Buddhism in Central Asia III

Impacts of Non-Buddhist Influences, Doctrines

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Contents

CHAPTER 7

The Fluid Lives of Tibetan Ritual Narrations during the Imperial and Post-Imperial Period

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Abstract

Buddhism started to play a significant role in the Tibetan Empire (ca. 7th c. to 842, Tib. Bod chen po) from the eighth century onward. On arrival in the Empire, it encountered a ritual tradition lacking universal claim which could be seen as an array of rituals aimed at solving critical situations in the lives of both individual people and society. These rituals were performed by followers of ritualists (Tib. *gshen* or *bon*) who often take on mythic proportions. Up to the present time, Buddhist rituals in Tibet remain the sphere of their descendants' influence.

An important element of ritual performance was voicing (Tib. *gyer*) the ritual narrations (Tib. *smrang*), in order to infuse the ritual with meaning. Surviving origination myth accounts (Tib. *rabs*, related to 'lineage/succession') probably reflect a later tendency to assemble various originally locally based myths within single collections of such narrations spanning larger areas of Tibetan Plateau. Through this process, qualitatively different ritual traditions were crystallised, giving some traditions prominence whilst silencing others. Post-imperial texts of monastic Bön (Tib. *bon*) lineages associate the tradition of orating various origin myths with the terms lore or wisdom (Tib. *gtsug lag*). It is possible to speculate that the great variety of ritual narratives were organised under such umbrella terms. One can observe a certain divide between Central Tibetan ritual traditions and those found across large areas of Western, Northern, and Eastern Tibet. The paper eventually introduces the *'Bum bzhi* [Fourfold Collection] that survive in the *Bon bka' 'gyur* [Bön Kangyur]. These voluminous texts mostly contain origin myths and tales dealing with four kinds of spirits—(1) chthonic spirits (Tib. *klu*), (2) fierce spirits (Tib. *gnyan*), (3) earth-lords (Tib. *sa bdag*) and (4) rock spirits (Tib. *gtod*)—and are difficult to date in their current forms. They contain traces of stages of development reflecting monastic Bön religion and evidence of absorbing Buddhist elements. However, they also preserve some features characterising eastern non-Buddhist ritual traditions, although an attempt to include local Eastern-Tibetan lore in pan-Tibetan ritual tradition likely lies behind their compilation.

1 Introduction

Buddhism in Tibet is clearly grounded in various Buddhist traditions once native to India. In addition to further influences witnessed by apocryphal texts likely created in China and Central Asia, the valued doctrinal core of Buddhism is embedded in a very flexible cultural matrix. The matrix in which Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions meet accommodates Buddhist doctrinal and ritual traditions with pre-existent and radically different lay practices oriented towards worldly needs.

In case of Tibet, the above-mentioned matrix represents a vast array of mainly ritualised activities characterised by the blending of Indic or Buddhist divinities, spirits, and ideas with similar autochthonous ones. The influences are apparently mutual, although the impact of Buddhist ideas is relatively clearly observable on such a heterogeneous substrate. Also, due to the predominance of monks in the production of texts following the 11th century, their influence is more in evidence than that of autochthonous traditions. There are many reasons for the difficulty of discerning indigenous ideas within Buddhism in Tibet.

One of the main obstacles to recognising them is certainly poor familiarity with what could be called 'indigenous' religious ideas. Such an appellation 'indigenous ideas' itself could be misleading for non-Buddhist practices, as it is not possible to separate these out from borrowings and other influences from Tibet's neighbouring countries.

The lack of knowledge of non-Buddhist and possible pre-Buddhist religious practices is primarily caused by the difficulties connected with understanding the surviving textual material related to them. These texts are typically very dense, fragmented, with unusual orthography, little-known expressions, and devoid of information about their context.

Yet, this is far from being the only hindrance awaiting researchers attempting to make sense of such confusing witnesses of the past. The idea that a uniform religious tradition existed in Tibet before encountering Buddhism is certainly naïve and lacks grounding in research.

A down-to-earth picture of the situation must take into consideration the numerous human societies on the Tibetan Plateau prior to the creation of the Tibetan Empire (ca. 7th c. to 842, Tib. Bod chen po). This happened suddenly during the mid–seventh century. We have almost no information about the religious traditions and culture of that time. The sudden rise of the Tibetan Empire, resembling somehow the later immediate appearances of Arabs and Mongols, was accompanied by a transformation of social rules and traditions

along with the need for an effective and sophisticated administrative apparatus. The evidence also shows that religious practices were not left intact. It is clear that attempts were made to reorganise existing rites into those fitting the new reality of the Tibetan Empire.

Only slightly later, almost simultaneously, Buddhism entered the scene. It might be the case that Buddhism was already in evidence during the mid-seventh century formation of the Tibetan Empire. The deeper influence of Buddhism on the ruling strata of the society might be supposed to come with Emperor Tri Songdétsen (r. 742–ca. 800, Tib. Khri Srong lde brtsan). By the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, the influence intensified and known records show the foundation of a large number of Buddhist monasteries sponsored by the ruling class.

The historical background of the events only sporadically outlined here suggests a very complex situation in which regional ritual traditions undergo their transformation into pan-Tibetan ones. At the same time, they encounter Buddhism with its progressively stronger impact on society.

In this paper, attention will be paid to distinctive elements of non-Buddhist religions in Tibet. A very characteristic feature of non-Buddhist rites in Tibet is the need for a mythical narrative on origin—be it the origin of the ritual itself, the tools used during the ritual, items of daily use, or the use of animals, etc. The mythical narrative is what makes the ritual meaningful. In addition to that, it seems to provide an elementary mode of understanding the surrounding world.

2 Tibetan Ritual Narrations and Their Wisdom (Tib. *gtsug lag*)

Fine examples of often fragmented narrations of origin events appear among the oldest surviving Tibetan manuscripts found near Dunhuang (敦煌). These documents represent a vast collection of texts that date before the mid-11th century. Four such documents containing myths were presented in an anthology by Frederick W. Thomas as early as 1957.[1] Some of the manuscripts discussed by Thomas were later subjected to further analyses,[2] and later presentations

1 Frederick W. Thomas, *Ancient Folk-Literature from North-Eastern Tibet* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957).

2 Namely, Rolf Stein, "Du récit au rituel dans les manuscrits Tibétains de Touen-houang," in *Études Tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, ed. Ariane Macdonald (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1971), 476–547.

of parts of them benefited from an advancement in understanding their contents. There are many more such texts found among the Dunhuang documents. Some of those related to funeral rituals, which seem to constitute the majority of similar ritual narrations, were rendered in English by John V. Bellezza;[3] some were recently analysed by Brandon Dotson.[4] After the turn of the millennium, non-Buddhist manuscripts containing mostly ritual narrations were found in Southern Tibet in Gatang (Tib. dGa' thang) *stūpa* and published.[5] Tentatively dated to the 11th century or earlier, these manuscripts substantially enrich knowledge about non-Buddhist rituals.

It is now more than evident that what has been called folk literature by Thomas, represents a specific genre of ritual narration that constitutes an important part of the ritual. The tradition of performing origin myths did not stop at the end of the Tibetan Empire. Fine examples of manuscripts containing origin myths of later provenance were dealt with, besides others, by Samten G. Karmay and Charles Ramble.[6] These come mainly from the environment of village ritualists and are close to what could be labelled folk religion.

3 John V. Bellezza, *Zhang zhung: Foundations of Civilization in Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008); John V. Bellezza, *Death and Beyond in Ancient Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013).

4 Brandon Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories: Preliminary Remarks on the Place of Narrative in Tibetan Religion," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 45 (2016): 77–112; Brandon Dotson, "The Horse and the Grass-Grazing Man: Domestication, Food, and Alterity in Early Tibetan Cosmologies of the Land of the Dead," *History of Religion* 57.3 (2018): 270–287.

5 Pa tshab Pa sangs sbang 'dus and Glang ru Nor bu tshe ring, ed., *gTam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdam bsgrigs* [Collection of Ancient Bönpo Manuscripts Newly Discovered in Tamshül Gatang Bumpaché Stūpa] (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2007). For reference in English see Samten G. Karmay, "A New Discovery of Ancient Bon Manuscripts from a Buddhist Stūpa in Southern Tibet," *East and West* 59.1–4 (2009): 55–83.

6 There are several studies by Karmay on the topic, for example, Samten G. Karmay, "The Appearance of the Little Black-headed Man," in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, ed. Samten G. Karmay (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 245–281. For interesting Tibetan texts containing ritual origin narrations from the post-imperial period, see Samten G. Karmay and Yasuhiko Nagano, *The Call of Blue Cuckoo* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2002). For a comparative study of one particular myth making use of more textual variants and observation of the performance of the ritual, see Charles Ramble, "The Deer as a Structuring Principle in Certain Bonpo Rituals. A Comparison of Three Texts for the Acquisition of Good Fortune (g.yang)," in *Cultural Flows across the Western Himalaya*, ed. Patrick McAllister, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, and Helmut Krasser (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 509–540.

Research by Toni Huber reveals the continuing use of such narrations as a crucial part of ritual surviving in eastern Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh.[7]

There are many more such ritual narratives scattered among Bön (Tib. *bon*) and Buddhist ritual texts and disappearing traditions of lay ritualists, which are still relatively undocumented by scholars. The variability of their forms and distribution across folk religion, lay ritualist traditions, Bönpo (Tib. *bon po*) and Buddhist monasticism indicates that one is touching here a crucial element of Tibetan culture. Their great variability in terms of form, content and context lead them to be inconsistently referenced in this chapter according to their predominant features. Here, terms like semi-mythical are not intended in any way to be pejorative in the sense of meaning ahistorical or therefore something wrong. Myth is understood here instead as a key and relevant carrier of knowledge and orientation in the world.

These diverse ritual narrations (Tib. *smrang*; cf. *smra*, to speak) can be labelled origin myths, charter myths, tales of origin, expositions, antecedent tales, and others in English. The Tibetan expression *smrang* designates a ritual narration situated in the timeless past (or origin of the world) to be voiced during the ritual. It usually discloses the context of the ritual, which would otherwise remain meaningless. Another name used for such narrations is account (Tib. *rabs*). This could be a synonym for the first. The term *rap* appears frequently in collections of series of myths on related topics and could be understood as 'an account from the series of them'. This is similar to the meaning of account appearing in the 'historical literature' as royal genealogy (Tib. *rgyal rabs*), or family genealogy (Tib. *gdung rabs*): a series of accounts regarding the individuals who form the lineage. In some cases, a long series of such ritual narrations are voiced during the ritual.

Some of these myths are explicit concerning their function. Frequently, the concluding phrase, found both in the oldest documents from Dunhuang (cf. P. T. 1136) and myths of later provenance alike, appears as follows: "As it was beneficial and fortunate in the past, it is also beneficial and fortunate in the present."[8]

Thus, the role of such narratives clearly lays in presenting mythical or semi-mythical events to be re-enacted. Such events typically consist of a

7 Toni Huber, *Source of Life: Revitalisation Rites and Bon Shamans in Bhutan and the Eastern Himalayas*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2020).

8 Conclusion of P. T. 1136: *gna' phan da yang phan gna' bsod da yang bsod/ /*.

description of the emerging crisis, followed by a successful ritual method applied to solve it in the timeless past.

Indicating one perspective on their function, some sources label these myths 'example' (Tib. *dpe*) in some sources; they provide an example or model to be followed. In the canon of monastic Bön, where these myths are called examples of good wisdom/custom (Tib. *gtsug lag bzang po*), their function is described as follows: "Applying 'examples' from the good 'wisdom' of the past, the true was exposed by voicing the bon."[9]

This short sentence connects such models/examples with certain lore or wisdom/custom (Tib. *gtsug lag*), as will be discussed after first addressing the specific method of their oral performance.

Such myths are described as being performed orally and orated with the use of a specific voice, voicing (Tib. *gyer*) in some cases. It is significant that the expression never applies to the common recitation of Buddhist texts in Tibet (Tib. *zhal 'don* / *kha 'don*, in Old Tibetan also *nan*, *klad*). In Tibetan, the term voicing is associated with a specific method of oral performance and can also sometimes be used for certain types of singing. Within the post-imperial monastic Bön religion, it is claimed that this is originally a term borrowed from the Zhangzhung language, and that the term is synonymous with *bön*. As such, it appears in many names of early monastic Bön masters (Tib. *gyer mi*, *gyer spungs*, *gyer sgom*) beginning from the 11th century. However, it is found in Dunhuang documents and seems to be utilised in that context as a Tibetan expression characterising ritual performance. The term voicing is simultaneously used to characterise a specific variant of tantric chant in the Buddhist tradition that resembles an overtone or throat singing,[10] while the monastic Bön tradition uses chants (Tib. *gyer mo*) called long chant (Tib. *gyer chen*) and short chant (Tib. *gyer thung*) for the purposes of propitiation rites to protective deities. Monastic Bön seems to retain a possibly older understanding of the chants as imitations of animal and bird's voices.[11] There are several Buddhist

9 "Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs swo [Fierce Spirit Collection from the Fourfold Direct Path]," in *New Collection of Bonpo Katen Texts*, vol. 253, ed. Sog sde sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma (Lhasa: bsTan pa'i nyi ma, 1998), 633: *sngon gyi gtsug lag bzang po la dpe blangs/ bon smras bden pa ni bshad/.*

10 See, for example, Polina Butsyk, "Sounds of Speech and the Tiger's Roar: Two Different Ways of Perceiving Vocal Music in Tibet in the 13th–17th Centuries," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 55 (2020): 15–34.

11 This monastic Bön ritual practice is systematised under the category of four portals of *gyer* and nine ululation voices (Tib. *gyer sgo bzhi skad gcong dgu*), which are understood as (1) portal of purification (Tib. *sel sgo*) with voices of tiger, dog, horse, (2) portal of creation rituals (Tib. *srid sgo*) with voices of *garuda* and parrot, (3) portal of ransom rituals

accounts from the post-imperial period containing polemics concerning Bön ritualists' performance of chants. Yet, a rendering that situates the emergence of a similar style of recitation in India but explains its origins in terms of the vision of the prominent Tibetan Buddhist translator Rinchen Zangpo (ca. 985–1055, Tib. Rin chen bzang po) is suspect, as is the subsequent allusion to its adoption by followers of the Bön.[12] Such accounts suggest rather the opposite: that Buddhist overtone chanting styles in Tibet have been influenced by this tradition of chanting.

There seems to be no clear description of the performance of these myths among the surviving Dunhuang documents. However, scattered among much later texts of the monastic Bön religion, fragments of vivid details connected

(Tib. *glud sgo*) with voices of lion and lark, (4) portal of *to* rituals (Tib. *gto sgo*) with voices of dragon and cuckoo. There are, however, alternative lists of this classification. According to the *Gal mdo* [Essential Sūtra], the categories are divided into (1) portal of offering to heavenly spirits (Tib. *lha gsas mchod pa'i sgo*), (2) portal of purification rituals of elimination and ablution (Tib. *sel dang khrus kyi sgo*), (3) portal of freeing and ransoming rituals (Tib. *thar dang glud kyi sgo*), (4) portal of fierce spirits regarding rituals of summoning well-being (Tib. *phya g.yang gnyan gyi sgo*). In some sources, these categories are also considered to be methods of translating from the language of Zhangzhung. This shift in meaning seems to be an attempt to alter the original meaning of the term. Cf. Namgyal Nyima Dagkar, "The Early Spread of Bon," *The Tibet Journal* 23.4 (1998): 7, ns. 13 and 14.

12 As an example, the following two cases could be mentioned. First, there is an amazing story about the famous early translator, Rinchen Zangpo, who invented the styles of chanting imitating a tigress and the creaking sound of a tree for invoking protective deities. It is described as having taken place in India. The story goes that he competed with Bönpos, who changed some of his repertoire (i.e., *mantra*s) into Bön. This story could be seen as an example of history (Tib. *lo rgyus*) applied by Buddhists in place of origin myths. See Kun dga' bsod nams, "Rig pa'i gnas lnga las bzo rig pa'i bye brag rol mo'i bstan bcos kyi rnam par bshad pa 'jam dbyangs bla ma dgyes pa'i snyan pa'i sgra dbyangs blo gsal yid 'phrog phril nas yongs khyabs" [Melodious Voice Vibrating Through the Bright Mind of Joyful Master Mañjuśrī: Detailed Elucidation of the Commentary on Music which Belongs to the Art of Crafts Within the Five Kinds of Art], in *Sa skya paṇḍi ta chen pos mdzad pa'i rol mo'i bstan bcos* [Commentary on Music Composed by Sa skya Paṇḍi ta], edited by Kun dga' bsod nams (Dharamsala: Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, 1980). For translation, see Ricardo O. Canzio, "Sakya Pandita's 'Treatise on Music' and its relevance to present-day Tibetan liturgy" (PhD diss., SOAS, 1978), 144. There are also other texts that use the pejorative phrase 'chanting like a Bönpo' (Tib. *bon du gyer ba*). They show that Buddhists were imitating this style of ritual. An example could be the following extract from the *Zangs gling ma* [Copper Island]: "[O]therwise, if one just makes as much a loud or dramatic racket as one can, with no connection to the specific words and music of the rituals of (authentic) sources, this is what is known as 'chanting like a bönpo' (*bon du gyer ba*) and is something to be avoided." See Ben Philip Joffe, "White Robes, Matted Hair: Tibetan Tantric Householders, Moral Sexuality, and Ambiguities of Esoteric Buddhist Expertise in Exile" (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 2019), 55.

with their ritual use appear. One must be cautious regarding such fragments, since several centuries separate them from the time of the Tibetan Empire. Nevertheless, they could provide fragmented information regarding certain characteristics for at least some of the greater variants of such practices.

One of the monastic Bönpo sources is the 14th century compendium *mDo dri med gzi brjid* [Sūtra of Immaculate Splendor], organised in twelve volumes.[13] While Buddhism-related doctrines and practices appear mostly at the top of their hierarchy, among the lower ones labelled 'black water' (Tib. *chab nag*) are worldly-oriented ritual practices. In the section dealing with purification (Tib. *sel*) rituals, vivid details related to the oral performance of these myths appears. The term ritual narration was rendered only generally as exposition in the following translation by David L. Snellgrove and his collaborators, which somehow obscures that in fact the text does not discusses any exposition, but just the ritually used narrations on origin, or origin myths. In the following, the translation by Snellgrove is used, only exorcism has been changed to '*sel* purification' and exposition to 'origin narration':

> So for each original lore of origin narration
> there is subdivision into 120 ways of *sel* purification,
> and with these are associated the eight ululations of sound.
> First in the case of the three originals
> for urging the acceptance of purity and rejection of defilement,
> effect the ululation of the growling tigress.
> Then for the incantation of the origin narration of *sel* purification,
> effect the ululation of bird and dog and horse.
> There are various variable sounds of birds.
> The sound of the dog is barking or growling.
> The sound of the horse is neighing and pleasant.
> The utterance of ululations must be done well [...]
> The great speaker of the original bon of purification *sel*,
> Binds the turban on his head.
> In his mouth he receives the draught that is to be drunk.
> In his hand he offers the thing that is to be offered.
> With his voice he intones the origin narration using ululations.

13 There are many editions of this text. Nevertheless, the following version published in a book form could serve as first reference, taken in the comparative context of other versions: Pa sangs tshe ring, ed., *mDo dri med gzi brjid* [Sūtra of Immaculate Splendor], 12 vols. (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2000).

> Unsuitable ritual items must be avoided.
> The origin narration must be done carefully in full.
> The potency of the "Black Waters" emerges in origin narration,
> [...]
> So, for the "Black Waters" origin narration is the most important thing.[14]

This extract reveals that the specific voices of animals and birds (Tib. *gcong*) were used to voice origin myths. The verb voicing appears in this extract translated as "intoning the origin narration" (Tib. *smrang du gyer*). It may well point to the features of a practice underlying the throat chant used within the Buddhist traditions and monastic Bön. However, this extract is important in stressing that the voicing style of performance imitating voices of birds and animals was not used for some general propitiation of spirits and deities. It is firmly bound to the performance of origin myths. Furthermore, this practice associated with the origin myths was not intended primarily for human listeners. In using a voice that mimics animals, the content of the myth was obscured. Ritual narrations were probably seen in this case as a means of communication with spirits and deities.

In the two other surviving versions of the myth describing the origin of the purification ritual, a similar phrase appears, indicating that the heavenly deity ritualist (here named Lhabön, Tib. lHa bon) drinks an alcoholic beverage (Tib. *chang*) after binding his turban as a part of the steps undertaken before the proper voicing of the myth:

> Lhabön bound a turban around his head,
> and spread a precious cushion at his feet.
> He poured nectar of *chang* into his neck,
> and was given desirable offerings to his hands.[15]

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14 David L. Snellgrove, *Nine Ways of Bon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967): 46–51: *sel sgo brgya dang nyi shu dbye/ de la skad kyi gcong brgyad sbyar/ dang po srid pa gsum po las/ gtsang sme blang dor bzhen 'debs pa/ stag mon gar ba'i gcong las drang/ de nas sel gyi smrang gyer ba'i/ bya khyi rta yi gcong las drang/ bya skad sna tshogs 'gyur ba yin/ rta skad 'tsher dang snyan pa yin/ gcong gi snyan ngag legs par bya* [...] *srid pa'i sel bon smra chen gyis/ dbu la 'gying ba'i thod kyang bcing/ zhal na skyem pa'i skyems yang gsol/ phyag na 'bul ba'i yon kyang 'bul/ zhal nas gcong gis smrang kyang gyer/ mi 'gro yas stags spang bar bya/ smrang ni zhib pa rgyas par bya/ chab nag nus pa smrang la 'byung/* [...] *de phyir chab nag smrang gis gtso/.*

15 The Tibetan text is available on the BDRC website; Anonymous, "gTsang ma lha ser (= sel) dkar po [White *Sel* Purification of Pure Heavenly Spirits]," in *Khyung po steng chen khul gyi bon chog dpe rnying bri ma phyogs sdebs* [Collection of Old Bön Ritual Manuscripts from the Area of Khyungpo Tengchen], Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC)

However, it is possible to encounter similar descriptions of the ritual performance of myths. In the following, it is not an alcoholic beverage, but the consumption of gold and turquoise that is mentioned. This is probably meant as a ritual drink with gold and turquoise dust in the alcoholic beverage, resembling in some way the golden drink (Tib. *gser bskyems*)[16] used as a libation also in Buddhist rituals: "The Bönpo bound his head with a turban and swallowed gold and turquoise in his mouth. Placing the powerful protective amulet on the donor, he pronounced […]."[17]

Such repeated details inform us that at least some of the ritual performances of the origin myths were accompanied by consumption of alcoholic beverages and the head was ritually covered by a turban.

Although the term voicing clearly indicates that specific oral performance matters in the ritual, even the Dunhuang manuscripts containing such antecedent myths attest to the fact that they were committed to writing even in the early times of the Tibetan Empire. This raises questions about the motivations for doing so. This tradition of oral performance of ritual narrations is rare nowadays, but some recent examples from Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh show that in some cases the written texts were employed as mere tools for memorising them.[18] As such, the texts are fragmented and serve as abbreviated outlines of oral performance. In such recent examples, the strong emphasis on oral performance—which seems to be naturally associated with them—is retained.[19]

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no. W3CN4081, vol. 19 (scanned in 2016, https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:W3CN4081, accessed February 24, 2022), fol. 5b: *lha bon dbu la thod cig sol/ zhabs la rine* (*rin chen*) *gdan cig bting/ mgur du bdud* (*bdud rtsi*) *chang skyems drang/ phyag du 'dod pa'i yon la phul/*.

16 For further examples of the use of gold in beverages, see Dan Martin, "The Gold Drink Rite. Indigenous, But Not Simply Indigenous," *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia* 7.2 (2014): 79–95. A non-Buddhist origin narration, *gSer bskyems rabs* [An Account on Gold Drink], appears also among the Gatang texts, cf. John V. Bellezza, "gShen-rab Myi-bo: His Life and Times According to Tibet's Earliest Sources," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 19 (2010): 31–118, 45.

17 *Sa bdag 'bum* [Earth-Lord Collection], full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las sa bdag dbang chen gyi sgyur bcos te bam po gnyis pa'o* [The Second Volume from the Fourfold Pure Collections, on Restoration of the Earth-Lords' Power] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6280), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 140, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 57, ll. 6–7: *bon po'i dbul* (*dbu la*) *thod bcings/ zhal du gser g.yu gsol/ yon bdag la srung btsan bkad de 'di skad/*.

18 Huber, *Source of Life*, vol. 2, 227–244.

19 This is also confirmed by some indications given in an almost extinct lay ritual tradition from the north-eastern outskirts of the Tibetan Plateau that is sometimes called *léu* (Tib. *le'u*). According to the information collected during my fieldwork there in 2017 and 2018, some of the texts containing origin myths were written down by Bönpo monks (who

Let us return our attention to the term lore/wisdom (Tib. *gtsug lag*), through discussion of the following post-imperial extract. This passage alludes to the function of ritual narrations as an important means of understanding the surrounding world in general:

> It will be exposed in great core treatises of 'wisdom' [(Tib. *gtsug lag gzhung chen*)]. The specific manners of their voicing [(Tib. *gyer thabs*)] will be passed on in each tradition of narration on origin [(Tib. *smrang rgyud*)]. Thus, all the created world would be understood.[20]

This brief extract explicitly stresses the crucial role of such ritual narrations for orientation in the world. By specifying the great treatises (which alludes to written texts) and linking them with specific methods of voicing the origin myths, an aspect of their organisation is implied. This could be an indication of an emerging pan-Tibetan ritual tradition. However, the origin myths themselves are seen to be related to the term that was only provisionally translated as wisdom or custom in both previous extracts.

This term has been discussed in connection with the old religion in Tibet. Ariane Macdonald suggested it as a name for the old religion.[21] Her conclusions were nevertheless disputed by Rolf Stein in his very detailed analyses of this term based on the Dunhuang documents.[22] Stein summarises his detailed observations as follows:

> [...] *gtsug lag* is well defined by numerous texts. It comprises a rather broad range of meanings, such that it is impossible to adopt single and same translation in all cases. It designates a wisdom, an art, a science, a *savoir-faire* (and the writings which speak about it). For the king, notably for Srong btsan sgam po, it clearly concerns the art of governance and a

censored them), while one of the few surviving old ritualists from Thewo (Tib. The bo) knows them only from his memory. Such an interesting situation of a tradition based on oral performance living in an environment heavily influenced by written texts could be said to be characteristic of the Tibetan cultural sphere in general.

20 *mDo rnam 'grel bar ṭi ka* [Commentary Explaining Sūtras] (Dolanji: Bonpo Monastic Centre, 2012): chap. 30, fol. 108a–108b: *gtsug lag gzhung chen de la bshad/ gyer thabs re zhing* (= *zhig*?) *smrang rgyud dang sprad/ 'on tang srid pa kun gyis go/*.

21 Ariane Macdonald, "Une lecture des Pelliot Tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, et 1290: essai sur la formation et l'emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Sroṅ bcan Sgam po," in *Études Tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, ed. Ariane Macdonald (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1971), 190–391.

22 Rolf Stein, "A propos du mot gcug-lag et de la religion indigène," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 74 (1985): 83–133.

> political wisdom. There also, the authors could subtly play on an assimilation of the ancient wisdom of the first mythic kings with Buddhism (sometimes called *gtsug lag bzang po*, and not *chen po*). Since 814 (*Mahāvyutpatti*), *gtsug lag* designates the sacred texts of Buddhism. In the same era, it was also employed by the Indian paṇḍits. It then designates the morality and the good conduct of the laity (synonymous with *mi chos*) being used as preparation for Buddhism (*lha chos*).[23]

It is obviously a term that is extremely polysemantic and flexible. Rolf Stein has amply demonstrated that the term is not a designation of a religious tradition, but a very general term that encompasses the various arts, principles and knowledge that are applied to preserve the order of society and the course of the world. This term has been rendered differently by various authors as governance, custom, literature, wisdom, and religion, among others.[24] For the sake of clarity, the translation 'wisdom' will be used in this text, but with the understanding that this is a considerable simplification.

While Rolf Stein mentions the inclusion of Buddhism under this term from the early ninth century in the form of sacred texts, etc., Michael L. Walter argues in favour of the conscious inclusion of Buddhist concepts as early as the eighth century, during the reign of Emperor Tri Songdétsen (r. 742–ca. 800, Tib. Khri Srong lde brtsan), as evidenced by the text *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma las*

23 For this English rendering by Arthur P. McKeown, see Rolf Stein, *Rolf Stein's Tibetica Antiqua* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 189. For the original French text, see Rolf Stein, "A propos du mot gcug-lag et de la religion indigène," 132–133.

24 One recent and detailed investigation of this term is Joanna Bialek, *Compounds and Compounding in Old Tibetan. Vol. 2: A Corpus-Based Approach* (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 2018), 392–402. On the basis of the great variability in possible translations, Bialek suggests 'principles' as a fitting general rendering of this term in English. The Tibetan text from the 17th century explains it as "that which has come out of the head (*gtsug*) of the most holy, i.e., the result of his intellect, and has been placed in the hands (*lag*) of the inquirer, hence sciences, sacred literature, etc." (Tib. *'phags pa'i gtsug nas bton/ zhu byed lag tu bzhag pas brjod*); text and translation based on Sarat Chandra Das, *Tibetan-English Dictionary* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1902), 1002a. This citation comes from a 17th-century treatise on astrology, the *Vai dū rya dkar po* [White Beryl] authored by Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653–1703/5, Tib. sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho), but such an understanding is the result of its adaptation and widening of its sematic field by Buddhist scholars. Michael Hahn comes up with a tentative etymology as "that which has been (or, is to be) recited in order to be penetrated" (Tib. *gtsug* (*bk*)*lag*(*s*)); see Michael Hahn, "A Propos the Term *gtsug lag*," in *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz, 1995*, vol. 1, ed. Helmut Krasser et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995), 353. However, this interpretation seems to have very little support in the textual evidence and the context of the imperial Period.

mdo btus pa [Extract of the Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures] whose authorship is attributed to this Emperor.[25] In the post-11th century period, it appears in Buddhist circles as a name not only for sacred Buddhist texts but also for the Buddhist temple (Tib. *gtsug lag khang*) and, surprisingly, is associated with the art of astrology (Tib. *rtsis gtsug lag*). This connection with astrology will be touched upon at the end of this chapter, where a collection of myths about the earth-lord spirits (Tib. *sa bdag*) may provide an explanation.

Whatever the case, the two extracts presented here, along with the frequent appearance of the term in existing collections of origin myths calling their lore by this term, bear witness to the fact that the term lore/wisdom is also understood to cover specific general knowledge/customs/principles mediated by ritual narratives on origin events. The ritual context and the means of mediating it are inseparable from this specific knowledge. An example from the collection of origin narrations surviving in the Bön Kangyur describing the ritual performance accompanying an oath is rather straightforward in this regard:

> In between of heavenly and fierce spirits [(Tib. *lha dang gnyan*)],
> a stone and a tree were planted as witnesses,
> in the vast triangular land,
> the white cushion of heavenly spirits was spread,
> on the earth of not seeing, the flag was hoisted,
> on the earth of not hearing, the conch-shell was blown,
> on the earth of not understanding, the ritual narration of 'wisdom' [(Tib. *gtsug lag gi smrang*)] was pronounced.
> To the monkey, to the badger, and to the ox, to the three,
> unspoiled and uncreated offerings [(Tib. *yas*)] were gathered,
> the snout of a greyish ox was pierced (?),
> the back of a greyish cow was split,
> the goat and dog were slaughtered as witnesses,
> the red ox was slaughtered.[26]

25 Michael L. Walter, *Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 228.

26 *gNyan 'bum* [Fierce Spirit Collection], full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum* [Precious Fierce Spirit Collection from the Fourfold Pure Collections] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6281), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 141, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 141–142, ll. 5–7, 1: *de ni lha dang gnyan gnyis kyi bar du /gzu rdo dang gzu shing btsugs/ yul yang mo gru gsum pa/ lha gdan dkar po btings/ mi mthong dog nas dar phyar/ mi thos dog na dung 'bud/ mi go dog na gtsug lag gi smrang bshad/ spre'u grum glang gsum la/ mi sdigs mi srid pa'i yas bgrangs/ glang bre bo'i sna phol/ ba bre mo'i sgang bkral/ gzu ra gzu khyi bsad/ bse glang dmar po bsad/.*

These verses say that the lore/wisdom was voiced in the origin narration for the ritual, during which animals were slaughtered. Although this text survives among the monastic Bön texts, the animal sacrifice mentioned there goes very much against the essential principles of even early monastic Bön scriptures.

However, such lore/wisdom can also be seen as indicative of a principle that underlies the world itself. In the following example from a post-imperial collection of myths, it relates to the creation of the world and ascribes it cosmogonical significance:

> First, when the sky expanded in height,
> it was expanded by creating 'wisdom' [(Tib. *gtsug lag srid*)].
> When the earth spread below,
> it was spread by delegating knowledge of origin [(Tib. *ye mkhyen skos*)].
> In the void of original non-existence [between them],
> a bit of original existence was created.[27]

This myth speaks of a specific wisdom connected with the power of creating (Tib. *srid*) the world and the sky. As such, it resembles a driving force from outside the world. The myths related to the origin of the world are participating in it. The knowledge of the primordial is paired with it. It is seen as appointing, delegating (Tib. *skos*) and related to the earth. It established order within the space of world already created by the wisdom.[28]

These latter examples connecting ritual narrations with specific lore/wisdom or principles come from post-imperial textual sources. However, the imperial background of some of their elements and features cannot be excluded from analysis of them. Despite the doubt that remains given the gap of time, it seems that the driving force behind imperial rituals was the narration on origin or past events. When referring to wisdom or principles it is by no means odd to suppose that it was understood to be mediated through such ritual narrations.

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27 *gNyan 'bum* [Fierce Spirit Collection] full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum* [Precious Fierce Spirit Collection from the Fourfold Pure Collections] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6281), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 141, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 198, ll. 5–6: *dang po mtho ru gnam phub kyang / gtsug lag srid kyi* (*kyis*) *phub/ dma' ru sa bting yang / ye mkhyen skos kyis bting / ye med stong las ye yod cung tsam srid/*.

28 In monastic Bön religion, the creating and delegating could also be understood as specific kinds of being, along with royal ancestral deities (Tib. *phywa*). Yet, in some myths, the first two are also accompanied by primordiality (Tib. *ye*).

The detailed analysis of this term by both Macdonald and Stein seem to bear witness to its role within the established Tibetan Empire, not just regional and local ritual tradition. By linking such wisdom/principles with ritual narrations, the connection with attempts to organise non-Buddhist rituals of the Tibetan Empire could be assumed. The absence of this term in the ritual narrations from Dunhuang could be well explained by its usage as a cover term. It is used only from a very general perspective, surveying a large variety of ritual narrations and rituals associated with them.

The term lore/wisdom reveals a certain pattern of arrangement, which could also be related to ritual narratives. The crown of the head (Tib. *gtsug*) is evoked by it, certainly indicating something ultimate, higher, and perhaps also related to emperors. The second syllable then refers to branches (Tib. *lag*). The logic of this compound is not very far from the Tibetan term used for *maṇḍala*, which is composed of the terms centre surrounding (Tib. *dkyil 'khor*) and so does not seem to strictly adhere to the Indic term.[29] Similar dynamic ideas encompassing the term lore/wisdom certainly unite a variety of knowledge and wisdom. However, it has been shown that ritual narrative on origins or precedents was certainly an important means of formulating wisdom or knowledge. At the level of ritual narrative, such branches could be mirrored by a series of attested ritual narratives; a whole series constituting the branches of the higher narrative. The term lore/wisdom could well refer to the methodology of creating a dynamic, single ritual system out of a large variety of systems.

3 Notes on Tibetan Ritual Traditions during the Empire

The relevant sources available do not indicate that, for the majority of the Tibetan imperial period (ca. 600–850), autochthonous ritual traditions would

29 The explanation of the Tibetan rendering of *maṇḍala* as centre-surrounding is based on combining two popular etymologies in *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* [The Two-Volume Lexicon], an early catalogue of Indic terms prescribing their Tibetan equivalents (see, for example, rTa rdo, ed., *dKar chag 'phang thang ma*/ *sGra sbyor dbang po gnyis pa* [Pangtangma Catalogue and the Two-Volume Lexicon] (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003), 172). It says that the expression *maṇḍala*, when divided into *maṇḍa* and *la*, has the meaning of essence, sphere, centre (Tib. *snying*, *dbyings*, *dkyil*) for *maṇḍa*, and taking, retaining (Tib. *len pa*, *'dzin pa*) for *la*. Its second meaning is 'something with round edge' (Tib. *kho ra khor yug zlum po*). However, it is further stated that, as it was known earlier as centre surrounding, it is decided to use this term. For the difference in understanding between *maṇḍala* and centre surrounding (though rather a sweeping one, arriving at quantum physics), see Herbert Guenther, "Mandala and/or dkyil 'khor," *International Journal for Transpersonal Studies* 18.2 (1999): 149–161.

have been seen as conflicting with the universal religion of Buddhism. One such rather well-known example can be seen in the recorded inscription on the stele located near the bridge of the valley of Chonggyé (Tib. 'Phyongs rgyas) close to the tomb of the Emperor Tri Songdétsen, which was estimated to have been inscribed following his death in 799.

In the context of the present article, it is perhaps interesting that the tradition of ancestors is described using the term lore/wisdom. In the examples given above, it is also referred to as manifested through origin myths. Hugh E. Richardson translated it as "world order" in the following extract. Stein later pointed out that *gtsug lag* is a very general term that can be translated very differently depending on the context, but it never means something like world order.[30] In the present context, perhaps a general translation of 'principles' would be appropriate. However, since the same text also contains praise for propagating Buddhism, labelling it a 'supramundane religion/doctrine' (Tib. *'jig rten las 'das pa'i chos*), the text clearly implies that the Emperor followed the religious ideas of the past alongside propagating Buddhism:

> The divine Btsan-po Khri Srong-lde-brtsan, too, in accordance with the custom of his ancestors did not impair the 'principles' of the gods [(Tib. *lha'i gtsug lag*)]; he acted in agreement with the religion [(Tib. *chos*)] of heaven and earth.
>
> When through possessing in his mind the acts of enlightenment in great abundance he had found the excellent supramundane religion [(Tib. *'jig rten las 'das pa'i chos*)], he bestowed it as a favour on all [...].[31]

It is not entirely clear how to interpret this. While Snellgrove saw similarities between the Tibetan Empire and other the Central Asian empires in relation to their practise of more universal religions, such as the later Mongol Empire (13th/14th c.), and he seems to assume that they simply coexisted side by side,[32] Walter argues that "Buddhist values were encapsulated [...] in concepts of *gtsug lag*."[33]

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30 Rolf Stein, "A propos du mot gcug-lag et de la religion indigène," 132–133.

31 Hugh E. Richardson, *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1985), 39. The Tibetan text reads: *lha btsan po khri srong lde brtsan gyi zha snga nas kyang/ yab myes kyi lugs bzhin lha'i gtsug lag nI ma nyams/ gnam sa'i chos dang ni 'thun par mdzad/* [...] *thugs la byang chub spyod pa rlabs po che mnga' bas/ 'jig rten las 'das pa'i chos bzang po brnyes nas/ kun la bka' drin du byin no/* [...].

32 Cf. David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 426–428.

33 Michael L. Walter, *Buddhism and Empire*, 228.

Despite such indications of certain forms of co-existence during the imperial period, one cannot say it is likely that ritualists performing indigenous rites would have existed in vicinity of an enlarging community of Buddhist monks without any conflict at all. This appears to be a contradiction, but the existing sources actually suggest both co-existence and polemics.

When discussing the relationship between Buddhism and indigenous rites during the imperial Period, a rather well-known Dunhuang document, P. T. 239, immediately comes to mind. It is a manuscript containing a Buddhist critique of non-Buddhist funeral ritual which has attracted the attention of scholars including Stein.[34] The text attests to the fact that non-Buddhist rituals were seen as problematic by followers of Buddhism in Tibet during at least some part of the Tibetan Empire, or slightly afterwards. Specifically, slaughtering sheep, horses, and yaks and so forth as psychopomp animals is considered a cruel and deplorable practice. However, the practice of pronouncing origin myths is also mentioned. They are portrayed by Buddhists as ineffective mainly because the value and abilities of animals slaughtered during the funeral ritual are overrated by their non-Buddhist ritual counterparts:

> In the main treatises of the 'black people', in their black funeral rites, in their origin narrations [(Tib. *smrang*)] of the ritualist's desire for material offerings, in the series of origin accounts [(Tib. *rabs*)] of the desire of troublesome spirits [(Tib. *'dre*)] for burned offerings, a sheep is wiser than people. And it appears there even that sheep have greater magical power than people. Yet, each of the sentient beings is led solely by its own deeds.[35]

There are more fragments of texts containing critiques of non-Buddhist funeral rituals, suggesting that conflict over funeral rituals was the general case and not just one entailing an isolated voice.[36]

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34 Rolf Stein, "Un document ancien relatif aux rites funéraires des Bon-po tibétains," *Journal Asiatique* 258 (1970): 155–185. Further discussion can be found in Brandon Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories: Preliminary Remarks on the Place of Narrative in Tibetan Religion," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 45 (2016): 77–112.

35 P. T. 239, fol. 7–8, ll. 4–5, 1–2: *myI nag po'i gzhung// gshid nag po'i lugs// bon yas 'dod smrang// 'dre gsur 'dod gyI rabs las// myI bas nI lug 'dzangs la// myI bas kyang lug mthu che bar 'byung ba yang// sems can thams gyang sa so'I las kyIs khrId pas//.*

36 For more fragments containing critique of non-Buddhist funeral rituals, see Brandon Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories," and Sam van Schaik, "The Naming of Tibetan Religion: Bon and Chos in the Tibetan Imperial Period," *Journal of the International Association for Bon Research* 1 (2013): 227–257.

Interestingly, we learn from P. T. 239 that the Buddhists appropriated the layout of the non-Buddhist funeral ritual. Therefore, the text not only bears witness to conflict, but also documents Buddhist borrowing from indigenous rituals. The elements that clashed with the central ideas of Buddhism were modified. These mainly concerned animal sacrifice, which is also referred to in several other critiques. However, the general structure of the ritual and the need to guide the deceased were retained.

This text clearly represents an early example of the influence of Tibetan non-Buddhist ritual traditions on Buddhism. It contains the main features of the former that repeat on a more general plan according to the latter. The layout of the original non-Buddhist ritual is retained in often very simplified form. Elements contradicting Buddhist conventions and doctrine are suppressed or changed into unproblematic ones. However, in many known such cases, the origin myth is omitted, since to include it would provide unwanted witness to Buddhist appropriation, or fraud. Therefore, through the omission of the crucial components of origin myth narration, the ritual is deprived of its meaning. It becomes an inconsistent sequence of ritual acts that lack any coherence or integration. In an attempt to counter this, in some cases a brief myth (usually related to the Buddha or the eighth-century master Padmasambhava) is inserted. Yet, such a charter myth usually does not provide meaning to the ritual performance. Instead, its focus is often simply to anchor the ritual within a Buddhist context. In other instances, the myth is replaced by a history (Tib. *lo rgyus*), which is frequently situated in Tibet's imperial past. Instead of infusing ritual with coherent meaning, such seemingly historical accounts attempt to empower it with the charisma and authority of past Buddhist heroes.[37]

37 Relatively well-documented approaches from the side of Buddhist traditions appear in the case of rituals summoning well-being (Tib. *g.yang 'gugs*). The very elaborate myth of miraculous deer from the beginning of the world, whose body gives rise to the ritual tools used in the ritual, survives in several variants (see Ramble, "The Deer as Structuring Principle"). In contrast, brief Buddhist mythical accounts connecting this ritual with Buddha or Padmasaṃbhava are incoherent (see Daniel Berounský, "Tibetan Myths on 'good fortune' (*phya*) and 'well-being' (*g.yang*)," *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia* 7.2 (2014): 55–77). For research on early appropriations of mythical narrations in tantric rituals see Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, "Enduring Myths: *smrang*, *rabs* and Ritual in the Dunhuang Texts on Padmasambhava," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 15 (2008): 277–314. An early example of history used as origin myths is documented by Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories." An example of a history employed as origin myth could also be seen in *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus* [History of Food Provisioning], likely a later addendum to the chronicle *dBa' bzhed* [Testament of the Ba], discussed in the contribution by Lewis Doney in the present volume.

There are some dozen surviving Dunhuang documents relating to non-Buddhist funeral rituals. This indicates the importance attributed to them during the imperial period. Many of them contain origin tales and this makes them suitable lenses to give insight into factors which could characterise rituals other than funerary rites.[38] These texts were recently discussed insightfully by Brandon Dotson with focus on origin myths.[39] It is evident that the plot and the narrative structure could be the subject of the rearrangement of tropes, manipulation of the basic outline, and the inclusion or suppression of some motifs, etc. The narrative could be considerably expanded but also concentrated in amazingly brief outlines. Following Stein,[40] Dotson rightly points out that the samples of what have been called catalogues (be it of principalities or minor kings), represent in some cases contracted lists of redactional outlines of such ritual narrations consisting merely of locations and the names of main characters.[41]

Such unstable forms of ritual narratives can also be witnessed in much later examples.[42] While in later examples such features could be ascribed to the oral component in the process of their formation, this is much more uncertain in the case of those related to the imperial period. The circumstances of their production should be considered first, as it is possible to suppose intentional agents underlie such restructuring and arrangement.

38 Besides the ritual manual containing the steps of a pompous and large-scale funeral ritual (P. T. 1042, see Marcelle Lalou, "Rituel Bon-po des funérailles royales," *Journal Asiatique* 240 (1952): 339–361), there are several examples of manuscripts containing origin myths related to the funeral rites. A fine, and the probably best-known, example of them could be IOL Tib J 731, a poetic and lengthy myth describing the origin of the wild ass (Tib. *rkyang*) and wild yak from the sky, a conflict between them following their descent to the earth, the separation of horse from the wild ass and its eventual use as a psychopomp animal in the funeral rituals of indigenous people (see Thomas, *Ancient Folk-Literature*, 1–39; Dotson, "The Horse and the Grass-Grazing Man"). Two other myths related to funeral rituals appear in the same manuscript (IOL Tib J 731, see Bellezza, *Death and Beyond in Ancient Tibet*, 236–346) and in IOL Tib J 732, the last of which is connected with a certain Gyimpo Nyakchik (Tib. Gyim po Nyag cig). More myths related to funeral rituals are contained in P. T. 1194 (dealing with the origin of the bird wing ritual tool), P. T. 1068 (fragmented narration on the funeral ritual (Tib. *gshid*) of female accompanied by sacrifice of female hybrid yak *dzomo*), P. T. 1134 (funeral ritual of a man), P. T. 1136 (two accounts of a funeral for a man killed by a yak, the second referring to Western Tibet—Gugé and Tsang), and *doma* horse (horse used as psychopomp). This is also a central topic for P. T. 1060, which also contains a list of 13 countries, their lords, ministers, servants, etc. (cf. Bellezza, *On Zhang Zhung*, 496–542).

39 Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories."

40 Rolf A. Stein, "Du recit au rituel dans les manuscrits Tibétains de Touen-houang," 476–547.

41 Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories."

42 See the already mentioned Ramble, "The Deer as a Structuring Principle."

In attempting to place these existing fragments of early ritual narrations in context, one should first draw a general picture. Due to ongoing but still rather limited archaeological excavations, it is known that a variety of burial customs preceded the Tibetan Empire. Such excavations uncover both deep burial pits and coffins placed only slightly below the surface of the earth. In these times, which predate the Tibetan Empire, a variety of animals were sacrificed, and golden masks used to cover the face of the deceased are also in evidence.[43]

Rapid change in the ways of burying the deceased of higher social standing occurs in the period of the Tibetan Empire. A tradition of erecting large burial mounds is documented from that period, thus marking also its very specific religious and cultural background.[44] On a general level it is an indication of change in religious ideas corresponding to the sudden rise of the Empire. This is because none of the surviving origin myths among Dunhuang documents could predate the Tibetan Empire, making existing ones likely to be representative of newly emerged religious ideas.

The difficult question connected with surviving ritual narrations is related to the context of their conversion to written texts. In general, these crucial components of non-Buddhist ritual traditions are based on an oral exposition of origin myth and voicing. Writing characterises Buddhism, but also

43 Recent research indicates that although burial places changed from being pits to monumental mounds, the presence of golden masks could also be seen as indicating continuity with rituals predating the Tibetan Empire. Not only that, they also survived in the repertoire of monastic Bön after the Tibetan Empire. See Samten G. Karmay, "The Gold Masks Found in Shang shung and the 'Five Supports of the Soul (rten lnga)' of the Bon Funerary Tradition," in *Ancient Civilization of Tibetan Plateau: Proceedings of the First Beijing International Conference on Shang shung Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Tsering Thar Tongkor and Tsering Dawa Sharshon (Xining: mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2018), 330–344. For a summary of the archaeological evidence for burial customs predating the Tibetan Empire, see Mark Aldenderfer, "Variation in Mortuary Practice on the Early Tibetan Plateau and the High Himalayas," *Journal of the International Association for Bon Research* 1 (2013): 293–318.

44 Until recently only a limited number of exemplars of Tibetan tombs from the imperial period were known, restricted mostly to the region of Chonggyé, south of Lhasa, where Tibetan emperors were buried (for example, Giuseppe Tucci, *The Tombs of the Tibetan Kings* (Rome: IsMEO, 1950)). These tombs had already been plundered by the end of the Tibetan Empire, circa the ninth century. However, with an ongoing project led by Guntram Hazod, using a combination of satellite images and investigative visits focusing on surface, more than 600 tombs have been documented in Central Tibet (see Guntram Hazod and Karel Kriz, *The Burial Mound Sites of Imperial Central Tibet. Map scale 1:800 000* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2020)). We know that the custom of burying the deceased in large tombs spread on a large scale in Tibet during the imperial period. This marks the sudden growth of prominence of leaders at various levels demonstrated outwardly by monumental tombs.

administrative centres of the Empire. It is unlikely that a chant belonging to a local lineage of regional ritualists would be recorded in writing. However, the likeness increases when the newly established ritual tradition connected with the administration of the Tibetan Empire is considered, exemplified by the sudden appearance of the large tombs evidenced in archaeological research. It is much more likely that the manuscripts representing non-Buddhist rituals relate to a tradition reinvented for the whole Tibetan Empire. They could be based on some local tradition but were modified to fit the new context of the Tibetan Empire.

Returning to the critiques of non-Buddhist funeral rituals, a seemingly marginal argument was overshadowed by expressions of earnest disgust over animal sacrifices. The fragment from Dunhuang (S. 12243) discussed by van Schaik, follows a brief description of the funeral ritual by concluding: "If one examines the justifications for this [practice] [...] even the ritual narratives of the bon po of Tibet are not in agreement."[45]

It clearly views deficiency of non-Buddhist ritual as lying in the incoherence of ritual narrations. It could be the case, as van Schaik notes, that the Buddhist author did not understand the actual role of the origin tales and myths in non-Buddhist rituals. However, I am inclined to take the view that this instead points out inconsistencies in the nature of ritual tradition due to the fact that they drew on a variety of regional ritual methods, incompatible once amalgamised. This argument will be examined in more detail in the following section.

4 Taming the Spirits Causing the Untimely Deaths of Pregnant Women and the Composite Nature of (Post-)Imperial Tibetan Rituals

This section mainly aims to elaborate more on what surviving documents can tell us about the rites performed on the Tibetan Plateau. It can also be taken as an exploration of the critique levied against Bönpo funeral rituals which states that their ritual narratives are not in agreement (Tib. *smrang mi 'thun*). As a point of departure, a document that is in line with the previous examples will be considered. It concerns a very specific and rather sinister case of rituals performed to purify the pollution related to untimely deceased pregnant women or their tragic miscarriages. They reflect the highly specialised subcategory of funeral rituals. Nevertheless, as Huber rightly pointed out, the main purpose

45 van Schaik, "The Naming of Tibetan Religion," 252: *de nyid bcu ba brtags na/:/ bod kyi bon po rnams kyi smrang yang myI 'thun te*.

of these texts is not the funeral ritual, but the purification of and remedy for highly polluting and dangerous situations.[46]

The manuscript we are concerned with here is entitled *rNel dri 'dul ba'i thabs* [A Method of Taming Spirits of Polluting Untimely Death].[47] We do not know what the expression exactly means. 'Spirit of untimely death' (Tib. *dri*) means a specific class of spirit entities connected with untimely death (which seems to be interchangeable with Tib. *gri*). What is meant by pollution/disorder (Tib. *rnel*) here is not exactly clear. One possibility is that it stands for specific pollution (cf. *nal*—pollution from incest, *mnol*), or a very specific accident-bringing disorder, connected with the death of foetuses and pregnant women. Huber also suggests a tentative rendering of it as 'infant'.[48]

The text was found in the Gatang *stūpa* in Southern Tibet and does not contain traces of Buddhist terminology. The script resembles that of the Dunhuang documents, but it is difficult to date it. It has been estimated that it could be from the 11th century or earlier,[49] but this remains open to question. The details of the discovery of this manuscript and even the rendering of it were published elsewhere,[50] so I will restrict myself to the rather general task of examining what it could tell us about indigenous rituals on the Tibetan Plateau.

The manuscript can be divided into three parts. The first, incomplete section describes in detail the ritual performed by a mythical ritualist named Yangel (Tib. Ya ngal) on behalf of a pregnant lady whose death was untimely (pp. 1–9). It seems that it is a detailed rendering of a ritual which is connected with events narrated later in the seventh antecedent tale, which names the same female spirit causing the death. This is followed by a separate and less elaborate description giving details of the ritual performed by Rajag Kyigyel

46 Huber, *Source of Life*, vol. 2, 40.

47 For references to the original text, the publication edited by Pasang Wangdu will be used. See Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus and Glang ru Nor bu tshe ring, ed., *gTam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdam bsgrigs* [Collection of Ancient Bönpo Manuscripts Newly Discovered in Tamshül Gatang Bumpaché Stūpa] (Lhasa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 2007). For dealing with the entire collection of texts in Tibetan, see lCag mo mtsho, *gTam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas rnyed pa'i bon gyi gna' dpe'i zhib 'jug* [Research on Ancient Bönpo Texts Discovered in Tamshül Gatang Bumpaché Stūpa] (Beijing: Krung go bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2016).

48 Huber, *Source of Life*, vol. 2, 41–42.

49 See. Karmay, "A New Discovery of Ancient Bon Manuscripts from a Buddhist Stūpa in Southern Tibet," 55–56.

50 Ibid.

(Tib. Ra ljags skyI rgyal) (pp. 9–11), who frequently appears in several narrations occurring later in the text.[51]

The second part of the manuscript contains a series of 14 narratives concerning the origin of deaths of pregnant women and their subsequent ritual treatment (pp. 11–37). The third part (pp. 37–47) is incomplete and contains only one full narrative and a fragment of a second.

The following analysis will focus mainly on the second and only complete section of the text. It is unique in the sense that it represents a complete collection of origin tales, which, to my knowledge, is very rare in the case of Dunhuang manuscripts. It is more normative for such collections of texts to be fragmented, making them insufficient to provide us with information concerning the structure of narrative collections as complete units.

Each of the 14 narrations has a similar structure, albeit not identical. As an example, what follows is a brief outline of the content of the third origin tale.

The third origin tale first names the father and mother, stating that a girl and a boy were born from their union. The name of the main character, the girl, was Göza Chamdarma (Tib. Gos 'za Phyam 'dar ma). She was very beautiful, "[h]er face was beautiful as a full moon, her body was elastic as a bamboo sprout." The spirits and divinities residing in her home valley fell in love with her. They all asked her father to become her husband. Yet, her father refused to give her to them. The text states that "he made a mistake, he broke her heart. He separated her from the blood-thirsty spirit [(Tib. *srin*)]." It implies that she was in love with one of the spirits, which could allude to the fact that it was this spirit who was behind the tragic events.

She became the wife of a certain Lord of Copper Country (Tib. *zangs yul zangs stod*) named Zangkar Seupa (Tib. Zangs 'gar se'u pa). After nine months—apparently pregnant—she travelled back to her father's house to visit him. Riding a horse that resembled a goat, she met two shepherds. One of them threw a stone at her head, she fainted, and was caught in her hourse's halter. Stampeding, dragging her behind, the horse jumped into a gorge. Stones covered the young woman, her dress twisted around her neck and strangled her, she fell into the river and drowned. As a result, she and her baby were

51 While John Bellezza considers this part to be the first myth of the next section, Huber (*Source of Life*, vol. 2, 41–47) assumes it to continue describing single ritual with two parts performed by Yangel and Rajag Kyigyel respectively, I am inclined to see it simply as a description of a ritual method employed by Rajag Kyigyel, and not necessarily connected with the first part of the ritual. An argument supporting this is that the seventh tale—naming the same deceased lady and the female spirit—does mention Yangel as a ritualist, but not Rajag Kyigyel. For Bellezza's rendering of this manuscript, see Bellezza, *Death and Beyond in Ancient Tibet*, 121–176.

killed no less than nine times, the tale of which including explicitly mentioning her body being cut open by her husband, and nine spirits of untimely death (Tib. *dri*) appeared. These represented the untimely death which was consequentially enacted upon her body. The text also explicitly mentions that she was buried inside a tomb (Tib. *bang so*).

The text says that the ritualist Rajag Kyigyel was invited to perform the ritual at the home of Zangkar Seupa. The brief description of the ritual reminds us of embalming corpses and apparently uses a method of draining the body of liquids. However, there is no technical process entailed here, rather the main purpose of the ritual is to remove the nine spirits of untimely death from the body:

> He erected nine cairns of spirits of untimely death. He prepared nine 'bird-heads', nine various apertures ['eyes'], and nine skins. Nine [ritual vessels (Tib. *slug gu, skur bu, drod pa*)] were filled with nine kinds of blood. A liquid of medicinal plants was led downward from nine vessels. Nine (ritual tools) [(Tib. *'gal ba*)][52] were separating them. Let the distraction regarding the corpse not be great! Let death not be long mourned! Spirits of untimely death were led away through the hollows of the nine pipes and nine apertures ['eyes']. By the golden yellow pipe, turquoise blue pipe, silver white pipe, iron blue pipe, copper red pipe, agate brown pipe, by hollows of the nine pipes were led away. The wild spirits of untimely death of Göza Chamdarma were tamed and pacified. She was washed with many liquids. She was sprinkled with much purifying blood [(Tib. *tshan*)]. She was placed to the right side of the Zangkar Seupa's tomb. The untimely deceased girl was converted into an 'alpine spirit' [(Tib. *sman*)]. So, it was beneficial and lucky in ancient times. Reciting it brings benefits and luck now.[53]

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52 The Tibetan expression could mean a sharpened wooden slip aimed at destroying these spirits (Tib. *'gal ba*).

53 Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus and Glang ru Nor bu tshe ring, ed., *gTam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdam bsgrigs* [Collection of Ancient Bönpo Manuscripts Newly Discovered in Tamshül Gatang Bumpaché Stūpa], 13–16: *dri tho rgu cIg btsugs/ bya mgo rgu sna dmyIgs rgu/ pags bu rgu/ slug gu rgu/ skur bu rgu/ drod pa rgu// khrag rgus bkang ste/ rtsa rdzIng sna rgu thur du brug/ 'gal pa rgu thur du dgar/ ro phIr yen ma che/ shi phir gchags ma rIng/ sbubs mo dmyig rgu'i sbubs nas 'dren// ro phIr yen ma che/ shi phir gchags ma rIng/ sbubs mo dmyig rgu'i sbubs nas 'dren// gser sbubs ser mo dang/ g.yu sbubs sngon ma dang/ rngul sbubs/ dkar mo dang/ lcags sbubs sngon mo dang/ zangs sbubs dmar mo dang/ mchong sbubs smug mo dang/ sbubs rgu sbubs nas grangs/ 'gos za phyam 'dar ma/ bu gri rgod las g.yung du btul/ chu sna mang po nas bkrus/ tshan sna mang po nas btab/ zangs 'gar se'u pa yis/ bang so g.yas gyI dral du bzhag/ bu gri sman du bskyal/ gna' de ltar phan de bsod do/ da pu la gyer ba la phan de bsod do//.*

One can assume that this is a considerably shortened description of the ritual. However, for present purposes it suffices to compare it with other methods described in other narratives. The result of such a comparison reveals that the ritual methods used are very diverse. For example, the seventh narration alludes to the journey undertaken by a deceased lady. First, a ransom offering (Tib. *glud*) is presented to the female spirit responsible for the death. Then the deceased is led through nine layers of the realm of the spirit, after which she is instructed not to remain in the ritual pit, but to embark on a heart path (Tib. *thugs shul*) to the joyful place of the heavenly spirits (Tib. *dgyes lha sa*). A mask (Tib. *zhal*) and a ritual board (Tib. *byang bu*) is utilised for the transfer of the soul principle, as is still the case today for soul retrieval rituals. Finally, a sheep is mentioned, which probably serves as a psychopomp animal.

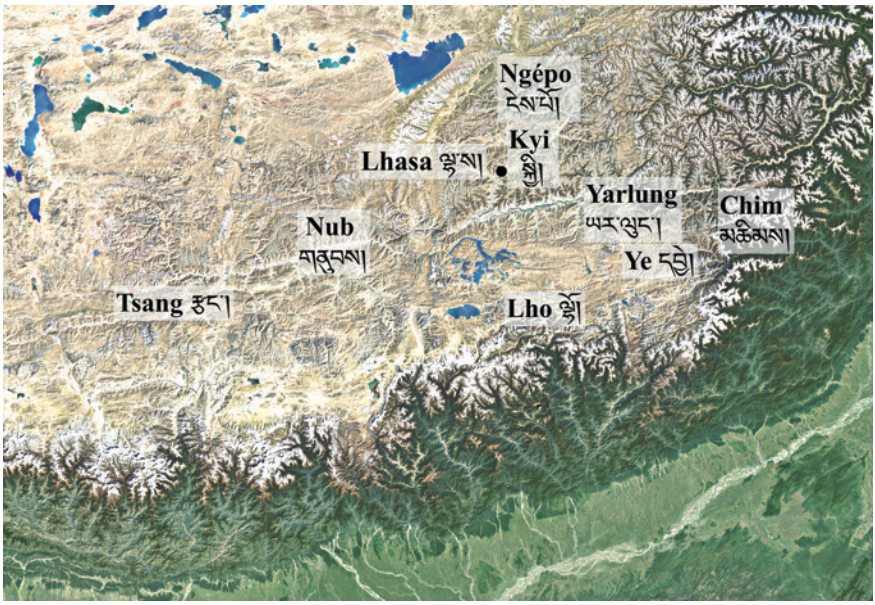
Another story—number 12 in the series—alludes to a ritual during which a golden umbilical cord is tied to a female vulture to open the heavenly window. This method is not mentioned in other ritual texts.

In yet another narrative (number 14), a series of 13 gravid female animals are used along with 13 different yogurts made from various milks. In yet another narrative—number nine—a method using stuffed kites (Tib. *'ol pa*) is mentioned.

As can be seen, the methods described vary considerably. Of particular importance is the fact that the performance of each of the different rituals is ascribed to different types of ritualists. This seems to suggest that different lineages of ritualists used different ritual means. In some cases, several ritualists are invited, presumably meaning that their ritual methods were combined.

These ritual narrations are particular in that their semi-mythical temporal localities are often infused with those of the ritual situation as well as with features outside of time and place. The names of the ritualists are likely representative of mythical founders of ritual lineages rather than of living people contemporary with the narrations.[54] The narrations don't always mention real localities, but fortunately, in the majority of the cases, these can be identified, and connected with the name of the ritualist. These can be charted as on the below map (map 7.1). It does not say that the events happened in the locations depicted, or the ritualists mentioned were present. However, the ritualists were situated at the localities shown by the compilers of the manuscript.

54 Cf. Toni Huber, "The Iconography of gShen Priests in the Ethnographic Context of the Extended Eastern Himalayas, and Reflections on the Development of Bon Religion," in *Nepalica-Tibetica: Festgabe für Christoph Cüppers*, ed. Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Petra Maurer (Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2013), 263–294.



MAP 7.1 Map of Central Tibet with locations mentioned in *A Method of Taming Spirits of Polluting Untimely Death*
LOCATIONS ADDED BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, GROUND MAP BASED ON GOOGLE MAPS

Mapping the textual references reveals that this corpus of narrations is related to Central and Southern Tibet. It stretches from western Tsang to Chim in the east and from northernmost Ngépo to Lho in the south.

When looking into the content of the narrations, it becomes clear that the collection is of a composite nature and that the self-contained collection of myths eight to 13 forms the basis of it. This can be seen from the content. These narrations have a simplified structure and phrases are repeated in almost identical fashion, for example, each time the moment of crisis occurs in which the woman is attacked by a spirit, resulting in miscarriage. These repetitive narrative phrases state that the baby turns its head downward, blood with amniotic fluids leaks from the womb, and the baby becomes twisted in the umbilical cord. The fact that these core narratives stand alone is also borne out by a statement at the end of the 13th tale to the effect that the sixth chapter has concluded. This exactly matches the repetition of phrases in narratives eight to 13.

To the self-contained collection of these six core origin tales, one can add another one. Tales one to six exclusively mention Rajag Kyigyel as a ritualist performing the ritual, calling him the ritualist of the spirits of untimely death (Tib. *dri bon*). Thus, it is highly likely that they originally formed a separate tradition.

TABLE 7.1 List of ritualists and their corresponding locations according to *A Method of Taming Spirits of Polluting Untimely Death*

Ritualist	Location
Rajag Kyigyel (Tib. Ra ljags skyI rgyal)	Kyi (Tib. sKyi), Gya (Tib. rGya), Do (Tib. mDo), Mu (Tib. rMu), Chim (Tib. mChims), Len (Tib. Glan)
Lhabön Mönbön Thökar (Tib. lHa bon Mon bon thod dkar)	Lho (Tib. lHo)
Khangza Thidang Payéyé (Tib. Khang za This dang spa ye ye)	Lho
Yangel Gyimkong (Tib. Ya ngal gyim kong)	Lho
Tsangshen Nyénngag (Tib. rTsang gshen snyan ngag)	Tsang (Tib. rTsang/gTsang)
Nubshen Rumpo (Tib. gNubs gshen Rum po)	Nub (Tib. gNubs), Char (Tib. Byar)
Abo Yangel (Tib. A bo Ya ngal)	Ngépo (Tib. Ngas po)
Kyishen Gyenngar (Tib. sKyi gshen rgyan ngar)	Kyi (Tib. sKyi)
Deshen Munbu (Tib. lDe gshen rmun bu)	Yarlung (Tib. Yar lung)
Tshemi Mugyal (Tib. mTshe myI rmu rgyal)	Yarlung
Yeshen Kharbu (Tib. dBye gshen mkhar bu)	Ye (Tib. dBye)
Phanyen Thökar (Tib. Pha gnyen thod dkar)	Len
Lanshen Drilbu (Tib. Glan gshen dril bu)	Len
Durshen Mada (Tib. 'Dur gshen rma da)	Len

TABLE PREPARED BY DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ

Narratives seven and 14 stand out somehow from the rest as specific single narrations. Both are connected to the name of Yangel Gyimkong (Tib. Ya ngal gyim kong), who appears in them as only one of a whole group of ritualists performing the ritual. The detailed reference to the ritual performed by him in the fragmented opening parts of the manuscript indicates that the method of the ritual was seen as prominent despite rather limited presence in the origin tales.

From the above-mentioned characteristics, it is possible to make some general observations concerning such ritual traditions. First, there was a tendency to move towards unifying ritual traditions into narrative collections. These tales are semi-mythical in nature, but in the case of the narrative collection studied here, the localities mentioned in the texts reveal that they are related to specific regions of central and southern Tibet. The method of amalgamating

them does not seem to be very elaborate. The tales were probably shortened into narratives of roughly corresponding length and similar structure. They usually consist of an introduction that mentions details of the parents of the deceased and locality. A brief story follows, explaining the background of the death of the pregnant lady. Following her death, the ritualist is summoned, and a brief description of the applied ritual method is given. This was probably the method used in assembling once diverse traditions connected with ritualists dealing with a similar problem.

The variety of methods used reveals that, despite features held in common, there was no uniform ritual tradition. This demonstrates that, at least in the case of these narratives, it would be problematic to speak about a single ritual being performed for pregnant women who had suffered untimely death. It may be that the assembling of stories slowly resulted in the ritual method of some prominent ritualist becoming preferred. Such could be the case in respect of this manuscript, whose first section describes in detail the ritual method of the ritualist named Yangel.

Furthermore, while most of the origin tales mention only a single ritualist performing the ritual, some of them describe a ritual performed by a whole group. Quite illustrative is the 14th tale, where four ritualists participate in the ritual. Firstly, Phanyen Thökar purifies heavenly spirits and suppresses troublesome ones. Then Lanshen Drilbu performs a ritual using a series of 13 pregnant female animals, yogurt from their milk, a species of trees, etc. Using a ritual pit (Tib. *gshed khung*), he resorts to a sort of exorcism after first having caught the pigeon who played a role in causing the death. Thirdly, Yangel performs his purification rite, and finally, Durshen Mada leads the deceased lady into an 'alpine spirit' (Tib. *sman*) as a part of a funeral ritual. As can be seen from this 14th tale, we have indication that originally separate ritual traditions associated with different ritualists were combined to form a more complex ritual. Hence, formerly separate rituals become the building blocks of a new structure created by their combination. It follows that recovering or reconstructing any one single ancient Tibetan funeral ritual on the basis of this combination would be a tricky task. The hypothesis that complex rituals were constructed from combining individual traditions explains the critique of one of the Dunhuang documents mentioned above as internally incoherent.

Such collections of origin myths and tales are very flexible in their recorded form. As has been rightly pointed out by Stein and Dotson,[55] the shortest of them seem to represent mere catalogues listing ritualists, localities, and

55 Stein, "Du recit au rituel dans les manuscrits Tibétains de Touen-houang"; Dotson, "The Dead and Their Stories."

perhaps local lords. The extensive ones, also known from among the Dunhuang documents, can be very poetic, entailing detailed narratives of considerable length. The manuscript titled *A Method of Taming Spirits of Polluting Untimely Death*, discussed above, contains relatively short stories that are formally unified, with some narrating the same event yet giving different details—for instance, narrations two and three, then three and 14, share the same story elements. The work to assemble these myths undoubtedly led to their becoming shortened and simplified.

We can posit that similar strategies to those used in the case of the narrative collection discussed above were used more generally to create a unified ritual tradition across the Tibetan Empire. This hypothesis is also supported by other documents. For example, the Dunhuang manuscript P. T. 1285 schematically mentions nine ritualists representing specific regions stretching from Tsang in the west to Kongpo in the east and thus covering the area of Central Tibet. A mythical land, Mayül Takgyé (Tib. sMra yul thag brgyad), is located east of Kongpo and is probably associated with eastern parts of Tibet. Again, the manuscript is written from the perspective of Central Tibet. Another example is provided by IOL Tib J 734, which lists in detail regions of Central Tibet, with Do (Tib. mDo) standing for all eastern parts.[56]

As the above examples reveal, local traditions were amalgamated to allow for geographical unity. It is quite likely that organising the variety of ritual traditions of the Tibetan Empire somehow attempted to follow the lead of the military administration which had divided the Tibetan Empire into clear units. One might assume that on the level of the rituals performed, the diverse ritual methods of local ritualists were combined, some—such as those of Yangel—eventually rising to prominence; others becoming silenced.[57]

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56 Another example are the manuscripts found in Gatang *stūpa* in Southern Tibet. The collection is entitled *Byol rabs* [Accounts on the Rite of Averting] (see Karmay, "A New Discovery of Ancient Bon Manuscripts"; Bellezza, "gShen-rab Myi-bo") and contains six antecedent myths. The first one takes place between the 13 layers of the sky and nine layers of the earth. The next five stories are from the (1) Miyül Kyiting (Tib. Mi yul rkyi thing), (2) Belpo (Tib. Bal po) (of Tsang), (3) Yar khyim so kha (of Yarlung), (4) Kyiyül (Tib. sKyi yul) (of Central Tibet), and (5) Mayül Tang-gyé (Tib. sMra yul thang brgyad). The last story mentions the mountain deity Machen Pomra (Tib. rMa chen pom ra) of Minyak (Tib. Mi nyag). Despite the mythical nature of the narrative, its location is in the north-east of the Tibetan Plateau. This might indicate that there was also an exception to the more common focus on Central Tibet. This shows that, at least in some cases, ritual traditions outside Central Tibet came to be known there.

57 Divination manuals surviving among the manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang could supplement us with additional insights. It is striking that recognisably Turkic and Chinese deities are listed alongside Tibetan ones—and localities such as Zhangzhung,

In the case of the collections of origin tales given above, the certain divide they reveal is quite significant. The area of Central Tibet between Tsang and Kongpo is the focus here. The vast regions of the Tibetan Plateau covering Ngari (Tib. Zhang zhung), the Northern Plains (Tib. Byang thang), and very large areas of contemporary Kham and Amdo (i.e., Do, Sumpa (Tib. Sum pa), Azha (Tib. 'A zha)) are either subject to the attribution of simplified labels (Do or the mythical land Mayül Takgyé is used in association with them), or altogether omitted.

5 The Fourfold Collection of Ritual Narrations (Tib. *'Bum bzhi*)

Some ritual narrations and their collections from Dunhuang, as well as those found in the Gatang *stūpa,* show that the eastern, northern, and western regions were only marginally represented in the collections of the imperial ritual tradition. At the same time, there are several Dunhuang ritual narrations, including those related to funeral rituals, which are likely of Eastern Tibetan origin. These probably represent an attempt to make eastern Tibetan ritual narrations—otherwise underrepresented in the number of surviving ritual narrations—compatible with the ritual repertoire of the Tibetan Empire. This concerns namely the collections of ritual narrations appearing in the interrelated documents IOL Tib J 731 and 732.[58] These documents likely represent

Yarmothang in the north-east, and Kyi in Central Tibet are mentioned. Metaphorical phrases are quite often repeated in various versions of the manuals, indicating that these were circulated. See Ai Nishida, "A Preliminary Analysis of Old Tibetan Dice Divination Texts," in *Glimpses of Tibetan Divination: Past and Present*, ed. Petra Maurer, Donatella Rossi, and Rolf Scheuermann (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 49–72. The deities and spirits listed in these divination manuals do not represent some regional tradition, but the divination manuals were composed from a perspective reflective of the whole Tibetan Empire. This again points to the methodology previously discussed, that of assembling local traditions and subsequently crystalising their once divergent parts.

58 The first one (IOL Tib J 731) contains a lengthy poetic myth describing the origin of the wild ass and wild yak from the sky, a conflict between them following their descent to the earth, the separation of the horse from the wild ass and its eventual use as a psychopomp animal in the funeral rituals by people in the origin narrative (see Thomas, *Ancient Folk-Literature*, 1–39; Dotson, "The Horse and the Grass-Grazing Man"). The myth mentions a land called Changka Namgyé (Tib. Byang ka snam brgyad). This is also known in other Dunhuang manuscripts. In P. T. 1060 (ll. 90–91), for example, it is included in the schematic list of countries, or catalogue of principalities, arranged in the direction from west to east. Changka Namgyé is listed after Kongpo (it would be located somewhere behind Kongpo) and the name of its main deity is mentioned as Turkic (Tib. *dru gu'i lha*); the kings are also listed with apparently Turkic names, Hirkin and Darkan (Tib. *rgyal*

an adaptation of the ritual narrations of peoples from the bordering regions of the Tibetan Plateau to the imperial ritual tradition.

Two surviving post-imperial exemplars of ritual narrations on the origin of purification rituals are quite illustrative of the continuing divide between Central (and Southern) Tibet and the vast areas of the rest of the Tibetan Plateau. These myths were discussed elsewhere,[59] so only their narrative frame will be mentioned here. They associate themselves neither with Bön nor with other non-Buddhist traditions. They present themselves as a pan-Tibetan tradition of all original Tibetan clans, literally four families of little-men (Tib. *mi'u rigs bzhi*). Yet, when these clans are mentioned, they are strikingly presented as only those of the eastern and western regions (i.e., Zhangzhung, Sumpa, Azha, and Minyak), as if these manuscripts wish to claim that authentic Tibetan tradition comes from the bordering regions of the Tibetan Empire.

In what follows, a little-explored, vast collection of ritual narrations included in the Bön Kangyur will be briefly discussed, highlighting its possibly Eastern Tibetan background. this is the *'Bum bzhi* [Fourfold Collection], a large compendium of ritual narrations or origin myths related to four specific types of spirits: (1) chthonic spirits (Tib. *klu*), (2) fierce spirits of the sky and the natural surroundings of people (Tib. *gnyan*), (3) rock spirits associated also with earthquakes (Tib. *gtod*) and (4) earth-lord spirits (i.e., earth-lords or lords of positions related to astrological calculations) (Tib. *sa bdag*).[60] This Collection was

hir kin dang dar kan). Another two myths related to funeral rituals appear in the same manuscript (IOL Tib J 731) and in IOL Tib J 732 (cf. Bellezza, *On Zhang Zhung*, 236–346; Thomas, *Ancient Folk Literature*, 40–51). References in the language of the Nampa Dong (Tib. Nam pa lDong), a subtribe of the Dong (Tib. lDong) clan, appear there. The Dong are related to various peoples called Qiang (羌) in Chinese. Gyimpo Nyakchik (Tib. Gyim po Nyag cig), a prominent character in a myth present in both IOL Tib J 731 and IOL Tib J 732, also appears in the *Fierce Spirit Collection* surviving in the Bön Kangyur (see footnote 27, above). Most of the content found in this collection seems to represent the tradition related to the Dong clan (corresponding roughly to Qiang in Chinese) and Minyak (Tanguts and proto-Tanguts).

59 Daniel Berounský, "Tibetan Purificatory *Sel* Rituals: Fragments of the Tradition from the Borderlands of the Tibetan Plateau," *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 19.1 (2019): 1–66.

60 See *Klu 'bum* [Chthonic Spirit Collection], full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las gtsang ma'i klu 'bum* [Clean Chthonic Spirit Collection from the Fourfold Pure Collections] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6279), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 139, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 346 pages; *gNyan 'bum* [Fierce Spirit Collection] full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum* [Precious Fierce Spirit Collection from the Fourfold Pure Collections] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6281), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 141, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 325 pages; *Sa bdag 'bum* [Earth-Lord Collection], full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las sa bdag dbang chen gyi sgyur bcos te bam po gnyis pa'o* [The Second Volume from the Fourfold Pure Collections,

introduced elsewhere.[61] For purposes here, the prime information concerning the collection can be summarised in the following way.

Later chronicles and monastic Bön catalogues ascribe their appearance to accidental finds by hunters in Western Tibet not far from Mt. Kailash. They even narrate these events as happening before the discovery of large volumes of texts by Shenchen Luga (996–1035, Tib. gShen chen Klu dga'), which can be dated to 1017.[62] This would indicate that these chronicles represent the event as taking place roughly at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, as far as I am aware, the earliest datable mention of this discovery by hunters was in the 18th century,[63] a very long time after the alleged discovery of the texts. Even if one could simply trust this, another question concerns the surviving copies of manuscripts included in the Bön Kangyur. Their colophons suggest that the individual manuscripts of the four collections come from different places. The texts of the manuscripts were hardly left intact over centuries. It is likely that they were edited, amended, etc. However, no information regarding this process is available.

Some of the contents of the texts corroborate the early date of these manuscripts. There is a version of the *Fourfold Collection*, which was rediscovered in the 12th century by the prolific treasure-revealer Ponsé Khyung Götsel (fl. 1175, Tib. dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal), in Tsang. This version, entitled *Nye lam sde bzhi* [Fourfold Direct Path], displays surprisingly heavier influence of Tantric

on Restoration of the Earth-Lord's Power] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6280), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 140, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 451 pages; *gTod 'bum* [Rock Spirit Collection] full title *rNam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rdo bdag gtod po bcos pa ste bam po bzhi pa'o* [The Fourth Volume from the Fourfold Pure Collections, on Propitiation of the Rock Spirits] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6282), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 142, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 400 pages. For numerous versions of the *Chthonic Spirit Collection*, see Bazhen Zeren, "A Comparative Study of the Klu 'bum: Tibetan Bonpo Sources for an Understanding the Cult of the *klu* (Serpent Spirits)" (PhD diss., EPHE, Université Paris PSL, 2021).

61 Daniel Berounský, "The Nyen Collection (Gnyan 'bum) and Shenrab Miwo of Nam," in *Mapping Amdo: Dynamics of Change*, ed. Jarmila Ptáčková and Adrian Zenz (Prague: Oriental Institute, 2017), 211–253.

62 For a detailed rendering of Shenchen Luga's life, see Dan Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures: Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer, with a General Bibliography of Bon* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

63 Kundrol Dragpa, "Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khungs" [General Origin of the Doctrine of the Buddhas], in *Three Sources for a History of Bon*, ed. Khedup Gyatso (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1974).

Buddhist ritual compared to the version that survived in the Bön Kangyur.[64] This gives some weight to their supposed ancient origin. Yet, one cannot rely on the surviving manuscript being identical to those of allegedly appearing by the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Despite the issues highlighted, these manuscripts seem to bear witness to a process of passage from the Tibetan religious traditions of the imperial period to the emerging monastic Bön religion. One of the most obvious indications of this is that the founding figure of monastic Bön, Shenrab Miwo (Tib. gShen rab mi bo)—with Buddha-like features and given the title teacher/Buddha (Tib. *ston pa*)—appears in these manuscripts both as the teacher/Buddha and as a ritualist resembling those of the more ancient Tibetan tradition. The co-existence of these two portrayals of Shenrab Miwo marks his transformation from indigenous ritualist into Buddha-like figure.

It is also quite significant to note that all the individual volumes of the *Fourfold Collection* contain only ritual narratives or origin myths. In the case of the *Klu 'bum* [Chthonic Spirit Collection], these are in some cases transformed into a narrative that formally resembles the style of Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, with Shenrab Miwo narrating the tale, or contains a dialog resembling that of some Indic tantric texts. However, the remainder of the texts in the collection adhere to the usual formal structure of ritual narratives.

The *Chthonic Spirit Collection* is also known outside of the canonical version of the Bön Kangyur. It is typically divided into three volumes of White, Variegated, and Black (Tib. *dkar nag khra gsum*), but also exists as one volume. The *Klu 'bum dkar po* [White Chthonic Spirit Collection] exhibits the strongest Buddhist influence. A recent PhD dissertation written by Bazhen Zeren (a.k.a. Dpal sgron)[65] focuses on existing versions of it and identifies around a dozen known exemplars. This study also reveals that most of the content presents Shenrab Miwo in his Buddha-like attire. However, in some versions he also appears as an ancient ritualist. The merging of chthonic spirits with Indic *nāga*s is widely attested in these manuscripts, even if their distinctive features are retained. In some cases, the chthonic spirits manifest themselves as ox or deer etc. The existing number of manuscript variants attests to their widespread popularity. However, it is difficult to connect these manuscripts

64 *Nye lam sde bzhi* [Direct Fourthfold Path], full title *Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs swo* [Fierce Spirit Collection from the Fourfold Direct Path], in *New Collection of Bonpo Katen Texts*, vol. 253, ed. Sog sde sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma (Lhasa: bsTan pa'i nyi ma, 1998), 603–635. For a living ritual tradition based on these texts, see Jonathan E. Verity, "The Tidiness of Chaos: Tradition and Innovation in the Sadak Nyelam Dé Zhi Ritual at Triten Norbutsé" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2014).

65 Bazhen Zeren, "A Comparative Study of the Klu 'bum."

with a specific space and time. If some localities could be identified, this may be possible. There are clearly several mentions of the Mapam Yutso (Tib. Ma pham g.yu mtsho) lake near Mt. Kailash in Western Tibet. A version found in eastern Tibet contains bilingual names. In addition to Tibetan, names are given in the Nam Dong language (Tib. Nam pa ldong) associated with Eastern Tibet and typical for the *Fierce Spirit Collection*.[66]

Another of these volumes, entitled the *gTod 'bum* [Rock Spirit Collection] deals with rock spirits associated with rocks and earthquakes. These are also sometimes identified with the 12 animals of the zodiac. It consists of four hundred pages divided into 23 chapters. Shenrab Miwo often appears as a ritualist, despite his travels to the continents surrounding Mt. Meru, which represents Buddhist cosmology. The colophon states that it spread in Dokham (Tib. mDo khams)[67] and specifies its locality as Tül-dzagang (Tib. Tul rdza sgang).[68] While the *Chthonic Spirit Collection* mentions a number of languages in the titles of the individual chapters, in the *Rock Spirit Collection* references to languages appear inside several myths and are there usually connected to some name or term. These languages are commonly Nampa Dong, Shenrab Miwo, Indian, Chinese, Tibetan (Tib. *sPu rgyal bod*), in some cases the Shenbön language (Tib. *gShen bon*), Shenrab Tibetan (Tib. *gShen rab bod kyi skad*), Phenyül language (Tib. *Phan yul skad*) and Grandfather language (Tib. *A bo skad*). In terms of development, I myself tentatively see this phenomenon as influenced by both the *gNyan 'bum* [Fierce Spirit Collection] and *Sa bdag 'bum* [Earth-Lord Collection]. The number of languages mentioned reflects an effort to present the myths as reflecting a universal tradition.

Less blurred and confusing would be the last two collections of the *Fourfold Collection*, that of the *Earth-Lord Collection* and the *Fierce Spirit Collection*. The *Earth-Lord Collection* is divided into 53 chapters containing myths, on a total of 226 folios. It has a colophon which states:

66 The language of *Nam* was the subject of rather dubious research by Frederick W. Thomas. See Frederick W. Thomas, *Nam, An Ancient Language of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

67 This term seems to be used for what is today Amdo (Tib. mDo smad) in the imperial period, but later it could designate Kham (Tib. mDo stod) as well. See also the chapter by Carmen Meinert who discusses the establishment of dharma colleges in Dégam (Tib. bDe gams/khams) and Dokham (Tib. mDo 'khams).

68 *gTod 'bum* [Rock Spirit Collection] (Bön Kangyur), 400, ll. 5–6: *dbus rtsi chu gnyer mkhan na/ dbal rgyal ba snang nyi 'od kyi bka' bsgom nas/ ston pa dbang chen gyi mnos te/ mdo khams tul rdza sgang du spel ba rdzogs so/.*

> The propitiation of *sadak* of the first, middling and last [parts] has concluded. This is a tradition of Tönpa Lhadun [(Tib. sTon pa lha bdun)]. These are rituals [(Tib. *gto*)] composed by eastern Chinese and translated (or 'transformed') at the request of Angä Sertön [(Tib. A nga'i gser ston)]. It is beneficial [(Tib. *bon*)] for both teachings for deceased and living, for both relaxed and violent behaviour, for [treating] death and loss, diseases, and disturbances. Virtue![69]

The identities of the people mentioned in the colophon remain hidden, but it clearly states that it is inspired by a Chinese tradition. This is corroborated by the several occurrences of bilingual names in both Tibetan and Chinese in the texts of the myths.

My reading of the content resulted in a tentative hypothesis of the composite nature of the whole collection, which could be categorised into four loose groupings of myths. That division was based mainly on some similarities regarding language and formal structure. Chapters one to five are certainly inspired by Buddhist notions,[70] but their flavour is different from most of the *sūtra* texts of monastic Bön. The myths are brief and result in a list of 'earth-lord' spirits, offerings, etc. The text typically contains brief myths on world origins, followed by cosmological arrangements. Lists of the earth-lord spirits of years, planets, stars, and days are supplemented by lists of offerings to them. These include skulls, animals, birds, and their feathers, etc.

Chapters six to twelve and 28 to 31 seem to combine non-Buddhist, Buddhist, and Chinese elements in a unique way. Their focus is cosmological, and on the myths. Shenrab Miwo is seen as an organising agent of the universe. Several myths (10, 11, 28 to 31) are dedicated to the Chinese king Kongtse (Chin. Kongzi 孔子), who is inspired by the Chinese figure of Confucius.[71] These mentions seem to bear witness to some evolution of this figure in Tibet and probably predate the known depiction of the miraculous King Kongtse in the biography

69 *Sa bdag 'bum* [Earth-Lord Collection] (Bön Kangyur), 451, ll. 3–6: *sa bdag bsgyur bcos/ rab 'breng* (= *'bring*) *tha gsum rdzogs so/ ston pa lha bdun gyi gto rgyud lags so/ de la a nga'i gser ston gyi* (*gyis*) *zhus/ shar phyogs rgya yis mdzad pa'i gto bsgyur lags so/ gson chos gshin chos gnyis/ spyod pa dal drag gnyis/ shi chad na tsa* (= *tsha*) *'khrugs long kun la bon no/ dge'o/*.

70 On locating the chapters of this manuscript, see Dan Martin, Per Kværne, and Yasuhiko Nagano, ed., *A Catalogue of the Bon Kanjur* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2003).

71 Cf. Shen-yu Lin, "The Tibetan Image of Confucius," *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* 12 (2007): 105–129.

of Shenrab Miwo entitled the *Zermik* (English translation uncertain, Tib. *gZer mig*), an early hagiography of Shenrab Miwo.[72]

Chapters 13 to 27, 32, and 40 to 54 are very close to the repetitive style of monastic Bön *sūtra*s and include some tantric elements. They are very ornamental; typically, a *mantra* is mentioned in the text, which is missing in the rest of the chapters. However, some of them reveal through their list of offerings (including bat, badger, head of horse, yak) that their inspiration remains partly autochthonous. Chapter 49 contains a detailed list of polluting acts inspired by indigenous traditions (enmity, defilement of the hearth, incest, killing relatives, pollutions connected with oath and bad omens).

Chapters 33 to 39 contain unique myths about stars. These narratives tell of their malevolent impact on the main character and the ritual that remedies it. The style is often archaic, but Shenrab Miwo is called Buddha here. The main characters in these myths are the sons of the Dong clan (Tib. lDong sras), and a king of Zhangzhung.

This volume contains a straightforward confession that it is inspired by Chinese tradition. The earth-lords are apparently inspired by similar Chinese spirits (probably *tudigong* 土地公). The number of various languages attesting to the need to present the tradition as universal is totally missing here. Instead, several terms and names are given just in transcribed Chinese. However, it is by no means a translation of a Chinese text.

Perhaps the most striking fact is that earth-lord spirits related to astrology are not dealt with in the technical manner of astrological texts here. Formally, the entire text is simply a collection of ritual narratives expounding some timeless origin events. The contents of the myths reveal inspiration from Buddhist texts, including tantric ones, and Buddhist cosmology, as well as Chinese. This is put together using details from and the formal structure of apparently autochthonous inspirations. It is also notable that in a number of cases the narrations use the already mentioned term lore/wisdom for the name of the tradition they represent. As has been shown, this term is often understood as related to ritual tradition based on the performance of ritual narrations. However, in latter times up to the present, the term is frequently associated with the art of astrology (Tib. *gtsug lag rtsis kyi rig pa*) and thus with China. The gap between these seemingly unconnected understandings are bridged by the *Earth-Lord*

72 Samten G. Karmay, "The Interview between Phyva Keng-tse lan-med and Confucius," in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and Beliefs in Tibet*, ed. Samten G. Karmay (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 171.

Collection, in which astrological discipline is presented via an ancient form of ritual narration that introduces itself as originally Chinese lore.[73]

The last collection of myths, the *Fierce Spirit Collection*, is probably the richest source of information on the fierce spirits available.[74] These spirits are frequently mentioned in Buddhist ritual texts as representing the vertical sphere between the earth and the sky (Tib. *bar snang*), which could be considered as the upper spheres of human habitat. The sky is represented by heavenly spirits (Tib. *lha*), and the earth by chthonic spirits. Yet, this is not unanimous among these rather schematic texts. In a number of cases, fierce spirits are not mentioned in connection with the intermediate sphere, but ferocious spirits (Tib. *btsan*) are listed instead of them. This could be linked to anthropological data. In many regions of Tibet, the fierce spirits are not worshipped at all. Although I am unable to provide a precise list, through my rather incidental inquiries, it seems that in the areas of Bhutan, Central Tibet, Tibetan-speaking areas in Nepal and Western Tibet, fierce spirits do not appear among the spirits and deities who are worshipped locally. Therefore, practice of the *Fierce Spirit Collection* is clearly bound within Eastern Tibet with high probability that the centre of their worship can be located there.[75]

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73 The *Earth-Lord Collection* contains rather early usage and example of the specific understanding of the term lore/wisdom as connected with astrology. Another manuscript mentioning this term in its title and dealing with 'earth-lord' spirits, suddenly departs from the form of ritual narration and so could be seen as a further developmental step, in which the term lore/wisdom ceases to relate to ritual narration. See *gTsug lag 'bras bu g.yung drung ye dbang sa bdag dpal 'bum dkar po thig pa chen po'I mdo* [Sūtra of the Great Vehicle, Eternal White Collection on the Earth-Lords of Primordial Might, the Fruit of Wisdom] (Bön Kangyur, text no. 6283), in *bKa' 'gyur* (*Bon*) [Bön Kangyur], vol. 143, ed. sMon rgyal lha sras (Chengdu: Kun grol lha sras mi pham rnam rgyal, 1999), 351.

74 For an introduction and translation of one of its myths, see Samten G. Karmay, "Tibetan Indigenous Myths and Rituals with Reference to the Ancient Bön Text: The Nyenbum (*Gnyan 'bum*)," in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53–68. See also Berounský, "The Nyen Collection (Gnyan 'bum) and Shenrab Miwo of Nam."

75 The Buddhist sources also provide a schematic list of the four lords of *nyen* (cf. René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities* (Kathmandu, Varanasi: Book Faith India, 1993 [1956]), 212–213). Although Nebesky-Wojkowitz does not localise the number of the mountain deities regarded as *nyen*, except for Nyenchen Tangla (Tib. gNyan chen thang lha) of the nomad area of Northern Tibet known as the Changthang, the rest of them all appear in the north-east of Tibet: Nyenpo Yutsé (Tib. gNyan po g.yu rtse/sNgo la g.yu rtse), Nyenjé Gongngön (Tib. gNyan rje gong sngon), and eventually Machen Pomra (Tib. rMa chen spom ra). Machen Pomra is regarded by some versions of the *Fierce Spirit Collection* to be the lord of local spirits (Tib. *yul sa*), who are contrasted with the fierce spirits. Nevertheless, this might well indicate some regional distribution of the cult of the fierce spirits. It has never been

The *Fierce Spirit Collection* also does not corroborate with the assignation of fierce spirits to the middle sphere between sky and earth, as is quite common in Buddhist ritual texts. In some myths, the whole universe is connected with them; in other myths they are related to the sky and only their offspring then manifests among humans in their natural surroundings—as trees, rocks, lakes, soil, etc., but also in the form of animals such as deer or snakes. They are also considered to be the source of certain diseases, manifesting themselves through poxes appearing on the skin or leprosy.

The *Fierce Spirit Collection* consists of 325 pages divided into 26 chapters. However, the total number of narratives in the collection greatly exceeds the number of chapters, since some of the chapters represent self-contained collections of ritual narratives. The structure of this collection reveals its composite nature. Strikingly, Shenrab Miwo frequently figures as a ritualist summoned to solve problems, yet he is totally devoid of the Buddha-like features in the whole of the collection (with the exception of the opening verses which are likely to be a later addition). The core of the text makes references to the Dong clan and some of the myths even specifically to the branch of it named Nampa Dong (Tib. Nam pa lDong). The text gives names bilingually, in this language as well as in Tibetan. Besides that, its longest myth of considerable importance contains references to the language of Minyak (which in the times following the 11th century would mean Tangut as well). The main character of the myths and mythical ancestor of the people is often given as the son of the Nam people (Tib. Mi nam bu Don chen), but also the son of the Dong clan, etc.

So far, the most convincing identification of the Nampa Dong branch was provided by the Chinese scholar Wen Yu.[76] Based on Chinese chronicles, he demonstrates that the branches of that subclan of the Qiang tribes—as seen from the side of Chinese—frequently migrated. However, by the time of the Tang Dynasty (618–907, 唐, corresponding to the time of Tibetan Empire), they had established a minor kingdom in the Minshan (Chin. Minshan 岷山) mountains. This area contains a forested region with extremes of altitude that

assumed that, for example, Mt. Kailash or Yarlha Shampo should represent deities of the fierce spirit typology.

76 This appears in his review of Frederick W. Thomas' book on Nam language, which in fact contains a new and more reliable attempt to localise Nam. See Wen Yu, "Review: Nam, An Ancient Language of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland by F. W. Thomas," *T'oung Pao* 40 (1950): 199–207. See also the chapter by Carmen Meinert in this volume. The Minshan region is situated in the bottom part of her map 8.2.

stretches between Songpan (Tib. Zung chu) and Coné (Tib. Co ne), and along the borders of the current provinces of Gansu (甘肃) and Sichuan (四川).[77]

The content of the *Fierce Spirit Collection* seems to include various texts differing in terms of the time of composition (or emendation). Although some parts resemble the texts known from Dunhuang, other parts of the texts are less condensed and much closer to the style of writing of the later date. In general, the first myth is quite unique and contains only fragmented narration about the Ma (Tib. *rma*) brothers, including Machen Pomra, pollution from incest, and a subsequent purification ritual. The following chapters, two to nine (pp. 18–56), contain myths dealing with the separation (Tib. *dbye*) of various beings who got themselves mixed up with the fierce spirits (but not exclusively with them). Then the later sections are divided into two chapters (10 and 11) that cover a rather significant part of the text (pp. 56–87). They contain a variety of myths that narrate the origin of the various types of fierce spirits. The following chapters 12 to 22 (pp. 87–271) constitute the largest part of the collection (pp. 87–271). They deal mainly with the origin of conflict between people and the fierce spirits. Such conflicts are for the most part caused by the killing of fierce and/or other spirits. The conflict is then resolved in most cases by paying the compensation for killing (Tib. *stong*, lit. 'thousand'),

77 This reference to Nam appears in the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New Book of the Tang Dynasty] and *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [Old Book of the Tang Dynasty]; in the section dealing briefly with the history of the Eastern Women's Kingdom. A kingdom called Nanshui (南水) is listed among the eight small kingdoms in the Minshan range in the year 793 as submitting to the Chinese Empire: "[…] [They] lived scattered around the 'Western Mountain' (a special term implying the Min 岷 mountains, in present Mou Hsien 茂縣, Sung-p'an 松潘 and their adjacent regions). […] Since there had been much trouble in the heart of the Empire, they were controlled by the T'u fan (Tibetans). Among those kingdoms the big ones ruled nothing more than two or three thousand (families)"; Wen Yu, "Review: F.W. Thomas," 203–204 (parenthetical information is Wen Yu's). From the side of Old Tibetan sources, there is only one mention of a place which aspires to be related to the Nam Kingdom. It appears in the *Old Tibetan Annals* (IOL Tib J 750, ll. 140–141) and concerns the years 702–703. It says that in a certain Namdong Trom, a winter council was held: "Khu Mangpoje Lhalung and Minister Mangtsen Dongzhi convened a winter council in Namdong Trom of Domay" (Tib. *mdo smad gyi nam ldong prom du khu mang po rje lha lung dang blon mang rtsen ldong zhis bsdu ste*).

Namdong (Tib. Nam ldong) indicates that this was the seat of the Nam branch of the Dong clan. The name Namdong Trom is similar to a contemporary city called Dongtrom (Tib. lDong khrom) in Tibetan and Tanchang (宕昌) in Chinese. There are ruins of several ancient Tibetan fortresses above the city. It is known to have been the centre of a small kingdom of a certain Dong tribe between the fourth and sixth centuries. Later, during the Tang Dynasty, it was conquered by Tibetans. It is a very strategic place near the mountainous region of Minshan, located at its north-eastern edge. The location, in general, matches with the descriptions provided by the *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*.

which is prescribed and assisted ritually by summoning ritualists. Chapter 23 (pp. 271–288) is repetitive and mostly comprised of lists of names and events in catalogue form. Chapter 24 (pp. 288–316) is a self-contained collection of brief and formally very similar ritual narratives concerning diseases caused by angry fierce spirits and their ritual antidotes. Chapter 25 (pp. 316–323) contains only brief skeletons of various narratives about the reconciliation of people and fierce spirits, described as meeting of mother fierce spirit with her son (Tib. *gnyan ma bu sprad*). The brief concluding chapter, number 26 (pp. 323–325), praises the fierce spirits and requests them to depart to their respective abodes.

This collection of mythical narrations reveals the recurrent core themes of fear of harm from various spirits and the effort to restore their pure forms. This seems to be linked with the first myth, which is concerned with a similar fear of pollution from incest. Both these fears can be seen as due to the inappropriate mixing of things that should remain separate. By far the most represented topic relates to almost judicial procedure dealing with reparation for causing the death of spirits. This is a long tradition among societies on the Tibetan Plateau, particularly in Amdo. These myths give supernatural examples of frequent cases of extra-tribal killing that have arisen from ancient to present times. This is remedied by an authority respected by both sides (resembling the role of pre-Buddhist ritualists) discerning an appropriate compensation for the killing that can be agreed upon by both parties.

By far the longest myth on the topic (i.e., *Mi dang gnyan bsdum pa'i le'u* [A Chapter on the Reconciliation of People and Fierce Spirits], 18th chapter, 122–201) included in the *Fierce Spirit Collection*[78] is also notable for its apparent influence up to the present time in the region of the Minshan mountains.[79] Of interest could be to note that it follows the same plot as the origin tale from Gatang *stūpa* included in the *Accounts on the Rite of Averting,* mentioned above as an example of eastern ritual traditions travelling to Central and Southern Tibet, and wherein the Machen Pomra appears as one of the main characters.[80] The main difference is that the Gatang *stūpa* does not mention fierce spirits,

78 For detailed information on the eleven known versions including those from among Naxi manuscripts, see Daniel Berounský, "An Old Tibetan Myth on Retribution for Killing the Nyen (*Gnyan stong*): Manuscripts Scattered between Naxi, Tanguts, Eastern and Western Tibet," in *Bon and Naxi Manuscripts*, ed. Agnieszka Helman-Ważny and Charles Ramble (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 169–212.

79 After my lecture given at Chengdu University in 2018 on this topic, some of the students from the area of Zitsa Degu (Tib. Gzi rtsa sde dgu) informed me that this narration is still widely known in the region.

80 For translation, see Karmay, "A New Discovery of Ancient Bon Manuscripts from a Buddhist *stūpa* in Southern Tibet," and Bellezza, "gShen-rab Myi-bo: His Life and Times According to Tibet's Earliest Sources."

but instead chthonic spirits. It is possible to speculate that one of the reasons for this could be that the fierce spirits were not worshipped in that region.

Perhaps one could tend to see the *Fierce Spirit Collection* as a remnant of an ancient tradition of the Dong tribes, known as Qiang in Chinese. However, the situation is not so straightforward. As in the case of the appropriation of the Chinese tradition by the *Earth-Lord Collection*, it is very likely that in this case we are witnessing an attempt to see the tradition of the Dong people through the Central Tibetan viewpoint. The term lore/wisdom appearing in the narratives of this collection corroborates this. It is clearly not a direct translation of the Dong ritual narratives into Tibetan. Such adaptations could have a long tradition stretching back to the imperial period, as witnessed by Dunhuang documents IOL Tib J 731 and IOL Tib J 732, which also contain references to the Nampa Dong language. Individual instances of bilingual expressions do not always match up, as was once supposed by Thomas.[81] Instead of translating from the language of the Nam branch of the Dong tribe, or Minyak, they seem rather to facilitate understanding from the side of those rooted in the Central Tibetan tradition.[82] Whether this *Fierce Spirit Collection* stems from an early Tibetan attempt to create a pan-Tibetan ritual tradition of the Tibetan Empire, or if it intentionally imitates it, remains open to debate.

Such collections, despite all their dating problems, provide a very useful insight into the process of the formation of the monastic tradition of Bön. The term Bön, in the sense of religious tradition, appears only in the opening passages of the *Fierce Spirit Collection*. These were probably added to the collection later. The passages stand in stark contrast to the actual content of the large number of myths in the collection itself, which are characterised by the apparent absence of the term Bön in the sense of religious tradition. The individual myths, often highly simplified and abbreviated into a set formal structure, still represent individual, practical ritual models of a local character. Their universality is only brought about by the entirety of the collection, which requires editing of the individual myths and attempts at overall structuring of the collection. This feature is also true for the Gatang *stūpa* myth series discussed above, and for some Dunhuang myth collections. They show

81 Thomas, *Nam*.

82 Only a brief example could be given here. In IOL Tib J 731, v. 67–68, bilingual expression appears. In Nam language, it should be "*bya rma bya'i rma li bye'u rma bye'u gi thing tshun*," and in Tibetan "*khab yo bya'i 'dab bkra mying dang mtshan spos so*." In the first case, the text apparently speaks about a certain bird (Tib. *rma bya*), which nowadays means 'peacock', but was then apparently a bird associated with the Ma region (i.e., Machen Pomra range). The Tibetan part of it appears to be an explanation and not a literal translation, perhaps: "it is a name for a bird *khab yo* with wings of bright colors."

signs of a tradition in the making characterised by written text, repetitive formulas, lists of ritual experts and the creation of collections of series of once individual myths.

At this early stage, the individual myths remain largely local in character (as is inadvertently revealed, for example, by the bilingual names in Tibetan and Nampa Dong or Minyak). In a certain transitional state, one can see a tendency to add to the universality of the myths by editing and adding a multitude of real and supernatural languages to the text, as the *Rock Spirit Collection* illustrates. The *Earth-Lord Collection*, in turn, demonstrates the creative inclusion of outside tradition, in this case Chinese. These general tendencies toward greater universality suddenly reach a critical moment of qualitative shift.

This shift consists in the transformation of one of the mythic ritual specialists figuring in the collections of once-local myths into the narrator of these myths, hand in hand with his transformation into a Buddha-type figure (Tib. *sTon pa*). This transfiguration of the former ritual specialist Shenrab Miwo into the universal preacher is well reflected in the *Chthonic Spirit Collection*, where the *White Chthonic Spirit Collection* completes the process. Paradoxically, the older form of the ritual specialist Shenrab Miwo appears prominently in texts associated with Eastern Tibet (*Fierce Spirit Collection* and IOL Tib J 731, 732), but in this new form the Zhangzhung language comes to the fore out of number of real and unreal languages.

With the increasingly universal proponent of myths comes the universal name for this tradition as Bön. The key role of ritual narrations and myths is later superseded by other forms of discourse, although it does not disappear entirely. The earlier *Fierce Spirit Collection*, mostly from Eastern Tibet, contains myths that include Shenrab Miwo alongside other ritual specialists. In contrast, the early 14th-century chronicle of Bön places this ritual specialist far ahead of this collection. The ritualist elevated above the collection is suddenly a universal preacher leaving the knowledge of rituals in the universal sphere of fierce spirits. However, the very collection representing his teachings left there (containing testimony to his previous role) is a witness to this transformation.[83]

83 See Khod po blo gros thogs med, *Srid pa rgyud kyi kha byang* [Inventory of the Worldly Lineages] (mTsho sngon: Cang ha'o glog rdul dpe skrun khang, 2011), 11: "Then Tönpa [Shenrab Miwo] arrived in the land of fierce spirits. He presented to Nyanbön Tangtang Trölwa the teachings of the Fierce Spirits Collection, the rituals of releasing the fierce spirits' birds, and others" (Tib. *de nas ston pa gnyan gyi yul du byon/ gnyan bon thang thang khrol ba la/ 'phan yul rgyas pa gnyan 'bum dang/ gnyan gyi bya bkrol las sogs bstan pa bzhag/*).

Although this qualitative leap might seem to be a sudden invention of tradition, from what has been described above it appears instead to represent the culmination of a longer process. This process started with the beginning of the Tibetan Empire and from then on had been moving towards universality.

6 Concluding Remarks

Ritual narratives of various forms continue to exert an impact on Tibetans. Although distorted, abridged, modified, or erased, their traces still permeate Tibetan societies. Most origin myths, or ritual narrations, were probably never recorded, as their practice remained in the sphere of orality. Whilst providing knowledge about the created world, at the same time they served as means of communication with spirits and deities. Fragments containing notes on voicing them through imitating the voices of animals and birds, witness their crucial role in communication. Quite paradoxically, it is exclusively ritual narrations that were written down that are the subject of this paper. They represent just brief glimpses of a far more robust tradition. The term lore/wisdom referred to in some collections of such ritual narrations could be taken as a sign of their modification in the process of architecting at least seemingly coherent structures. Although we do not know whether some attempts to collect a large series of such ritual narrations predate the Tibetan Empire, it seems that the basic method of their assembly resembled snowballing. Various collections of these narrations became part of even larger collections, etc. This process was evidently marked not only by the presence of Buddhism, but also by some inner tensions between Central Tibet and peripheral regions of the western, northern, and eastern parts of the Tibetan Plateau. Too often, those ritual narrations that survive in written form are inherently marked by their multiple transformations. The elasticity they exhibit often leads to the loss of meaning and sometimes also to distortion of poetic beauty. However, on the other hand, their elasticity has lent them persistence. The influence of ritual narrations on Tibetan Buddhism is not always straightforwardly clear. They appear as dismantled fragments scattered meaninglessly across a net of Buddhist symbols, notions, and ideas. Nonetheless, the impact of ritual narrations could be deeply buried within the very Buddhist messages meant to supersede them. The surprising popularity of semi-historical genres of Buddhist literature in Tibet could serve as example. These semi-historical narratives may have stepped into the spaces vacated by the demise of pre-Buddhist autochthonous ritual narrations.