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Foreword

There is an abundant literature on the Buddhist art of Tibet. Not only are its iconographic conventions well known, but an understanding of the history of Tibetan Buddhist art, in terms of schools and stylistic development, is gradually emerging, thanks to the efforts of many scholars.

The art of Bon, on the other hand, has remained practically unexplored. The present volume is the first to attempt to describe this art in a systematic manner. This dearth of studies is not due to a lack of material. The Bon religion of Tibet has a vast and complex iconographical heritage, expressed in works of art which are in no way inferior to those of Buddhism. It is my hope that this study, in spite of its shortcomings, will provide new information and fresh insight for readers interested in Tibetan religion and art.

I have tried to bring together a representative selection of religious paintings and statues, mainly bronzes. With a single exception (Plate 60), all the pieces originate in Tibet (or the district of Dolpo in Nepal) and date from before the upheavals and devastations of which Tibet has been the victim in the second half of this century. The objects are preserved in private collections and museums in the West, or in monasteries and private households in Tibet or among Tibetans in exile. I have included many objects that have never been published. Some particularly interesting or beautiful objects have been published before, but are reproduced again in the present volume and provided with more detailed descriptions. A survey of reproductions of Bonpo religious art in other publications, arranged alphabetically according to the figure depicted, is provided following Chapter Six in the section entitled Further Visual Sources.

The focus of this book is the form and content of the religious art of Bon, in other words, its iconography. Wherever possible, all attributes of a major deity and each individual figure of complex thangkas have been identified. On the other hand, I have not attempted to date the objects reproduced. Dating Tibetan thangkas and bronzes mainly relies on the assessment of stylistic criteria; this is a task which requires specialized skills which I do not have, and I have accordingly decided not to deal with this question, except in one case (Plate 9) where an inscription provides possible clues to the date.

I have translated excerpts from Bonpo texts explaining or describing the iconographic representations of many of the figures presented. In other cases, short mythological texts have been included. Some of the excerpts have been translated before, while the majority are published here for the first time. Tibetan words and names are rendered in phonetic approximation. I am aware of the inevitable inconsistencies which this procedure entails, but as the Tibetan spelling is given whenever a word or a name occurs for the first time (and in many cases repeated
if necessary), confusion can be avoided.

This book would not have materialized without the encouragement, practical assistance and extraordinary patience of many friends and well-wishers. First and foremost I must thank those who have provided much of the material presented in this book. Many collectors have allowed me to reproduce objects from their collections. A number of museums and libraries have also kindly provided photos of objects from their collections: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (Plate 14), Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich (Plate 5), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Plate 15), Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin (Plates 7, 23 and 59) and Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich (Plate 27).

During a journey to Tibet in 1988, I had the opportunity to photograph a considerable number of thangkas which had escaped the havoc of the Cultural Revolution. Some of these thangkas, or details from them, are reproduced in this volume. Other thangkas and bronzes have been photographed in Tibet or Nepal by friends who have generously placed their photos at my disposal. For this, I would like to express my gratitude to Geshe Tenzin Wangyal (Plates 20, 22, 25 and 37), Michael Henss (Plate 16) and Charles Ramble (Plates 45 and 48).


I thank Anthony Aris, Joachim Baader, Gilles Béguin, Richard E. Ernst, Michael Henss and Louis and Pia Van der Wee for constant and enthusiastic support and encouragement in many ways. Thanks are also due to Lorenzo Alessandri, Erberto Lo Bue, Steven R. Krolik, Michel Postel, Helga Uebach and Rainer Waldschmidt, Chaphur Namkha Gyaltse, who sadly and unexpectedly passed away on March 19th 1995, carefully identified all the figures on several thangkas (Plates 11, 30, 38 and 39) where I found myself unable to analyse the teeming entourage of the principal deity; without his help, the usefulness of this book would have been considerably reduced. I am grateful to Patrick Booz for his careful editing and many useful suggestions. Samten G. Karmay read the entire work before it went to press, and contributed several timely corrections for which I am most grateful, in particular for the conclusive identification of the main deity on Plate 17 as Shenlha Wökar; for technical reasons the plate has retained its position instead of being placed with the other plates showing this deity.

Much of the groundwork for this book was done during the years 1989-91 when I had the privilege of a full-time research scholarship from the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (Copenhagen). I herewith express my gratitude to NIAS for its financial and institutional support, making academic freedom not just an ideal but a reality. Finally, the publication of this book has benefited from a grant from the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture (Oslo), for which the Institute is to be warmly thanked.

Per Kværne
Introduction

Tibet is universally regarded as the homeland of one of the major Buddhist civilizations of Asia. Introduced into Tibet in the seventh and eighth centuries, Buddhism soon became the dominant religion. Although Chinese influences were not altogether absent during the initial period of Buddhist activity in Tibet, it was above all to the Indian subcontinent (including Kashmir and the Kathmandu Valley) that the Tibetans turned for their sacred scriptures and traditions of philosophy, art and learning, and monastic life was organized on the whole according to Indian models.¹

With its many centres of learning and places of pilgrimage connected with the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, India became, in the minds of most Tibetans, a holy land of religion. This remained true even after the Muslim conquest of northern India in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries caused Buddhism in India to disappear and gradually brought the flow of Tibetan pilgrims to a virtual standstill.

Not all Tibetans, however, regarded India as the source of their religious traditions. Since the tenth or eleventh century and until the present day there have been two organized religious traditions in Tibet: Buddhism and a faith that is referred to by its Tibetan name, Bon.²

Western scholars have adopted the Tibetan term bön (bon) together with the corresponding adjective bönpo (bon po) to refer to ancient pre-Buddhist as well as later non-Buddhist religious beliefs and practices in Tibet. Hence, in the context of Western scholarship, 'Bon' has no less than three significations:

1. The pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet which was gradually suppressed by Buddhism in the eighth and ninth centuries. This religion, only imperfectly reconstructed on the basis of ancient documents, appears to have focused on the person of the king, who was regarded as sacred and possessing supernatural powers. Elaborate rituals were carried out by professional priests known as bönpo. It is possible that their religious doctrines and practices were called bön (although scholars disagree on this point); certainly they were so designated in the later, predominantly Buddhist historiographical literature. In any case, their religious system was essentially different from Buddhism. Thus, the rituals performed by the ancient Bonpo priests were above all concerned with ensuring that the soul of a dead person was conducted safely to a postmortem land of bliss by an appropriate animal—usually a yak, a horse or a sheep—which was sacrificed in the course of the funerary rites. Offerings of food, drink and precious objects, and, in the case of kings, even of servants and ministers, likewise accompanied the dead. The purpose of these rites was twofold: on the one hand, to ensure the happiness of the deceased in the land of the dead, and on the other, to obtain their beneficial influence for the welfare and fertility of the living.

Tönpa Shenrap (štön pa gShen rab), the Teacher of Bon; main image in the temple of the Bonpo Monastery at Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, India.
2. Bon may also refer to a religion that appeared in Tibet in the tenth and eleventh centuries, at the same time that Buddhism, introduced once again from India after a period of decline in Tibet, became dominant. This religion, which has continued as an unbroken tradition until the present day, has numerous and obvious points of similarity with Buddhism with regard to doctrine and practice, so much so that its status as a distinct religion has been doubted. Some scholars (among them the present author in earlier publications) have suggested that it could most adequately be described as an unorthodox form of Buddhism. The fact that the adherents of this religion, the Bonpos—of whom there are many thousands in Tibet and in exile today—maintain that their religion is anterior to Buddhism in Tibet, and, in fact, identical with the pre-Buddhist Bon religion, has tended to be either contradicted or ignored by Western scholars. Tibetan Buddhists, however, also regard Bon as a distinct religion, and it will be argued below that this claim is justified if one emphasizes aspects such as concepts of religious authority, legitimation and history rather than rituals, metaphysical doctrine and monastic discipline.

3. Bon is sometimes used to designate a vast and amorphous body of popular beliefs, including divination, the cult of local deities and conceptions of the soul. Tibetan usage does not, however, traditionally refer to such beliefs as 'Bon', and since they do not form an essential part of Buddhism or of Bon (in the sense of the word outlined under point 2 above), a more appropriate term is that coined by R.A. Stein, viz. 'the nameless religion'.

Even if one leaves this third sense of 'Bon' aside, the usual view of Bon in the West has been less than accurate. This is particularly true of the continuous, living religion called 'Bon' (point 2 outlined above) which has often been characterized as 'shamanism' or 'animism', and as such, regarded as a continuation of what supposedly were the religious practices prevalent in Tibet before the coming of Buddhism. It is worth noting that the argument in support of this view is a circular one, the presence of such elements in the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet being inferred from their existence in present-day popular religious practices. Further, the later, so-called 'developed' Bon religion was often described in distinctly unfavourable terms as a perversion of Buddhism, a kind of marginal counter-current in which elements of Buddhist doctrine and practice had either been shamelessly copied, or else inverted and distorted in a manner which was compared with the mediaeval satanic cults of Europe (no matter whether such cults ever actually existed or not). This view of Bon was, however, not founded on first-hand research, but on certain polemical writings by Tibetan Buddhist critics of Bon, who tended to employ standard terms of polemical invective. It is only since the mid-1960s that a more adequate understanding of Bon has emerged, first and foremost thanks to the efforts of David L. Snellgrove.

The religious art and iconography of Bon in the second sense of the word outlined above are the topics of this book. This is the religion that emerged in the tenth and eleventh centuries (at least in its present form) and which still flourishes today. Of the pre-Buddhist (or, if one prefers, the pre-seventh-century) art of Tibet almost nothing is known, and iconographical expressions of folk beliefs are for the most part integrated in either the Bonpo or the Buddhist traditions.

An adherent of the Bon religion is called Bonpo. A Bonpo is a 'believer in Bon', and for him Bon signifies 'Truth', 'Reality' or the eternal, unchanging Doctrine in
which Truth and Reality are expressed. Thus, Bon has the same range of connotations for its adherents as the Tibetan word cho (chos, translating the Sanskrit term dharma) has for Buddhists.

Although limited to Tibet, Bon regards itself as a universal religion in the sense that its doctrines are true and valid for all humanity. The Bonpos also believe that in former times Bon was propagated in many parts of the world (as conceived in their traditional cosmology). For this reason, it is called ‘Eternal Bon’, yungdrung bon (g.yung drung bon). The importance of the term yungdrung, ‘eternal, unchanging’, which for Tibetan Buddhists, but not for Bonpos, translates the Sanskrit term svastika, explains the frequent appearance in Bonpo iconography of the swastika, which is its symbol. In Bonpo usage, the term yungdrung corresponds in many respects to the Buddhist term dorje (rdo rje, Sanskrit vajra). The Bonpo swastika, however, turns to the left, i.e. counter-clockwise, while the Buddhist version turns to the right. This is but one of innumerable examples of a characteristic (although superficial) difference between Bon and Buddhism; in Bon, the sacred movement is always counter-clockwise. This is not, however, an expression of protest, much less of a spirit of perversion; it is, so the Bonpos believe, simply the normal ritual direction which contributes, ultimately, to moral purification and spiritual enlightenment. Several basic terms in the Bon religion contain the word yungdrung; thus, beings who have advanced on the path of enlightenment are known as yungdrung sempa (g.yung drung sens dpa’), corresponding to the Buddhist term vajrasattva, but in practice having the same range of meaning as the term bodhisattva. In this volume yungdrung sempa will be rendered ‘Spiritual Hero’, stressing the second element of the term sempa (sens, ‘mind’; dpa’, ‘hero’).
To the casual observer, Tibetans who follow the tradition of Bon and those who adhere to the Buddhist faith can hardly be distinguished. They all share a common Tibetan heritage. In particular, there is little distinction with regard to popular religious practices. Traditionally, all Tibetans assiduously follow the same methods of accumulating religious merit, with the ultimate end in view of obtaining rebirth in a future life as a human being once again or as an inhabitant of one of the many paradisiacal worlds of Tibetan (Buddhist as well as Bonpo) cosmology. Such practices include turning prayer wheels, hand-held or set in motion by the wind or a stream; circumambulating sacred places such as monasteries or holy mountains; hoisting prayer flags; and chanting sacred formulas or engraving them on stones or cliffs. It is only when these practices are scrutinized more closely that differences
appear; the ritual movement is, as already mentioned, always counter-clockwise and the sacred mantra is not the Buddhist “Om mani padme hum”, but “Om matri muye sale du”. Likewise, the cult of the innumerable deities of Tibetan religion, whether Buddhist or Bonpo, may at first appear to be indistinguishable; but again, the deities are, in fact, different (although belonging to the same range of divine categories) with regard to their names, mythological origins, characteristic colours and objects held in their hands or adorning their bodies.

Even a cursory glance at the doctrines of Bon, as expressed in their literature or explained by contemporary masters, reveals that they are in many respects identical with those found in Tibetan Buddhism. It is this fact that until recently led Western scholars to accuse the Bonpos of plagiarism. The view of the world as suffering, belief in the law of moral causality (the ‘law of karmā’) and the corresponding concept of rebirth in the six states of existence, and the ideal of enlightenment and Buddhahood, are basic doctrinal elements not only of Buddhism, but also of Bon. Bonpos follow the same path of virtue and have recourse to the same meditational practices as Buddhist Tibetans.

In view of the many manifest similarities between Bon and Buddhism, one may well ask in what the distinction between the two religions consists. The answer, at least to this author, would seem to depend on which perspective is adopted when describing Bon. Rituals and other religious practices, as well as meditational and metaphysical traditions are, undeniably, to a large extent similar, even identical. Concepts of sacred history and sources of religious authority are, however, radically different and justify the claim of the Bonpos to constitute an entirely distinct religious community.

According to its own historical perspective, Bon was introduced into Tibet many centuries before Buddhism and enjoyed royal patronage until it was finally supplanted by the ‘false religion’ (i.e. Buddhism) from India and its priests and sages expelled from Tibet by king Trisong Detsen (Khri srong Idg btsan) in the eighth century. It did not, however, disappear from Tibet altogether; the tradition of Bon was preserved in certain family lineages, and after a few generations it flourished once more, although it never again enjoyed royal patronage.9

It is claimed that before reaching Tibet, Bon prospered in a land known as Zhangzhung and that this country remained the centre of Bon until it was conquered by the expanding Tibetan empire in the seventh century. Zhangzhung was subsequently converted to Buddhism and assimilated into Tibetan culture, losing not only its independence but also its language and its Bonpo religious heritage in the process. There is no doubt as to the historical reality of Zhangzhung, although its exact extent and ethnic and cultural identity are far from clear. It seems, however, to have been situated in what today is, roughly speaking, western Tibet, with Mount Kailash as its centre.10

A crucial question—for present-day Bonpos and Western scholars alike—is the authenticity of a specific Zhangzhung language. Just as the greater part of the canonical, sacred texts of the Tibetan Buddhists has been translated from Sanskrit, the scriptures of Bon have, so the Bonpos claim, been translated into Tibetan from the language of Zhangzhung. Numerous texts have titles that are given, first, in a non-Tibetan form, stated to be “in the language of Zhangzhung”, followed by a Tibetan translation of the title. As no texts have so far come to light that can be conclusively shown to be of Zhangzhung origin, it has not been possible to identify
this language with any degree of precision. The issue of the Zhangzhung language has been hotly debated, especially since the publication of a bilingual Tibetan-Zhangzhung vocabulary by the Danish scholar Erik Haarh in 1968. R.A. Stein, on the other hand, has argued against the existence of an authentic Zhangzhung language. While much more research is needed, it is at the very least clear that the sacred texts of Bon have preserved a large and authentic vocabulary from a Tibeto-Burman linguistic stratum closely linked to languages in the Himalayas and along the Sino-Tibetan border, such as the dialects of Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh), Tsangla (eastern Bhutan) and the dialects of Gyarong (Sichuan). These languages are only distantly related to Tibetan.

Many Zhangzhung words are used in Bonpo texts, quite independently of textual titles, and thus contribute towards giving Bonpo texts a different character from Buddhist Tibetan texts. Such words are (to quote only a few random examples) shetun, 'heart' (she thun, Tibetan snying), nyiri, 'sun' (nyi ri, Tibetan nyi ma); werro, 'king' (wer ro, Tibetan rgyal po); rang, 'horse' (hrang, Tibetan rta) etc. Some Zhangzhung words occur in the names of deities presented in this book, such as tsamé, 'woman' (tsa med, Tibetan skyes dman, cf. Kinnauri tsamè); si, 'god' (sad, Tibetan lha, cf. Kinnauri sat); ting, 'water' (ting, Tibetan chu, cf. Kinnauri ti).

The ultimate homeland of Bon is, however—so the Bonpos claim—to be found even farther to the west, beyond the borders of Zhangzhung. The Bonpos believe that 'Eternal Bon' was first proclaimed in a land called Tazik (rTag gzig or sTag gzig). Although the name suggests the land of the Tajiks in Central Asia, it has so far not been possible to make a more exact identification of this holy land of Bon. Tazik is, however, not merely a geographical country like any other; in Bon
Lungtok Tenpé Nyima, abbot of the Bonpo monastery at Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, India, wearing the robes and ‘lotus hat’ pesha (pad zhva), of a fully ordained Bonpo monk. Beside him is the böru (bos ru), mendicant’s staff, and on the low table in front of him, the other objects of a monk’s paraphernalia, viz. a flatbell, shang (gshang), a cup with lid, begging bowl and vase.

(Below) The abbot, assisted by a monk, dispenses consecrated water as a blessing during the celebration of the Tibetan New Year. The ritual life of Bon as well as Buddhism entails constant interaction between monks and lay people.
The protective deity Sipé Gyalmo, Queen of the Created World, (see Chapter Three).

(Below) One of the minor deities in the entourage of a tutelary deity.
For the Bonpos, Tazik is the holy land of religion, being the land in which Tönpa Shenrap (sTon pa gShen rab, ‘the Teacher Shenrap’) was born in the royal family and in due course became enthroned as king. Tönpa Shenrap is believed to be a fully enlightened being, the true Buddha (the word ‘Buddha’ simply means ‘the Enlightened One’) of our world age. The Bonpos possess a voluminous hagiographical literature in which his exploits are extolled. Without entering into details or discussing the many problems connected with the historical and literary genesis of this extraordinary figure, one may at least note that his biography is not, contrary to what has sometimes been claimed by Western scholars, closely related to that of Śākyamuni. Thus, during the greater part of his career, Tönpa Shenrap was the ruler of Tazik or Wölmo Lungring and hence a layman, and it was as such that he incessantly journeyed from his capital in all directions to propagate Bon. It is worth noting that this propagation also included the performance of innumerable rituals. These rituals, which are performed by Bonpos today, thus find their justification and legitimation in the exemplary exploits of Tönpa Shenrap. Contrary to Buddhism, where rituals generally have no direct canonical basis, in Bon, as pointed out by Philip Denwood, “we have whole developed rituals and their liturgies specified in the minutest detail in the basic canon”. The propagation of Bon by Tönpa Shenrap also included the construction of temples and stupas, but not the foundation of monasteries, which are not mentioned at all in his biography. Travelling far and wide and surrounded by his entourage he engaged in the conversion of notorious sinners. His numerous wives, sons, daughters and disciples also played significant roles in this soteriological activity, in a way for which there is no Buddhist parallel. It was only late in life that he was ordained, after which he retired to a forest hermitage, and it was only at this point in his career that he finally succeeded in converting his mighty opponent, the Prince of Demons.

Certain parts of the biography of Tönpa Shenrap are clearly related to figures such as Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian yogin and magician who, according to the Buddhists, was invited to Tibet by the king and, subjugating the local gods and demons, founded Samye (bSam yas), the first Buddhist monastery (c. 779). He may also be compared to Gesar, the hero of the great Tibetan epic who, like Tönpa Shenrap, conducts triumphant campaigns in all cardinal directions against the forces of evil. The historical and literary relationship between these various figures remains to be clarified, but it is at least certain that the entire cycle of biographical material relating to Tönpa Shenrap—whatever its relationship to historical fact—cannot be dismissed as simple plagiarization of Buddhist texts.

By the late eleventh century, the Bonpos had begun to establish monasteries organized along the same lines as those of the Buddhists, and several of these monasteries eventually developed into large institutions with hundreds of monks and novices. The most prestigious Bonpo monastery, founded in 1405, is Menri (sMan ri) in the Central Tibetan province of Tsang, north of the Brahmaputra (Tsangpo) river, but there are numerous other monasteries, especially in eastern and northeastern Tibet (Kham and Amdo). Monks are bound by strict rules of discipline, including celibacy. Fully ordained monks are called drangsong (drang...
Monks playing shawms, gyaling (rgya gling), outside a Bonpo monastery in eastern Tibet.

Ruins of the monastery of Yungdrung Lhading (g.Yung drung Iha sding) in one of the deep valleys of Guyang in eastern Tibet. This monastery, one of the greatest of Bon in the eighteenth century, was destroyed by Chinese troops following the conquest of the principalities of Guyang in 1775. It was rebuilt as a Buddhist (Gelugpa) establishment, but was once more destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Reconstruction was begun in the late 1980s, the site having been given back to the Bonpos.

A term that in Tibetan usually translates Sanskrit rṣi, the semi-divine ‘seers’ of the Vedas. Over the centuries the monastic life of Bon has increasingly come under the influence of the tradition of academic learning and scholastic debate that characterizes the dominant Buddhist Gelugpa school, but the tradition of tantric yogins and hermits, living in organized communities or in solitude, has never been abandoned.

The Bonpos have a vast literature which Western scholars are only just beginning to explore. Formerly it was taken for granted in the West that this literature was nothing but an uninspired and shameless plagiarism of Buddhist texts. The last twenty-five years have, however, seen a radical change in the view of the Bon religion. This reassessment was initiated by David L. Snellgrove, who in 1967 made the just observation regarding Bonpo literature that “by far the greater part would seem to have been absorbed through learning and then retold, and this is not just plagiarism”.

Subsequently, other scholars have been able to show conclusively that in the case of several Bonpo texts which have obvious, even word-by-word Buddhist parallels, it is not, as was formerly taken for granted, the Bonpo text which reproduces a Buddhist original, but in fact the other way round: the Bonpo text has been copied by Buddhist authors. This does not mean that Bon was never at some stage powerfully influenced by Buddhism; but once the two religions, Bon and Buddhism, were established as rival traditions in Tibet, their relationship, it is now realized, was a complicated one of mutual influence.

The nature of the sacred texts of Bon can only be understood in the context of the Bonpo view of history. Bon tradition holds that the early kings of Tibet were adherents of Bon, and that consequently not only the royal dynasty but the entire realm prospered. This happy state of affairs came to a temporary halt during the reign of the eighth king, Drigum Tsenpo (Gri gum btsan po). This king persecuted Bon with the result that a large number of Bon texts were hidden away so that they might be preserved for future generations. For Bonpos, this was the beginning of the textual tradition consisting of ‘treasures’, terma (gter ma), i.e. concealed texts that have been rediscovered at an appropriate time by gifted individuals called ‘treasure-revealers’, tertön (gter ston).

Although Bon was reinstated by Drigum Tsenpo’s successor and flourished during the reigns of subsequent kings as it had done before, it was once more persecuted by king Trisong Detsen in the eighth century. This king is portrayed in mainstream Tibetan tradition as a devout Buddhist, thanks to whose patronage the first Tibetan monks were ordained. Bonpo sources maintain, however, that his motives for supporting Buddhism were, on the one hand, the selfish belief that he could thereby prolong his life, and, on the other hand, the argument put forward by certain evil individuals at his court that the Bonpo priests, already equal to the king in power, would certainly take over the whole government after his death.

Whatever the truth—and leaving aside the question of whether “later historians have made two persecutions out of what was in fact only one”—both Buddhist and Bonpos agree that during the reign of Trisong Detsen, the Bonpo priests were either banished from Tibet or compelled to conform to Buddhism. Once again Bon texts were concealed, to be rediscovered when the time was ripe for propagating Bon anew.
The greater part of this vast body of literature which the Bonpos regard as forming their canon of sacred scriptures belongs to the class of 'treasures', believed to have been hidden away during the successive persecutions of Bon and subsequently revealed by 'treasure-discoverers'. Bonpos also claim that many of their sacred scriptures were transformed by the Buddhists into Buddhist texts, thus reversing the accusation of plagiarism.

According to Bonpo historical texts, the final rediscovery of their sacred scriptures began early in the tenth century. The first discoveries are said to have been made by chance. Wandering beggars stealing a box from the monastery of Samye in the belief that it contained gold and later exchanging the contents—which to their disappointment turned out to be only Bonpo books—for food, has an authentic ring; the same is true of an account of Buddhists looking for Buddhist texts, who, finding only Bonpo texts, simply gave them away. Gradually, however, the textual discoveries came to be surrounded by supernatural signs and circumstances. Discoveries of texts were frequently preceded by initiatory preparations, often lasting several years and culminating in visions in which supernatural beings revealed the place where the 'treasure' was hidden. Often the 'treasure' is not a concrete book at all, but an inspired text arising spontaneously in the mind of the 'treasure-discoverer'; such a text is a 'mental treasure', gongter (dgon gter).

Those texts which were considered by the Bonpos to be derived, ultimately, from Tönpa Shenrap himself, were collected to form a canon. This vast collection of texts (the only edition available today consists of approximately 190 volumes) constitutes the Bonpo Kanjur (bKa' 'gyur), forming an obvious parallel to the Tibetan Buddhist canon, likewise called 'Kanjur'. While no precise date for the formation of the Bonpo Kanjur can be ascertained at present, it should be noted that it does not seem to contain texts which have come to light later than 1386. A reasonable surmise would be that the Bonpo Kanjur was assembled by 1450. The Bonpo Kanjur, which in turn only constitutes a fraction of the total literary output of the Bonpos, covers the full range of Tibetan religious culture; as far as Western scholarship is concerned, it still remains practically unexplored.

A common division of the Bonpo Kanjur is the fourfold one into Sutras (mDo), Prajñāpāramitā ('Bum'), Tantras (rGyud) and texts dealing with the higher forms of meditation (mDzod, 'Treasure-house'). For the sake of convenience the Indian (Buddhist) terms are used here and elsewhere, but it must be kept in mind that although the Bonpos employ the same Tibetan terms as the Buddhists, they do not accept their Indian origin, since they trace their religious terminology to Zhangzhung.

Like the Buddhists, the Bonpos also have a vast collection of commentarial, philosophical and ritual texts known as the Tenjur (brTen 'gyur). The contents are divided into three basic categories: 'External', including commentaries on canonical texts dealing with monastic discipline, morality, metaphysics and the biographies of Tönpa Shenrap; 'Internal', comprising the commentaries on the Tantras including rituals focusing on the tantric deities and the cult of dākinis, goddesses whose task it is to protect the Doctrine, and worldly rituals of magic and divination; and finally 'Secret', a section that deals with meditational practices. For the present study of the iconography of Bon, textual material has been extracted from the Sutra and Tantra sections of the Kanjur, and from the 'External' and 'Internal' sections of the Tenjur.
A significant genre within Bonpo literature is that of historiographical texts. The importance of this genre lies in the particular perspective on Tibetan history that it presents, a perspective which is radically different from Tibetan Buddhist texts. Thus, in Buddhist texts, the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh and eighth centuries under the patronage of successive Tibetan kings is regarded as a great blessing, pre-ordained by the Buddha Śākyamuni and carried out by saints and scholars from the holy land of India. Thanks to Buddhism, so the Buddhists maintain, Tibetans acquired a higher ethical code, the art of writing, the subtleties of philosophy and the possibility of reaching spiritual enlightenment—in other words, they became a civilized nation.

The picture is altogether different when we turn to Bonpo historical literature. The introduction of Buddhism into Tibet is described as a catastrophe. Writing in 1842, a Bonpo scholar, an abbot of Menri monastery, Nyima Tenzin, described the introduction of Buddhism as ultimately due to “the perverse prayer of a demon” and put into effect when the moment was ripe by “he who acted like a monk but retained the Five Poisons”, i.e. the Buddhist saint Śāntarakṣita. The suppression of Bon is referred to as “the setting of the sun of the Doctrine”, followed by the dissolution of the Tibetan state and the spread of moral and social anarchy. On the other hand, conciliatory efforts have not been lacking; thus one source suggests that Tönpa Shenrap and the Buddha Śākyamuni were in reality cousins, and their doctrines, consequently, essentially identical.

It is difficult to assess the number of Bonpos in Tibet. Certainly they are a significant minority. Particularly in eastern Tibet, as for example in the Sharkhog area north of Sungpan in Sichuan, whole districts are populated by Bonpos. Another important centre is the region of Gyarong where several petty kingdoms, fully independent of the Tibetan government in Lhasa as well as of the Chinese Emperor, provided generous patronage for local Bonpo monasteries until the greater part of the region was conquered in a series of devastating campaigns conducted by the imperial Chinese army in the eighteenth century. Scattered communities of Bonpos are also to be found in central and western Tibet; of the ancient Zhangzhung kingdom, however, no trace remains, although Mount Kailash is an important place of pilgrimage for Bonpos as well as Buddhists. Another much-frequented place of pilgrimage, exclusively—as opposed to Mount Kailash—visited by Bonpos, is Mount Bönri (Bon ri), ‘Mountain of Bon’, in the southeastern district of Kongpo. In the north of Nepal there are Bonpo villages, especially in the district of Dolpo. At a point in history which remains to be determined, Bon apparently exerted a strong influence on the Nakhi people in Yunnan Province in southwestern China; with this exception, the Bonpos do not seem to have engaged in missionary enterprises. In India, Bonpos belonging to the Tibetan exile community have established (since 1968) a large and well-organized monastery in which traditional scholarship, rituals and sacred dances of Bon have been preserved and are carried out with great vigour.

For an overview of Bon, cf. Kvarne 1987b. There is no consensus as to the etymology of the word bon; the discussion is summed up in Snellgrove 1967: 2.

Bon has been described as an unorthodox form of Buddhism by Snellgrove 1967, Kvarne 1972 and again by Snellgrove 1987.

I have emphasized this perspective in Kvarne 1987b and Kvarne 1990c.


This understanding of Bon has been consistently maintained by Helmut Hoffmann, cf. Hoffmann 1961.

Hoffmann 1961: 98. Fifteen years later, he still maintained this view in spite of a radical improvement in the availability of relevant sources, cf. Hoffmann 1975.


The relevant section of the historical work Legs bshad mdzod, written in 1929 but quoting a large number of older sources, has been translated by Karmay 1972.


Snellgrove 1967: 10

Ibid: 12.


Karmay 1972.

Cf. the Bonpo historical work known as Grags pa gling grags, hitherto unpublished and known to exist in the form of two manuscripts only. I am preparing an edition and translation of this text for publication.

Karmay 1972: xxxiii.

Karmay 1972: 152.

For an overview of the traditions of Bonpo 'treasures', cf.
As with Buddhism in Tibet, Bon distinguishes between 'peaceful' and 'wrathful' deities. Bon likewise makes a fundamental distinction between deities who are 'enlightened', and thus have transcended the round of birth and death, and deities who are 'of this world', and hence are not—or not yet—fully enlightened.

This distinction does not, however, correspond to a division into divine as contrasted to human beings. Men as well as women can attain enlightenment and thus pass beyond the limitations of the round of birth and death, just as transcendent, enlightened beings can manifest themselves in human form. In fact, sages who lived in Tibet, so the Bonpos believe, before the introduction of Buddhism, i.e. in the period during which Bon claims to have held undisputed sway, as well as lamas in later times, are regarded by followers of Bon as divine manifestations and are worshipped and portrayed as deities in ritual and iconographic contexts.

THE FOUR TRANSCENDENT LORDS (Plate 1)
The principal peaceful deities are a group of four known as the Four Transcendent Lords, Deshek Tsozhi (bDer gshegs gtso bzhi). This divine tetrad is headed by a goddess, 'the Mother', Yum (Yum), followed by three male deities, known as 'the God', Lha (Lha), 'the Procreator', Sipa (Srid pa), and 'the Teacher', Tönpa (sTon pa).¹ The Four Transcendent Lords are depicted on the carved book-cover reproduced on Plate 1.

In each successive world-age—the age when man lives, respectively, 100,000 years, 80,000 years, 60,000 years and so on down to ten years—the latter three manifest themselves under different names. In the present world-age, when man lives to the age of 100 years, they are Shenlha Wokar (gShen Iha 'od dkar), the God; Sangpo Bumtri (Sangs po 'bum khri), the Procreator; and Shenrap Mwo (gShen rab mi bo), the Teacher. The Mother is Satrig Ersang (Sa trig er sans).

An important source—interesting not least because of its obvious age—for the iconography of the Four Transcendent Lords, is a manuscript, preserved in Berlin, of the Zernig (gZer mig), the medium-length version in two volumes of the biography of Shenrap.² This manuscript contains no less than 65 miniatures, depicting the Four Transcendent Lords as well as members of the family and entourage of Shenrap, narrative scenes and, finally, portraits of the lay patrons who commissioned the manuscript. It gives an altogether archaic impression and could well date from the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

For each member of the Four Transcendent Lords, the Zernig invokes five different forms manifesting the five qualities of Body, Speech, Mind, Excellence and Power, each manifestation bearing an individual name and distinguished by
different colours. The majority of these manifestations are portrayed among the miniatures of the Berlin manuscript. On Plate 9 are reproduced the five manifestations of the ‘Procreator’.

These four deities are frequently portrayed on sets of four thangkas. Three thangkas from one set (Plates 4, 5 and 9), and two from a second set (Plates 3 and 8) are reproduced in this book. They are all of the same type, in which the main figure is surrounded by 252 miniature figures of the same deity, the complete set of four thangkas thus giving a total of 1008, corresponding to the number of Enlightened Beings in the present world-age.

SATRIC ERSANG (Plates 2 and 3)
The name of the ‘Mother’, Satrig Ersang (Satrig ersang), is in the language of Zhangzhung. The first two syllables, Satrig, signify ‘Wisdom’ (Tib. shes rab), while the following two syllables remain unexplained, although sang (sangs) in Tibetan means ‘purified’ and is the first element in sangye (sangs rgyas), ‘Buddha’, a term which the Bonpos, too, use to designate Enlightened Beings.

Her name thus indicates her essential character, Wisdom. Just as the Buddhist goddess Prajñāpāramitā (‘Perfection of Wisdom’), her colour is yellow. Her attributes are the ‘Five Heroic Syllables’, pazoo drunga (dpab bsu bru lnga), SRUM, GAM, RAM, YAM, OM, set in a swastika, the symbol of eternity, which she holds in her right hand, and a mirror, which she holds in her left. Her throne is supported by lions.

Seated on a shining, white lotus:
The Great Mother, Satrig Ersang!
The colour of her body is like the essence of gold,
Her ornaments, attire and palace
Are adorned by pure, golden light.
In her right hand she grasps the Five Heroic Syllables,
In her left, she holds a shining mirror.
She sits on a seat supported by mighty lions addorsed.
To the Mother, from whom the Enlightened Ones
Of the past, present, and future come forth,
Majestic in her power to bless,
I, together with donors of generous gifts,
Present prostrations, praise and offerings
In order to remove the impurity of countless beings.¹

SHENLHA WÖKAR (Plate 4)
Shen (gshen) is an enigmatic word. In many contexts it seems to signify ‘priest’; thus the historical texts of Bon, the earliest of which date from perhaps the twelfth century, relate that each of the ancient kings of Tibet was assisted by a minister and a kushen (ku gshen), ‘personal priest’. Likewise, the Enlightened Teacher of the present age is known as Shenrap (gShen rab), ‘the Supreme Priest’. The exact interpretation of Shenlha (gShen lha) is, however, uncertain. It could be understood as ‘the God of the Priests’, or as ‘the God Who Is a Priest’. Wökar (‘Od dkar) signifies ‘White Light’.

25
The body of Shenlha Wokar is white; his hands rest in his lap in the position of meditation. His attribute is a hook held in his right hand, and his throne is supported by elephants.

The ontological status of Shenlha Wokar, often called the 'God of Wisdom', is that of boiiku (bon sku), 'unconditioned being' or 'supreme being', literally 'Body of Bon' (thus corresponding exactly to the Buddhist category of dharmakriya). This status, as well as his association with light, makes it tempting to regard him as essentially a variant of the Buddha Amitābha of Mahāyāna Buddhism and perhaps even to suggest influences from the Manichaean religion. Such connections remain, however, to be substantiated.5

Seated on a shining, white lotus:
The Great God, Shenlha Wokar!
The colour of his body is like the essence of crystal,
His ornaments, attire and palace
Are adorned by crystal light.
In order to rescue sentient beings
From the morass of birth-and-death,
He grasps the hook of Compassion.
He sits on a seat supported by elephants addorsed.
To the God of Wisdom, the compassionate,
Majestic in his power of Compassion,
I, together with donors of generous gifts,
Present prostrations, praise and offerings
In order to remove the impurity of countless sentient beings.6

SANGPO BUMTRI (Plates 5, 6 and 7)
Sangpo Bumtri (Sangs po 'bum khri) is a deity who brings forth the beings inhabiting the world, and hence he is styled the 'Procreator', sipa (srid pa).7 The first element of his name, Sangpo (Sangs po), is etymologically related to Tsangpa (Tshangs pa), the Tibetan rendering of the Hindu creator-god Brahmā. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Sangpo Bumtri is an authentic Tibetan deity. The second part of his name, Bumtri ('Bum khri), literally means 'Hundred Thousand, Ten Thousand', and is also found as the first part of the name of the Tibetan deity Bumtri Gyalpo ('Bum khri rgyal po').8 Sangpo Bumtri plays an important role in ancient Tibetan cosmogonic myths, where he is identified with the demiurge Yeman Gyalpo (Ye smon rgyal po). In one such myth, his name is explained as follows: "Because he is enlightened (sangs) from the beginning of time and thus is the lord of the hundred thousand ('bum) (beings), he is given the name Sangpo Bumtri."9 A different etymology states that he is accompanied by a hundred thousand male and ten thousand female 'procreators'.10

The colour of his body is white. One hand rests on his lap in the posture of meditation, while the other is raised, holding a banner. His throne is supported by garudas.11

His ontological status is that of dzokku (rdzogs sku), 'perfected being', corresponding to the Buddhist sambhogakāya.
Seated on a shining, red lotus:
The Procreator, Sangpo Bumtri!
The colour of his body is the essence of silver,
His ornaments, attire and palace
Are adorned by silver light.
In order to instruct in the eternal meaning of examples,
He grasps the invincible banner.
He sits on a seat supported by mighty garudas addressed.
To the Subduer, through Skilful Means, of living beings,
Majestic in the power of his magic emanations,
I, together with donors of generous gifts,
Present prostrations, praise and offerings
In order to remove the impurity of countless sentient beings.\textsuperscript{12}

SHENRAP MIWO (Plates 8, 9 and 23)
Shenrap Miwo (gShen rab mi bo), 'Supreme Priest, Great Man'—also known as Tönpa Shenrap (sTon pa gShen rab), 'the Teacher Shenrap'—is the Teacher of Bon in the present cosmic period in the world of birth-and-death. His role in the Bon religion is similar to that of Śākyamuni in Buddhism, but his biography, as related in several texts of varying length, has little in common with that of Śākyamuni. Thus, the greater part of his career takes place while he is a prince, and later the king, of the land of Tazik (sTag gzig), situated, according to Bonpo tradition, to the west of Tibet. He propagates the doctrine not only by preaching, but also by performing rituals, and his numerous wives, offspring, and disciples play prominent roles in this connection (see Introduction).\textsuperscript{13}

Tönpa Shenrap can be depicted in various ways, depending on the stage of his career (e.g. before or after his ordination to monkhood), and several of these forms will be dealt with separately below. When portrayed as the fourth member of the Four Transcendent Lords, however, the colour of his body is dark blue;\textsuperscript{14} one hand touches the ground as a sign of his enlightenment, the other rests in the position of meditation on his lap. This aspect is thus parallel to that of Śākyamuni at the moment of his enlightenment, but in addition Shenrap holds a sceptre, called a chakshing (phyag shing), in his right hand; it is marked with a swastika, the symbol of Eternal Truth.

Seated on a shining, blue lotus:
The Teacher, Shenrap Miwo!
The colour of his body glitters like jewels,
His ornaments, attire and palace
Are adorned by jewel light.
In order to instruct those who are deluded by ignorance,
He holds a golden sceptre.
He sits on a seat supported by wheels of universal dominion.
To the Guide, through insight, of ignorant ones,
Majestic in his power of radiance,
I, together with donors of generous gifts,
Present prostrations, praise and offerings

In order to remove the impurity of countless sentient beings.  

A number of important deities are aspects or special manifestations of the Four Transcendent Lords. They are the object of particular ritual cycles and meditational practices. Their iconography, though distinct, is often related—especially with regard to colour—to the relevant member of the basic tetrad.

These deities will be dealt with in the same order as that of the Four Transcendent Lords.

SHERAP CHAMMA (Plates 10 and 11)
Chamma (Byams ma), 'the Loving Lady', is the chief manifestation of Satrig Ersang. Her name derives from cham (byams), 'to love tenderly', to which is added the feminine suffix ma. Her name is thus the feminine form of Champa (Byams pa), the Buddhist bodhisattva Maitreya, with whom she otherwise does not seem to share any attributes. She is frequently called Sherap Chamma (Shes rab Byams ma), 'the Loving Lady of Wisdom'. Like several other deities (e.g. Mawé Sengé, the 'Lion of Speech', see p. 37) she can assume five-fold form; she can also, like the Buddhist female bodhisattva Tārā, appear in eight-fold form, each form banishing fear of a particular danger (Plate 11).

She is beautiful and richly adorned; like Satrig Ersang, her colour is yellow and her throne is supported by lions. Her attributes, however, are different: in her right hand she holds a golden vase, and in her left, a mirror.

On a throne supported by a lotus, the sun and the moon,
And eight agile lions of Wisdom:
The Loving Lady of Wisdom!
Her body glows with a reddish-yellow light,
On her head is a turquoise crest,
Her throat is adorned with a necklace,
A golden string of 108 beads.
On her right and left earrings
Turquoise beads are ranged on strings.
The upper part of her body, striking a dancing posture,
Is bathed in the crystal light of the sun and the moon.
All her bracelets and anklets
Are decorated by clusters of jewels.
She is adorned with beautiful, lustrous garments
And all the ornaments of a heavenly being.
In her right hand, level with her heart,
She graciously holds a golden vase;
In her left hand, level with her head,
She holds a magic mirror supported by a lotus.  

15
16
KÜNNU ZANGPO (Plate 12)
In the context of rituals, and especially in the meditational traditions of Bon, Küntu Zangpo (Kun tu bzang po), 'the All-Good', is regarded as the supreme deity, from whom all knowledge emanates. His position is thus very similar to that of Shenlha Wökar, both being regarded as personifications of the bönu (bon sku), literally 'Body of Bon', i.e. Ultimate Reality.

In death rituals he represents the Ultimate Reality; it is the goal of the ritual to unite the consciousness of the deceased with him. In meditational traditions, he is the source of the lineage of the Aural Transmission of Zhangzhung, the Zhangzhung Nyengyü (Zhang zhung snyan rgyud), one of the three lineages of sages through which the teachings and practices of 'the Great Perfection', dzokchen (rdzogs chen), of Bon are transmitted.

Künntu Zangpo is portrayed as a naked Enlightened Being, an image of the enlightened consciousness which likewise is 'naked', i.e. without discursive thought and devoid of mental obscurations such as hate, greed and ignorance. He is without attributes, both hands resting in his lap in the posture of meditation. His colour is usually white, but occasionally blue.

In Tibetan Buddhism, too, Küntu Zangpo (Sanskrit: Samantabhadra) is an important entity, especially in the Nyingmapa and the Kagyüpa traditions. In India, Samantabhadra was at the outset a bodhisattva, but in Tantric Buddhism he acquired the entirely different status of a personification of Ultimate Reality. As such, in the Buddhist tradition his bodily colour is generally blue.

Künntu Zangpo has a number of manifestations, all of whom have different names and different attributes.

KÜNZZANG AKOR (Plate 13)
Künzang Akor (Kun bzang a skor), 'the All-Good, Cycle of A', is a frequently represented form of Küntu Zangpo (abbreviated: Künzang). Like Küntu Zangpo, Künzang Akor is seated in the posture of meditation, both hands resting with the palms upwards on his lap; he is richly dressed and adorned with jewels.

On his breast is the Tibetan letter A, the syllable which forms part of his name. A is the final letter of the Tibetan alphabet, inherent in all the consonants; it is a phonetic symbol of Primeval or Absolute Reality. Thus, one of the traditions of the Great Perfection is known as Atri (A khrig), 'the instructions (khrig) regarding Primeval Reality (A). A is a frequent element in meditational visualizations and in mantras, such as A AKAR SALE WO A YANG OM DU (a a dkar sa le 'od a yang om 'du).

The attributes which Künzang Akor holds in his hands can vary slightly. The figure reproduced on Plate 13 has a lotus on his right-hand side and a small vase on his left. More frequently the deity holds a swastika in his right hand and a vase in his left.
Künzang Gyalwa Düpa (Plates 14 and 15)

Künzang Gyalwa Düpa (Kun bzang rgyal ba 'dus pa), 'the All-Good, Assembly of Conquerors', is seated in the posture of meditation, crowned and adorned with jewels. More rarely his naked body is white and without ornaments. He has five faces and ten arms.

The following invocation, composed by the great scholar Sherap Gyaltse (1356-1415), provides a description of this deity, his attributes and entourage:

Küntu Zangpo Gyalwa Düpa —
His body shines like fire-crystal.
Of his five faces, the face in the centre is white,
That to the right is yellow, that to the left is green;
The face at the crown of his head is red,
That of his top-knot is deep blue.
Of his ten hands, the first pair is joined at the breast
In the gesture of mental equipoise;
On his right and left palms are the disks of the sun and the moon
On which are the syllables A and MA,
The symbols of Skilful Means and Wisdom.
To the right, the next three hands hold, from the top downwards,
Royal banner, swastika and wheel;
On the left, the three hands hold
Bow and arrow, noose and hook.
The last pair make the 'earth-touching' gesture of enlightenment.
His four legs rest in the cross-legged posture.
He is adorned with the thirteen ornaments of a peaceful deity —
Thus one should visualize him.

Again, emanating to the left and right,
From rays of light from the breast of the main deity —
To the right, the Loving Lady of Compassion, brilliant pale yellow,
To the left, the Goddess of the Sky, brilliant pale green.
They have one face, two arms,
And each holds a shining mirror.

Again, emanating from rays of light from the heart of the chief deity,
So as to form an outer circle,
(The Six Subduing Shen):
Yeshen Tsukpi, of white colour;
Chegyal Barti, of blue colour;
Sangwa Düpa, of deep-blue colour;
Tisang Rangzhi, of green colour;
Mucho Demdrug, of white colour;
Sangwa Ngangring, of bluish-red colour.
They all have one face, two arms,
And each holds a hook of Compassion.
One should also visualize the deity as surrounded by
The Blessed Ones of the Ten Directions,
The Spiritual Heroes of the Ten Stages,
And the host of Protectors who guard the Doctrine.

To the east is the Queen of Spring, yellow, holding a chain;
To the north, the Queen of Summer, blue, holding a shang (flat-bell),
To the west, the Queen of Autumn, red, holding a noose;
To the south, the Queen of Winter, white, holding a hook.

KÜNZANG GYALWA GYATSO (Plate 16)
The attributes which this deity holds in his ten hands show that he may be regarded, at least in iconographic terms, as an elaboration of Künzang Gyalwa Düpa. His standing posture, his thousand outstretched arms and multiple faces all combine to give a strong impression of relationship with the Buddhist deity Chenrezi (sPyan ras gzigs; Sanskrit: Avalokiteśvara). In the case of Gyalwa Gyatso, these heads are usually ranged five-five-one, but a variant, shown on Plate 17, has five-three-one-one-one.

The name Gyalwa Gyatso (rGyal ba rgya mtsho), 'Ocean of Conquerors', can be understood as referring to the limitless activity of his Compassion, symbolized by his thousand arms and multiple heads.

The following invocation is found in the sixth volume of the Ziji (gZi brjid), the extended (twelve-volume) version of the life of Tönpa Shenrap, believed to have been revealed as a mental inspiration to Loden Nyingpo (b. 1360):

The Lord, the All-Good, Ocean of Conquerors —
The colour of his body is pure white like snow or a conch,
It is smooth and youthful.
His five main faces are white, yellow, red, green and blue,
According to the Five Families (of Enlightened Beings).
Above them are five faces of Perfection (of Enjoyment),
Like five spread-out mandalas of the Five Families.
Above them is the smiling red face of Magic Appearance.
Of the ten main hands, the first pair is joined at the breast
With the palms joined (in the gesture of adoration):
On the palms of his hands are the sun and the moon,
Marked with the syllables A and MA.
To the right, the next three hands hold
Royal banner, swastika and wheel;
On the left, the three hands clasp
Bow and arrow, noose and hook;
The last pair make the 'earth-touching' gesture of enlightenment.
Behind them are twenty hands of the Perfection of Enjoyment,
Making the gesture of meditation.
Behind them again are forty arms of Magic Appearance,
Making the gesture of threatening.
Behind them again are a thousand hands of Magic Appearance,
Making the gesture of universal dominion,
On the palms of which a thousand eyes appear—
The thousand Enlightened Ones of the Good Aeon,
Who have renounced their families and become monks.
The four feet trample underfoot
Birth, old age, sickness and death.
The twenty perfect toes
Shine on a thousand magic lotus petals.
His head-ornament and earrings,
Necklace and bracelets, finger-rings and so on,
Are decorated with various kinds of precious stones.
His upper and lower garments are of thinnest silk and cotton.
On the ten points of his body
The Ten Blessed Ones and their consorts dwell;
On the ‘eight heaps’,
The Eight Spiritual Heroes and their consorts;
Surrounding him on all four sides,
Are the Four Gate-keepers;
In the pores of his skin
Enlightened Ones and Spiritual Heroes dwell,
Too numerous for their bodies to be grasped by the mind
Or their names invoked.

To his right and left.
From two MA syllables dissolving into light, appear
On his right, the Loving Lady of Compassion,
Of white colour and holding a vase;
On his left, the Goddess of the Sky,
Of blue colour and holding a lotus.26

Chimé Tsukpü (Plates 17 and 18)
The holy scriptures of Bon relate that before taking birth among humans on the continent of Dzambuling, the Enlightened One of the present world-age was born on the summit of Mount Sumeru in the paradise of the Thirty-three Gods. In that existence, he received the name of Chimé Tsukpü (‘Chi med gtsug phud), ‘Deathless One With the Hair-knot’. His supernatural birth from the divine lady Zangsa Ringtsün (bZang za ring btsun, see Chapter Four) is told as follows:27

Trülshen Nangden transformed himself into a cuckoo and alighted on the right shoulder of Zangsa Ringtsün who was staying by the shore of a lake. As a result a son was born, so she said,

O son born to a mother whose body has known no man,
O tender shoot who has sprouted without seed!
Stay in this place which is like a precious fan!
Digging in the golden sand of the shore of the lake, she built a jewel hut and placed the child in it. When nine days had passed, light was shining, so the mother went to look at her son. The son recognized his mother and smiled, his face radiating light, and on the crest of his head a lotus flower with three crowns, one on top of the other, appeared. The mother was amazed at this, and said,

O son of the Supreme God of Primal Existence,  
You have an eternal body which knows neither birth nor death,  
Emitting the light of the Five Immutable Wisdoms.  
You are the lamp illuminating darkness,  
The protector of living beings.  
Although you were left for nine days you did not die,  
And an udumbara flower appeared on the crest of your head —  
Hence I give you the name 'Deathless One With the Hair-knot'.

Chimé Tsukpu is venerated as the divine transmitter of the teachings of the Tantras which he received from the god Shenlha Wökär. Transforming himself into a turquoise cuckoo, he flew up to the heavenly sphere of Womin ('Og min, Sanskrit: Akanisṭha), where he entreated Shenlha Wökär to proclaim Bon. Filling the universe with light from his body and causing the universe to quake and tremble, Shenlha Wökär proclaimed the Doctrine in the form of Tantra in 16,000 chapters. Having firmly retained the teachings in his mind, the divine youth Chimé Tsukpu again transformed himself into a cuckoo and returned to his mother who received the teachings from him. Later, he transmitted the Tantras as well as part of the teachings of the Great Perfection to Sangwa Dupa (gSang ba 'dus pa, see Chapter Four). He also transmitted the teachings concerning the deity Purpa (Phur pa) to Takla Mebar (sTag la me 'bar, see Chapter Four).

Chimé Tsukpu wears the princely ornaments of a Spiritual Hero. The colour of his body is white, and between his hands, resting in the position of meditation, he holds a wish-fulfilling gem.

NAMPAR GYALWA (Plates 19, 20 and 21)
The doctrine of Eternal Bon was proclaimed by Tönpa Shenrap as he repeatedly sallied forth from his capital to rescue kings and princes from evil rebirths or to enable them to successfully carry out pious tasks. It was in connection with such an episode that he manifested himself as Nampar Gyalwa (rNam par rgyal ba), 'the Fully Victorious One'. The story of this manifestation is found in chapter thirteen of the Zernig as well as in volume eleven of the Ziji. Below is a summary of the account as found in the Ziji.²⁸

In the land of Goje Gya (rGod rje rgya) a prince is born; because thirty magic letters appear on his body, he is called Kongtse (Kong tse), 'Having Magic Letters of Power', and later he became known as 'the Magic King Kongtse'.²⁹ As an act of piety, the prince decides to build a temple in the middle of a lake; as this task is impossible to accomplish for ordinary humans, he scrutinizes the magic letters in his hand and realizes that in a former life he was allied to a hundred demons, sinpo (srim pa). He accordingly travels to the land of demons; they promise to help him, but only on condition that he keeps their aid secret.

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²⁸ The Peaceful Deities  33
The demons lay the foundation of the temple. Kongtse’s wife, however, discovers the reason for her husband’s long absence. She comes to the lake, whereupon the demons, released from their promise, abandon the site. Kongtse now travels to the border between the land of gods and the land of demons; here he receives the prophecy that the cha (phya) deity Kengtse Lenmé (Keng tse lan med) will complete the construction.30

Together with a thousand artisans, Kengtse Lenmé proceeds to the capital, Wölmo Lungring (‘01 mo lung ring), where Shenrap instructs him in how to construct the temple. Flying through the air and surrounded by a thousand master artisans, Kengtse Lenmé arrives at the lake and the construction of the temple is completed. It is given the name Karnag Trasel (dKar nag khra gsal), ‘Brilliantly White-and-Black Spotted’. Because Kongtse had broken the vow of secrecy, an army of demons now returns and tears down the temple, except for the foundations. A monster, resting on the bottom of the lake, awakes, and rising to the surface, is on the point of swallowing the foundations as well. On seeing this, Kongtse is terrified; he turns towards the sky and utters a pitiful cry. The cry is heard by Shenrap, who immediately appears, surrounded by his entourage of Spiritual Heroes. Entering the temple which appears again as if by magic, he emits rays of light in all directions, and transforming himself into Nampar Gyalwa, the Fully Victorious One, the subduer of demons, he emanates four fierce deities. The latter terrify the army of demons, who flee back to the land of darkness; the king of demons is converted and transformed into a young god who becomes the guardian of the temple.

Nampar Gyalwa, accordingly, is Tönpa Shenrap in his aspect of the invincible subduer of demons and, in general, the remover of hindrances. Iconographically, he is easy to recognize, as his right hand is raised with the palm turned upwards in the gesture of vanquishing; his left hand rests on his knee. He is seated in a cross-legged posture. His body is said to shine with a multi-coloured radiance, and he has the fierce smile signifying power.31

He is surrounded by four bluish-black fierce deities, each having nine heads, eighteen arms and four legs.32 The heads are those of garuda, lion, dragon, makara (aquatic monster), tiger, leopard, yak and snake; in the centre is the head of a fierce deity. In each hand the deity holds a weapon: arrow, spear, axe, sword, sabre, hammer, gimlet, saw, razor, disk, mass of fire, boiling water, ‘killing sword’, ‘cutting sword’,33 kamali,34 ‘rectangular stone’, chain and thunderbolt.

TRITSUG GYALWA (Plate 22)
In contrast to the Buddha Śākyamuni, Tönpa Shenrap to a large extent accomplishes his task of propagating the Doctrine while he is prince and later king of Wölmo Lungring, in other words, while he is a layman. Finally, however, he does receive full ordination as a monk, and as such establishes the tradition of monastic discipline within Bon.

At his ordination he receives the name of Tritsug Gyalwa (Khri gtsug rgyal ba). Iconographically he is represented with the robes and attributes of a drangsrong (drang srong), a fully ordained monk, holding the five objects which a monk is allowed to possess: staff, razor, needle, pitcher and bowl, and wearing the six items of dress: upper robe, lower robe, cloak, ‘lotus hat’ and ‘lotus boots’ (the latter counts

34 THE Bon RELIGION OF TIBET
as two items). After his ordination, Shenrap leads a life of severe asceticism for three years, and it is through the power of his asceticism that he is finally able to convert Khyappa Laring (Khyab pa lag ring), the king of demons. Asceticism is thus an ideal in the Bonpo tradition established by Tönpa Shenrap himself.

Other Forms of Tönpa Shenrap (Plate 23)
Tönpa Shenrap is often shown in the dress of a monk, his right hand touching the earth in the gesture of enlightenment. In this form, he does not wear a ‘lotus hat’ and is iconographically indistinguishable from the Buddha Śākyamuni.

The Berlin manuscript of the Zermig has several unusual representations of Tönpa Shenrap, of which three are shown on Plate 23, p. 71.

The following peaceful deities play an important role in many Bonpo rituals and are also frequently encountered in religious art.

**The Six Subduing Shen**
The Six Subduing Shen, Dülwe Shendrug ('Dul ba'i gshen drug), are the deities who rescue sentient beings from the six realms of existence within the round of birth-and-death. In general appearance and function they clearly correspond to the Buddhist Avalokiteśvara manifesting himself in the six realms of existence. The Six Subduing Shen are regarded in Bon as emanations from six points of the body of Shenrap. They have already been mentioned in the invocation translated above (p. 30); their colours (and sometimes also their names) can vary slightly (below Sangwa Düpa is yellow, and not, as has been seen above, blue).

They are usually shown standing, holding their respective attributes and wearing the crown and other ornaments of a Spiritual Hero. They may also be seated, however, with or without ornaments. They are most frequently represented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realm</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hell</td>
<td>bluish-red</td>
<td>banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangwa Ngangring (gSang ba ngang ring)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tormented Spirits:</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>nectar-bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mucho Demdrug (Mu cho ldem drug)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals:</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tisang Rangshi (Ti sangs rang zhi)</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>drum and shang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humans:</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>drum and shang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangwa Düpa (gSang ba ‘dus pa)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi-gods:</td>
<td>blue</td>
<td>sword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chegyal Barti (Ice rgyal bar ti)</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>lute and book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gods:</td>
<td>white</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeshen Tsukpü (Ye gshen gtsug phud)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Peaceful Deities   35
THE THIRTEEN PRIMEVAL SHEN

The Thirteen Primeval Shen are regarded as Spiritual Heroes who inhabit ‘the region of clear light of intermediate space’. Each presides over one of the thirteen stages of the progress of a Spiritual Hero. In funerary rituals they preside over the intermediate state between death and rebirth (bar do). They are not regarded as emanations of Tönpa Shenrap, but are intimately associated with him; thus, according to the Zermig, they formed part of his entourage at the moment of his birth.

They are shown standing, holding weapons, musical instruments, or objects related to birds (feathers etc.) as their attributes (cf. Plate 5).\(^{41}\)

THE TWELVE RITUALS

‘The Twelve Rituals’, Choga Chunyi (Cho ga bcu gnyis), is the collective term for a group of twelve deities that figure prominently in the Ziji. In this twelve-volume compendium there is a major ritual text devoted to each of these twelve deities,\(^{42}\) and iconographically they are often represented in sets of twelve thangkas. Some of them also have a well-established cult in their own right. All except one, Namjom, manifest themselves in the peaceful mode, and all except one, Gyalwa Gyatso, have one face and two arms (cf. p. 31). All are seated in a cross-legged posture, except Namjom and Gyalwa Gyatso, who are standing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>colour</th>
<th>attribute</th>
<th>throne supported by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Künying (Kun dbyings) blue banner</td>
<td>lions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Genyen (dGe bsnyen) white banner and  A right hand: equipoise; left hand: enlightenment</td>
<td>lions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jamden (Byams ldan) white right hand:</td>
<td>elephants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Dükhor (Dus ’khor)(^{43}) turquoise right hand: chakshing;</td>
<td>wheels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Künrig (Kun rig) white banner</td>
<td>lions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Gyalwa Gyatso (rGyal ba rgya mthsho, cf. p. 31) white wheel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Namjom (rNam ’joms) bluish-grey vajra 44</td>
<td>(standing, no throne)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Menlha (sMan lha)(^{45}) blue right hand: chakshing; left hand: medicinal nut</td>
<td>elephants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Namdag (rNam dag)\textsuperscript{46} yellow right hand: mirror;
left hand: vase

10 Chamma (Byams ma, cf. p. 28)

11 Mōnlam Thayé (sMon lam mtha’ yas) red right hand: lions
red lotus;
left hand: vase

12 Dülchog ('Dul chog), identical with Tritsug Gyalwa (cf. p. 34)

**Mawé Sengé**

Mawé Sengé (sMra ba’i seng ge), ‘the Lion of Speech’, is the divine bestower of eloquence, worshipped especially by the monastic community in order to obtain proficiency in scholastic debate. The name of this deity is the Tibetan counterpart to Sanskrit Vādissimha, a common epithet of Mānjuśrī, the bodhisattva of eloquence and learning, and iconographically the Bonpo Mawé Sengé is hardly distinguishable from the Buddhist Mānjuśrī. He is seated in a cross-legged posture, holding in his right hand a sword and in his left, the stem of a lotus supporting a book. He is often represented in five-fold form.\textsuperscript{47}
The Four Transcendent Lords

Joachim Baader — Schoette Ostasiatica,
Galere für tibetische Kunst, Munich
55.5 x 17 cm.

This sumptuously carved and painted book-cover shows the Four Transcendent Lords according to their normal sequence, from left to right: the 'Mother', Satrig Ersang; the supreme God of Wisdom, Shoniha Wökar; the Procreator, Sangpo Bumtri; and the Teacher, Tonpa Shenrap. Each figure can be readily recognized by his or her characteristic attribute.

Plate 2 (right)

Satrig Ersang
V. d. W. Collection
Height: 20.6 cm.

The goddess is represented with her attributes, the Five Heroic Syllables and a mirror, held in her right and left hands respectively. The attributes are supported by lotuses. Her throne is supported by lions. At the base of the throne is the following inscription: "Homage to the Great Mother of Unbounded Space, Satrig Ersang."
Plate 3
Satrig Ersang
R. Waldschmidt Collection
82.5 x 64 cm.

The thangka is one of a set of four. Another thangka from the same set, portraying Shenrap, is reproduced on Plate 8. The goddess holds her usual attributes, the Five Heroic Syllables in her right hand and a mirror in her left. The 252 miniature figures of the goddess forming the background are without attributes but their hands make the same gesture as the main deity, except the first four figures of the bottom row, whose hands rest in the position of meditation. Each of the thangkas, forming a set of four depicting the Four Transcendent Lords, has a similar fierce deity in the same position; these four fierce deities are 'the Four Penetrating Wrathful Ones', Welgyi Trowo Zhi (dBal gyi Khro bo bzhi) emanated by Shenrap, see p. 34. (cf. plates 4, 5, 8 and 9).
Plate 4
Shenlha Wökar
R.E.E. Collection
81 x 63 cm.
(also in Auboyer and Béguin 1977: Plate 203, text p.186; and Lauf 1972: Plate 47)

The thangka seems to belong to the same set of four as the thangkas reproduced on Plates 5 and 8. The main figure is set against a background of 252 miniature figures of which the first five to the left in the bottom row have attributes (banner, lute, sword, flat-bell, book) which strongly resemble those of the Six Subduing Shen. The back of the thangka is inscribed with a long series of mantras, at the end of which is found the following prayer:

May there be good fortune in the country in which this icon dwells,
May there be great blessing in that fortunate region,
May disease afflicting men and cattle be averted,
May rain fall at the right time,
May the crops and livestock always be good,
May there at all times be good fortune and happiness.45
The thangka seems to belong to the same set as those of Plates 4 and 8. Like the other two, a standing figure can be seen below the deity, and a fierce deity with nine heads and eighteen arms is found in the centre of the bottom row. Counting from the left, the first eleven figures of that row can be identified by their attributes as the first eleven of the Thirteen Primeval Shen (cf. p. 36).
Plate 6
Sangpo Bumtri
Joachim Baader — Schoettle Ostasiatica,
Galerie für tibetische Kunst, Munich
64 × 21 cm.

The banner that the central figure of this carved book-cover holds in his right hand and the two garudas which support his throne identify him as Sangpo Bumtri. He is flanked by two standing figures and a third figure is standing beneath the throne. The remaining space is filled with 252 miniature figures of the deity.
Plate 7. 1-5
Sangpo Bumtri
Zermig ms., Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin, Orientabteilung

The miniatures portraying the five manifestations of the 'Procreator' Sangpo Bumtri are among the 65 miniatures in the Berlin manuscript. The names of the five manifestations and the inscriptions accompanying the miniatures are as follows:

1 Yesang Karpo (Srid pa Ye sangs dkar po) (fol. 25a).
2 Yedel Mutri (Srid pa Sangs po 'bum khri'i gsung las sprul pa'i khrö bo Ye bjal mu khri, "The fierce deity Yedel Mutri, the emanation of the speech of the Procreator Sangpo Bumtri") (fol. 275a).
3 Karjé Chöpa (Kar jie phyod pa) (fol. 194a).
4 Shezhin Tangpo (Srid pa Shes bzhin thang po) (fol. 93).
5 Trulto Longtangje (Srid pa 'Phrul to glong thang rje) (fol. 247a).

Yedel Mutri (7.2) is not described in the Zermig as being a fierce manifestation. It should also be noted that instead of the banner, the usual attribute of the Procreator, in the present miniature this deity holds what seems to be a hook.
Plate 8
Tönpa Shenrap
R. Waldschmidt Collection
82.5 x 64 cm.

This thangka belongs to the same set as that portraying Satrig Ersang (Plate 3). In the bottom left-hand corner is seen a lama in ornate robes, assisted by two monks, one of whom holds a parasol—a symbol of high dignity—over the head of the lama, while the other monk covers his mouth with a corner of his robe. In front of the lama is a table with various offerings. Presumably the scene shows the ritual consecration of the set of thangkas.

As in the other thangkas of this type, all the miniature figures make the same gesture except one figure to the right of the consecration scene, who seems to hold two attributes, possibly a staff or banner and a mirror. Immediately above the main figure is a deity of yellow colour holding a vase and a mirror, identifying her as the goddess Chamma, cf. Plate 10.
This thangka, portraying Tönpa Shenrap, also shows a group of lamas in the bottom left-hand corner, presumably the monks who performed the consecration of the entire set of four thangkas. To their left are two laymen and a laywoman, who, we may assume, commissioned the thangkas and patronized their consecration. To the right of the bowl filled with offerings (jewels and elephants' tusks) is a yellow deity; his attributes—a jewel and a mongoose—identify him as Jambhala, the god of riches.

The thangka is of extraordinary interest as the names of the three lamas are written below the corresponding figures. Thus, from left to right, we read: Khyungpo Yongdrung Gyaltser, Khyungpo dbangsang64 Yeshé Tsültrim and Yangtön52 Rinchen Lhündrup.53 The third monk is perhaps the same Rinchen Lhündrup who, according to the Yangel Dungrap (Ya ngel gdon gnyis), the 'Genealogy' of the Yangel or Yang clan (which, at least from the twelfth century, lived in Dolpo in northwestern Nepal), received the religious name of Rinchen Gyaltser.64 D.L. Snellgrove convincingly argues that Rinchen Gyaltser lived about 400 years ago.65 Thus, on historical grounds, one may venture to date this thangka to the sixteenth century, and to assume that it was painted by local artists in Dolpo.

On the back of the thangka is an inscription which (following a somewhat shorter series of mantras) is identical with that on the back of the thangka reproduced on Plate 4, except for the last sentence which reads: “May all sentient beings possess perfect happiness!”66

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Plate 10
Sherap Chamma
Steven R. Krolik Collection
20.6 cm.

This bronze of Sherap Chamma, Loving Lady of Wisdom, conforms exactly to the iconographic description in the invocation translated on p. 28. At the back of the throne is an inscription which reads: “Homage to the Great Mother, the Loving Lady of Wisdom”. Below the inscription are two addorsed lions.
Plate 11
Sherap Chamma
Block print from Tibet

The central figure is Sherap Chamma, seated cross-legged on a lotus throne supported by lions, richly adorned with jewels and a crown, and holding her characteristic attributes: in her right hand, a vase, and in her left, a lotus supporting a mirror. The block print contains the following sets of deities, cf. Fig. 1:

1-5 THE FIVE LOVING LADIES (BYAMS MA RIGS LNga)
1 Centre, Loving Lady of Wisdom (Shes rab byams ma).
2 East, Blissful Liberation of Skillful Means (Thabs chen bde sgrol).
3 North, Holder of the Treasury of the Sky (Nam mkha’i mdzod ’dzin).
4 West, Loving Lady of Compassion (Thugs je byams ma).
5 South, All-famous of the World of Appearance (sNang srid kun grags).

6-13 THE PROTECTORS AGAINST THE EIGHT DREADS (JIGS PA BRGYAD SKYOBs)
6 The Protector Against Dread of Enemies.
7 The Protector Against Dread of Magic (byang).
8 The Protector Against Dread of Families.
9 The Protector Against Dread of lu (klu).
10 The Protector Against Dread of Heretics.
11 The Protector Against Dread of Harm.
12 The Protector Against Dread of Death.
13 The Protector Against Dread of Planets.

14-17 THE FOUR GATE-KEEPERS (SGO SRUNG BZHI)
14 The Goddess Holding a Hook (Lha mo lcags kyu ma).
15 The Goddess Holding a slung (Lha mo gshang thogs ma).
16 The Red Lady Holding an Iron Chain (dMar mo lcags sgrags ma).
17 The Black Lady Holding a Noose (Nag mo zhags thogs ma).

This group of four is also known as the Goddesses of the Four Seasons, cf. p. 31.

There is a clear parallel between Chamma in her eightfold aspect of protectress against dangers and the Buddhist goddess Tara ‘Who Takes Care of the Eight Fears’. Various lists of ‘fears’ are known. “A 1095 A.D. Indian inscription gives the eight fears as ‘lion, elephant, fire, snake, thief, fetters, ocean and demons...’” 61
The central figure is Küntu Zangpo, the personification of Absolute Reality, which is identical with the mind of the adept of higher meditational practices. He is seated in the posture of meditation, and his aspect is that of a naked Enlightened Being. The colour of his body is white; his throne is supported by lions.

Except for the two figures to the extreme right, all the monks in the bottom row wear the white elongated hat which is the characteristic mark of the practitioner of dzogchen, the ‘Great Perfection’; its purpose is to shade the face of the adept while meditating in daylight. The background consists of eleven rows of seated figures, representing the lineage lamas of the Drenpa Akar Gongdu cycle. The top row begins at the left with a white Tibetan letter A. In the bottom row is seen, to the left, a monk seated beside an altar or table on which are ranged a vase containing flowers and a stand with precious objects (jewels, coral and two rhinoceros horns), followed by two figures (a layman and a laywoman?) who seem to strike postures of dance, and, finally, a group of six monks. The mantra on the reverse of the thangka indicates that Küntu Zangpo in this case is a divine form of the eighth-century sage Drenpa Namkha (see Chapter Four) in his function as chief divinity of the Drenpa Akar Gongdu (Dran pa Adkar dgongs 'dus) cycle.

On the reverse of the thangka is the following inscription:  "a akar sole wo a yang om du (twice); a om hum Gyerpung Drenpa Mulh3 nyelo yo hum du. For the sake of the gracious Mother, six thangkas depicting mandalas were made, and as ‘support’ for (i.e. image of) the Father, a (statue) of Kunzang with five faces and ten arms. From the depths of a sincere, pure mind, the donor, the khendrung Yungdrung Gyalpo, led his kind parents (to release from birth and death?). They (i.e. these objects) were given for the sake of all sentient beings in the Three Realms—a great blessing! May it be auspicious!” The introductory mantra is that of Drenpa Namkha in his divine form.
Künzang Akor
Alessandri Collection
Height: 15 cm.
Photo: Nono, Como (Italy)
(also in Lo Bue 1991: Plate 62, text p.81)

Künzang Akor has the characteristic A on his breast and the attributes of lotus (right) and vase (left).
Kunzang Gyalwa Dupa
Asian Art Museum of San Francisco
Height: 22 cm

This statue of Kunzang Gyalwa Dupa exactly corresponds to the description in the invocation text by Sherap Gyatso in 1320-1333, including the two syllables 'Lam' and 'Na'. The throne is supported in front by from left to right: an elephant, a lion, and a horse; on the left hand side: not visible a dragon; and on the right a garuda.
This thangka portraying Kunzang Gyalwa Dūpa should be compared with the invocation by Sherap Gyaltsen (1356-1415). The main figure holds the symbols of the sun and the moon on the upturned palms of his hands in front of his breast, but they are not inscribed with the syllables A and MA. The significance of the two symbols is, however, the same as that of the syllables. The throne is supported (from left to right) by a dragon, an elephant, a lion, a horse and a garuda. The two standing figures to the right and left of the main figure might be Chamma and the Goddess of the Sky. The Six Subduing Shen (see p. 35), seated in the posture of meditation and wearing crown, jewels and richly embroidered robes, can be identified by the hook which each holds. They are situated to the immediate left and right of the heads of the main deity. Likewise, the Goddesses of the Four Seasons can be identified by their attributes: to the left, above the swastika held by the main deity, is the Queen of Summer, holding a shang; below the standing figure to the left is the Queen of Autumn, holding a noose (hardly discernible); below the corresponding figure to the right is the Queen of Winter, holding a hook (likewise effaced); and above the third left hand of the main figure is the Queen of Spring, holding a chain (cf. p. 31). A large figure in the centre of the bottom row is an unidentified, white deity, perhaps a form of Kunju Zangpo, flanked to the right by a deity riding a lion, probably Machen Pomra (rMa chen Pom ra), the divine protector of the Doctrine of Bon residing on the mountain bearing the same name in Amdo (northeastern Tibet). There are two unidentified fierce deities in union with their consorts in the second row of figures. The remainder of the thangka is filled by 63 lamas of the lineage of transmission of Kunzang Gyalwa Dūpa's cult.
Plate 16
Künzang Gyalwa Gyatso
Tibet
Photo: Michael Henss

The presentation of Künzang Gyalwa Gyatso corresponds to that of the invocation of the Ziji, except for the arrangement of the heads which is five-three-one-one-one instead of the usual five-five-one, as in the invocation. The two goddesses are portrayed as in the invocation, the Loving Lady, Chamma, to the left holding a vase, and the Goddess of the Sky to the right holding a lotus. The entourage of the main deity consists of ten different manifestations of Gyalwa Dupa, with a kneeling figure in a posture of adoration in front of each. In the centre of the top row is a small figure of Tönpa Shenrap, dressed as a monk and in the posture of enlightenment. Along the left and right borders of the lower half are the Six Subduing Shen (see page 35). On the lower left-hand side there is also a fierce deity with eighteen arms. In the bottom row can be seen the Four Kings of the Quarters, two in either corner, flanking four fierce deities.
The central figure is identified by an inscription as Shenlha Wokar, the deity who is the source of the lineage of teachings of ‘the Threefold Propagation’, Trakpa Korsum (bsGrags pa skor gsum), i.e. the propagation of the Great Perfection, Dzokchen (rDzogs chen), in the Land of Gods above, the Land of Men in the middle and the Land of Nāgas below. It is this lineage which is shown on the thangka. From Shenlha Wokar the lineage passes to the Five Enlightened Ones (lit. ‘Conquerors’) of the Five Classes, Gyalwa Rikna (rGyal ba rigs nga), depicted on the left-hand side of the upper row. Five tutelary deities are seen to the right, with a blue Kunju Zangpo in the middle. The figures to be seen on the following six rows are the various saktis and lamas through whom the Threefold Propagation was transmitted. On the right-hand side of the second row are seen, from the left, Yongsu Takpa (Yongs su dag pa), Milu Samlek (Mi lus bsam legs) and Yeshé Nyingpo (Ye shes snying po), the teachers of the Threefold...
Propagation among gods, men and niñas respectively. Below them is a row of four siddhas seated in caves: Tonggyung Tuchen (sTong rgyung mthu chen), holding a 'bomb', tso (btsa), Shari Wuchen (Sha ri dbu chen), Chetsa Kharbu (ICe tsha mkhar bu) and Gyimtza Machung (Gyim tsha rma chung). The first three are said to be scholars of Zhangzhung, Tibet and Menyag (i.e. Si-hsia or Tangut) respectively.

In the second row on the left-hand side are seen, from the left, Chimé Tsukpi, Chimé Woden ('Chi med 'od Idan) and Trulshen Nangden ('Phrul gshen snang Idan). The figure below Chimé Woden is Sangwa Dupa (see Chapter Four).

In the centre of the thangka, between the main figure and the siddha seated holding the staff and surrounded by dakinis and siddhas, are ranged the Six Subduing Shen, in two groups of three. The siddha is Lishu Taring who played a crucial role in disseminating the Threefold Propagation in Tibet in the eighth century.

For further details, see Chapter Four where this section of the thangka is reproduced as Plate 46.

In the bottom left-hand corner a monk is seated inside a temple with a table on which are placed offerings in front of him. He is only identified as 'the root-lama', i.e. a lama who is regarded by his disciples as a manifestation of an enlightened being. In the right-hand corner the protective goddess Sipé Gyalmo, 'Queen of the Created World', appears in threefold form: the White Sigyal (above), the Dark-brown Sigyal (below, left) and the Black Sigyal (below, right).

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Plate 18
Chimé Tsukpi
R.E.E. Collection
86 x 66 cm.

Chimé Tsukpi is seated in meditation, his hands resting palms upwards on his lap; in his hands he holds a wish-fulfilling gem. The colour of his body is white; he is richly adorned with the princely jewels and dress of a Spiritual Hero. The background of the thangka is filled with figures representing the lineage of transmission of the Tantras, which were revealed to humans by Chimé Tsukpi.

Below the central figure is a tutelary deity with seven heads (five-one-one) and sixteen arms, in union with his consort; this deity is the yidam Magyü (see Chapter Two).
The central figure of this book-cover is Nampar Gyalwa, his right hand raised in the characteristic gesture of this deity. He is flanked by the four fierce deities which he emanates in order to subdue the host of demons. The two pairs of peaceful deities to the right and left are the Four Transcendent Lords, viz. upper left, Satrag Erkag; upper right, Shenlha Wokar; lower left, Sangpo Rumtri; lower right, Tumpa Shenrap. Their attributes and thrones are as described above (pp. 25-28).

With its oversize head and somewhat awkward posture, this bronze of Nampar Gyalwa nevertheless radiates the concentrated power of Shenrap, subduer of demons. The right hand is raised in the gesture characteristic of Nampar Gyalwa. The statue has been set on a more recent lotus petal base.
In the centre of the thangka is Nampar Gyalwa, seated in a cross-legged posture, with his right hand raised to the level of his ear and the left hand resting on the throne. The throne is supported by two horses. Surrounding the main figure, in exact accordance with the description in the *Zermig*\(^{57}\) are the following figures, from the top downwards: a garuda devouring two nāgaras; two dragons, each devouring a nāga-child; two lions, each devouring a brahmin. In the four directions four fierce deities, with nine heads and eighteen arms, stand guard. Between each pair of fierce deities, on the left and right-hand side, are four seated figures; these are probably the Four Excellent Youths, who are the intimate disciples of Shenrap.\(^{68}\)

In the bottom left and right-hand corners are two nāgas, accompanied by entourages of nāgas. In the bottom centre is a red figure which is either a fierce deity, or the king of demons, surrounded by four attendant demons with animal heads, striking grotesque dancing postures.

Above this figure can be seen the figure of a prince, wearing a white turban, facing, to the right, a female figure; presumably these are Kongtsé and his wife. They are accompanied by smaller figures which are either their children or their entourage. To the left of Kongtsé is a seated, unidentified figure wearing helmet and armour; in the corresponding position to the right is another unidentified figure. Finally, in the upper right and left-hand corners, and immediately below the lower fierce deities, are four figures dressed in the loose robes of Spiritual Heroes; each seems to be preaching to a group of similarly attired attendants.

Above the garuda in the upper centre of the thangka are four deities seated in a cross-legged posture inside golden haloes. These are the deities of the mandala of Yungdrung Longye (g-Yung drung klong rgyas) which Tönpa Shenrap constructs when consecrating the temple, thus fulfilling Kongtsé’s wish (see p. 34).\(^{69}\)
Tönpa Shenrap is seated cross-legged; his right hand, which holds a sceptre, *chakshing*, touches the ground, while his left hand, which rests on his lap, supports the alms-bowl. He is dressed in the robes of a fully ordained monk, including the characteristic 'lotus hat', *pesha* (*pad zhwa*). His throne is supported by lions; in front of the throne is a table with various offerings. He is surrounded by four standing figures, likewise dressed as fully ordained monks; they hold alms-bowls and staffs, *hiru* (*hos ru*), and can be identified as the Four Excellent Youths. The thangka has been painted in Tibet in recent years.
Plate 23. 1-3
Tönpa Shenrap
Zermig ms., Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin, Orientabteilung

23.1 (fol. 43b) above Shenrap is seated cross-legged; the colour of his body is dark blue, and apart from a red loin-cloth and red bracelets and anklets, his body is unadorned. He wears heavy earrings and a high, crown-like hat; his long hair falls down to his neck and shoulders. In his hand he holds a sceptre, chakshing, which is, however, more elaborate than the usual version (normally consisting of two swastikas connected by a handle). Here the sceptre consists, from below upwards, of a diamond-shaped dagger-blade, a swastika, two symbols of the moon, a second swastika, a square on which are drawn the symbols of the four continents (triangle, semi-circle, square and circle), and four symbols of the sun. Clearly the sceptre is an image of the universe and serves to emphasize the universal dominion of Tönpa Shenrap.

23.2 (fol. 200a) above right Iconographically, this representation of Tönpa Shenrap is unusual: he is dressed as a monk, but in blue robes; his body is red. The right hand holds an unidentified, curved object; his left hand rests on his lap in the gesture of meditation.

23.3 (fol. 93 a) right Tönpa Shenrap is shown as an ascetic, of dark green bodily colour, both hands resting on his lap in the gesture of meditation. He wears a white loin-cloth, white bracelets and anklets, white ornaments on his upper arms, red earrings, and a white and red band or crown. His long hair falls to his shoulders.
Chapter 1 Notes

1 The Four Transcendent Lords are described briefly by Hoffmann 1943: 16-17; 1967: 90-92; Snellgrove 1961: 47 (the deities he describes have slightly irregular attributes); Karmay 1975b: 196-197; Kvaerne 1985a: 22-23.

2 For a description of the manuscript, cf. Schuh 1981: 89.

3 It has been suggested (Hoffmann 1961: 103) that these pentads may reflect Manichaean influences, but it must be emphasized that there is no evidence for this theory.

4 This stanza, as well as the three stanzas that follow, is translated from an invocation of the Four Transcendent Lords in the Zermig (gZer migs), the medium-length version of the biography of Tönpa Shenrap, Delhi 1966 edition, vol.II fol.162b-164a (pp.867-870), cf. also ibid. pp.831-834. A slightly abridged translation of these stanzas was published by Hoffmann 1961: 102-103.

5 The question of possible Iranian elements in Tibetan religion is discussed in Kvaerne 1987a.

6 See note 4 above.

7 For an analysis of the wide semantic field covered by the Tibetan verb srid po, see Stein 1973.


9 Karmay 1986: 109 and 130-131. This etymology does not explain the syllable khrī, unless it is to be understood (wrongly) as an error for khrīd, 'to lead'. Cf. also Stein 1972: 194.


11 I use the more familiar Indian word garuda for the Tibetan khyung. The mythical bird khyung is, however, an indigenous Tibetan concept, originally quite independent of the Indian garuda, with which it was later identified. For a discussion of the khyung, cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 256-258.

12 See note 4 above.


14 The colour of his body on the thangkas reproduced on Plates 8 and 9 is in fact green, probably due to discolouring caused by age.

15 See note 4 above.

16 Invocation forming part of the compilation Kun gzsl Byams na chen mo mdo snyngs sgrub pa ('Invocations of the All-Radiant, Great Chamma (Drawn from) Sutras and Tantras'), compiled by Nyima Tenzin (b.1813), one of the greatest Bonpo scholars of the nineteenth century; published in Delhi, 1966.

17 Kvaerne 1985a: 25.


21 Sacred formulas play the same crucial role in religious practice in Bon as in Buddhism in Tibet.


24 The sequence implies the Bonpo manner of circumambulation, i.e. turning towards the left.


26 It may be noted that in the case of the preceding invocation of the deity Kunzang Gyalwa Dupa, the two goddesses are yellow and green respectively.


29 Kongtse is a rendering of the Chinese K'ung Fu-tzu (Confucius); his scholarliness is expressed through the thirty letters adorning his body. The name of his kingdom contains the word Gya (rgya) which implies 'China' (rgya nag).


31 Zermig: 774; Ziji, vol. DA, ch.50, fol.50a.

32 The four deities are listed as follows in Ziji vol. DA, ch.50, fol.52a: east, Zo bo dbo dgu; north, Ze ma dbyu dgu; west, Ru co sde dgu; south, Rum po dbo dgu.

33 'Killing sword' and 'cutting sword' are only tentative translations of bskyur ba'i ya lad and good pa'i ya lad. Dictionaries usually give 'armour' or 'armour and helmet' (go cha dang rmgog) for ya lad, but Bonpo Dictionary: 128 explains ya lad as ral gti, 'sword'.

34 I have been unable to find an explanation of ka ma li.

35 The six items of dress are described in Snellgrove 1967: 157-159, illustrations pp.269-273.

36 The Four Excellent Youths, Tseden Khye'u Zhi (mTshan Idan khye'u bzhis), are Yikyi Khye'u chung (Yid kyi khye'u chung), Yulo (g.Yu lo), Malo (rMa lo) and Tobu Bumsang (gTo bu 'bum sangs).

37 Kvaerne 1986: 37 (Fig.1).


39 Kvaerne 1986: 51 (Fig. 18).

40 See plates 15, 16 and 17. For a table showing attributes etc. as described in three different sources, see Kvaerne 1985a: 21 (Fig. 3). In the Zermig, vol. KA, fol. 45a-b, more elaborately, in the Ziji, vol. CA, ch. 22, fol. 18b ff., there is a different version in
which the names and attributes are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hill:</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ngardrag Jampa</td>
<td>bluish-red</td>
<td>banner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TORMENTED SPIRITS:

| Drangdzin Jinpung | reddish-green | nectar-bag |

ANIMALS:

| Tingsel Hekyi Drönma | blue | lamp |

HUMANS:

| Drajin Dönpung | yellow | jewel |

DEMI-GODS:

| Musang Chebar | green | (not indicated) |

GODS:

| Künsbé Selbar | white | wheel |

For the full list, see Kvarne 1985a: 20-22.

For a list of the chapters of the Ziji, see Snellgrove 1967:5-8. On the Twelve Rituals, cf. also Denwood 1983.

Dükhor, 'Wheel of Time', corresponds to the Buddhist Kalacakra.

Note that Namjom, 'the Completely Victorious One', holds the vajra as his attribute, an object which otherwise is regarded as specifically Buddhist. He thus corresponds closely to the Buddhist Vajrapani.

Menlha, 'God of Medicine', corresponds to the Buddhist 'Medicine Buddha'.

Namdag, 'the Perfectly Pure One', is identical with Chamma, but her attributes—mirror and vase—have switched sides.


"dbying gi (sic) yum chen mo Sa tri (sic) er sangs kyi sku la na mo". For the spelling Sa tri, cf. Sa tri er sangs in Grub mtha' shel gyi me long, quoted by Hoffmann 1950: 334.

"sku brten 'di bzhugs pa'i yul phyags (read phyogs) su bkra shis sa phyogs su byin che mi nad dang phyug nad gyis rgyun chad/ char chu dus su 'bas'/ lo bceu (read phyug) rtag du legs/ dus mams kun du bkra shis dang bde legs kyi shob par gyur cig/".

A brief description of the various pentads associated with the Four Transcendent Lords is given in Hoffmann 1967: 87-92.

Drang srong (which in Tibetan Buddhist texts translates Sanskrit rsi) designates the fully ordained monk in the Bon religion, corresponding to the Buddhist gelong (dge slong; Sanskrit bhikṣu), cf. Snellgrove 1967: 10. Khyung po is a district, still a stronghold of Bon, northeast of Lhasa.

'The Teacher of (the) Yang (clan)'.

"Khyung po g.Yung drung rgyal mtschan la na mo/ Khyung po drang srong Ye shes tshul khrims la na mo/ Yang ston Rin chen lhun grub la na mo/".

Ramble 1984: 163.

CHAPTER TWO

Tutelary Deities

The ‘enlightened’ deities of Bon can be divided into those who appear in a peaceful mode and those whose manifestation is wrathful, trowo (khro bo). Chief among the latter are the great tutelary deities, yidam (yi dam), around whom the main ritual and meditational practices of the Tantras revolve. One or several Tantras are generally devoted to a particular yidam, and with each yidam are associated a host of attendant beings.

The iconography of the tutelary deities of Bon conforms to the basic conventions of the same class of deities in Buddhism, such as Cakrasamvara, Yamantaka or Hevajra. In their typical manifestation, they appear as awe-inspiring figures with several fiercely distorted faces, their numerous arms wielding irresistible weapons. They are enveloped by flames, wear ornaments made from human bones and trample the enemies of Bon underfoot. Most of these deities are embraced by a consort of a similarly fierce aspect (although usually portrayed with fewer faces, hands and legs). The divine couple is known as the ‘Father’ and ‘Mother’ (yab and yum) respectively. On taking a closer look at each individual yidam, however, one soon realizes that there is no question of simple identity with Buddhist counterparts. The tutelary deities of Bon have their specific and unique iconography, detailed in the invocations and visualizations of the Bonpo Tantras and other ritual texts. As in Buddhism, however, the iconography of a yidam is regarded as consisting of symbolic elements so that to meditate on such a deity is to comprehend the whole of reality and thus obtain enlightenment.

MAgyU SANGCHOg TARTUG (Plate 24)

The Tantras of Bon are divided into ‘Father Tantras’, pagyü (pha rgyud), and ‘Mother Tantras’, magyü (ma rgyud). The chief deity of the ‘Mother Tantras’ is Magyü Sangchog Tartug (Ma rgyud gsang mchog thar thug), ‘Supreme Secret of Mother Tantras, Attaining the Limit’, often referred to simply as Magyü. He is portrayed standing in the characteristic posture of a yidam, his left legs bent and his right legs outstretched. He has sixteen arms, each of which holds a skull-bowl containing blood and a fresh heart; he has seven heads, arranged five-one-one: the first five are, from the left, blue, yellow, dark blue, white and green, while the upper heads are red and white. The colour of his body is dark blue, and behind his body are two raised and outspread wings. He is embraced by his consort Kyema Marmo (Kye ma dmar mo), ‘Red Kyema’, whose body, as her name indicates, is red. The cult of the Mother Tantras is believed by Bonpos to have been transmitted to humans by Zangsa Ringtšün (see Chapter Four).1
The ‘Father Tantras’ focus on five deities collectively known as the ‘Five Supreme Ones of the Divine Shrine’, Sekhar Chonga (gSas mkhar mchog Inga).2

1. Welsê Ngampa (dBal gsas rnapa), the fierce god of Body (sku)
2. Lhago Togpa (Lha rgod thog pa), the fierce god of Speech (gsung)
3. Trowo Tsochog Khagying (Khro bo gtso mchog mkha’ ‘gying), the fierce god of Mind (thugs)
4. Purpa (Phur pa), the fierce god of Action (phrin las)
5. Welchen Gekhö (dBal chen ge khod), the fierce god of Good Quality (yon tan)

Of these, Welês Ngampa, Trowo Tsochog Khagying and Welchen Gekhö will be presented below. Welchen Gekhö is closely associated with the yidam Meri (Me ri), who is likewise discussed below. Lhagô Togpa is not worshipped to any great extent, but is important as the male consort of the goddess Sipé Gyalmo (see Chapter Three). Purpa is a personification of the ritual dagger, the purpa; the cult of Purpa, though important, will not be discussed in this study.3

TROWO TSOCHOG KHAGYING (Plates 25 and 26)
A yidam of the greatest importance in the Tantric literature and ritual traditions of the Bonpos is Trowo Tsochog Khagying (Khro bo gtso mchog mkha’ ‘gying), ‘Wrathful One, Supreme Lord Towering in the Sky’. He has three heads and six arms, his body is dark blue, and he is embraced by his consort, Khala Dugmo (mKhal la gdug mo), ‘Furious Lady in the Sky’, whose body is red.

The invocation translated below is from a text discovered as a textual Treasure, terma (gter ma), by the ‘treasure-discoverer’, tertön (gter ston), Shenchên Luga (gShen chen Klu dga’, 996-1035) in 1017.4

BSVO! In the central realm of Highest Truth,
In the blazing shrine of the Wrathful One,
Causing furious cries of HALA and CHA to resound,
Is the blazing Wrathful One, the Supreme Lord,
the God Towering in the Sky.
His majestic form, furious utterly beyond endurance,
Has three faces, six arms, one leg extended
and the other one drawn in.

BSVO! The right face is shining white,
The left face is lustrous red,
The middle face is bluish black.
His dark brown hair twists upwards,
He utterly overpowers the Three Worlds with his splendour.
He leads the universe upwards,
He presses the nine doors of hell downwards.
He wears crystal ornaments of wind,
He has put on the lower garment of flashing lightning,
He is adorned with the insignia of a hero, a demon’s flayed skin,
His girdle is a serpent, bound round his waist.
On the upper part of his body is a demon's hide,  
On the lower part, a tiger's tattered skin.  
Of his six hands, in the upper right hand  
He clasps the banner of victory—  
With it he overcomes the demons and their hosts.  
Next, he brandishes the sword of Wisdom  
which cuts off discursive thought—  
With it he cuts off inimical and obstructing demons—  
birth and death—at the very root.  
Next, he clasps the thunderbolt-axe of meteoric iron—  
With it he cleaves the obstructing enemies from head to toe.  
Of his six hands, in the upper left hand  
He clasps an arrow and a bow, the weapons of the visible world—  
With them he strikes the demons in the very centre of their hearts.  
Next, he extends the magic lasso of skilful Means—  
With it he rescues (sentient beings) from the pit of birth-and-death.  
Next, he clasps the magic hook of Compassion—  
With it he rescues (sentient beings) from the quagmire of hell.5  

Spreading his fingers,  
He hurls magic weapons6 at enemies and demons.  
Raising his great face towards the sky,  
He consumes the country of the ogres with its inhabitants as his food.  
The eight great gods adorn his head,  
The eight great nagas are pressed down under his feet,  
The eight great planets are set in motion by his hand,  
The four great kings are sent forth as his messengers.  
The lion, elephant, horse, dragon and garuda,  
The male and female gods and demons are spread out as his seat.  

When the Great One surges forth from the Void,  
Causing vengeful cries of HALA! and of CHA! to resound,  
The whole entourage chants:  
"Arise, arise, from the Void arise!  
Come forth, come forth, from your place come forth!  
If you harm, you may harm even a god,  
If you are wrathful, there is neither near nor far.  
There is nothing which you do not subdue:  
Those who destroy the Doctrine of Bon,  
Those who revile the rank of priests,  
Those who destroy the wealth of the holders of drums,  
Those who break their solemn vows,  
Malicious enemies who create hindrances—  
Without compassion towards them,  
Subdue them utterly and grind them to dust!  
Drive them far away and quickly 'liberate'7 them!
BSVO! As for the great Mother inseparably united in embrace—
From the mind which has the nature of the tranquil sky,
The marks of the fury of an irresistible thunderbolt arise:
The Furious Lady in the Sky, the matrix, Mother of all!
Shining in splendour with the red colour of power,
Her bluish-black hair piled up like clouds cleaving the sky,
Her eyes flash upwards like two great, irresistible stars,
Her eyebrows move like rainbows in the space of heaven,
From her nostrils whirls the black apocalyptic storm,
In her mouth Compassion spreads a turquoise mist,
From her ears thunders the dreadful sound of a dragon’s roar.
The marks of glory—sun, moon, planets, stars—adorn her limbs.
With her right hand she hurls
The great golden thunderbolt at the enemy;
With her left, she offers a heart
To the mouth of the Father.

Trowo Tsochog Khagying has a complex entourage. The thangka reproduced on Plate 26 shows the entire entourage of this deity (cf. Fig. 2), which to a large extent is also part of the entourage of Welsé Ngampa as represented on Plates 27 and 28.

Welsé Ngampa (Plates 27, 28 and 29)

Welsé Ngampa (dBal gsas rnąm pa) is widely worshipped. His name, ‘Fierce (rNgam pa) Piercing Deity (dBal gsas)’, indicates his nature, which is one of overwhelming power and irresistible ferocity.8

He has nine heads: the bottom three are, from right to left, white, red and blue; the middle three, those of tiger, lion and leopard; the top three, those of dragon, garuda and makara (aquatic monster). In his eighteen arms, he grasps different weapons with which he destroys inimical and obstacle-creating demons. The colour of his body is blue. He is embraced by his dark-green consort, the ‘Lady of Boundless Space’.

His body is bluish-black, emitting the jewel light of beryl;
His right face is white, his left face red.
The face in the middle is bluish-black.
His right face is that of the Father, supreme Means;
His left face is that of the Mother, highest Wisdom;
The face in the middle is the perfection of Father and Mother.
The ornament crowning the dark blue head in the middle
Is the fierce head of an all-devouring lion.
The ornament crowning the white head to the right
Is the spotted, fierce head of a great leopard.
As for the crown at the very top,
It is the fierce head of an all-devouring, mighty garuda.
As for the crown of the tiger’s head,
It is the fierce head of a mighty dragon, king of sound.
As for the crown of the leopard’s head,
It is the fierce head of a nimbly leaping makara.
The nine fierce heads subdue even the mighty.
The reddish-yellow hair twists upwards,
Reducing divine priests to subjection.

Of his eighteen hands, the foremost pair
Holds a sharply pointed dagger which strikes the Five Poisons—
With it he dries up the sea of birth-and-death from the very bottom.
To the right, the topmost of his eight hands
Holds the victorious banner of knowledge—
With it he vanquishes the army of demons.
Next, he brandishes the sword which cuts off discursive thought—
With it he cuts off inimical and obstructing demons—
  birth and death—at the very root.
Next, he holds a broad axe—
With it he cleaves the demons from head to toe.
Next flutters the ensign of the created world—
With it he subdues the host of wisdom-gods.
Next, he holds a straight and long spear—
With it he pierces the inner pride of the mind of (imagined) wisdom.
Next, he holds a military banner surmounted by a garuda—
It appears as fierce to inimical and obstructive demons.
Next, a fierce and all-devouring tiger leaps forth—
It cuts off the path of flight of the demons,
  so that not even a trace remains.
Next, he holds a thunderbolt of meteoric iron—
With it he obliterates the host of demons.
To the left, the topmost of his eight hands
Holds the bow and arrow of Means and Wisdom—
With them he causes Means and Wisdom to play in the vastness of space.
Next, he holds the seizing and subjugating noose—
With it he rescues (sentient beings) from the pit of birth-and-death.
Next, he holds the iron hook which catches those who flee—
With it he rescues (sentient beings) from the quagmire of hell.
Next, he holds a copper meat-hook—
With it he seizes demons in the very centre of their hearts.
Next, he holds an iron chain—
With it he binds and tames the demons.
Next, he holds a ... (?) shang—
With it he causes demons to go mad and swoon.
Next, he holds a rat by the hind-legs (?)—
With it he casts down the ‘soul-sign’ of the demons.
Next, he holds a great boulder—
With it he overwheels and transfixes the demons.

With his four feet firmly parted,
He subdues the haughty gods and demons with his majesty.
Clad in the still-moist skin of a demon,
He instils fear in the great and powerful ones.
His lower garment is the skin of a fierce and valiant tiger,
Thereby fixing the mark of a hero on the demon of ignorance.
From his wrathful eyes red lightning flashes,
From his rounded ears a dragon's roar resounds,
From his jutting, wrinkled nose a violent tempest blows,
From his tongue sharp and heavy hail-stones fall.
The magic apparitions of his mind fill the ten directions,
Golden sparks throb from the pores of his skin,
He glows with the light of an all-consuming mountain of fire.
He vanquishes and reduces to ashes
Demons who create hindrances and lead astray.
His nine heads overwhelm the Nine Stages with their splendour,
His hands bring the Three Realms under his control,
His feet overwhelm the universe with their splendour,
He shines with the sun and the moon of Compassion.
He is majestic, having the haughty gods and demons as his seat.

In order to subdue the harmful nāgas and demons,
He adorns his head with the white class of kings,
He makes his ears beautiful with the yellow class of lords,
He makes his necklace from the red brahmins,
He heaps up the shoulder-ornaments from the green class of commoners,
He adorns his feet with the black-motley outcastes.

Cries of BSVO and CHA and HA resound—
The thousand worlds of the Three Realms quake and tremble.
When Welsé Ngampa, the fierce lord,
Manifests a flaming body from invisible, limitless space,
We implore you to look at us with your eye of Wisdom!
We implore you to grasp everyone with your eye of Compassion!
We implore you to avert hindrances with your eye of Magic-appearances!
We implore you to avert unfavourable circumstances and hindrances!
Set the male and female gods and demons to their task!
We implore you to 'liberate' all into the empty and unbounded space of heaven!
Homage to the God of Imperishable Life!

BSVO! The great Mother, inseparably united with him—
The fierce lady, great Mother, Lady of Boundless Space,
who bears six names:
When she is the mistress of the Shrine of Expansion,
She is the queen Satrig Ersang, the Mother of Boundless Space.
When she is the mistress of the hundred thousand minor goddesses,
She is Namchi Gunggyal, the Lady who keeps the treasury of heaven.
When she emanates from her body Yeshen Tsugpü, the goddess who is the mother of the youth.

Tutelary Deities
When she is the mistress of the Shrine of Peacefulness,  
She is Tukjé Chamma, the Loving Lady of Compassion,  
The Mother who nourishes living beings.

When she is the Mother who 'liberates', the consort of Lhagö Togpa,  
She is Sipé Gyalmo, the Queen of the Visible World, who is without rival.18

When she is the secret consort of the God Towering in the Sky,19  
She is Khala Dugmō, the Furious Lady in the Sky, the matrix, Mother of all.  
Although in her furious nature her bodily colour is green-black,

Her magic apparitions are white, yellow, red, green and blue.  
Her deep-blue hair rises up into the boundless space of heaven,  
Her eyebrows flash with a thousand lightnings in the sky,  
Her eyes—the sun and the moon—gaze into the infinite space of heaven.  
From her rounded ears the great roar of a rain-storm resounds.  
From the jutting, wrinkled nose,  
The snow-storm that ends the world whirls forth.  
On her tongue and palate terrible flashes of lightning whirl around,  
From her womb a hundred thousand fierce goddesses spring forth.  
With her right hand she nourishes living beings  
With the casket of heaven and earth.  
With her left hand, she holds the all-curing vase of nectar.20

Welchen Gekhō (Plate 30)

Two tutelary deities are closely connected with the holy land of Zhangzhung:  
Welchen Gekhō (dBal chen ge khod), 'All-piercing Gekhō', and Meri (Me ri),  
'Mountain of Fire', who will be discussed later. The epithets and characteristics of  
the two deities overlap to such an extent that it is not always easy to determine  
which one is referred to; their iconographic attributes are, however, quite distinct,  
so that one may immediately recognize the deity in question when examining a  
bronze or a thangka.

The word gekhō (ge khod) designates a class of ancient Tibetan gods. The  
etymology of the word is entirely obscure, but it may be taken to be a loan from the  
language of Zhangzhung. The gekhō are said to number 360 and to reside on Mount  
Tisé (Ti se, i.e. Mount Kailash), the sacred mountain of Zhangzhung. Their number  
has been connected with the 360 days of the lunar year:21 "Ge-khod also has  
connection with the divination gods in Zhang-zhung ju-thig where the 360 gods are  
represented by the 360 knots of the thirty-six strings (ndud-lha 360)".22 Welchen  
Gekhō, too, is believed to reside on Tisé.23

Welchen Gekhō is also known as Gekhō Sangwa Dragchen (Ge khod gsang ba  
drag chen), 'Gekhō, the Secret, Great Violent One'. The epithet Dūdūl (bDud 'dul),  
'Subduer of Demons', is often joined to the name of the deity and Gekhō may be  
omitted, so that several variants of the name are to be found. Thus, the most  
complete form is Welchen Gekhō Dūdūl Sangwa Dragchen, alternating with  
Dūdūl Sangdrag, Gekhō Sangwa Dragchen and Welchen Gekhō. As an abbrevi-  
atated form of the name, the deity may be simply known as Gekhō.

While most of these elements may also enter into the various extended names  
of the tutelary deity Meri, the iconography of the two deities is, as already  
mentioned, entirely distinct. Thus both have nine heads and eighteen arms, but of
the nine heads of Gekhô, only the top one is that of an animal (garuda), whereas the remainder are those of a demon, sin (srin). The heads to the right are white, those to the left red, and those in the middle bluish-black, which is also the colour of his body. In his sixteen hands he wields various weapons, enumerated in the invocation translated below, while with two hands he brings demons to his gaping mouth, where they are torn asunder and devoured.

He is embraced by his consort, Logbar Tsamé (Glog 'bar tsa med), 'Lady of Flashing Lightning'. She has three faces and six arms, and the colour of her body is reddish-yellow. She, too, has a name pointing to a connection with Zhangzhung, tsamé (tsa med) being the Zhangzhung word for 'woman'. She is styled 'Queen of draplas'; like the gekhô, the drapla (sgra bla) are a class of ancient Tibetan gods, going back to the pre-Buddhist period, but not specifically associated with Zhangzhung. The drapla frequently, but not invariably, have a fierce and warlike character.

The fierce form of Welchen Sangdrag,
Gekhô, king of gods, subduer-of-demons with great magic power,
Terrifying, with nine heads and eighteen arms,
Bluish-black, furious, an awe-inspiring, blazing wonder—
His form has a violent, haughty posture.
With his fierce nine heads he subdues the arrogant, black demons:
The faces to the right are shining white,
Those to the left are flaming red,
While the faces in the middle are bluish-black.
All nine heads are furious, with the face of a demon.
The topmost head has the face of a garuda.
His hair is yellowish-black,
Like a mass of fire filling the universe.
Lightning, hail and snow-storms whirl around him,
His eyebrows are like flashes of lightning,
Shooting forth violent hail and thunderbolts.
His eyes, forming a triangle, are filled with rage;
Thrown back by his eyes, red with fury,
Gods and demons swoon from fright.
Violent claps of thunder resound from his ears,
Adorned with turquoise dragons as beautiful earrings.
His nose has terrifying wrinkles,
From it swirls an apocalyptic snow-storm.
His greedily gaping mouth devours and destroys the demons;
From his tongue flashes of lightning penetrate the Three Realms.
His pale-yellow beard showers sparks,
Violent lightning falls, thunderbolts and hail whirl around.
The cry of the garuda at the top of his head
Unsettles the nāgas at the bottom of the sea.
His eight gaping faces subdue the eight classes of gods and demons,
The sound—HA HA—of his pealing laughter
Causes the inimical demons who lead astray and create obstacles
To swoon and fall headlong.
On the upper part of his body
The wings of a great garuda are raised and spread;  
Their awesomeness overwhelms the entire universe. 
The stems of the feathers are glowing, all-consuming masses of fire, 
Reducing to ashes the demons who lead astray. 
From each hair of his body sparks shoot forth, 
Forming a mass of fire, 
And subduing the female fiends and lords-of-death. 
The upper part of his body is enveloped from above downwards 
In the flayed hide of an elephant, 
To which is attached as the hem the skin of a destructive demon, 
Spreading forth a hundred thousand mighty masses of fire 
And reducing to ashes the demons who lead (sentient beings) astray. 
The lower part of his body has a loincloth made from a fierce tiger, 
With a lower hem of the skin of karakul, vulture and leopard, 
Showering sparks which form a mass of all-consuming fire 
With a brightness which reduces the sadag, lu and nyen to ashes. 
Flashes of red-hot lightning, rendering them immobile 
as soon as it touches them, 
Reduce to ashes the eight classes of destructive demons. 
The head-ornament, the five classes of great garudas, 
Smile as they emerge from infinite space, 
Overwhelming with their majesty the black lu-demons. 
A lu-serpent is his beautiful, blue-spotted necklace; 
His hands and feet are adorned by the five classes of serpents, 
Forming beautiful jewel tassels. 

The first pair of his eighteen hands 
Holds demons and vampires to his mouth. 
Male and female dön he gnashes headfirst. 
The black mountain of the demons he burns to ashes, 
The boiling sea of demons he dries out to the very bottom. 
As for the attributes of the eight hands to the right: 
Sword, axe and wheel; thunderbolt, mass of fire and crooked knife; 
Staff and sceptre, brandished to the sky, 
Cutting, chopping, cleaving and hacking into pieces 
All demons who create obstacles, 
Burning and rending them completely asunder from head to toe, 
Pounding them and reducing them to food and garments. 
As for the attributes of the eight hands to the left: 
He holds bow and arrow, noose and hammer; 
Chain, hook, and natse; the horn of a wild sheep, 
And all-dissolving, boiling water, 
Pounding, binding and beating 
The host of harmful and obstructive ghosts and demons; 
Tying them up, dragging them away 
And reducing them to food and garments; 
Burning them, vanquishing them 
And performing the magic of 'bombs'.  

82  THE BON RELIGION OF TIBET
The four legs are wide apart,
One pair bent in, the other stretched out,
Troubling and oppressing the eight classes of destructive demons.
Thunderbolts and snowstorms whirl about his body,
Completely overcoming the wounded demons.
As for his entourage, he is surrounded by the gekhō gods,
Accompanied by a further emanation
Of a hundred thousand divine warriors.

As for the great Mother, inseparably united with him—
The Queen of draplas, Logbar Tsamé, the Lady of Flashing Lightning.
She has three faces, six arms, and a wrathful appearance.
Her body is reddish-yellow, glowing like the sun,
She is the wrathful lady in the sky, shining like the sun.
To the right her face is that of the ‘water-crystal’ moon (i.e. white),
To the left, that of the ‘fire-crystal’ sun (i.e. red),
While the middle head glows like molten gold.
Her hair is reddish-yellow, her diadem shines brightly.
A snowstorm with flashes of lightning
Shining like fire whirls about her.
In the hair-knot of ‘fire-crystal’ adorning her head
She wears a töding with the lustre of the sun and the moon.
Her eyebrows are flickering flashes of lightning,
Her eyes are shining zi-stones, ta-la-la,
From her ears comes the violent sound of thunder, u-ru-ru,
Her golden earrings tinkle, si-li-li,
From her nose a violent tempest whirls about,
From her gaping mouth comes a terrible gnashing of teeth.
On the silken garment on the upper part of her body
Is the skin of the Eight Great Planets,
On the lower part of her body
Is a loincloth of red-hot lightning,
Like thunderbolt-furrows showering sparks.
She is girdled with a belt of a venomous black serpent,
She subdues the noxious lu and dön.
On her bracelets which shine like the sun and the moon,
The twenty-eight lunar mansions are engraved.
The first pair of her hands
Holds masses of fire like a golden Mount Meru,
Burning, oppressing and troubling inimical demons.
The second pair hurls lassos like a rain of thunderbolts,
Binding and completely piercing the demons.
The last pair holds a ‘red bomb’
As a choice offering to the mouth of the Father,
Vanquishing the ‘life-force’ of the demons and fulfilling her vow.
Inseparably united, she joyously embraces the Father,
Showing the Father her sweetly smiling face,
The entourage of Welchen Gekhö is headed by two deities who are likewise connected, as will be seen, with Meri. These deities have names which make no sense in Tibetan, but which can, at least partially, be understood as Zhangzhung terms. They are Kuchi Mangké (Ku byi mang ke) and Ati Muwer (A ti mu wer), ‘Ati, King (wer) of the Sky (miu)’. Kuchi Mangké is described as the ‘supreme son of the hearts of the Father and Mother’ (i.e. of Gekhö and his consort). His body is tiny, like “a golden spindle”, and has the colour of burnished gold. He has one head and two arms, and in his right hand he holds a sword, in his left, a snake forming a lasso. Ati Muwer is regarded as a mythological sage, the first to teach the cult of Welchen Gekhö. He is also described as a deity, a ‘god of wisdom’, yeshé lha (ye shes lha) and a kulha (sku lha), ‘body-god’—the latter term is probably a variant of sku bla, a term often used to designate the gods residing on holy mountains. He holds a bow and arrow of meteoric iron in his right hand, and from his left, he sends forth nine hundred thousand iron garudas.

**MERI** (Plate 31)
Meri (Me ri) means ‘Mountain of Fire’, and alludes to the awe-inspiring manifestation of the deity, surrounded by flames and reducing demons to utter subjection.

Besides Meri, the short version of his name, the deity is also known by a number of other names, which may overlap with the names of the tutelary deity Gekhö (see above). Thus he is known as Meri Sangwa Pawo Gyepur (Me ri gsang ba dpa’ bo gyad phur), ‘Mountain of Fire, Secret Hero, Athlete-Dagger’, Meri Pawo Gyepur, or simply Meri Gyepur. He is also known as Gekhö Meri Gyepur or Welchen Meri (dBal chen me ri), ‘All-penetrating Mountain of Fire’, or even Welchen Gekhö, in which case there is complete terminological identity with the tutelary deity Gekhö.

Like Gekhö, he is closely associated with Zhangzhung, and hence he is frequently referred to simply as Zhangzhung Meri, the ‘Mountain of Fire of Zhangzhung’. Iconographically, however, Meri is entirely distinct from Gekhö and can be immediately recognized. Like Gekhö, he has nine heads surmounted by a garuda, but only the lower heads are anthropomorphic; the remainder are the heads of various birds and animals. His body is golden yellow, and he wears a helmet and golden armour. In his eighteen hands he holds weapons and other objects which will be detailed below. In pictorial representations he is not embraced by a single consort, but is flanked by two female attendants. Ati Muwer appears at the top of his head and Kuchi Mangké in his heart; it may be noted that the description of these two deities differs from the one given when they form part of the entourage of Gekhö (see above).

*Welchen Gekhö has nine heads and eighteen arms,*
*Standing with his six legs wide apart.*
*The colour of his body shines like refined gold.*
*His right face, shining white and smiling,*
*Is surmounted by a helmet of liquid bronze;*
*His left face, glowing red and reviling,*
*Is surmounted by a helmet of leather.*
His central face, dark blue and fierce,
Is surmounted by a helmet of meteoric iron.
The topmost of the three heads to the right
Has the reddish-yellow face of a garuda.
The next, the dark-blue face of a raven,
The bottom one, the yellow face of an owl.
The topmost of the three heads to the left
Is the striped face of a tiger.
The next, the ash-grey face of an elephant,
The bottom one, the dark-blond face of a bear with hair awry.\(^{42}\)
His dark-blond hair is massed together like clouds,
He hurls down various kinds of weapons like rain.
From his nose a storm whirls forth,
From his mouth flows purified gold,
His eyes are blood-shot like red clouds,
His fangs are a full circle of thunderbolts.
On his tongue flashes the red lightning
Which comes at the end of the universe.
Between his jaws he crushes the eight classes of demons and vampires.
From each single hair emanate
A hundred thousand arrow-heads of fire.
Above his head soar nine hundred and ninety thousand
Shining, great golden garudas
With turquoise eyes and thunderbolt claws.
On his yellow armour of gold
Innumerable golden sparks of fire glisten.
A violent snowstorm with flashes of lightning whirls about him.
In his eighteen hands he holds to the right—
From the topmost hand downwards—
A hook, a snake forming a noose, a cane,\(^{43}\)
A hatchet, a spear, a bow and arrow,
A ‘red bomb’, a heart\(^{44}\) and a human skin.
To the left he holds—
From the topmost hand downwards—
An axe, a ‘water-noose’, a mass of fire,
A violent wind, Mount Meru, poisoned beer,
A great conch, a magical iron weapon and the horn of an antelope.
On the upper part of his body
He wears the flayed hide of a demon,
Over which hangs the skin of a vampire.
On the lower garment, formed by the hide of a female demon,
Is the skin of a ‘northern demoness of the uplands’.
On the lower part of his body
Are tattered lion and tiger skins, girthed by a venomous snake.
His necklace is formed by the skulls
Of nine hundred ‘liberated’ male and female demons.
At the crown of his head,
Seated on a great garuda and a lotus
Formed by the sun and the moon,
Transformed from the syllable A melting into light, is Ati Muwer.
The colour of his body is white,
He has one face, two arms, thirteen peaceful ornaments,
And the nine attributes of Brahmnā.

At his heart,
Transformed from the green-blue syllable OM melting into light,
Is Kuchi Mangkê.
His colour is similar to a turquoise,
His hair is azure-blue and bound up in a knot turning to the right.
He is beautiful, shining with se’urag jewels.
With his right hand, held at the level of his heart,
He makes the gesture of teaching Bon.
In his left, he holds a golden sceptre
With the design of a turquoise swastika.
Beautifully adorned with jewels,
He sits with one leg drawn in, the other stretched out.
The six feet of Welchen trample underfoot
Demons, sprites, chinayaka-demons, golden garudas,
Those born of the horn of se, gyalgong-demons of tempests,
And male and female vampires.
His body is immense and his limbs massive,
He blazes within and without with all-consuming fire.

On his right is the Mother of ‘liberation’,
Namkhé Wölé of dark red colour,
Adorned with tresses of a hundred thousand ‘fire-crystals’.
She holds a dagger in her hand
And has a conch-white tortoise as her throne.
On his left is the Mother of ‘union’,
Nélé Sipé Gyalmo, of dark yellow colour,
Adorned with tresses of blazing golden light.
She offers a skull filled with blood to the Father.
They are locked in embrace so that they are one.
She has a fierce black bear as her throne.

Among the deities which are particularly associated with Meri, the chief ones are an inner entourage of ten fierce deities (the ‘Ten Terrifying Ones’), each with a consort and two ‘messengers’. He is guarded by four ‘gatekeeper-athletes’, and sends forth twelve ‘messengers’. He commands four ‘female generals’ as well as the protectors of the Four Lakes and the Four Rivers, all of whom are also female. Many of these deities are associated with Zhangzhung, either through their names which are, in whole or in part, in the Zhangzhung language (many goddesses have names ending in tsamé (ma), ‘woman’), or through geographical associations, such as the Four Lakes and the Four Rivers, all of which are located in Zhangzhung.
Plate 25
Trowo Tsochog Khagying
Tibet
Photo: Tenzin Wangyal

The deity holds the usual attributes in his right hands: banner, sword and axe; in his left hands he holds bow and arrow in his first hand and a hook in his third; in his second hand, however, he holds a hexagram instead of a lasso. His throne is supported by five animals, from left to right: garuda, elephant, lion, horse and dragon.
Plate 26 (overleaf)

Trowo Tsochog Khagying
R.E.E. Collection
86 x 66 cm.
(also in Lauf 1972: Plate 49)

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Fig. 2

The complete entourage of the tutelary deity Trowo Tsochog Khagying is portrayed on this thangka, in addition to a number of other deities. The chief deity as well as his entourage are numbered and the position of each is indicated in Fig. 2:

1-2 THE TUTELARY DEITY TROWO TSOCHOG KHAGYING AND HIS CONSOR T KHALA DUC MO

3-10 THE FOUR WRATHFUL ONES WHO AVERT EVIL

East
3 Trossê Khagying (Khro gsas mkha' 'gying), 'Wrathful God Towering in the Sky'
4 consort: Nelê (Ne slas), 'Earth'\(^3\)
North
5 Ngamsê Khagying (rNgam gsas mkha' 'gying), 'Fierce God Towering in the Sky'
6 consort: Limun (Li mun), 'Air'
West
7 Welsê Khagying (dBal gsas mkha' 'gying), 'Piercing God Towering in the Sky'
8 consort: Tsangtang (Tshangs stang), 'Fire'
South
9 Tumsê Khagying (gTum gsas mkha' 'gying), 'Ferocious God Towering in the Sky'
10 consort: Tingnam (Ting nam), 'Water'

11-26 THE EIGHT EMANATIONS OF THE OUTER CIRCLE\(^2\)

East
11 Tongsê Drömmra (mThong gsas sgron ma), God of Sight
North
12 consort: Lishag (Li shag)

East
13 Nyet-lha Hosang (sNyan lha ho sangs), God of the Ear
West
14 consort: Khashag (Kha shag)

East
15 Shang-lha Rumpo (Shangs lha rum po), God of the Nose
South
16 consort: Gyumshag (IGyum shag)

East
17 Gul-lha Changyug (mGul lha byang yug), God of the Throat
Northwest
18 consort: Reshag (Re shag)

South
19 Tsik-lha Gyurbu (Tshigs lha gyur bu), God of the Spine
East
20 consort: Chushag (Chu shag)

North
21 Namdrak Ngarchen (gNam grags ngar chen), 'Powerful Roar in the Sky'
Northwest
22 consort: Gyashag (Kya shag)

Southwest
23 Mape Lhachen (Ma pad ha chen), 'Great God Mape'
South
24 consort: Kyelshag (sKyel shag)

Northwest
25 Karpo Nedzin (dKar po gnas 'dzin), 'White Place-holder'

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27-34 THE FOUR DOOR-KEEPER S

East
27 Welgyi Gyalpo (dBal gryi rgyal po), 'All-piercing King'
28 consort: Zeshag (gZe zhags)
North
29 Tagdro Gyalpo (sTag gros rgyal po), 'Tiger-gait King'
30 consort: Langre (Glang re)
West
31 Kyindang Mipü (sKyin 'dang mi phud)\(^3\)
32 consort: Libar (Li bar)
South
33 Topkyi Gyalpo (sTobs kyi rgyal po), 'Forceful King'
34 consort: Khala Khyakdor (mKha' 'khyags 'dor), 'Removing Frost in the Sky'

35-61 THE TWENTY-SEVEN POWERFUL LADIES\(^4\)

35 blue, having the head of a dragon
36 dark green, having the head of a snake

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Tutelary Deities
black, having the head of a jackdaw
white, having the head of a lion
red, having the head of a bear
dark-red, having the head of a wolf
dark-brown, having the head of a tiger
yellow-green, having the head of a garuda
blue-green, having the head of a makara
reddish-yellow, having the head of a wild yak
white, having the head of a vulture
black, having the head of a black bear
yellow, having the head of an elephant
blue, having the head of a leopard
yellow-green, having the head of an owl
red, having the head of a falcon
spotted-grey, having the head of a snow-leopard
dark red, having the head of a boar
white, the chinti of gods ("a white woman")
blue, the chinti of the earth ("a black woman with locks of leather")
black, the chinti of demons ("a black woman with nine faces of leather")
brown, the chinti of mu (dmu) ("a brown woman with azure-blue locks")
blue, the chinti of lu (klu) ("a blue woman with six faces")
white, the chinti of nyen (griyan) ("a white woman with two turquoise faces")
red, the chinti of sin (sin) ("a red woman with nine heads")
blue-green, the chinti of cha (phya) ("a blue-green woman with two heads")
dark red, the chinti of gek (bgegs) ("a dark red woman with iron locks")

THE NINE FEMALE ATHLETES (GYAD MO DGU)55
reddish-yellow, having the head of a wild yak
white, having the head of a vulture
black, having the head of a black bear
yellow, having the head of an elephant
blue, having the head of a leopard
yellow-green, having the head of an owl
red, having the head of a falcon
spotted-grey, having the head of a snow-leopard
dark red, having the head of a boar

THE NINE chinté (BYIN TE DGU)56
white, the chinté of gods ("a white woman")
blue, the chinté of the earth ("a black woman with locks of leather")
black, the chinté of demons ("a black woman with nine faces of leather")
brown, the chinté of mu (dmu) ("a brown woman with azure-blue locks")
blue, the chinté of lu (klu) ("a blue woman with six faces")
white, the chinté of nyen (griyan) ("a white woman with two turquoise faces")
red, the chinté of sin (sin) ("a red woman with nine heads")
blue-green, the chinté of cha (phya) ("a blue-green woman with two heads")
dark red, the chinté of gek (bgegs) ("a dark red woman with iron locks")

THE TEN FEMALE ATHLETES (GYAD BCU)

72-81 THE TEN GENERALS (dMac dpun bcu)
72 Having the head of an elephant
73 Having the head of a bear
74 Having the head of a makara
75 Having the head of a wolf
76 Having the head of a snow-leopard
77 Having the head of a garuda
78 Having the head of a heron
79 Having the head of a pig
80 Having the head of a bear
81 Having the head of a tiger

THE FOUR OUTER DOOR-KEEPERS
82 east: white, having the face of a lion
83 north: brown (?), having the face of a pig
84 west: blue, having the face of a dragon
85 south: black, having the face of a bear

In addition to these figures, the thangka shows a number of other figures, divine as well as human. In the central part of the second row may be seen the Five Enlightened Ones in their aspect as heads of the Five Spiritual Families, Gyalwa Riknga (rgyal ba rigs lnga), each with a consort (86-90). They are flanked by two tutelary deities, Welsê Ngampa (91) to the left and Lhagô Thogpa (92) to the right.

In the bottom row are seated five persons in religious garb; the fifth wears the robes and 'lotus hat', pesha (pad zhna), of a drangs srong (drang srong), a fully ordained monk. He faces a table on which are placed offerings appropriate to a fierce deity, viz. red offering-cakes, torma (gtor ma). To the right are five fierce deities belonging to the class of 'Protectors of the Doctrine', tseung (bstan srong). Only the second, the goddess Sîpa Gyalmo (srid pa'i rgyal mo), 'Queen of the Created World' (see Chapter Three), can be identified.
The central dark-blue deity is Welse Ngampa (1) with nine heads and eighteen arms, embraced by his consort 'the Great Fierce Mother', Ngammo Yumchen (rNgam mo yum chen) (2). Immediately above the Father and Mother is Künzang Gyalwa Düpa (3). To the right of the main deity is the Wrathful Deity of Speech, Lhago Togpa (Lha rgod thog pa) (4), dark blue, with four faces and eight arms, embraced by his consort Sipé Gyalmo (Srid pa'i rgyal mo); to the left is the Wrathful Deity of Mind, Tsochog Khagying (gTso mchog rnkha' 'gying) (5), dark blue, with three faces and six arms, embraced by his consort Khala Dugmo (mKha' la gdwug mo).

On the thangka it is further possible to identify the ‘Four Wrathful Ones Who Avert Evil’, Dogché Trowo (Zlog byed khro bo), corresponding to deities nos. 3, 5, 7 and 9 of Plate 26, with their respective consorts. On the present thangka they can be located on Fig. 3 as nos. 6-9. The majority of the remaining multitude of minor deities cannot be confidently identified. There is no doubt that they correspond in a general way to the minor deities forming the entourage of Trowo Tsochog Khagying, portrayed on Plate 26. Thus nos. 10-12 belong to the troupe of the Nine chinte (byin te), identical with nos. 58, 59 and 57 respectively of Plate 26. In the bottom row are included the tutelary deity Gaṇacakra (13) and the two Protectors of the Doctrine, Nyipangsé (Nyi pang sad) (14) and Menmo (sMan mo) (15), who are particularly associated with Mount Kailash and hence with the holy land of Zhangzhung (see Chapter Three).

In the lower left-hand corner may be seen three lamas seated beside a table laden with ritual offerings. To the right of the table two laymen and a laywoman appear in a lotus, as if being reborn in a celestial sphere; they surely represent the lay patrons who commissioned the thangka.
Plate 28
Welse Ngampa
Joachim Baader—Schoetle Ostasiatica,
Galerie für tibetische Kunst, Munich

In the centre is the tutelary deity Welse Ngampa with nine heads and eighteen arms, holding the attributes described in the invocation (1) (p. 78). He is embraced by his consort, whose colour and attributes likewise correspond to the invocation (2). He stands on a lotus throne supported by five animals, from the left: lion, elephant, horse, dragon and garuda.

In the upper right and left corners are two other tutelary deities: Lhago Thogpa to the left (i.e. to the deity’s right) (3), and Trowo Tsochog Khagying to the right (4), embraced by their consorts, Sipe Gyalmo and Khala Dugmo respectively.

He is accompanied by the ‘Four Wrathful Ones Who Avert Evil’, Dogché Trowo (Zlog byed khrbo), each with three heads and six arms and embraced by a consort:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>7W</th>
<th>65</th>
<th>64</th>
<th>66</th>
<th>6N</th>
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<td>85</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5E</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>east: Trosé Khagying</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>north: Ngamsé Khagying</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>west: Welse Khagying</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>south: Tumse Khagying</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

On these deities, see Plate 26. Together with the central deity they form a pentad of deities who have transcended birth and death; this is marked by the clouds separating them from the other deities portrayed on the thangka.

The twenty-seven goddesses forming the entourage of Welse Ngampa are portrayed in groups, corresponding to the same groups that form the entourage of Trowo Tsochog Khagying in the thangka on Plate 26:

9-17 THE NINE ZEN
18-26 THE NINE FEMALE ATHLETES
27-35 THE NINE CHINTÉ

36-39 THE GUARDIANS OF THE FOUR QUARTERS:
Four animals, yak, dragon, garuda and tiger, leap forth from behind the main deity. Clearly they are guardians of the four directions. As the yak is normally assigned to the north and the tiger to the south, the dragon and garuda may be placed to the east and the west respectively:

| 36 | east: dragon |
| 37 | north: yak |
| 38 | west: garuda |
| 39 | south: tiger |

40-47 THE EIGHT GODDESSES OF OFFERINGS, CHÖPE LHAMO GYE (mChod pa’i lhmo mbrgyad)

48-51 THE GODDESSES OF THE FOUR SEASONS

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Plate 29
Welsé Ngampa
Tibet
Photo: Per Kvæne

In the centre of the thangka is the yidam Welsé Ngampa with nine heads and eighteen arms, embraced by his consort, the Lady of Boundless Space. Their colours, attributes, etc. are as described in the invocation (p. 77). The deities which fill the remaining space on the thangka are not, as one might have expected, the specific entourage of Welsé Ngampa, but are the twelve principal tutelary deities of Bon, identified by inscriptions below each deity:

Top row, centre: Meri (Me ri)
Second row, left: Raksha Chidul (Raksha spyi 'dul)
                right: Purpa Rampa (Phur pa ram pa)
Third row, left: Drenpa Namkha (Dran pa nam mkha’)
                right: Sangchog (gSang mchog, i.e. Ma rgyud)
Fourth row, left: Drugse Chempa ('Brug gsas chem pa)
                right: Tsochog Khagying (gTso mchog mkha’ `gying)
Fifth row, from left to right: Traktung Rolpa (Khrag mthung rol pa)
                                 Takla Mebar (sTag la me ‘bar)
                                 Lhagö Thogpa (Lha rgod thog pa)
                                 Nampar Jompa (rNam par ‘joms pa)
                                 Bumpa Saya (‘Bum pa sa ya)

All the deities are embraced by consorts except Meri, Takla Mebar and Nampar Jompa.

The thangka further shows the Five Great Garudas. In the top row, on either side of Meri, are, from left to right:

The great garuda of Perfect Action (phrin las)
The great garuda of Infallible Mind (thugs)
The great garuda of Auspicious Good Quality (yon tan)
The great garuda of Unimpeded Speech (gsung)

Below the second garuda is the slightly smaller, white figure of the fifth garuda, the great garuda of Immutable Body (sku).
In the same position on the other side of the thangka is a skull with the brain exposed and the eyes hanging out of their sockets as an offering to the fierce deities.

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Plate 30
Welchen Gekhó
V. d. W. Collection
90 x 60 cm.

The bluish-black central deity can be easily recognized as Welchen Gekhó with his consort, Logbar Tsamé, ‘Lady of Flashing Lightning’. The attributes of Welchen Gekhó and his consort are as described in the invocation (p. 81); it should be noted, however, that while the deity is described as having nine heads, the thangka in fact portrays him with ten heads, the nine demonic faces being surmounted by the head of a garuda.

Several texts describe the entourage of Welchen Gekhó, but as far as can be seen, these descriptions refer to different sets of figures from those portrayed here. He stands on a lotus throne supported by five animals: lion, elephant, tiger, horse and l~mknrn.

25-28 The Five Gekhó:
25 Gekhó Dzomen Tiki Dag (Ge khod dzo man this kyi bdag)
26 Gekhó Ringnam Trulmo (Ge khod ring nam 'phrul rno)
27 Gekhó Sisurn Kiindiil (Ge khod srid gsurn kun 'dul)
28 ...
29 Kulha Gekhó Wopung (SKU Iha ge khod 'od dpung)

30-13 The Six Great Penetrating Fierce Gods, Welgi Trochen Drug (dBal gyi khrø chen drug):
8 east: Welmo Karser Bar (dBal mo dkar ser 'bar)
9 north: Welmo Ngojang Bar (dBal mo sngo ljang 'bar)
10 west: Welmo Marmag Bar (dBal mo dmar nag 'bar)
11 south: Welmo Yuvö Bar (dBal mo s.yu 'od 'bar)
12 above: Welmo Tingnag Bar (dBal mo 'thing nag 'bar)
13 below: Welmo Marmug Bar (dBal mo dmar smug 'bar)
Each goddess has three faces and six arms, and is clad in a tiger-skin loincloth.

14 Ati Muwer 15 Kuchi Mangke
16-21 The Six Little Youths:
16 The Magic Little Youth with the Body of Peacefulness, Trulpe Khye'uchung Shiwe Ku (sPrul pa'i khye'u chung zhi ba' sku)
17 ... with the Body of Expansion, Gyepé Ku ( ... rgyas pa'i sku)
18 ... with the Body of Power, Wanggi Ku ( ... dbang gi sku)
19 ... with the Body of Ferocity, Dragpö Ku ( ... drag po'i sku)
20 ... with the ‘Method of Throwing out’ of the Lord of Death, Dortabchen ( ... 'dor thabs can)
21 The Little Youth of the Sky with the Radiance of zi, Namkhé Khye'uchung Zidangchen (Nam mkha'i khye'u chung gzi mdangs can)

22-24 The Four Fierce Gods of Action, Lekì Trowo Zhi (Las kyi khro bo bzhü):
22 The Unique Consort with the Face of a maknro, Luyi Chamchig Chusin Dong (Klu yi lcam gcig chu srin gdong)
23 The Unique Life-consort, Performer of Action, Tseyi Chamchig Lechema (Teše yi lcam gcig las byed ma)
24 The Black Female Demon, Performer of Action, Lusin Nagmo Lechema (Klu srin nag mo las byed ma)
(Only three deities are shown on the thangka.)

34-37 The Four Kings of the Four Quarters:

Protectors of the Doctrine:
38 Nyipangsé (Nyi pang sad) 39 Draplamo (dGra bla mo)

Lamas:
40 Tridem Chaggi Charuchen (Khri idem lcags kyi bya ru can)40
41 Zhangzhung Takpa Gyalpo (Zhang zhung sTag sna rgyal po)41

Fig. 5

The ‘Father’ (yab), Sangwa Dragchen, i.e. Welchen Gekhó
The ‘Mother’ (yum), Mitsamé, Queen of Drapla (dGra bla'i rgyal mo Mu tsa med), i.e. Logbar Tsamé
The Five Great Garudas (Khyung chen rigs lnga), each characterized by a different colour
Ati Muwer 5 Kuchi Mangké 6 Shenlha Wökar 7. Tönpa Shenrap
Plate 31
Meri
R.E.E. Collection
85 x 76 cm.
(also in Auboyer and Béguin 1977: Plate 204, text p. 186)

The complete entourage of the tutelary deity Meri is portrayed on this thangka, in addition to the lamas who form the lineage of transmission of his cult, and a number of other deities. The chief deity and his entourage are numbered and their positions indicated in Fig. 6:

1. **The Tutelary Deity Meri (Me ri)**.
2. Garuda
3. Ati Muwer (A ti mu wer)
4. Kuchi Mangkê (Ku byi mang ke)
5. Namkhe Ole (Nam mkha’i o slas)
6. Nelé Sipé Gyalmo (Ne slas srđ pa’i rgyal mo)

Nos. 1-6 are depicted as described in the invocation (p. 84).

7-16. **The Ten Terrifying Ones, each with a consort and two ‘messengers’, ponya (pho nyla)**.

**East:**
17. Wegli gyalpo Melagyang (dBar gyi rgyal po me la rgyung)
   - consort: Satenma (Sra brtan ma)
   - messengers: lion-face, vulture-head.

18-20. **The Four Gatekeeper-Athletes (sGo ba gyad bzhi)**.

19. east: a white man with the head of a lion, riding a white lion, holding a three-pointed, crystal staff (ber ga).
20. south: a blue man with the head of a nukara, riding an aquatic demon (pin), holding a sharp (dbal) sword.
21. west: a red man with the head of a wild boar, riding a red boar, brandishing towards the sky an axe of meteoric iron.
22. north: a black man with the head of a wild yak, riding a yellowish-white wild yak, holding bow and arrow.

23-32. **The Twelve Female Messengers (Pho nya mo bcu gnyis)**.

24. An individual identification of each of the Twelve Female Messengers is not possible on the basis of the text.

33-36. **The Four Female Generals (dMag dpon ma bzhi)**.

36. east: Takrirong (sTag ri rong), Queen of drapas; reddish-black, riding a tiger.
Plate 31 cont.

34 north: Limün Lengye (Li mun lan bgyad), wears golden armour, riding a violent storm.
35 east: Nelé Gyalmo (Ne słas rgyal mo), 'Queen of the Earth', wears turquoise armour, riding a makara.
36 south: Yarkhyé Jowo (Yar skyes rje bo), leader of the Nine Masang Brothers, wears a white silk gown and turban, riding a white horse.
37 The sister-consort of the Nine Masang Brothers, wearing the feathers of a peacock, riding a white horse.78
38-40 The Protectors of the Four Rivers (mTsho bzhi srung ma):
38 Chatsamé (Phya tsa med), a white lady of silver, wearing a silver helmet and crystal armour, riding a black mule; protecting the silver lake of Gunggyi (Gung rgyud).
39 Tingtsamé (Ting tsa med), a blue lady of turquoise, wearing a turquoise helmet and blue armour, riding a turquoise Indian (?) falcon; protecting the turquoise lake of Mapang (Ma pang).
40 Tsyltsamé (rTsal tsa med), a yellow lady of gold, wearing a golden helmet and armour, riding a yellow tigress; protecting the golden lake of Langag (La ngag).
41 Betsamé (rBe tsa med), a bluish-black lady of molten metal, wearing a helmet of molten metal and blue armour of iron, riding a great garuda of meteoric iron; protecting the iron lake of Somshang (Zom shang).
42-45 The Protectors of the Four Lakes (Chu bzhi srung ma):
42 east: Heru Khungcham (He ru khyung lcam), wearing a tiger-skin and a golden helmet, seated on a throne supported by an all-knowing horse; protecting the white conch-river.
43 north: Mula Tsamé (Mu la tsa med), 'Lady of Heaven', with a single braid of hair and a white gown, seated on a throne supported by shangshang, protecting the yellow gold-river.
44 west: Draplé Gyalmo (gSgra bla'i rgyal mo), 'Queen of drapla', of bluish-black colour, seated on a throne supported by a mighty elephant; protecting the red copper-river.
45 south: Tingnam Gyalmo (Ting nam rgyal mo), a black lady of iron, wearing a bluish-black cloak, seated on a throne supported by a magic peacock; protecting the blue turquoise-river.

In the bottom row, three figures to the right can be identified as important Protectors of Bon: Sipe Gyalmo, 'Queen of the Created World' (46), Nyipangso (47) and Menno (48). The latter two are, like Meri himself, associated with Zhangzhung. All three are dealt with in Chapter Three. To the left are three lamas, two wearing the characteristic 'lotus hat', while the lama in the middle wears a hat called serthel (ser thed), said to be 'worn by high ecclesiastical dignitaries'. The names of the three lamas are given in short inscriptions below each, from left to right: Tsugplu Tsońltrim, the drungsung (fully ordained monk) of the Shen (gShen) lineage; the drungsung Namdag Tsońltrim; and the drungsung Gyaltsen Tsońltrim. Nothing is known concerning the origin or dates of these lamas.

Starting from the top left-hand corner, the two top rows depict the lineage of transmission of the cult of Meri. The fourth to seventh figures in the upper row (49-52) can be identified as Ati Mwuer, Kuchi Mangke, Meri and Sangwa Dupa (see Chapter Four). Finally, the Eight Goddesses of Offerings (mChod 'bul ma bgyad) are ranged along the left and right sides of the thangka (53-60). They represent the offerings of form, body, sound, beautiful objects, smell, mind, taste and enjoyment, but their respective attributes cannot be clearly identified on the thangka. There remain a number of deities in the three bottom rows which it has not been possible to identify.

Plate 32
Reverse of thangka, Plate 31

Thangkas frequently have inscriptions on the backside, usually consisting of a series of mantras and a short prayer. In the case of Bonpo thangkas, the mantras consist of mantric syllables such as A, OM, UHM etc., Tibetan words such as wi (wa), kar (kar) and du (du), and words and syllables such as ngelo (ngye lo), trup (pra phun), shesrin (she thu), and ngrin (ngyi ri), regarded as being in the Zhangzhung language.

The inscription on this thangka is contained within the outline of a stupa surrounded by the heads of two garudas flanking a flaming jewel. The horn and eyes of the garudas are given particular emphasis.

The main body of the text consists of a series of different mantras, which cannot be further discussed here. The bottom line is of particular interest, as the name of one of the lamas mentioned on the front side is repeated: 'It (i.e. the thangka) has been presented (or: made) by the drungsung of the Shen lineage, Tsugplu Gyaltsen, as the tutelary deity of this life and the next. May all sentient beings of the Three Realms (i.e. the entire universe) be encompassed by the compassion of the Three Lords, who are tutelary deities' Auspiciousness.'
Chapter 2 Notes


2. Briefly presented in Karmay 1972: 45 n.2 and Karmay 1975b: 197-198. Sekhar (gnas mkhar), 'temple, shrine', is a specifically Bonpo term, gnas corresponding to Tibetan lha, 'god'.


4. On Sipé Gyalo, see Karmay 1972: 126-140 and Martin 1991: 224-305. The invocation has been published in Kvarne 1900a, where the Tibetan text with references may also be found. The text is Khro bo dzang chen gyi pha nyi le'u, fol.1b-4b, text no.15 in Zhi khro sgrib skor, Delhi c. 1967.

5. In the line-drawing published in Kvarne 1900a: 121, the attributes held in the three left hands of the deity are, from above, lasso, hook and arrow (without bow). See also Plate 26.


7. 'Liberate', drol (igrol), is a euphemism for 'kill', the implication being that the demons are prevented from returning to the round of birth-and-death, thus being effectively liberated.

8. dPal indicates any pointed, sharp, piercing object, including the penetrating, consuming force of fire or lightning; it is translated 'piercing' or 'all-devouring'. See Rock 1952: 1,130-131 (n.109) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 312-317. GSas means 'god', see note 2 above.

9. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 317 "which has been dipped into the five kinds of poison" is a misunderstanding, perhaps arising from a tendency to focus on the exterior, 'demoniciacal', aspect of the yidam.


11. Note that the deity on the thangka reproduced on Page 27 has a trident.

12. Nebesky-Wojkowitz ("arrow-head") has clearly read mthu' for mthe'u. The exact significance of mthe'u, 'little-finger', is not clear, but the object which can be seen on Plate 27 is the conventional representation of a thunderbolt.

13. I am at a loss to explain gling re in gling re gshang chen.

14. Nebesky-Wojkowitz ("cat") has clearly read zi (mi) for byi (br), 'rat'. The translation of 'jug skyen' is tentative, based partly on how the animal is actually held on the thangka, and partly on the supposition that one should read mjug, 'hind foot', for 'jug'.

15. On Satrig Ersang and Chamma (below), see Chapter One.

16. Namchi Gunggyal (gNam phyi gung rgyal), 'Celestial Grandmother, Queen of the Sky', occurs in cosmological myths. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 202 and 317 wrongly gives her name as gNam phyi bsdud ("demon") rgyal.

17. This refers to Chime Tsugpu, see Chapter One. On Zangsa Ringssun, see Chapter Four.

18. On Sipé Gyalo, see Chapter Four.

19. The deity referred to is Trewo Tsochog Khagying, on whom see above.

20. From the dBal gnas sku rdza's gzhung, pp.231-292 in: sMin ri ba'i phyag len skor dang bon skyang sog sgis kyi ched bston, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Ochghat (India), 1975. The same text is the source of the brief summary given by Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 316-317, who has either misread the names of these two deities, or had a faulty manuscript copy of the text: for Khra 'byungs lha, read mkha' 'gyungs lha and for mkha' 'la gdag (Index p.608 has gbud, likewise an error) mo bdag kun gyi yun, read ... ka kun gyi yun.


25. I adopt the spelling found in Bonpo texts, viz. sgra bla. The spelling used in Buddhist texts is dgra lha. Cf. Snellgrove 1967: 258 n.20. On the dgra lha, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 318 ff. (Ch. XVII).

26. In Tibetan, there are a wide range of terms which are difficult to translate otherwise than by 'demon'. Such terms, which occur frequently in invocations to fierce gods, are sin (tnin, which is the term occurring here), don (gdon), dui (bdshu) and gek (bgegs, 'hindrance').

27. As the god has three eyes, they form a triangle.


29. The sna lag (sa bdag), lhu (klu) and myen (ngyen) are supernatural, ambiguous beings, often mentioned together. The lu is identified with the Indian nāga, in contexts where this Indian association would seem to be absent, the Tibetan term lu is retained. Cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 288-298.


31. Natse (ma ri), unidentified object.

32. Tso (btsa), 'bomb', is a magic devise composed of various substances and infused with great destructive power. Hurling 'bombs' at enemies is regarded in Bonpo tradition as a ritual practice in which the priests of Zhangzhung were experts. Cf. Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 100-102.

33. Tiding (thod rding), an unidentified object, presumably some kind of hair ornament.

34. Tsa (dzos) is a variant form of the word tso, cf. note 32 above.


40. Gc khot gsong ba drag chen gyi sgrib skor: 266-267 (cf. note 34).


42. On the thangka reproduced on Plate 31, the heads of tiger and bear have changed places.
Denkar (idan kar), 'canine, sceptre', cf. Karmay 1972: 92 n. 6 and 350; on the thangka it resembles some kind of banner.

She thun is the Zhangzhung term for 'heart', cf. Haarh 1968: 41. On the thangka, however, the object depicted resembles an axe or a hammer.

Se urag (ce u rag), unidentified jewel.

Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 268 states that Byi na ya ga (Sanskrit Vinayaka, i.e. Ganesha) is the leader of the gek (bgegs) demons. Here it would rather seem to be the name of a class of demons. The se (sbe) are likewise a class of demons, cf. Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 310. On the gyal gong (rgyal 'gong'), see ibid.: 300. Tamsi (dam sri) literally signifies 'vampires of swamps'.

The text has the spelling Nam mkha' i od las; if od is a mistake for 'od, the three first syllables could be understood as 'Light of Heaven'. Las as an isolated syllable remains unexplained, but cf. Ne las, 'Earth', cf. note 51.

On the thangka reproduced on Plate 31, both goddesses are shown standing in a dancing posture to the right and left of Meri.


The names of the elements are in the language of Zhangzhung.

The names of deities nos. 11, 13, 15, 17 and 19 begin with the name of a part of the body, followed by lha (or ges), 'god', and finally an epithet consisting of two syllables which (apart from that of no. 11, drötna, 'lamp') remain unclear. No. 21 is, literally, 'Powerful Sky-sound'; the final two syllables of no. 23 signify 'great god' and no. 25 literally translates as 'White Place-holder'.

On skyon 'dang, see Stein 1971b: 545-547.

The Twenty-seven 'Powerful Ladies', wangs mo (dhang mo), form the entourage of Dipé Gyalmo (Srid pa'i rgyal mo), 'Queen of the Created World', see Chapter Three. They are discussed in Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 312-315.

For more information on the 'Nine Female Athletes', see Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 313.

Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956. 313 "heron" must be wrong.

Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956. 313 "ox (or elephant ?)"). The figure on the thangka has an elephant's head.

For the cosmogonic myth describing the birth of these goddesses from nine eggs, see Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 313-315, where a description of each figure may be found. The characteristic appearance of each is given in parentheses, quoting Nebsky-Wojkowitz.


Each of the four animals—tiger, dragon, yak and garuda—is characterized as sgrub (dbal), 'piercing, devouring'.

I am unable to translate no.71 cha la rgyung ni.

The figures on the thangka seem to be roughly equivalent to the four goddesses described by Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 315-316.


Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 274, according to whom the god rides an otter and wields an axe (sta mo) of meteoric iron and a battle-lance with a pendant of black silk.

The following texts are to be found in the volume entitled Gile khdod gsang bo drag chen gyi sgrub skor, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Ochghat (India), 1973: Dlad 'du lhal gsang drag chen gnyon rtogs gsal bsdug sgron me, pp. 155-195; pp. 161 ff; Dba' chen ge khaod bsdud 'du lhal gsang drag chen gyi sgrub zhung gzhung ldog med gser gyi sgron me, pp. 231-283; pp. 263 ff.

No name is indicated.

Zhangzhung sage through whom the cults of Meri and of Gekhi were passed, cf. Karmay 1972: 50.


Each deity is described as having three faces, six arms and four feet. To the name of each is added the epithet tuweche (mthu bo che), 'having great magic power'. To the names of the consorts is invariably prefixed the term yungdrung (g yung drung), 'eternal'. Each pair of messengers consists of one having the 'face' of an animal and one having the 'head' of a bird. The description is found in Me ri gsang ba dpa' bo gnyad phur gyi sgrub pa'i phrim las, pp. 123-127, in Zhang zhung Me ri bka' gter gnyis kyi sgrub skor, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Ochghat (India), 1973, cf. pp. 174-180. The descriptions of other groups of deities in the entourage of Meri are taken from the same text.

rGyung is a Zhangzhung word meaning 'lightning'; this would fit well with the terms dbal and me, 'fire'. Cf. Haarh 1968: 37.

Sn is a Zhangzhung word which may mean 'supreme, utmost' (Tibetan rab), cf. Haarh 1968: 32; her name would thus mean 'the supremely Firm'.

There are certain patterns in the names of these gods and their consorts: the gods of the cardinal directions and below are all styled gsal po (rgyal po), 'king', or kun la (skt lha), 'body-god', a designation usually reserved for gods residing on sacred mountains. The names of their consorts may be translated as follows: 'Birth-giver' (9), 'Ripener' (11), 'Support-giver' (13) and 'Sustainer' (16). The gods of the intermediate directions all have the Zhangzhung term mttver (mu wer), 'King of the Sky', as the second part of their names, while the second part of the names of their consorts is tsa nema (tsho med ma), the Zhangzhung word for 'woman', cf. Haarh 1968: 38.


A pir (pir), here described as an 'aquatic monster' (chur shu, Sanskrit makara), is usually shown as a monster with a balloon-shaped body (sometimes said to have the shape of a gong). On the thangka it is portrayed as a makara.


Pp. 185-190, cf. note 61 above. The fourth member of this group is in fact a male.

Masang Pungu (Ma sangs spun dgu) are explicitly stated to be 'brothers' (mting po). On the Nine Masang Brothers in a Buddhist context, see Nebsky-Wojkowitz 1956: 156.

The text states that she holds a drum and a shung (gsbang).
‘flat-bell’, as her attributes; these objects are held by the figure which is second from the left in the same row. Nevertheless, the peacock dress and the white crane make the identification of the figure numbered 37 practically certain.


rGya khra could also be ‘Chinese falcon’, as rGya can be short for rGya gar, ‘India’, as well as rGya nag, ‘China’.


On the thangka the four goddesses are seated not on thrones, but on the animal in question. On the ‘all-knowing’ (cang chyes) horse, cf. Stein 1959: 535-542.

Mula Tsamé (Mu la tsa med) is in the Zhangzhung language, cf. Haarh 1968.

The shanglung (shang shang) is a mythological animal, half bird, half human. See Plate 58 below.

Zhangzhung ting can mean ‘water’, ‘blue’ and ‘turquoise’, cf. Haarh 1968: 32; tingnam (ting nam) is found as an epithet to yu (g.yu), ‘turquoise’.

Snellgrove 1967: 274 (Plate VI(a)).

“gshen gyis drangs (sic) rTsug phud tshul khrims la na mo/ drangs (sic) rNams bdag (sic) tshul khrims la na mo/ thabs zhes drangs (sic) rgyal mtshan tshul khrims la na mo/ bkra shis/.”


On Bonpo stupas, see Denwood 1980.

The Three Lords are Ati Muwer, Kuchi Mangke and Welchen Ghekho (i.e. in this context Meri), according to Namkhai Norbu 1989: 32.

“gShen gyis drangs (sic) rTsug (sic) phud rgyal mtshan gyis tsho bdi’ (sic) phyis 2 kyis yid dam du bzhangs (for bzhengs) pa yin/ khamgs gsun sems can thams cad yid dam gon po rnam (sic) 3 kyis thugs rjes bzung 1/ bkra shis/.”
CHAPTER THREE

Protectors and Local Deities

The 'Protectors', sungma (srung ma), are an important category of gods within the pantheon of Bon. They are frequently styled bönkyong (bon skyong), 'Protectors of Bon', kakyong (bka’ skyong), 'Protectors of the Word', or tenkyong (bstan skyong), 'Protectors of the Doctrine'. Although their character and general appearance correspond to similar deities in Buddhism, the Protectors of Bon have their individual attributes, mythology and cult. Most of them manifest themselves in fierce form, although there are exceptions to this rule.

SIPÉ GYALMO (Plate 33)

Chief among the Protectors of Bon is Sipé Gyalmo (Srid pa’i rgyal mo), 'Queen of the Created World'. Her name is often abridged to Sigyal (Srid rgyal). It is said that she was originally one of the demonic beings called 'the Female Arrogant Ones', and that she was compelled to become a religious protector when Takla Mebar (see Chapter Four) subdued her by giving her his semen.\(^1\) She is also known as Namchi Gunggyal (gNam phyi gung rgyal), 'Grandmother of Heaven, Queen of the Sky'.\(^2\)

In her most common aspect, she rides a black or a red mule—thus obviously resembling the Buddhist goddess Palden Lhamo (dPal ldan lha mo), 'the Glorious Goddess'—and has three faces and six arms. She also has a dark-brown manifestation, and, finally, two forms—a white and a black—riding on birds. Among the many sacred dances of Bon—dances which are still performed today in Bonpo monasteries—one is entirely devoted to representing six different manifestations of Sipé Gyalmo, each being related to a particular time of the day and characterized by a different colour.\(^3\)

The following invocation is directed to Sipé Gyalmo 'Riding a Red Mule', Sigyal Drelmar (Srid rgyal drel dmar), and is excerpted from a Tantra focusing on the goddess:\(^4\)

As for her three faces,
The face to the right is white and smiling,
That to the left is red and fierce,
That in the centre is bluish-black and wrathful.
Her blackish hair stands on end,
Her three eyes shine like the essence of the sun;
Her nose has the beautiful wrinkles of a wrathful deity,
Her mouth gapes like a receptacle for an all-consuming fire-offering,
Her innumerable teeth are ranged like snow mountains,
Her tongue makes a terrible clicking sound,  
Her beard sends forth sparks as from an apocalyptic fire,  
Her roaring resounds like thunder in the sky.  
The upper part of her bluish-black body is adorned  
With the moist, ash-grey skin of an elephant and of a human being;  
On the lower garment, consisting of a moist tiger-skin,  
Is attached the skin of a fierce bear.  
Reddish-yellow venomous snakes are intertwined,  
Forming writhing necklaces;  
She is adorned with a threefold rosary  
Of dry, moist, and blood-dripping skulls.  
As for her terrifying attributes,  
In her top right hand she holds a zhingchung5—  
It is adorned with a crown of silk of various colours,  
Fluttering in the expanse of invisible space.  
In her top left hand a swastika  
Encompasses the secret space of the treasury of her heart.  
Her middle right hand brandishes a sword  
To the sky, like a flaming weapon.  
Her middle left hand holds a trident  
While a great drum resounds like thunder.  
Her lower right hand clasps a pointed dagger;  
Its triangular blade is thrust into the heart  
Of those who have perverted views.  
Her lower left hand holds a bowl  
Filled to the brim with billowing blood.  
As for the way she places her legs:  
In order to subdue the four demons of delusion  
And perfect the four kinds of forceful action,  
She haughtily draws in one leg and stretches out the other.  
As for her mule,  
The bluish-black tips of its ears are adorned with silk,  
Nāga kings are halter and bridle,  
Male and female vampires are made into her saddle,  
The still-moist skin of a corpse is her saddle carpet,  
The saddle-strap is fixed with a hundred thousand  
Pieces of cloth taken from corpses.6  
The stirrup-bands are made from the still-moist skin of corpses  
To which are attached stirrups made of skulls.  
The four hoofs of her mule  
Are supported by the Four Great Kings of the Quarters.

It is said that the cult of the goddess as a Protector of Bon was introduced by  
Shenchen Luga (gShen chen Klu dga', 996-1035). Her cult has remained extremely  
popular.7
Nyipangse (Nyipang sad) is above all associated with Zhangzhung. He is the guardian deity of the meditational teachings known as Dzokpa chenpo Zhangzhung nyengyü (rDzogs pa chen po Zhang zhung snyan rgyud). ‘The Great Perfection, the Aural Transmission of Zhangzhung’, which contain meditational practices believed to have been transmitted by the sages of Zhangzhung. It was the ‘Teacher of Bon’, gyerpung (gyer spungs) Nangzher Löpo (sNang bzher lod po), who lived in the eighth century, who compelled Nyipangse to become a Protector of Bon. He did this by performing the ritual of hurling a ‘bomb’, tso (btso), at the god, at the same time subduing all the sipa (srd pa) deities, male as well as female.

The dwelling of Nyipangse is the summit of Mount Meru, but this cosmic mountain is identified with Mount Tise (Ti se, i.e. Kailash) in Western Tibet, the holy moutain of Zhangzhung. He is subordinated to the mighty tutelary deity of Zhangzhung, Welchen Gekho (see Chapter Two).

In invocations to Nyipangse, the god is described as kasung (bka’ srung), ‘Guardian of the Word’, and tenph kakyong (bstan pa’i bka’ skyong), ‘Protector of the Word of the Doctrine’. He is a deity of the category styled gyalpo (rgyal po), ‘king’. He is ‘king of the drapla’ (sgra bla’i rgyal po) and ‘king of tsen’ (btsan gyi rgyal po). Gyalpo, drapla and tsen are all closely related categories of deities, fierce and potentially harmful, but capable of being bound by oaths to protect the Doctrine.

Nyipangse has certain traits in common with the great Buddhist religious protector Pehar (Pe har). Both are styled Shelgying Karpo (Shel’gying dkar po), ‘White Crystal-haughty One’, the colour of both is white, and they are both known as sogdag (srog bdag), ‘Lord of Life-force’. The name Nyipangse is in the Zhangzhung language, but cannot be entirely explained. Se (sad) means ‘god’ and nyi probably ‘sun’ (cf. Zhangzhung nyi ri, Tibetan nyi ma, ‘sun’). He is sometimes mentioned as belonging to a group of three deities in which a celestial phenomenon is part of the name: Nyipangse, Dapangse (Zla pang sad, cf. Tibetan zla ba, ‘moon’), and Zhnpangse (g’za’, ‘rainbow’). Pang remains unexplained.

Nyipangse does not have a consort, but he does have a goddess as his companion, the nammen (gnam sman) Namchi Gunggyal (gNam phyi gung rgyal), ‘Grandmother of the Sky, Queen of Heaven’. This goddess is also known from the epic of Gesar. The men (sman) are a class of ancient Tibetan female deities in which Bonpos as well as Buddhists believe. This particular men is often known simply as Menmo (sMan mo), or more fully as Men Kumaratsa (sMan Ku ma ra tsa). She, too, was subdued by Nangzher Löpo. She has an entourage consisting of ‘men of snow-mountains’ (gangs sman), ‘men of slate-mountains’ (g.ya’ sman), ‘men of cliffs’ (bras sman), ‘men of pasture’ (spang sman), ‘men of forests’ (nag sman), ‘men of rivers’ (chu sman), ‘men of lakes’ (nthsos sman) and ‘men of islands’ (do gling sman). Nyipangse is portrayed as a mighty king, clad in white robes and wearing a white turban. He rides a white horse. He does not have fierce or demonic attributes. One of his characteristics, shared by other gods, is the ability to appear under innumerable guises and different names, “remaining neither here nor there”; this fluid, indeterminate form is part of his divine nature. In his hands he holds a banner of white silk. Menmo is likewise without demonic traits. She rides a white yak.
The invocation to Nyipangse translated below was composed by Sherap Gyaltsen (1356–1415), the great scholar and organiser of Bonpo monastic life, in the monastery of Menri (sMan ri) in Tsang, which he founded in 1405:

BSVO! Do not forget, do not forget, your former oath do not forget!

Do not pass by, do not pass by, do not relax attention to your oath!

Obediently performing tasks that Welchen Gekho sets—

Protector of the Doctrine’s Word, King Nyipangse!

King of drapla, lord of life-force, possessing skill in magic power!

A male, white as conch-shell, the height of a spear:

On his body a garment of white silk flutters, lhup-sé-lhup.

At his waist a tiger-sword in a leopard-scabbard clatters, tra-la-la.

On his head a conch-white plait of hair is twisted round, dem-sé-dem.

In his hand a banner of white silk is displayed, cha-ra-ra.

As for his mount—a horse with red harness, prancing about, dring-sé-dring.

As for his entourage—a thousand vassal kings crowding together, bup-sé-bup.

When given a name by the Bon of Zhangzhung,

He is called ‘White Crystal-haughty’ Nyipangse.

When given a name by the king of Trom, He is called ‘Lord of Vital-force’, King of the Created World.

When given a name by the Bon of Eternal Tazik, He is called ‘White Crystal-haughty’.

When given a name by the Dharma of India, He is called Tsangpa with the conch-white hair-knot.

When given a name by the king of China, He is called King Dapangsé.

When given a name by Pugyal Tibet, He is called ‘the Great kyatrang (skya trang)’.

Assuming magic forms now here, now there, He transforms himself into every god and demon.

Remaining neither here nor there, He accompanies the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons.

Performing magic tricks now here, now there, He spreads abroad various tricks.

As for dwelling, he dwells on the summit of Mount Meru.

As for quaking, he causes the ten directions to quake.

As for action, he acts as guardian of the Doctrine, the Word of Bon.

As for realization, he realizes the rites of the sages who have taken vows.

With your entourage of emanations and secondary emanations, Without forgetting your former solemn oath,

We implore you to come like lightning, with magic feet!

We implore you to come with a loving mind, like a mother!

We implore you to come with a longing mind, like a friend!

Enjoy! Every desirable thing, every pleasure and ornament—enjoy!

Eat! The sacred ‘offering-cake of the Word’—eat!

Guard! The Doctrine of Eternal Bon—guard!
Realize! The thought of the sages who have taken vows—realize!
Praise! The 'Stage of Bon of the Triple Universe'—praise!
Repel! Adverse circumstances and hindrances—repel!
Act! As virtuous, white companion—act!
Increase! Retinue, enjoyment, power—increase!
Bestow! Long life, well-being of cattle, success—bestow!
Remove! Harmful enemies of the Doctrine—far hence remove!
Liberate! Enemies who break their oath—quickly liberate!

Do not forget, O king, guardian of the Doctrine,
Possessing magic power and strength!
Do not swerve from the oath of Welchen Gekhô!
Do not relax attention to your former solemn oath!
Do not pass by—fulfil the task you have been set!19

APSE (Plate 35)
Several Protectors belong to the class of ancient Tibetan deities known as tsen (btsan). They are believed to be fierce, aggressive beings, portrayed as mounted warriors clad in armour and holding various warlike attributes. In cosmological terms, they are associated with the middle region, the region between the vault of heaven and the underworld, hence they are frequently held to reside on mountains; their characteristic colour is red.20

One of the major Protectors of the class of tsen is Apse (A bsve). The se (bse or bsve) are a little-known sub-group of deities.21 Apse is depicted in the manner usual for a tsen, as in the invocation translated below. His most characteristic attribute is an owl, which he holds in his left hand; in his right he may hold a sword or a noose, or (as in Plate 34) a spear. He is styled 'cliff-tsen', draktsen (brag btsan), or 'king of tsen', and is said to dwell on the ledge of a cliff to the northeast of Mount Tisé (Kailash), 'at the border between Mon, Bal and Tibet'.22

The following invocation is said to have been extracted as part of the 'treasure', teriira &ter iliira), from Mount Dungpor in Tanag (rTa nag Dung phor) by Guru Nöntse (Gu ru rnon rtse, b. 1136).23

HÜM! Arise, O cliff-tsen—from the cliff-ledge arise!
Lord of vital-force, butcher—from the cliff-ledge arise!
In your right hand you hold the sword of Wisdom,
With your left, you send forth the cliff-bird, the owl.
Your body is adorned with huge red snakes.
As for your mount, you ride a (horse styled) 'Blinding Dust-storm'.
A violent storm roars, u-ru-ru;
Lightning and hail falls, sha-ra-ra;
Magic objects24 are hurled like stones, tra-la-la;
Magic spells are hurled like arrows, sha-ra-ra;
Thunder resounds in the sky, u-ri-ri;
Thunderbolts crash through the air, chem-sé-chem;
The ground is lit up like fire, lam-sé-lam;
Huge red snakes slither and slide, nyu-lu-lu.
When I, a sage, call upon
The great Lord of Life-force with his entourage,
Do not hesitate, come quickly here!
Bring the army of the Eight Classes of Gods and Demons
Up against the enemy who contends with me!
Inflict upon him 'sword-sickness', 'tsen-ache', vomiting of blood!
Hurl at him defilement, disorder, and weapons like rain!
Send sudden madness like arrows!
Kill the males, 'liberate' the females, cut off the line of offspring!
Cut off the vital-force, tear out the heart, grasp the breath!
Eat their flesh and drink their blood and flay their skin!
Without delaying for a year, a month, or a day,
At this very moment swiftly send arrows of illness!
Cut off the 'life-root' of the enemies who have broken their pledge!
Accomplish this task swiftly!
Fulfil the task you have been set!

**Drakpa Sengé (Plate 34)**

While some of the Protectors of Bon are of ancient Tibetan origin, this Protector is a fairly recent historical figure. Drakpa Sengé (Grags pa seng ge) is the name of the first 'Red Hat' (Zhva dmar) Incarnation (1283-1349) of the Karmapa sub-school of the Kagyüpa school. The story of how this Buddhist monk came to provide the name of a Protector of Bon has been recounted by S.G. Karmay. Briefly, the story is as follows: The Tenth Zhamar Incarnation, Chödrak Gyatso (Chos grags rgya mtsho, 1742-92), was involved with the Gorkha invasion of Tibet in 1792. When the Gorkhas had been driven out of Tibet, the property of Chödrak Gyatso was confiscated by the Tibetan government. He died in the same year, but his spirit turned into a malignant ghost. Eventually, the abbot of the Bonpo monastery of Menri (sMan ri), Sherap Gonggyal (Shes rab dgongs rgyal, b.1784, enthroned as abbot in 1810), summoned him and compelled him to swear an oath to become a Protector of Bon. The abbot was able to do this because he could invoke a connection in former lives between himself and the malignant spirit: the spirit had been none other than Shenchung Gowo (gShen chung go bo), a son of the Lord of Demons, Khyappa Laring (Khyab pa lag ring); his mother was one of Tönpa Shenrap's wives. The son was looked after by one of the disciples of Shenrap, Yungdrung Tsukshen Gyalwa (g.Yung drung gtsug gshen rgyal ba). The latter was now reborn as the abbot, while the son of the Lord of Demons was reborn successively as each incarnation of the Red Hat lineage. The abbot consequently gave him the name of Drakpa Sengé, the name of the first incarnation. Drakpa Sengé is shown wearing the robes and the hat of a Buddhist monk, riding a horse.

**Pangtsen (Plate 36)**

Innumerable minor deities are the local protectors of specific sites. They are seldom known outside their own locality, and indeed may often lack an individual personal name. Such is the case with Pangtsen (sPang btsan), literally 'Tsen of the Meadows', who protects the site of a small monastery in eastern Tibet.
Plate 35
Apsé
Wood carving, Tibet
Photo: Ogyenthar

Apsé is one of the many fierce deities of the tsen class. Like the tsen in general, he rides a horse, the colour of his body is red, and he wears armour and a helmet. This woodcarving is from a chapel dedicated to the cult of fierce deities, eastern Tibet. It portrays Apsé holding his attribute, the owl; in his right hand he grasps a spear. A bow and arrow can be seen protruding from a quiver behind his back. He is surrounded by flames and military banners, accentuating his martial, aggressive character.

Plate 36
Pangtsen
Painting on wooden board, Tibet
Photo: Per Kvaerne

Nothing is known of the mythology of this local deity, a ‘tsen of the meadows’ (pang), guarding the site of a small monastery in eastern Tibet. The deity is, as one would expect when dealing with a tsen, of red colour and rides a prancing horse. He does not wear armour or helmet, but his facial expression is fierce. In his left hand he holds a red and yellow flag, while he holds the reins of his horse with the other. He has two quivers, one covered by tiger skin and containing arrows, the other covered by leopard skin for his bow. A lu (klu) holding a flower is seen emerging from a pool or lake; the lu are, like their Indian counterparts the nagas, guardians of treasures. Consequently, three precious jewels are likewise seen in the lake. A deer is shown in the bottom right-hand corner.
Chapter 3 Notes

1 Karmay 1972: xxi.
3 Time Colour Name
   1. Evening (srod) black ‘Life-cutter’ (Srog gcod ma)
   2. Midnight (nnm gong) blue ‘Admonisher’ (gZhen ‘debs ma)
   3. Dawn (tho mngs) white ‘Controller’ (dBang sdud ma)
   4. Sunrise (nyi shar) yellow ‘Diffuser of Light’ (Od ‘phro ma)
   5. Midday (nyiri phyed) red ‘The Radiant’ (bKra gsal ma)
   6. Sunset (phyi phred) purple-brown ‘Having Bright Rays’ (Zer gsal ma)

The dance is called the ‘Six Periods of Sigyal’ (Srid rgyal dtrs drug).

4 Ma mo ‘dus pa’i yang snying gi rgyud, pp.11-60 in: Srid rgyal dre’u damar mo’i rgyud dang’ grel ba bca’ kyi gsum gphad, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Ochghat (India), 1973, pp.30-31.
5 Zhing phyug, unidentified object.
6 The text is not clear at this point and the translation is abbreviated.
8 The collection of texts forming the Aural Transmission of Zhangzhung has been published by Lokesh Chandra (ed.), History and Doctrine of Bon-po Nispnna Yog, Šata-pišča Series Vol.73, New Delhi, 1968. Short texts have been published by Orofino 1985.
10 Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 96, 120.
13 Cf. Lokesh Chandra, note 9 above.
14 Lokesh Chandra, op.cit.: 648.
16 Phrom/Khrom—referring ultimately to the Byzantine Empire—has a complex history in traditional Tibetan geographical concepts, cf. Stein 1956: 253 ff.
17 Tazik refers in general to the Iranian world, vaguely situated to the west of Tibet; in Bon tradition, Tazik is the sacred kingdom where Shenrap was born.
18 Pugyal (sPu rgyal) is a common epithet—the meaning of which is not clear—of Tibet in ancient as well as historical texts.
19 bsgo, p.645 in Lokesh Chandra op.cit. (note 8 above). An excerpt from this invocation has been translated in Kværne 1985b: 160.
21 On the bsve, cf. ibid.: 310. Apsé Gyalwa (A bse rgyal ba) is mentioned ibid. 251.
22 Mon is in a general way the region to the south of the Himalayan range; Bal is not Nepal (Bal yul), but probably Khotan or an area to the northwest of Tibet, cf. Vitali 1990: 29 note 91.
24 Tun (thun), cf. Snellgrove 1967: 256 n. 5. Snellgrove translates thun ‘deterrents’ and explains: “thun properly refers to various small items which are believed to be unpleasant to demons ... one harries them by hurling these items at them” (p.256).
25 sGrub gshen, ‘a priest (gshen) who accomplishes (sgrub) (a rite or meditational procedure)”.
26 A bsve jag pa me len gyi bskul ba/dg ra bsad (sic) pa’i man ngam gnam legs thog mdu’, pp.401-403 in: sMan ri ba’i phyug len skor dng bo skyon gyis kyi mchod bstod, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Ochghat (India), 1975.

Notes Chapter Three 115
Siddhas, Lamas and Dakinis

The Bon religion does not, as has already been pointed out, accept Indian origins for its doctrines and practices. Nevertheless, there are numerous figures which to a large extent correspond to the Indian Buddhist categories of siddhas, 'perfected ones', and the female dakinis. As these terms are more or less assimilated into English usage, they can be employed without contradicting the Bonpo claim to non-Indian origins. Terms used in Bon texts to designate the siddhas are druptob shen (grub thob gshen), 'priests who have attained spiritual perfection', tuwoche (nthu bo che), 'great magicians', and gyerpung (gyer spungs), 'teachers of Bon'—the latter term being in the Zhangzhung language. I shall refer to such figures indiscriminately as 'sages'. The Tibetan term corresponding to Sanskrit dakinis is khadrona (mkha’ ’gro ma, lit. 'sky-walker'), used by Buddhists and Bonpos alike.

The Bonpo siddhas are individuals who, through their mastery of esoteric meditational and ritual practices, have acquired spiritual and magical powers far exceeding those of ordinary humans. Some of them are believed to have existed in a distant, indeed mythical, past when they were instrumental in transmitting the teachings of the Tantras to the world of humans, often at the same time subduing certain demons who consequently became Protectors of Bon; others are regarded as human sages, claimed to have lived in Zhangzhung or Tibet in historical times. These siddhas were the priests and advisors of the mighty kings of Zhangzhung as well as Tibet. Only when the kings of Tibet—in particular, Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, 742–804)—were led astray by the evil doctrine of Śākyamuni emanating from India, did the influence of the Bonpo sages and priests decline, and with it, the fortunes of Tibet itself, which quickly fell into a state of social anarchy and moral confusion.

The siddhas are, however, not just mythological or historical figures. They are also the objects of worship and meditation, and thus they have—like the tutelary deities—their individual, highly symbolical iconography. In fact, some of the siddhas, as for example Takla Mebar, may at times be referred to as a yidam, and Drenpa Namkha may be identified with Kuntu Zangpo (p. 56).

The dakinis—whatever their ultimate origins outside the Land of Snow—are the 'fairies' of Tibet. They assume different forms and shapes, appearing as beautiful, smiling damsels, clad only in garlands carved from human bones; as old, toothless hags; or as ordinary human women of flesh and blood. Above all, they appear in visions and dreams, but whatever their guise, they are inspirators, revealers of hidden treasures and transmitters of secret doctrines.
Takla Mebar (Plates 37, 38 and 39)
The name Takla Mebar (sTag la me 'bar) alternates with Taklha Mebar (sTag lha me 'bar). The latter variant can be translated as 'Tiger-god, Flaming Fire', which formerly led some scholars to interpret the figure in question as a 'Tiger-god', 'Tiger-devil', or the like. It is the form Takla Mebar, however, which would seem to be the more common one, and which will be retained here. It is perhaps worth noting that the first element of his name is found in that of a deity reported to possess mediums in Ladakh, viz. Taklha Wangchug (sTag lha dbang phyug).

The name Takla Mebar is stated by S.G. Karmay to apply to "two different beings: one is a divinity and the other is a priest." Yet the sage Takla Mebar acts as a fierce deity when he subdues his evil twin brother Dharsha Chriwa, killing him by magical means. Perhaps Takla Mebar can best be understood as a borderline case between a siddha and a tutelary deity. On the one hand, he is a mythical figure, a disciple of Tönpa Shenrap and famous as a subduer of demons and transmitter of Tantras, especially those focussing on the deity Purpa, the personified magical dagger. On the other hand, he is also worshipped as a tutelary deity, and although invariably portrayed with only one head and two arms, he nevertheless has the fierce appearance and rich symbolism of a tutelary deity. As such he has three aspects: white, black and red; further, he has the epithet putri (spu gri), 'razor', emphasizing his power to destroy obstacles and demons.

The invocation translated below was composed by the 11th abbot of the monastery of Menri (sMan ri), Yungdrung Gyaltsen, in 1669:

"The magically-born lord, Takla Mebar—
The colour of his body is reddish-black,
His three wide-open eyes stare furiously,
In his gaping mouth his tongue is curled back
while he gnashes his teeth.
With his right hand he whirls a golden wheel,
With his left, he brandishes nine crossed swords.
From the hairs on his body he sends forth
A host of shining, fierce deities;
His reddish-yellow hair reaches the peak of the created world,
With his feet he presses down the deepest hell.
His majesty overcomes every single harmful demon.
The innumerable host of fierce deities,
Guarding all the ten directions,
Have wing-feathers of wind, wing-feathers of fire,
Wing-feathers of sharp, crooked knives.
In their hands they hold various kinds of weapons.
From their mouths resounds a great roar of BSVO, CHA, and HALA.
All the host of obstructive fiends are terrified,
And, rendered powerless, flee to the furthest darkness.

It is also said that Takla Mebar wears "the flayed skin of a matang demon on the upper part of his body, and on his lower garment, consisting of the skin of a valiant tiger, an apron of flashing red lightning; his belt is a venomous snake, his head-
ornament is made of dried human skulls and his necklace of still-moist human heads."10

SANGWA DŪPA (Plate 40)

Sangwa Dūpa (gSang ba 'dus pa), 'Concentration of Secrets', is a mythical sage believed to have been born as the son of a king of Tazik (sTag gzig), the holy land to the west of Tibet. He received the tantric teachings from Chimé Tsukpū (see Chapter One). While Takla Mebar undertook to subdue the 'Female Arrogant Ones' (chief of whom was Sipe Gyalmo, see Chapter Three), Sangwa Dūpa brought the 'Male Arrogant Ones' under his sway and compelled them to swear an oath to become 'Protectors of Bon'.11 Sangwa Dūpa does not seem to have a fierce form.

One of the Six Subduing Shen (see Chapter One) is also called Sangwa Dūpa. His appearance is that of a peaceful Enlightened Being, and his colour is normally yellow (alternatively it may be blue). Of the six realms of rebirth, he is associated with that of humans. It is not clear whether he has any connection with the siddha bearing the same name. It is also not clear what relationship, if any, he has to the Buddhist tutelary deity bearing the same name (Sanskrit: Guhyasamāja).

ZANGSA RINGTSÜN (Plate 41)

Zangsa Ringtsün (bZang za ring btsun), 'Auspicious Lady, Noble One of Long Life', is a manifestation of Satrig Ersang (see Chapter One). She was born as a semi-divine being in the abode of the Thirty-three Gods, situated on the summit of Meru, the mountain forming the centre of our world. Her miraculous appearance is described in the following passage from a Bonpo Tantra, in which her name, too, is explained:12

In the pleasant park with beautiful flowers
Of the abode of the Thirty-three Gods,
From the essence of the elements of the nine heavens,
In the ocean which swirls around the nine continents,
A turquoise egg, emitting light, appeared.
The egg was pierced by its own inner force,
And a beautiful, noble female form appeared,
Possessing divine marks and signs,
Effulgent with the light of the sun and the rays of the moon,
 Emitting the five colours of the rainbow in the ten directions.
The Supernatural King of Primal Existence
Conferred upon that lady a name:
This lady, possessing the marks of a deity,
Being without passion and greed,
Is an auspicious lady (bzung za);
Also, since she will remain for a long time
As a teacher guiding sentient beings,
She is 'the Long(-remaining) (ring), Noble One (btsun)';
Therefore she is called Zangsa Ringtsün.
Zangsa Ringtsin is also important because she gives birth to Chimé Tsukpu, the teacher of Tantras who in his subsequent birth became the Teacher Shenrap.

Her attributes are a golden vase held in her right hand and a golden rosary raised in her left hand, level with her head. (The bronze reproduced on Plate 41 has other attributes, however).

DRENPA NAMKHA (Plates 42, 43 and 44)

Drenpa Namkha (Dran pa nam mkha’), ‘Recollection-Sky’, is beyond doubt the most important and, in some respects, complex figure in the history of Bon during the reign of the great Tibetan kings. He is, above all, the chief protagonist of Bon during the eighth century in the bitter struggle with the Buddhist faith, introduced into Tibet under royal patronage; when Bon finally fell out of favour with the king of Tibet, Drenpa Namkha allowed himself to be converted to the new faith. According to the historical tradition of the Bonpos, he did so with an impressive gesture: he cut off his hair himself, in imitation of Buddha Śākyamuni, and then proceeded to ordain himself, scornfully refusing the assistance of the Buddhist monks and justifying his action by stating that Bon and Buddhism are distinct only on the plane of relative truth.13

There can be little doubt as to the historical reality of Drenpa Namkha. He is also mentioned in Buddhist sources.14 His family name is Khöpung (Khod spungs), and he is often referred to simply as lachen (bla chen), ‘the Great Lama (i.e. Preceptor)’, or, with a Zhangzhung term, gyerpung (gyer spungs), ‘Teacher of Bon’. According to the tradition of Bon, Drenpa Namkha is the father of another important sage, Tsewang Rigzin (Tshe dbang rig ‘dzin), to whom he transmitted Tantric teachings.15 In addition, a strong (but not universally accepted) tradition asserts that Drenpa Namkha was also the father of Padmasambhava.16

Bonpo histories maintain that Drenpa Namkha was active during the reign of King Mutri Tsenpo (Mu khri btsan po), the son of the first king of Tibet, Nyatri Tsenpo (gNya’ khri btsan po). Having obtained the power of extending his lifespan beyond normal human limits, he was able to ensure, many centuries later, that the sacred texts of Bon were hidden away when Bon was suppressed by King Trisong Detsen (Khri srong Id gtsan) in the eighth century. At this time he prophesied that the texts would be rediscovered as ‘treasures’, terma (gtser ma), by specially chosen individuals at appropriate times in the future.

As the siddha chiefly responsible for hiding ‘treasures’, Drenpa Namkha clearly has traits in common with the Buddhist—and, more specifically, Nyingmapa—figure Padmasambhava, and—again like Padmasambhava—he became the object of a cult. There exists a vast literature in Tibet related to Drenpa Namkha,17 including a biography in eight volumes brought to light by the ‘treasure-discoverer’ Sangngak Lingpa (gSang sngags gling pa, b. 1864), a native of Nyarong.18

There are various manifestations of Drenpa Namkha. He may be portrayed in a tranquil form, seated in the posture of meditation and wearing the robes of a monk; more often, he sits in a relaxed posture, richly attired and holding his characteristic attributes, a staff surmounted by a swastika in his right hand and a skull-cup in his left. He also has a wrathful form in which he manifests himself as a yidam embraced by his consort (as on Plate 29); in this form, too, he can be identified by the attributes mentioned above.
TSEWANG RIGZIN
As we have seen, Tsewang Rigzin (Tshe dbang rig 'dzin), ‘Knowledge-holder, Master of Long Life’, is believed to be the son of Drenpa Namkha, and is regarded as a manifestation of Sangwa Dūpa.19 His teachings, rituals and iconographic representations are grouped in three different traditions: ‘According to the Tradition of Zhangzhung’, Zhangzhungma (Zhang zhung ma), ‘According to the Tradition of India’, Gyagarma (rgYagarma), and ‘According to the Tradition of Tibet’, Pöyiilma (Bod yul ma).

Tsewang Rigzin is portrayed seated in a relaxed posture, holding a flaming jewel in his right hand and a skull bowl in his left hand. He is flanked by his consort, Nyima Wobar (Nyi ma 'od 'bar), ‘Light-radiating Sun’, who holds a chopper in her right hand and a skull bowl in her left.20

LISHU TARING (Plates 45 and 46)
Another siddha, a contemporary of Drenpa Namkha, is Nyachen Lishu Taring (sNyachensLishu stag ring). Like other sages, he is believed to have been able to extend his life-span by supernatural means, and thus remain in the human world for more than two thousand years. He is said to have gone to Zhangzhung as well as to Tazik several times in order to obtain sacred texts, which he translated into Tibetan. When Bon was proscribed in Tibet by king Trisong Detsen, he left the country, but not before he had cursed the king and prophesied the ruin of the dynasty and of Tibet. Like Drenpa Namkha, Lishu Taring also concealed sacred texts for the benefit of future generations. According to the chronological calculations of the Bonpo scholar Nyima Tenzin (Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, b. 1813), this event took place in 749.21

In the same way as Drenpa Namkha and other sages, he may be portrayed either alone or together with his consort, the dākini Nyibarma (Nyi 'bar ma),22 and he has a tranquil as well as a wrathful mode of manifestation.

A great number of other siddhas are to be found in the iconographic heritage of Bon. As in Tibetan Buddhist art, they may be shown in various postures of yoga, but also seated tranquilly in meditation, or in the act of performing rites of tantric magic (Plate 47).

DAKINIS (Plate 48)
There are numerous dākinis. In spite of their semi-divine nature, most of them manifest themselves in human form as beautiful young women, usually portrayed in dancing postures. However, historical figures may also be regarded as dākinis. Such female sages and magicians are particularly powerful, fully endowed with all kinds of superhuman capacities. Frequently they are the consorts of male siddhas, but some women have an independent and highly respected status. Thus Chosa Bōnmo (Co za bon mo), who lived in the eighth century, “tied three knots in a sword”, and at one point during the religious struggles during the reign of King Trisong Detsen, it was she who was appointed by the king to attempt to achieve a reconciliation with the Bonpo priests.23
LAMAS (Plate 49)

Many thangkas include monks, yogins or other religious personages. Occasionally they are shown as numerous figures, representing the entire lineage of transmission of certain teachings (Plates 12, 16 and 18). More often, however, a single or a small number of monks (sometimes flanked by laymen and laywomen) occupy a more subordinate position, for example one part of the bottom row (Plates 8, 9, 26, 27, 31 and 38). In this case, they may be regarded as the monks who commissioned or consecrated the thangka. In other cases (Plates 28, 30 and 39), a deity is flanked by two or more monks, who have a particularly close relationship to the deity in question, or who are generally revered as teachers or founders of monasteries.

A few thangkas have a single monk as the central figure (Plate 49, cf. also Plate 50), usually surrounded by other, smaller figures of monks belonging to the same spiritual lineage or succession of abbots, as the case may be.

Bonpo monks can generally be recognized by the characteristic 'lotus hat', pesla (pad zhwa) and other articles of dress and equipment mentioned in connection with Tritsug Gyalwa (Chapter One).

Plate 37
Takla Mebar
Tibet
Photo: Tenzin Wangyal

Takla Mebar is standing in the usual posture of a fierce deity, with one leg bent and the other stretched out. He holds his two characteristic attributes: in his right hand a wheel, and in his left, nine crossed swords. In this bronze, the two attributes give the impression of being more recent than the actual body of the statue, and may have been added as replacements of the originals. The colour of the face and the nine swords has been added later.
Plate 38

Takla Mebar
V. d. W. Collection
46 x 54 cm.

(21) of 'servants', lechê (las byed) and (22) of 'officers', lekhen (las nikhun).

In the bottom row two monks flank a table laden with offerings. There is a partially effaced inscription on the back of the thangka, consisting of mantras, as well as series of swastikas, turning anti-clockwise according to the Bonpo fashion.

Fig. 7

Takla Mebar is portrayed standing on a lotus throne supported by four lions. He has assumed the aspect known as 'Red Razor Takla, Wearing a Tiger-skin', Takla Putri Marpo Takki Lagpachen (sTag la spu gri dmar po stag gi slag pa can) (1). He is shown dressed in a tiger-skin (stag gi slag pa), or perhaps two skins, behind which is the flayed hide of a demon. As attributes he holds a wheel in his right hand and a single sword in his left.

Immediately above his head is Tôngpa Shenrap (2). The remainder of the thangka is filled with the following figures (Fig. 7):

3 White Razor Takla (sTag la spu gri dkar po).
4 Black Razor Takla (sTag la spu gri nag po).

Thus all three forms of Takla—'White', 'Red' and 'Black'—are depicted.

5-22 The Eighteen Haughty Ones, Dregpa Chogyé (Dregs pa bco brgyad): (5) the 'Haughty One' of gods (lha), (6) of nyen (gnyam), (7) of lu (lu), (8) of country gods', yul-lha (yul lih), (9) of demons, ti (bjud), (10) of tser (btsan), (11) of nu (dmu), (12) of kings', gyalpo (rgyal po), (13) of gong (gng), (14) of lords of death', shinje (gshin rje), (15) of 'masters of the ground', sadag (sa bdag), (16) of 'mothers', namo (ma mo), (17) of 'inferior demons', madii (ma bjud), (18) of gongpo ('gong po), (19) of te'urang (the'u rang), (20) of yiilsa (yul sa),
Four groups of demonic beings:

- *east*: the host of *drisna* (*dri za*)
- *north*: the host of *nojina* (*gnad sbarin*)
- *west*: the host of *loagang* (*klu dbang*)
- *south*: the host of *shinje* (*gshin rje*)

Other demonic beings:

- The Eighteen Haughty Ones, Dregpa Chogye (*Dregs pa bco bgrya*); these are also included in the thangka on Plate 38.

Protectors of the Doctrine:

- 'Red Tiger-face', Takdong Marpo (*sTag gdong dmar po*)
- 'The Messenger, Dark-red Demon of Emptiness', Ponya Tongdu Marnag (*Pho rnya sTong bdu dmar nag*)
- 'Cliff-tsen', Dragtsen (*Brag btsan*)
- 'Queen of the Created World', Sipé Gyalmo (*Srid pa'i rgyal mo*)

Other deities:

- Sangra yab yum (*gSang khra yab yum*)
- 'The Pellucid Goddess', Dangmé lhmo (*Dvangs ma'i lha mo*)
- 'The White Lion of Speech', Maseng Karpo (*sMra seng dkar po*)
- Gyalwa Dúpa (*rGyal ba dus pa*), flanked by four lamas.

On the back of the thangka is written the name of the deity, Taklha (*sTag lha, sic*).

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**Fig. 8**

The central figure is 'Red Razor Takla', Takla Putri Marpo (*sTag la spu gri dmar po*), holding his two characteristic attributes: in his right hand a wheel (attached in this case to a handle) and nine crossed swords (1).

Among the various groups of deities found in the thangka (cf. Fig. 8), the first group of four form, together with the central figure, the five-fold manifestation of Takla:

2 'Black Razor Takla' (*sTag la spu gri nag po*)
3 'White Razor Takla, Wearing Golden Armour' (*sTag la spu gri dkar po gsar khra*), together with his entourage of four similarly attired manifestations.
4 'Piercing Bon, Red Blood-face' (*dBal bon khrag gdong dmar po*)
5 'Officer, Red Blood-face' (*Las mkhan khrag gdong dmar po*)
The slightly obese figure of the sage Sangwa Düpa is sitting at ease in the posture of a siddha. In his right hand he brandishes a sword, and in his left, a bow and arrow.

Encircling the base of the statue is an inscription: “Om svästi! Homage to the priest Sangwa Düpa! It (i.e. the statue) has been made for the benefit of the mother of the lay patron Pönmuug Kumčé (dPon rmug rkum che). May she be reborn in (the divine realm of) Dewachen (bDe ba can)”

This bronze belongs to the same set as the bronze portraying Satrig Ersang, Plate 2. In her left hand the goddess holds a cup; it is possible that she holds a rosary in her right hand. Her throne, like that of Satrig Ersang, is supported by lions.

At the base of the statue there is an inscription at the front: “Homage to the Mother, Zangsa Ringtšün (in her) bodily form!” At the back there is an inscription which reads: “May the pious aspiration of Tazhi Tsültrim be fulfilled!”

Plate 40
Sangwa Düpa
Postel Collection
Height: 19 cm.
Photo: Michel Postel
Plate 41 (opposite)
Zangsa Ringtšün
V. d. W. Collection
Height: 20.6 cm.
Plate 42
Drenpa Namkha
Private Collection
Photo: Per Kvaerne
(also in Karmay 1972: frontispiece)

This bronze portrays the great sage Drenpa Namkha, seated in meditation, his right hand pointing towards the ground in the gesture of enlightenment, his left hand resting on his lap. His long hair, bound up in a top-knot, indicates that he is portrayed before his conversion to Buddhism, as he is reported to have cut off his hair with his own hands at his ordination.
Plate 43
Drempa Namkha
Detail of thangka, Tibet
Photo: Per Kvæne

A detail of a thangka on which several siddhas are portrayed shows Drempa Namkha seated in a cave with three attendants. He is seated in the relaxed posture of a prince or a yogin and holds two characteristic attributes: in his right hand a swastika, and in his left, a skull-cup. In front is a variety of offerings and the inscription: “The great Lama Drempa, of brilliant mental profundity”.28

Plate 44
Drempa Namkha
Postel Collection
Height: 22 cm.
Photo: Michel Postel

Drempa Namkha is portrayed sitting in a relaxed posture, wearing the crown, jewels and loin-cloth of a prince or a yogin. He holds his two characteristic attributes: a parasol surmounted by a swastika in his right hand and a skull-cup in his left.

Along the left front half of the base of the statue there is an inscription: “Om-swasti! Homage to the great lama Drempa Namkha”.29
Plate 45.1-2
Lishu Taring
Tsakli, Tibet
Photo: Charles Ramble

Both tsakli show Lishu Taring and his consort Nyibarma. Plate 45.1 (left) portrays Lishu Taring dressed in rich robes and wearing a hat which appears to be made of tiger-skin. He holds a skull-bowl and a trident. His consort Nyibarma is shown as a naked dakini wearing a crown and jewels. In Plate 45.2 (right) he is portrayed as a fierce deity holding a swastika in his right hand and a trident in his left; he is embraced by his consort. The inscription states: “Lishu Father-Mother” (Li shu yab yum), i.e. Lishu envisaged as a tutelary deity with his consort.

Plate 46
Lishu Taring
Detail of thangka (Plate 17), Tibet
Photo: Per Kvarne

In the centre of the section of a thangka reproduced here is seated Lishu Taring portrayed as a youthful figure, wearing rich, loose robes and the white hat, surmounted by three vultures’ feathers, of a tantric adept. He is flanked by his consort. Below his seat is the following inscription: “Lord Lishu, the essence of the Enlightened Ones of the thousand aeons” (bskal stong sangs rgyas ngo bo Li shu rje). In the space above his head are five dancing dakinis. Forming a semicircle around him are several groups of sages, identified by inscriptions, from the upper left moving down and towards the right: ‘the Six Scholars of Tazig’, ‘the Three Scholars of Tibet’, ‘the Four Scholars of Zhangzhung’ and ‘the Five siddhas of India’. On the outer edge are four standing figures representing the Goddesses of the Four Seasons: to the left: Shakma (Zhags ma), red, holding a noose, and Cagdrogma (ICag srog ma), white, holding an iron chain; to the right: Shangroma (Shang ro ma), green, holding a shang, and Cakkyuma (ICag kyu ma), yellow, holding a hook.
Namra Tseku is one of the 'Six Great Ornaments Who Remove the Mental Darkness of Living Beings' and who, according to the tradition of Bon, was active before the Tibetan king Lhato Tori, during whose reign (5th-6th century) the first contacts with Buddhism are reported in Tibetan sources to have taken place. He is dressed in the blue robes of a tantric magician, holding a ritual dagger, purpa (phur pa), in his right hand and a ritual bell, shang (gshang), in his left. In front of him is a large ritual structure, a do (chos), which has many functions, among which is that of expelling demons as well as representing offerings to the gods.

Chosa Bönmo, a historical figure of the eighth century, renowned for her supernatural powers, is portrayed in this tsakli as a dakini striking a dancing posture and holding a trident, dressed in a loin-cloth and wearing jewels and a crown.
The central figure in this thangka, which may have been painted around the middle of this century, is Namkha Lodro (Nam mkha’ blo gros), a lama of the Chaphur (Bya ‘phur) lineage in the Ngaba (rNga ba) district in the southern part of Amdo, and abbot of the monastery of Nangshig (sNang zhig). He was born in 1891. He is surrounded by a number of figures, some of whom are sages from the time of conflict with Buddhism during the reign of king Trisong Detsen in the eighth century, while others are monks and scholars of importance in the later tradition of Bon. Some can be identified as belonging to the same monastic lineage at Nangshig, and we may assume that all are regarded as part of the spiritual lineage of the main figure. The figures are identified by inscriptions, some of which are, however, no longer legible. The names of figures not accompanied by inscriptions are placed in parentheses.

**Fig. 9**

The central figure in this thangka, which may have been painted around the middle of this century, is Namkha Lodro (Nam mkha’ blo gros), a lama of the Chaphur (Bya ‘phur) lineage in the Ngaba (rNga ba) district in the southern part of Amdo, and abbot of the monastery of Nangshig (sNang zhig). He was born in 1891. He is surrounded by a number of figures, some of whom are sages from the time of conflict with Buddhism during the reign of king Trisong Detsen in the eighth century, while others are monks and scholars of importance in the later tradition of Bon. Some can be identified as belonging to the same monastic lineage at Nangshig, and we may assume that all are regarded as part of the spiritual lineage of the main figure. The figures are identified by inscriptions, some of which are, however, no longer legible. The names of figures not accompanied by inscriptions are placed in parentheses.
Chapter 4 Notes


2 Taklha (sTg la iha) is, however, also occasionally found in Bonpo sources; thus, it is inscribed on the backside of the thangka reproduced on Plate 39.


4 Karmay 1972: 46 (n. 2).

5 Obviously the Indian demon Daśagriva, the foe of Rama in the Rāmāyana.


8 sTag la spu gri dmar po'i phrin las tshig bohad so so'i mgon rtags thugs rje'i rgyun 'byung, pp.173-205 in: sTag la spu gri dkar nag dmar gsum yang bsang bcud dril bcas kyi sgrub skor, Vol.I, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Ochghat (India), 1973: 176-177.

9 Ma tan is the name of a class of demons. The term ma tan is certainly a loan-word in Tibetan, probably from Sanskrit, perhaps a form of Sanskrit mantraka (from mṛta), ‘dead, a corpse’.

10 sTag la spu gri dmar po'i mgon rtags, pp.207-220 in: sTag la spu gri dkar nag dmar gsum (cf. note 8 above): 212.


12 Quotation in the Legs bo had rin po che'i gter mdzod, Beijing (Mi rigs dpe skrun khang) 1985: 75 from the rTsa rgyud ngyi zer sgron ma.


14 Hoffmann 1950: 260.


16 ibid.

17 ibid.


22 Note the almost identical form of this name and the name of the consort of Tsewang Rigzin.

23 Karmay 1972: 100.

24 Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 275 mentions “the Bon god sTong bdul dmar po or sTong bdul 'chi bding, depicted—in spite of the word dmar po, “red”, in the first name—as a black deity”. This is also the case in the present thangka.

25 Cf. note 2 above.

26 “om sva ti (sic, for svasti) gshen rabs gSang ba ’dus pa la na mo (// yon gyi dag (sic) po d'pon rmug rkum che kyi yum gyi don du zhengs de (sic) ba can du skye bar shog // bkra shis // rig byed rkon na ? ma yin // /*”. For Buddhists, Dewachen (bDe ba can) translates Sanskrit Sukhavati, the paradise (‘Buddha-field’) over which the Buddha Amitābha presides in the west.

27 Front: “yum Zang dzang Rig tsun (sic) sku la na mo/” Back: “m'Tha’ bzhi Tshul khrim(s ?) thugs rgyong sdon (sic) pa gyur cig/”.

28 “Blra chen Dran pa thugs dgon gsal”.

29 “Om sva ti/ Blra chen Dran pa na (sic) mkha’ la na mo/”.


35 ‘Lion of Speech’, cf. Ch. 1.

36 Cf. Chapter Five (Plate 50).

37 One of ‘the Four Excellent Youths’, cf. Chapter One, note 36.

38 Reproduced as Plate 33.


40 Reproduced as Plate 35.

In the traditional society of Tibet, illiteracy was widespread. This does not, however, mean that ordinary Tibetans were cut off from acquiring a broad knowledge of their cultural and religious heritage. One of the mediums through which such knowledge was transmitted, was—and still is—visual art: temple frescoes, illuminated manuscripts, block-prints, thangkas and statues.

A special type of thangkas are paintings which depict a continuous story. The pedagogical function of such thangkas is obvious. In Buddhist art, the former lives of Buddha Śākyamuni are a favourite theme, as well as the lives of saints such as Padmasambhava, Milarepa, Tsongkhapa and others. An entire story or biography may be contained within a single thangka, or unfold through a series of thangkas forming a set. The visual representation is often based on a specific literary text, and may or may not have explanatory captions. The scenes may be strictly organized within boxes (as in a Western comic-strip), or distributed on the surface of the thangka in a less rigid fashion.

Narrative thangkas are also well represented in Bonpo art. The majority depict the life of Tönpa Shenrap, but examples of other biographical narratives on
thangkas exist, as for instance the life of Nyamé ('the Peerless') Sherap Gyaltse
(1356-1415), the great scholar and organizer of the monastic life of Bon (Plate 50).

Several sets of thangkas depicting the life of Tönpa Shenrap are known. These thangkas normally seem to come in sets of twelve. While some sets are based on the biography of Tönpa Shenrap as found in the Zermig, the medium-length version in two volumes dating, possibly, from the eleventh century, the majority are based on the Ziji, the long version in twelve volumes, dating from the fourteenth century. One such set—unfortunately incomplete, as two of the twelve thangkas are missing—has been published and described in detail.

In the present volume, a thangka, the first of a set of twelve, is reproduced (Plate 51), as well as sections of other thangkas from the same set. This set, which is complete, is preserved in a monastery in eastern Tibet. The scenes depicted on the thangkas illustrate the biography of Tönpa Shenrap as related in the Ziji. I was informed that it had been commissioned by one of the Bonpo kings of Gyarong in the eighteenth century; this would imply that it dates from before the devastating Chinese campaign of 1771-76. In the course of this campaign, imperial armies, after overcoming fierce resistance, brought Gyarong under Chinese rule, extinguishing the remarkable culture that flourished there in the eighteenth century.

The first thangka of the set (Plate 51) illustrates the birth of Tönpa Shenrap and his early years as prince in the kingdom of Wölmo Lungring. Among the scenes depicted on this thangka, several can be clearly identified. In the upper left-hand corner, the future Teacher of the World, the divine youth Chimé Tsukpû, requests the blessings of Shenlha Wôkar and Sangpo Bumtri before being reborn among humans in the land of Wölmo Lungring. In the centre of the upper part of the thangka he is seen descending through the upper atmospheric realms, surrounded by gods, before reaching the summit of Mount Meru, the mountain in the centre of our world. He continues his descent to the southern slope of the mountain, where he takes the form of the god Tamdû (Sanskrit Hayagriva), the ‘Horse-necked One’, and forces the gods and titans to swear to protect the teachings of Bon. This is shown below and slightly to the left of the former scene.

In the upper right-hand corner can be seen the palace of the king and queen of Wölmo Lungring. In a small room to the right can be seen the birth of the Teacher, while in the central part of the palace he is subsequently presented to the king while brahmîns, seated in the courtyard in front, give the prince a name.

In the lower, left-hand section of the thangka the Prince of Demons, who is to remain the arch-rival of Tönpa Shenrap throughout the greater part of the life of the latter, attacks the young prince and his companions while they are playing in the forest and enjoying (as the Ziji informs us) fruit, milk and beer. The demon appears slightly below the prince who remains seated serenely, while above him, to the left, one hundred drapla, created by his supernatural power, sally forth. The divine warriors wear armour and brandish their weapons, and without difficulty they repulse the prince of demons and his hosts.

After being in due course enthroned as king, Tönpa Shenrap teaches the Doctrine of Bon in Wölmo Lungring. Thereafter he sets out on a series of journeys to various other kingdoms, the purpose always being to save a notorious sinner from rebirth in hell, chiefly by means of appropriate rituals. In this way, Tönpa Shenrap becomes the source of authority and legitimation for the doctrines as well as the ritual practices of the Bonpos. He is invariably depicted journeying in his
royal chariot, "the chariot with eight wheels" as the Ziji asserts (the thangkas of this set, however, do not show more than four wheels), surrounded by his entourage of courtiers and disciples, and met by the inhabitants of the country carrying offerings and playing various musical instruments (Plate 52).

He also acquires an increasing number of royal consorts, a princess being one of the standard gifts offered him at the successful conclusion of a soteriological exploit, and his queens as well as the numerous sons and daughters to whom they in the course of time give birth play an important role in the propagation of Bon. His sons in particular become his closest disciples. Two sections are shown from the sixth thangka of the series. They show, first (Plate 53), the queen Höza Gyalme (Hos bza’ rGyal med) seated inside a palace, holding the newly-born prince Chebu Trishé (dPya’ bdun khri shes), who is saluted by gods and humans; behind her a god, identified by an inscription as Brahma (Tibetan Tsangpa, Tshangs pa), purifies the
child by pouring consecrated water on him from a vase. The inscription states "Hoza Gyalmé, having given birth to her son Chebu Trishe". The second section (Plate 54) shows the young prince seated in front of Tönpa Shenrap: "The Teacher abolishes the doubts of Chebu Trishe and his entourage", i.e. he imparts instruction in Bon.

Not all of Tönpa Shenrap’s offspring were, however, devoted to religious pursuits. One of his daughters, Shenza Nechung (gShen bza’ Ne’u chung), had a fickle and frivolous mind, and the Prince of Demons, Khyappa Laring, in the guise of a young and handsome prince, was able to seduce her. No sooner had she consented, however, than she was carried off to the ‘Land of Darkness’ of the demons and kept prisoner in the ‘Iron Castle with a Hundred Doors’. Here she gave birth to twin sons, Tabutung (sTag bu thung) and Zibutung (gZig bu thung), whose fierce and violent nature fully testified to their partly demonic parentage. Plate 55 shows the castle of the demons, decorated with skulls and guarded by armed demons keeping watch from every tower. Inside, we see the demonic twins in various scenes with their parents; they are so fierce that to keep them from tearing their mother apart, they have to be kept in chains. Tönpa Shenrap, however, hears the pitiful cries of his daughter, and flying through the air, lands in front of the gate of the castle. At first he is refused entry, but finally the Prince of Demons allows Shenza Nechung to come out to meet her father, but only on condition that she remains chained to the castle. Using his irresistible magic power, Tönpa Shenrap nevertheless enters the castle, the chains are loosened, and Shenza Nechung and her sons are safely extracted from the clutches of the demons and
entrusted to one of the Teacher's chief disciples, who is given the task of imparting to them spiritual instruction. The demons, however, swear revenge, and many dramatic episodes ensue in which the Prince of Demons is able to cause much damage before being finally converted by the Teacher to a life of virtue.

After many years of ceaseless activity for the welfare of sentient beings, the Teacher decides to renounce worldly life and to take the vows of a monk. Having removed his crown, jewels and royal attire, the five objects which a monk is permitted to own (staff, razor, needle, jar and alms-bowl), as well as the robes and 'lotus-hat' of a monk, descend from heaven (Plate 56, upper part). Exhorting his disciples to follow his example and take monastic vows, the Teacher shakes his body thrice and the robes are transformed into the wings of a shangshang, a creature which is half bird, half human, and soars up to the Womin ('Og min) heaven where he is respectfully received by the divine inhabitants (Plate 58). By means of consecrated water he is purified (Plate 56, lower part) and given the name Tritsug Gyalwa (see Chapter One).

Finally, the Teacher descends to the world of humans once more, and in a beautiful park on the northwestern border of Wölmo Lungring he practises asceticism for a year (Plate 57). He is attended on by Khading Deu (mKha’ lding lde’u), king of the shangshang, who daily brings him a single herb on which he subsists. Khading Deu can be seen seated in a tree to the right of the Teacher. Deeply moved by the hardships sustained by the Teacher, the demons are converted, including the Prince of Demons, Khyappa Laring; the demons are seen seated at the
foot of the tree. In the palace, his entourage is worried at the long absence of Tonpa Shenrap; his closest disciple, Yikyi Khye’uchung (Yid kyi khye’u chung), the ‘Little Youth of the Mind’, mounts the ‘blue dragon-horse’ and departs to find the Teacher. Finding him, he brings the entire entourage to the park to honour him with music and banners and present immense offerings. The dragon is seen to the right of the Teacher, and the four animals—tiger, yak, lion and elephant—which have drawn his chariot when he journeyed throughout the realms of the world, worship their master together with the rest of the entourage.

The Ziji does not relate the passing away of the Teacher. An account of this event is, however, found in the Zermig. Plate 59 reproduces an illumination from the Berlin ms. (cf. Chapter One) which shows, below, “the passing beyond sorrow (i.e. entering into nirvana) of the Teacher”; above, left, “the body of the Teacher resting inside a coffin”; and finally, to the right, “the (illusory) appearance of the Teacher as a corpse is consumed in the fire”.11

Chapter 5 Notes
6 “Hos bza’ rGyal mad la sras dpYad bu khris shes bitams pa’.
7 “sTon pas dpYad bu khris shes ‘khor bcas la the tshoms good pa’i bon gnang ba’.
8 Their names signify ‘Short Tiger-cub’ and ‘Short Leopard-cub’.
10 For Buddhists, ‘Og min translates Sanskrit Akanisthā.
11 “sTon pa’i sugs dpyad bya ba sna gnyis nas nas dpal gnang pa’i gnyis nas nas dpal gnang ma pha’i bzhugs pa la bzhin pa’o’”. Zermig ms., Waddell 1a.
12 Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin, Orientabteilung, fol. 248b.
Plate 60
CHAPTER SIX

The Wheel of Existence

One of the standard subjects of Tibetan Buddhist iconography is the ‘Wheel of Existence’ (Sanskrit bhavacakra) illustrating the six realms of birth, death and rebirth of sentient beings. The Bonpos, too, have their own version of the ‘Wheel of Existence’. Compared to the Buddhist bhavacakra, the basic lay-out of the Bonpo version is the familiar one, but numerous details differ. The Bonpo version thus provides a good example of the way in which Bon assimilates elements which are present in Tibetan culture as a whole, while retaining a considerable degree of freedom in utilising these elements according to its own religious concepts.

The origin of the Bonpo pictorial representation of the ‘Wheel of Existence’ supports this view. The painting reproduced here (Plate 60) was made in 1973 by the only Bonpo artist active in India at the time. It conforms to a short anonymous text, translated below, containing an explanation of the painting. Contemporary Tibetan Bonpo scholars affirm that it was only in the present century that the Bonpos actually created a pictorial ‘Wheel of Existence’ of their own; previously they simply used the Buddhist version. The elements constituting the Bonpo version are, however, found in the Bonpo Kanjur and are quoted in the text translated below. Thus the painting, based as it is on a Buddhist prototype—but only to the extent that scriptural justification can be found within the Bonpo religion itself—illustrates the characteristic faithfulness of Bon to its own scriptures and inner coherency, as well as its ability to assimilate new elements.

According to the text, the scriptural basis of the painting is chiefly to be found in three sources, the Dzö (mDzod), the Trijé Lungten (Khri rje lung bstan) and the Ziji (gZi brjed). The Dzö is quoted three times (and its commentary, the Dradrel (sGra 'grel), once); this is not surprising, as this text has a special status in Bon, being the basic systematic exposition of the various elements of the doctrine and placed as the second text of the Bonpo Kanjur. It was discovered as a ‘treasure’ on at least three different occasions in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.1 The Trijé Lungten is a short text classed as a sutra; it, too, is a ‘treasure’ from the eleventh century.2 The Ziji is the extended biography of Tönpa Shenrap in twelve volumes; it is a ‘mentally revealed treasure’, gongter (dgongs gter), from the fourteenth century.3 The text deals in turn with the three concentric circles of the ‘Wheel of Existence’, starting with the innermost one. Here we find not the familiar three animals of the Buddhist version, pig, cock and snake, but a single monstrous beast having the body of a cow, the tail of a snake and three heads: that of a cock, a pig and a snake. However, ample textual justification is adduced for this hybrid creature. The text quotes the eighth chapter of the Dzö which deals with the arising of the Three Poisons: the ‘poison cow of samsāra’ has three heads symbolizing the Three Poisons; from each of the three mouths proceed three classes of beings, nine
in all, ranging from gods to the denizens of hell. In the Ziji the same image of the cow is found in chapter 31; here it forms a part of a larger cosmological account of a kind familiar in Tibet, involving a ‘white’ and a ‘black’ light, a cosmic egg, etc. Part of this account is quoted by our text. The cow appears in this context as a demiurgic figure of a kind extremely common in Tibetan mythology, i.e. a being from whose body the world, or a significant part or aspect of the world, emanates. Besides lu (klu) and demons, sampo (srin po), various animals are known to have such a function, e.g. the tiger, the toad, or—coming closer to the present image—the yak.4

The second circle shows, as one would expect, the six realms of existence. One may note that the upward and downward movement of beings, usually shown immediately next to the circle in the middle in the Buddhist ‘Wheel of Existence’, is missing in the painting as well as in the text, although it is hinted at in the Trije Lungten in a way that could have justified its inclusion. The painting, on the other hand, shows the Six Disciplining Shen, Dülvé Shen Drug (‘Dul ba’i gshen drug), one in each of the six realms of existence (see Chapter One). Although the text does not mention them, scriptural justification could easily have been found.

Further we may note that the torments of hell are sharply divided into hot and cold, the otherwise familiar scenes of mutilation being absent: nor do we find the scene showing the judgement of the dead, which, it would seem, is never missing from the Buddhist ‘Wheel of Existence’. In the lower part of the world of humans are seen three individuals clothed in leaves and having animal heads; they represent a class of semi-divine, semi-demoniacal beings known as miamci.5

The outer circle shows the twelve links in the chain of dependent origination. The first is in the upper right-hand sector of the circle, and the subsequent ones follow in clockwise sequence (not, it may be noted in passing, counter-clockwise as one might have expected in a Bonpo painting). This is in accordance with the usual Buddhist pattern, although one frequently also finds the first link (Sanskrit nīdāna) in the lower left-hand sector.

A number of the links are illustrated in ways which are entirely different from those usually found in the Buddhist ‘Wheel of Existence’. Without entering into the question of how these differences have arisen, it may nevertheless be of interest to quote the brief remarks concerning the representation, ye (dpe), of each link found in the commentary Drndrel:

1 Ignorance is shown as an old blind woman, as in Buddhist tradition. “It is like a blind old woman erring about, unable to see the path”.
2 Predispositions are represented by a potter at work. “Material, tools and agent—these three being gathered together, perform”.
3 Consciousness is a monkey climbing a tree. “Abandoning one sense-object or body, it grasps another”.

The first three links follow the conventions of the Buddhist ‘Wheel of Existence’. In the remaining sectors, however, the scenes depicted are generally completely different from those found in Buddhist versions.

4 Name-and-form is represented by a pile of goods: the Buddhist symbol is a man being ferried across a river. “Name enjoys form as a lord enjoys his possessions”.

5 The six sense-fields are represented by a mask of a human face. In Buddhist versions one finds an empty house or a group of houses. The Bonpo version is not an arbitrary innovation, however, as the fifth link is in fact symbolized by
a mask in the sixth-century 'Wheel of Existence' from Ajanta, no longer preserved but described by Waddell. The intermediary stages linking the Indian and Bonpo versions are, however, not known. "In the one substance of the mask the five senses are complete".

6 Contact is shown by a snake crawling through a bamboo cane. Usually a man and a woman embracing are shown. "The sense-objects are like a snake; being of exactly the same size, they meet together (i.e. fit into each other)."

7 Sensation is illustrated by water being poured from a jar on red-hot iron. In Buddhist versions a man with an arrow in his eye is invariably shown. "It is like water being sprinkled on blazing red-hot iron".

8 Craving is symbolized by a man unable to find the door of a house. In the Buddhist 'Wheel of Existence' one always finds a picture of a man drinking or being served beer. "For example—like a prince who, not finding the door of his palace, wishes (to find) the door of his palace".

9 Grasping is symbolized by a turkey drinking water. The Buddhist version shows the picking of fruit, usually by a monkey, but also by people; sometimes the monkey hands fruit to one or several persons standing at the foot of a tree. "As for the turkey drinking water—it is like taking water in close succession at every moment".

10 Existence is represented by a man and a woman in union. This may also be found in Buddhist versions, but more frequently they show a pregnant woman. "Male and female being the cause, they are taken as illustration".

11 Birth is shown by an image in the process of being cast. Buddhist paintings show a woman giving birth. "As for birth, the substance itself becoming manifest, it is like liquid stone being founded and becoming manifest as form".

12 Old age and death are illustrated as an old man and a naked corpse, "without the use of symbolism". In Buddhist versions, only a corpse is shown, wrapped up and being carried off by one or several men.

Now follows the translation of the short anonymous text referred to above.


Obeisance to the supreme Teacher Shenrap who, by means of the rays of Wisdom from the sun of the Mind-of-Enlightenment, imparts the instruction which utterly dries up the expanse of the ocean of suffering which is incomprehensible to the mind!

Phenomenal existence in its evolution produces only suffering; by the extinction thereof the state of liberation is obtained. Explaining the nature of Suchness, joy greatly increases in my mind.

In this connection, there follows a brief explanation, based on the substance of the Scriptures, of the picture showing the round of birth and death as comprised by the twelve links of dependent origination, and a more detailed account of what the picture looks like.

First of all, the Dzo says: "Samsāra, a poison cow, arose", and its commentary, the Dradrel, says: "As for 'poison', it destroys the splendour of Knowledge and the flow of Bliss; as for 'cow' (bo-mo), bo means the expanse of the Three Realms, mo ('female') means 'the place where suffering arises'. (As for the phrase) 'The three faces looked toward the threefold phenomenal existence', (the three are) the region
of heaven above, that of animals in the middle, and that of evil rebirth below”.

The *Sitra of the Magic Production of Offspring* of the Ziji says: 12 “From the circle of light of heaven, empty and infinite, a black light shone forth to the bottom of the sea; a vapour of black obscurity arose. From the obscurity a noxious body ripened—the cow of poison of living beings. On the cow three noxious heads appeared, four limbs and serpent’s tail. As for the three noxious mouths of the three heads, hate was the mouth of the snake, delusion that of the pig, and desire-passion that of the cock. Thus the three poisons ripened into visible bodily form.”

On the basis of the Scriptures which teach thus, Ignorance, which destroys Knowledge, i.e. Wisdom which comprehends Emptiness, and does not allow Wisdom to be born in the minds of humans—or which, even if it arises, spoils it by false views and obscures Being-as-it-is—that Ignorance is thereby made to be a cow. In that connection, as for the arising of passion, hate and delusion, it is established that the heads of the cock, pig and snake are their representations.

Outside this is the plan of the six classes of beings. The Dzô says: “From the three mouths of the cock of desire-passion (issue) gods, men and nianci; from the three mouths of the pig of delusion (issue) lu, animals and those near hell; from the three mouths of the snake of hate (issue beings in) hell, the ghosts and the lords-of-death.” As for the demi-gods, although the establishing of them as a separate region is not clear here (i.e. is not explicitly mentioned in this quotation), it is in accordance with the teachings of Bon in general.

Outside this is the wheel of the twelve links. The Trije Lungten says: “By ignorance creating the predispositions, consciousness shines forth. In reality, that very perception is ignorance. Thus the links, the wheel-of-existence, arise; by this wheel, there is succession from one link to another. Just as, for example, the wheel of a chariot—its going up and coming down being without impediment—having gone up, the great bliss of the Body-of-Bon is obtained; having gone down, one hastens to the bottom of hell.”

The Dröma (sGron ma) says: 15 “The six classes of beings on the borders of the Three Realms took birth in the limitless whirl—from-beginningless-time, and the wheel-of-existence (consisting of) the twelve links was set in motion”.

As for the representation thereof (i.e. of the twelve links), the Dzô says:

*Ignorance is like a blind old woman;*

*Predispositions are like a potter girl;*

*Consciousness is like a monkey appearing in a tree;*

*Name-and-form is like riches and goods;*

*The six sense-fields are like a mask;*

*Contact is like a bamboo cane into which a snake has entered;*

*Sensation is like water on red-hot iron;*

*Being is like a ‘name-bearer’ not finding the door;*

*Grasping is like a turkey drinking water;*

*Craving is like a man and a woman in union;*

*Birth is like bronze which has been cast;*

*Old age and death are shown as they are.*

Outside that is the form of the Lord of Death.
This chapter is an adapted version of Kværne 1981.

1 Karmay 1977: 1 (ref. no. 1-2) and Kværne 1974: 97 (ref. no. K2); see also Karmay 1972: 8 n. 4.
2 Karmay 1977: 158-159 (ref. no. 86,4) and Kværne 1974: 99 (ref. no. K16).
3 Karmay 1977: 2-4 (ref. no. 3) and Kværne 1974: 98 (ref. no. K5).
4 Stein 1959: 461-462, quoting A.H. Francke, A Lower Ladakhi Version of the Kesar Saga, Calcutta 1905. Stein convincingly suggests that the sinpo in question must be conceived as a ruminant. An overview of Tibetan cosmogonic myths is provided in Kværne 1991b.
5 I am grateful to Samten G. Karmay for this information. "Tibetan miamsi corresponds to Sanskrit kinnara, a kind of heavenly musician, especially attached to the court of Kubera, god of riches.
6 Waddell 1892 and Waddell 1894.
7 The exact meaning of rgya bya is not clear. The bird depicted on the thangka would seem to resemble a turkey.
8 The Tibetan text is found in Kværne 1981.
9 I am grateful to Samten G. Karmay who helped me translate the introductory verses.
10 Cf. note 1. The quotation is found on p.35 of the Delhi 1966 edition.
11 This is the commentary by Drenpa Namkha (see Chapter Five), printed together with the Delhi 1966 edition of the Dzo. The quotation is found on p.176.
13 The first line of the quotation is not clear and has not been translated here. Cf. Kværne 1981: 283.
14 I am grateful to Samten G. Karmay for elucidating the term gdoor, 'the bottom of hell'.
15 The quotation is from sGron ma drug gi gdamgs pa, "The Instruction of the Six Lamps", vol.PHA of rDzogs pa chen po Zhan phri shing gyi rgyud, published in Lokesh Chandra (ed.), History and Doctrine of Bon-po Nispamna-Yog, Sata-pitaka Series vol.73, New Delhi 1968: 278.
16 The Dradrel p.180 has rdza nikkun bu pho, 'potter boy', which corresponds to what is shown on the thangka.
Further Visual Sources

The entries are in alphabetical order, according to the phonetic transcription. For each entry, the references are in chronological order; within each reference, the illustration is indicated first, followed by an indication of textual information. References to objects illustrated and described in this book are to the relevant Plates only, printed in italics.

Apsé (A bsev)
Plate 34
Ganacakra
Kuntu Zangpo (Kun tu bzang po)
Drenpa Namkha (Dran pa nam rnkha’)
Dulw.6

Dakini
Chima

Kunzang Akor (Kun bzang a skor)
Plate 13 (Lo Bue 1993: Plate 62, text p.87)
Bronzes: Toyka-Fuong 1987: Pl. C43 and C44 (both wrongly identified as “gšen-rab nam-par rgyal-po” for rNam-par, see Nampar Gyalwa); bronze: Pal 1990: 289 (S 50, text pp.290-291; the statue is not identified, and the syllable A is wrongly read as A±).

Kunzang Gyalwa Dupa (Kun bzang rgyal ba ’dus pa)
Plate 15 and 16

Kunzang Gyalwa Gyatso (Kun bzang rgyal ba rgya mtsho)
Plate 17

Magyu Sangchog Tartug (Ma rgyud gsang mchog mthar thug)
Plate 24

Mawé Sengé, the Lion of Speech (sMra ba’i seng ge)
Modern thangka (with the deity in five-fold form): Kvaerne 1988: 156.

Meri (Me ri)
Plate 31 (Auboyer and Béguin 1977: Plate 204, text p.186)

Nampar Gyalwa (rNam par rgyal ba)
Plates 19, 20 and 21


Kunzang Gyalwa Gyatso (Kun bzang rgyal ba rgya mtsho)
Plate 17

Magyu Sangchog Tartug (Ma rgyud gsang mchog mthar thug)
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Plate 31 (Auboyer and Béguin 1977: Plate 204, text p.186)

Nampar Gyalwa (rNam par rgyal ba)
Plates 19, 20 and 21

Miniature (Berlin ms.): Hoffmann 1943: plate following p.8
Tafel 5 (to the right); mural from a stupa in Dolpo (Nepal):
Tucci 1956: Fig.12; detail of a thangka (upper right): Tucci

Sangwa Dupa (gSang ba ’dus pa)
Plate 40

Satriq Ersang (Sa trig er sangs)
Plate 2 and 3
Miniature (Berlin ms.): Hoffmann 1943: plate following p.16,
and Hoffmann 1958: 878; mural from a stupa in Dolpo (Nepal):
Snellgrove 1961: Plate 61; thangka (goddess in the centre,
surrounded by 36 stupas): Essen and Thingo 1989: 220; Plate
II-457.

Shenla Wokar (gShen lha ’od dkar)
Plate 4 (Lauf 1972: Plate 49; Auboyer and Béguin 1977: Plate
203, text p.186)
Miniature (Berlin ms.): Hoffmann 1943: plate following p.16,
Hoffmann 1958: 879, and Schuh 1981: Tafel 5 (to the left);
mural from a stupa in Dolpo (Nepal): Tucci 1956: Fig.13, and
Snellgrove 1961: Plate IXc; thangka from Samling monastery in
Dolpo, ibid. Plate XXVI; detail of thangka (upper left): Tucci
1967: Plate 79.

Shenrap Miwo (gShen rab mi bo)
Plate 7 and 8; Plate 23
Miniature (Berlin ms.): Hoffmann 1943: plate following p.8,
Hoffmann 1950: Tafel 1, Hoffmann 1956: frontispiece, and
Hoffmann 1958: 873; thangka: Hoffmann 1958: 873; thangka
from Samling Monastery, Dolpo (Nepal): Snellgrove 1961:
Plate XXXII; modern line drawing: Lauf 1975: 179 and Bonpo
Bulletin 1990:99; thangka (throne supported by lions): Lauf
1979: Tafel 85, text p.186; thangka: Kva~rne 1986: 37, Fig.1;
bronze: Essen and Thingo 1989: 215, PI.II-449; modern line
drawing; Namdak 1993: 138, text p.159; Nakhi thangka: Rock
1952: Plate XX; See also Nampar Gyaliwa and Tritsug Gyaliwa.

Sipé Gyalo (Srid pa’i rgyal mo)
Plate 33

Takla Mebar (sTag la me ’bar)
Plates 17, 38 and 39
Bronze: Karmay 1972: fig. VI; thangka: Lauf 1979: 197, Plate 90,
text p.196; Nakhi thangka: Rock 1952: Plate XXV.

Tritsug Gyaliwa (Khri gtsug rgyal ba)
Plate 22
Trowo Tsochog Khagying (Khro bo gtsos mchog mkha’ ’gying)
Plates 25 and 26 (Lauf 1972: Plate 49)
Bronze: Karmay 1972: ill. no. V (attributes missing); line-

Tsewang Rigzin (Tshe dbang rig ’dzin)
Thangka: Tucci 1949: Plate 155, text vol.II: 553-554; thangka
(“according to the Tradition of Tibet”): Auboyer and Béguin
1977: 189, plate 205 (text 186), Béguin 1990: 88, plate 44, detail
(cen~ral figure) Lauf 1979: 105, plate 89 (text p.194).

Welchen Gekhó (dBal chen ge khod)
Plate 30
Welsé Ngampa (dBal gsas rmgam pa)
Plates 27 (Lauf 1971: Plate 3 (p.36), text p.29-30, detail, central
deity only), 28 and 29 (Béguin 1990: 93, plate 47, Béguin 1995:
461 (no. 414) and Béguin 1995: 480 (no. 412)
Statue in temple in Dolpo (Nepal): Snellgrove 1961: PI. XXXIIa, text
pp.49-50; thangka: Lauf 1971: 36, Abbildung 3, text pp.29-30;
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numbered); thangka: Béguin 1990: 94, Plate 47, text p.93
(wrongly identified as Tsochog).

Yeshen Chusum, the Thirteen Primeval Shen (Ye gshen bcu gsum)
Modern ritual card, tsal ki: Kva~rne 1985a: Plate XXa (showing
all thirteen Shen); set of thirteen tsal ki: ibid. Plates XLI-XLVII;
three tsal ki from the same set: Heller 1994: PLVII; thangka:
Tucci 1967: pl.79, includes four figures of the same type as
those reproduced in Kva~rne 1985a, but which are not,
however, entirely identical.

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Plate 41
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