་ནས།
 ས་སྤྱིང་དཀར་སྤོད་ལ་ཐོན་ཐལ།
 ངའི་སྤྱེས་ལྷ་དག་ལྷའི་དིན་ལ།
 གཞུག་ར་མདའི་ཉེན་ལས་ཐར་སོང་།

ང་སྤྱེས་ས་སྤྱིང་དཀར་སྤོད་ཡིན།།
 ངའི་སྤྱེས་ལུས་ཆིགས་དུག་སྤྱུག་ཡིན།།
 དཔོན་བཅན་པོས་བཅན་གཏམ་བཏང་ནས།།
 ང་རང་སྤེའི་གལ་ནས་ཕུད་དེ།།
 ང་ཕྱི་སྤེའི་གལ་ལ་བརྒྱབ་ཐལ།།

དུས་དེང་སང་ནངས་ཁའི་གསར་དུ།།
 སྤྱི་ས་མཐའ་ཉུལ་རྒྱུ་མ་དགལ།།
 ང་ཡི་དུགས་སྤྱི་ལ་མ་སྤྱོ།།
 འགངས་མ་སྤྱོ་བཟེས་ནི་མིན་ར།།
 དག་ནག་པོ་སྤོན་ནས་འབུད་དུས།།
 ཤ་ཚ་བའི་བྱ་ཞིག་དགོས་གི།
 གཞུགས་ར་མདས་ད་སྤོད་ཟེར་དུས།།
 སྤྱན་སྤྱན་ཟླ་ཅིབས་ན་དགོས་གི།
 ཟུང་བམེར་བུས་གཞུག་ནས་འདེད་དུས།།
 འིན་མ་ལོ་སྤོན་ན་དགོས་གི།
 ངས་འདི་གསུམ་དགོས་དོན་བཤད་ན།།
 མོད་ཐང་དཀར་ཞིག་ལ་དཔེ་འཛིག།
 མོད་ཐང་དཀར་འཁོར་བའི་ས་ནི།།

བྲག་དམར་པོའི་ཡན་ཞིག་མེད་ཀྱི།
 ཉ་གསེར་མིག་འཁོར་སའི་ཡུལ་ནི།
 ལྷ་གཙང་མེའི་ཡན་ཞིག་མེད་ཀྱི།
 བྱ་ཁེར་སྒྲིལ་འཁོར་བའི་ཡུལ་ནི།
 རང་སྤེལ་བའི་སྒྲིད་ཅིག་མེད་ཀྱི།

བྱ་རིག་བཟང་ཅན་གྱི་ན་བར།
 ཉན་ཤེས་ན་ཁ་ཏ་འདི་ཡིན།
 ཉན་མ་ཤེས་གོ་ཁའི་ཐལ་ཡིན།
 ཐལ་ཡང་ཡང་གཙུབ་ཀྱི་ཆེ་འདུག།