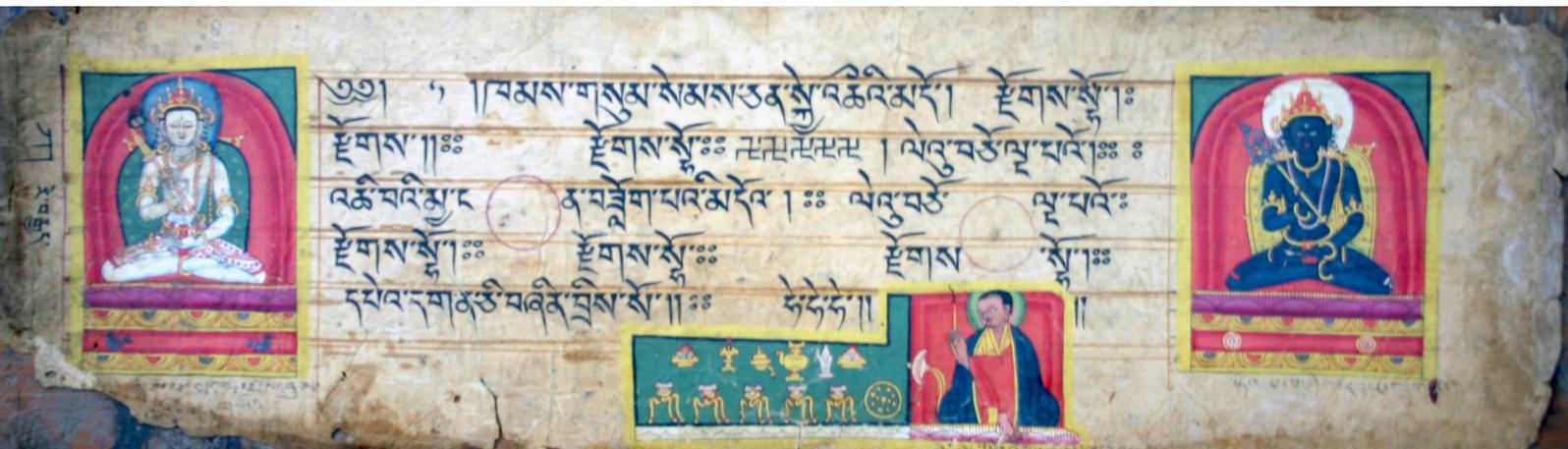


Bonpo Manuscript Culture

Towards a Definition of an Emerging Field

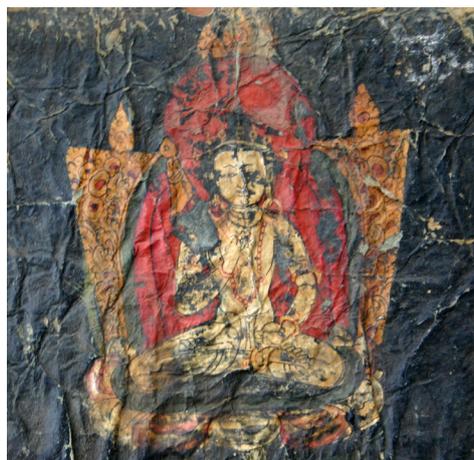
A workshop hosted by

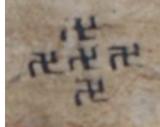
**THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES,
UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG**



Friday-Saturday, 11-12 March 2016

**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES
WARBURGSTRASSE 26
20354 HAMBURG**





Programme

FRIDAY

- 10:00 am Welcome
- 10:10–10:40 **Samten Karmay:** *Gold-lettered and other Bon manuscripts in the Potala Palace, Lhasa*
- 10:40–11:10 **Per Kvaerne:** *A Bon historiographic text: the Grags pa gling grags. Questions arising from the textual variants*
- 11:10–11:30 Coffee break
- 11:30–12:00 **Dan Martin:** *Manuscripts of the works of an important Bonpo author Sga-ston Tshul-khrims-rgyal-mtshan (ca. 14th century)*
- 12:00–12:30 **Marc des Jardins:** *Grimoires and ritual texts in Bon: two examples of 'personal use only' texts*
- 12:30–14:00 Lunch
- 14:00–14:30 **Ngawang Gyatso:** *A comparison and preliminary study of le'u manuscripts from Phan-chu, The-bo and lDom-khrom*
- 14:30–15:00 **Daniel Berounsky:** *The Nyen Collection (Gnyan 'bum): three versions of an anthology of Tibetan myths on Nyen*
- 15:00–15:20 Coffee break
- 15:20–15:50 **Michael Friedrich:** *Naxi manuscripts in the West: a survey of collections and scholarship*
- 15:50–16:20 **Charles Ramble:** *Bönpo and Naxi ritual texts: some more common features*
- 16:20–16:50 **Agnieszka Helman-Ważny:** *Science, technology and local knowledge: potential approaches to the material analysis of Bon manuscripts*
- 16:50 **Sam van Schaik** (remotely, via Skype or written comments): *The main collections and types of Bon manuscripts from Dunhuang and other Central Asian collections*
- Tsering Thar** (via Skype? tba)
- 19:00 Dinner

SATURDAY

- 10:00–13:00 Round table discussion

Introduction

Bonpo Manuscript Culture: Towards a Definition of an Emerging Field

Although a number of important xylographic editions of Bon texts are known to have existed, for the most part this religion has demonstrated a much more marked preference than Tibetan Buddhism has for manuscript works. Manuscripts account for the entire range of Bonpo literary production, from all the major canonical works to the collected writing of famous masters, and the plethora of ritual texts that are coming to light in many parts of the region. Manuscripts have been essential in supporting the efforts of Bon monks, nuns and hereditary priests to preserve their unique culture, as well as the attempts of scholars elsewhere to understand not only the Bon religion but also the early cultural and intellectual history of Central Asia.

Research on the Bonpo literary corpus is still very much in its infancy. Wherever Bon manuscripts have been found, the focus has been on making the material accessible, in either printed or digital form, but little else. The long-standing interest in Buddhism and the preservation of cultural heritage, combined with the more recent focus on the conservation of manuscript collections within Tibet and the Himalayas, has triggered a wave of interest in the codicological, historical and anthropological study of Tibetan book culture. However, Bon manuscripts have not yet been clearly identified as a distinct corpus, or formed the object of codicological and material studies.

This workshop is dedicated to existing Bon manuscript collections (some of the most important of which have been discovered only recently) which, besides being a record of history and religion in its textual sphere, are also material objects being a part of sustainable cultural world heritage. We aim to open an interdisciplinary discussion that will make it possible to see Bon manuscripts in the wider perspective of manuscript studies. The participants are specialists of different academic disciplines and will present their research on a variety of topics including different collections of Bon manuscripts, “emic” Bonpo ideas about their textual traditions, the science and technology of book studies, *inter alia*.

Apart from content, there does not appear to be a set of formal features that would clearly identify a text as a Bonpo, as opposed to a Buddhist, work. One of the aims of this workshop will be to explore the possibility that, even if there is no absolute distinction between Bon and Buddhist manuscripts, there may be a set of polythetic features – “family resemblances” – that *tend* to occur in Bonpo texts. These features may, for example, include:

- » The use of certain abbreviated forms (*bskungs yig* or *bsdus yig*): while this is common practice in Buddhist writing – as in many manuscript cultures – it is clear that some forms are unique to Bonpo works.

- » Distinctive marks and signs: Bon manuscripts habitually use anticlockwise swastikas as “asterisks” to establish a link with interlineal or marginal intercalations (for example omissions). Early manuscripts in particular reveal the use of a number of other symbols and abbreviations that are apparently unique to Bon, for example the digit “2” to signify *gnyan*, and a small zero to signify *dbyings*.
- » The systematic (i.e. not random or careless) reversal of agentive and genitive particles and endings in many Bonpo works: this phenomenon, that has bewildered many researchers, may represent the persistence of an early stage in the development of Tibetan cases (cf. Tournadre on the subject of the origins of the Tibetan ergative).
- » Is it possible to identify a distinctive style of graphic representation in the illustrations and illuminations that accompany certain texts? This question forms an entry point to a wider area of investigation in the proposed project, viz.:
- » While there seems to be little doubt concerning a genetic relationship between Bonpo and Naxi myth and ritual, is there any evidence of continuity of codicological features? It may be observed here, without further comment, that the illustrations appearing in some of the “*Le’u*” manuscripts that have been found in Amdo (mainly Gansu) bear more than a passing resemblance to certain Naxi depictions.

Abstracts

The Nyen Collection (*Gnyan 'bum*): three versions of an anthology of Tibetan myths on Nyen

DANIEL BEROUNSKY

The *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*) represents a corpus of texts with apparently ancient traits: Shenrab Miwo is devoid of any characteristics of a 'Teacher/Buddha' (*ston pa*) figure in its myths, and the 'Wise Bat' (*sgam po pha wang*) appears there in the role of a helper of priests. One of its versions constitutes the whole volume 78 of the *Bon Kanjur*. The second version is much shorter and appears among the texts collected in the so-called *New Collection of Bonpo Katen Texts*. The third version was photographed in Amdo by Ngag dbang rgya mtsho from Lanzhou University. All the three versions are obviously interrelated, but the wording of the particular texts they contain differs to a large extent. All of them refer frequently to *smra* beings associated with Ldong clan of Nam locality. The basic characteristics of these versions and some questions pertaining to their origin will be discussed.

Naxi manuscripts in the West: a survey of collections and scholarship

MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

Since the early twentieth century Naxi (sometimes wrongly called Mosuo) manuscripts were bought by Western collectors and institutions. The talk will introduce the major collections in the West and summarise the main topics of Western scholarship on the Naxi corpus.

Science, technology and local knowledge: Potential approaches to the material analysis of Bon manuscripts

AGNIESZKA HELMAN-WAŻNY

Tibetan books, of which Bon religious manuscripts constitute a category, have not been traditionally viewed as artefacts in their own right with a specific form and technology. Moreover, our knowledge about regional differences in book and paper history across the Himalayas has so far been very limited. In recent years, however, some scholarly works on the subject have been published, and interest in the codicological study of Tibetan books

has increased greatly. These changes have altered the way in which Tibetan manuscripts are now perceived by both Western and Tibetan scholars. The numerous manuscripts of the Bon religion have not as yet been clearly identified as a distinct corpus, and thus have not been the subject of codicological and material studies despite their importance for the study of history and religions of Central Asia. The aim of my work is to achieve an understanding of Bon manuscripts not only via their content, but also as distinct forms of material culture with a unique place in world's heritage.

The production of manuscripts in the Himalayas is usually based on resources in relatively close proximity to their usage. This hypothesis is supported by my earlier research on Tibetan books. Thus Bon manuscripts, which were produced by both Bonpo and Naxi communities in various geographical locations across Central Asia, might also signal regional patterns and production habits related to local plant resources. Advanced scientific methods allow us to detect new details of book technology and paper composition and to reconstruct local resources and book production habits.

This presentation will explore the possibilities for identifying the material features that would allow us to distinguish a manuscript as Bon. I will discuss my preliminary results for paper analyses of both Bon and Naxi manuscripts in the broader context of my earlier research on Tibetan books.

Grimoires and ritual texts in Bon: two examples of 'personal use only' texts

J.F. MARC DES JARDINS

Two copies of handwritten manuscripts of Bon esoteric material are presented here for preliminary examination. The first, a photograph of a photocopy of a handwritten 'secret instruction' (*man ngag*) entitled: *Man ngag 'bar ba bka' rgya ma rdzongs 'phrang sa ma ya rgya rgya*. It is a very private (*yang gsang*) document dealing primarily with magical methods to secure various mundane outcomes and which was meant strictly for private usage and not to be shared. Its content presents very abbreviated and unclear guidelines, spells and other methods to manifest wealth, love, and the killing of enemies as well as divination, calling spirits, conversing with the dead and many more. The text presents complex challenges with its cursive script, which uses a great number of abbreviated forms (*bskungs yig*), recurring symbols whose meaning are unclear, as well as diagrams to be used as talismans, *linga* and others.

The second manuscript situates itself in the *Dbal gsas rngam pa* cycle and dating prior to the formation of the contemporary Chinese state (i.e. 1940). It is incomplete and is accompanied with ancillary drawings and notes indicating its use for spells binding and other magical operation. It is entitled: *Spyi spungs skor gsum gyi (yang) Hu bcud rtsod pa bzlog pa'i 'khor lo dbal gsas rngam pa'i las rim* and appears to be similar to the one contained in the Bon *bka' brten* 027-21: 21-41. The manuscript is replete with abbreviated forms, and

the extent to which the appended material was to be used in conjunction with this text is also unclear. The interest of this text lies in its age and its status as an isolated rite aimed at achieving a number of different designated results. It also belongs to 'personal use only' texts which were probably meant to augment the 'magical' abilities of their adepts. This study is a preliminary one which intends to present the content of these documents in details, highlighting problems in ascertaining the meaning of their narrative as well as the implications in regard to practice and desired results by the would-be magician.

Gold-lettered and other Bon manuscripts in the Potala Palace, Lhasa

SAMTEN KARMAY

It is only very recently that we learned that catalogues were being made of manuscripts and printed works kept in libraries such as those of gNas bcu lha khang and the Gaden Photrang. Both are located in Drepung, but I have been unable to establish whether or not they have been published. On the other hand, I did manage to obtain a copy of a catalogue of the manuscripts and printed works of the Nyingma tradition kept in the Potala. This catalogue lists 1543 manuscripts and printed works (title: *rNying ma'i gsung 'bum dkar chag*; the name of the publisher and date are not given). I was told that it was the beginning and would be followed by the catalogues of other religious schools, but nobody has ever mentioned that there were Bonpo manuscripts in the Potala. In this presentation I will give an account of how I in fact saw the gold-lettered manuscripts of the Bon tradition in the Potala, but unfortunately was unable to consult them.

A Bon Historiographic Text: the *Grags pa gling grags*. Questions arising from the four textual variants

PER KVÆRNE

The presentation will examine the relationship between four manuscripts of the *Grags pa gling grags*, a twelfth-century historiographic text. The work deals with the geography of the world, placing Tibet in the centre; the origin of Bon as taught by the divine Teacher of Bon, Tönpa Shenrab; the origin of the Tibetan kings and the vicissitudes of the Tibetan royal dynasty, and its relationship with the Bon priests; and with the implantation of Buddhism in Tibet. It deals in detail with the fateful clash of Bon and Buddhism in the eighth century CE during the reign of King Khri Srong lde btsan, but according to a narrative which differs fundamentally from that of contemporary twelfth-century Buddhist writings: the Tibetan king is depicted as weak and irresolute, and Padmasambhava as a cynical purveyor of false doctrines, far removed from the original teachings of Shakyamuni who, in the view of the *Grags pa gling grags*, taught nothing that was not compatible with Eternal Bon. Hence the text presents a radical alternative to the standard, Buddhist version of the central characters and events linked to the introduction to Buddhism to Tibet. The paper will

discuss the origins of the manuscripts, spelling and other variants, the problem of one text being more extended than the others, and so forth, and will also give a brief presentation of the contents of the text.

Manuscripts of the works of an important Bonpo author Sga-ston Tshul-khrims-rgyal-mtshan (ca. 14th Century)

DAN MARTIN

This presentation offers little more than an initial, general assessment of the significance of Sga-ston as an interpreter of Bon traditions, particularly in the areas of history, scriptural studies and cosmology. The two main aims will be simply [1] to gather together what little could be found out about his life and historical circumstances and [2] to find out what works he composed, making a listing of them all, since no *Collected Works* appears to have ever been made and his works have been published here and there, with some important works appearing only during the last decade, with at least one of them still unpublished. At present, I have identified about a dozen texts he apparently composed (in one case, at least, an anthology based on his works). They will be arranged according to their five main subject areas: A. SCRIPTURE. B. HISTORY. C. COSMOLOGY. D. VEHICLES & PATHS. E. DHĀRANĪ TEXTS.

A comparison and preliminary study of *le'u* manuscripts from 'Phan-chu, The-bo and lDom-khrom

NGAWANG GYATSO

In the communities of 'Phan chu and The chu in mDo smad there is, to this day, a very long and unbroken tradition of Bon practitioners known variously as *a myes le'u*, *srid pa'i le'u*, *mgon po le'u* or *lha bdag le'u*. The ritual texts they use are known as *le'u yig*. The *le'u* texts are different in content from the recitations and texts that are used in Bon monasteries. In terms of the "Nine-Vehicle" system and the "Four doors and the treasury" scheme, their content corresponds respectively to the four vehicles of the Bon of Cause and of Black Water Bon. There are some local variations in what *le'u* texts are called, the number of texts used, and their content. In Bab bzo, in Upper 'Phan chu they are referred to as either *le'u yig* or *lung yig*. Bab bzo has long been a Bonpo area that has preserved an unbroken *le'u* tradition, and since there are *le'u* here who are familiar with the content of the texts, the conditions for research are ideal. It is generally said that there are four volumes of *le'u* texts that are used in the Bab bzo villages. These are said to be the teachings of gShen rab's father, rGyal bon thod dkar, and therefore a more archaic system. Having been going to Bab bzo to carry out research on *le'u* texts over many years, I have been able to establish that there are indeed four volumes. These are: *Blo 'dzin* ("By Rote"); *Zhag gcig ma* ("Single Day"); *brNgan gzhung* ("Offering Text"); and *Sel gzhung* ("Purification Text"). The first of these derives its name from the fact that there is in fact no text, and the recitations

are performed from memory. The second, as the name suggests, has to be recited in the course of a single day. The third deals with offerings to mountain gods, and the fourth is concerned with the removal of different kinds of pollution. The presentation will also discuss the different ritual activities of the *le'u* priests.

Bönpo and Naxi ritual texts: some more common features

CHARLES RAMBLE

The influence of Bon on the Naxi religion has been pointed out by various scholars, including Joseph Rock, Rolf Stein and, more recently, Anthony Jackson. This influence is to be seen most obviously in the names of the mythic founder *dTo-mba shi-lo* (< *sTon pa gshen rab*) and *Shi-lo mi-wu* (< *gShen rab mi bo*). Just how this influence found its way to Yunnan is not clear. It is unlikely that the Naxi *dto-mba/dongba* are the heirs of a tradition that their forebears received directly from Bonpos who fled Central Tibet in the eighth century. Stein, for example, attributes the Bonpo presence among the Naxi to a thirteenth-century policy of the Karmapas. Jackson has suggested that the *dongba* originated as the heirs of an earlier Bonpo monastic tradition that was supplanted by Buddhists, who occupied the soteriological high ground and left room only for the kinds of rituals that feature in the two lowest vehicles of the Nine Ways of Bon; and the pictographic texts (he suggests) must have been developed by Naxi monks who were familiar with Tibetan book culture. This presentation will skirt around all these important questions to focus on previously unnoticed points of kinship between Naxi and Bonpo ritual texts. It will be seen that the Naxi material may solve certain mysteries about early Tibetan ritual; it will also be suggested that the *le'u* corpus, to be presented in Ngawang Gyatso's paper, may constitute a bridge between Bonpo canonical works and Naxi ritual texts.

The main collections and types of Bon manuscripts from Dunhuang and other Central Asian collections

SAM VAN SCHAİK

Many manuscript sources for non-Buddhist rituals and narratives are found in the collections of Tibetan manuscripts from Central Asian sites, primarily the library cave at Dunhuang and the Tibetan fort at Miran. Some of these have been known for some time, thanks to the work of scholars such as Ariane Macdonald, Rolf Stein and Samten Karmay. Others have only been recognised recently. I will give an overview of these sources, with an inclusive approach to the question of what constitutes a "Bon" text in this early period.