JOHN VINCENT BELLEZZA

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ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
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Archaic Concepts and Practices in a Thousand-Year-Old Illuminated Funerary Manuscript and Old Tibetan Funerary Documents of Gathang Bumpa and Dunhuang

JOHN VINCENT BELLEZZA

Maps by Guntram Hazod

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Front cover: Tibetan yellow bronze (*li-ser*) plaque depicting confronting horses with sphere and carrying objects on their backs (flaming jewels?), set between stylized clouds and mountains (6 cm x 2.5 cm).
Of significant antiquity (private collection)

Back cover: Lha-sras lha-bo che and Lha-za gang-cig ma, frame Ca-1r of the illuminated funerary manuscript, circa 1000–1150 CE

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To the Tibetans

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Foreword

One of the most chilling episodes in the Old Testament is the story of Saul raising Samuel from the dead. Saul is about to lead his army into battle against the Philistines, and wishes to call up the dead prophet in the hope that he will give a favorable prognosis about the outcome of the battle. But no one can be found to perform the divination because Saul himself has banned the practice of necromancy, on pain of death, within his kingdom. However, he assumes an appropriate disguise and is led clandestinely to his fateful meeting with the Witch of Endor, who reluctantly agrees to his request. The shade of Samuel, irked at being disturbed from his slumber, tells the king in no uncertain terms that he will lose the battle, and returns once more to his subterranean home. In his study of the biblical antecedents of the Christian Resurrection, Geza Vermes underlines the importance of this story for what it reveals about the conception of the after-death state in one of the earliest recorded phases in Judaic thought. At the very least what we learn is that the realm of the dead seems to be a uniform, undifferentiated place. Vermes reminds us that the refraction of the realm into regions of bliss or chastisement as befitted the deeds of the dead while they were in life, as well as the stratification of this domain and the addition of intermediate zones, are part of a later development.

The evidence presented by John Vincent Bellezza in this remarkable study suggests that the evolution of the Tibetan after-death world has moved in precisely the opposite direction. The phantasmagoria of the *bardo* notwithstanding, the Buddhist vision offers a monotonous landscape compared with the richness of the Tibetan realms of the dead that preceded it, with a paltry repertoire of remedial interventions confined largely to the manufacture and transfer of merit. The texts discussed in this book, by contrast, reveal an extraordinarily varied range of measures to be taken in the event of precisely-defined instances of what an anthropologist would call 'bad death'. The untoward circumstances of premature demise, rather than the accumulation of any moral debt, consign the deceased to the clutches of soul-snatching demons in a realm of misery where they, too, assume a demonic nature. They must be liberated from their captors and guided through successive stages to an exalted condition by the ministrations of specialized priests, with the help of animals that act as bearers and guides.

The four texts, or sets of texts, that provide the substance of this book, may reasonably be described as archaic, to the extent that they belong to one of the oldest strata of Tibetan writing, or else are significantly marked by the conventions of that literature. Rolf Stein, one of the pioneers of research on the ritual texts of Dunhuang, observed that the efforts of his predecessors had "suffered badly" from a failure to consult similar materials from a later period for comparative purposes.* In the present work, the Dunhuang mortuary texts – like the funeral cycle of the Bonpos – feature in an ancillary role to two other sets: two works from a collection of manuscripts found in a stupa in southern Tibet and, most spectacularly, an incomplete illuminated manuscript from a private collection.

It has been plausibly argued by several scholars that, apart from the debt it owes to Indian Buddhism, Bon might be construed as a legacy of the Buddhist tradition of Central Asia. Perhaps so, but it is equally true that the components of the 'nine-vehicle' classification of Bon are diverse enough that a multiplicity of origins is a more probable explanation. In the absence of any obvious candidate for the source of the beliefs presented here, the law of parsimony supports

the likelihood that the content of these texts represents a truly indigenous tradition, albeit one with considerable local variation.

It is a matter of real regret that the complex of beliefs and rituals represented by texts such as those examined here are execrated by followers of the major Buddhist schools on the grounds that they are somehow primitive, the legacy of an embarrassing backwardness that was supplanted by a superior Buddhist eschatology. This contempt is unwarranted: in the same way that many Tibetans proudly vaunt the Darwinian implications of the monkey-and-demoness anthropogonic myth, it could equally be argued that there is something very modern about a worldview that recognizes such a close kinship and mutual dependency between humans and the natural world as we find in these funerary texts.

If the evidence of these and other texts is so heterogeneous that we cannot reasonably speak of a formal tradition, we are surely justified at least in recognizing a time-honored complex. And if the components of this complex have seemed marginal or parochial, the reason is obvious: the material is very sparse, and even when it does come to light the linguistic challenges it presents are daunting. Publications such as the present one are all too few, but they constitute crucial pieces in the identification of a half-forgotten world of supernatural beings, priests and heroes, and a literary expression of such force and beauty that would be hard to find in later writing. A thorough treatment of the material such as we find here is especially welcome, since, apart from its lucid presentation of the sources, it provides us with valuable tools for the understanding of others that might come to light. With more to compare, the comparative enterprise becomes easier. In the same way as it is possible to draw meaningful comparisons between Dunhuang Pt 1285 and the Naxi corpus (Stein), or between these two and the mythic recitations of the modern Magar (de Sales), the juxtaposition of the four textual collections analyzed here reveals a clear cultural continuity. The result is a solid bulwark from which we can reach out to other isolated examples of oral, literary or performative art and establish their place in the emerging complex. Although Buddhism is not synonymous with Tibetan culture, as an extreme view would have it, its contribution to that culture has of course been enormous; but the present study is part of an inexorably growing body of evidence of the degree to which it has also contributed to its impoverishment.

Charles Ramble

* "...Ces textes plus modernes sont souvent plus clairs et plus explicites que ces manuscrits. Il est clair qu'il faut étudier les premiers pour comprendre les seconds. M. Lalou et F. W. Thomas ont beaucoup pâti du fait qu'ils les ont ignorés" (Stein 1971: 482).

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In this age of accelerated activity, the scarcest commodity many of us have is our time. Material goods, even money, can be given without too much care, but for time itself there is no substitute. It is for this simple reason that I feel a deep sense of appreciation for all those who took the time to aid me in whatever capacity they have. There is no reclaiming time spent and I earnestly hope that this book serves as a form of compensation for it.

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Finally, it must be pointed out that any mistakes or shortcomings in this book rest squarely upon my shoulders. I appeal to the reader to make an allowance for my imperfect understanding of Tibetan culture and literature.

An Introduction to the Funerary Documents of This Study

The aim of this monograph is to elucidate the eschatological patterns and ritual constructs of death rites in ancient Tibet. The work is centered on an illuminated funerary manuscript, two funerary texts recently recovered in southern Tibet, and funerary documents discovered in the Dunhuang grottoes a century ago. Other Tibetan literature that supports the analysis and interpretation of these texts is also marshaled. This book builds upon the prior efforts of the author to explicate the otherworldly dimension in early Tibetan religion and culture.

The majority of the documents selected for this study were written between circa 800 CE and 1100 CE. They furnish a lucid view of cultural traditions that circulated around Tibet before its religious universe became saturated with Buddhism and Buddhist-influenced doctrines and practices. Four main genres of text are used in this study: an illuminated funerary manuscript of great rarity and texts from the Gathang Bumpa (Dga'-thang 'bum-pa), Dunhuang and Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur collections. Although these textual materials belong to four distinct bodies of literature, many cognate funerary motifs, personalities and narrative sequences resonate between them. This common ground, as well as antique contents unique to each source, constitutes what I style the 'Tibetan archaic funerary tradition(s)'. The term 'archaic' was selected to stress the antiquated nature of this literary matter and its relevance to an earlier period in the cultural history of Tibet.

By definition, the historical origins, conceptual structures and practical methods of the archaic funerary tradition are fundamentally non-Buddhist in nature. While it can be readily argued that archaic elements have permeated the prevailing funerary traditions of Tibet, those conducted today owe much of their inspiration and exercise to Indic religious culture, as adopted by the two modern religions: Tibetan Buddhism and Eternal (Swastika, G.yung-drung) Bon. For the purposes of this study, these two faiths can be grouped under one term: Lamaism.[1]

Part I

The painted manuscript of Part I of this study only came to light recently. It was kindly made available for study by its present owner, Moke Mokotoff, an art collector residing in New York City.[2] The document was composed in Classical Tibetan, in the 11th century or first half of the 12th century CE. It not only features an old funerary ritual of much interest and charm, it boasts a

[1] I use this term to denote formal or organized religion in Tibet, an institution in which clerics and masters called lamas (*bla-ma*) dominate. This term as employed in this work carries absolutely no negative connotations and does not hark back to Victorian models of Tibetan religion. In a book such as this where religious traditions of very different historical and theological orientations are compared and contrasted, it is necessary to distinguish between them simply and unequivocally, thus the application of the words 'Lamaist' and 'archaic'. Another term defined in the same manner as Lamaism could conceivably be coined, but the usage of a pre-existing word in the English language seems better indicated.

[2] Originally, I planned to deliver a study of the illuminated funerary manuscript to the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) conference held in Vancouver in 2010, but I was unable to attend.

series of illustrations that are of considerable art historical significance. These quaint depictions of deities, zoomorphic spirits and ritual instruments are rendered in an indigenous style of art that is virtually unknown to the field of Tibetology.[3]

The illuminated funerary manuscript now contains forty interrelated sections or frames that are fully or mostly intact. Each frame is comprised of a textual passage and a painting. This document was written for the funerals of women (*sman*), and particularly for the latter stage of the rite.[4] It is concerned with the protection of the departed at the funeral venue, thereby insuring her smooth passage to the afterlife. It appears that this valediction of the deceased was originally formatted as several long strips of paper that may have been concertinaed. Some adjoining frames of the document are still part of single sheets, while others were cut and subsequently rejoined or left in isolation. The not always skillful reattachment of the frames was executed with a needle and thread or with adhesive tape. As the manuscript now stands, two or three frames are commonly presented as an integral unit. The correct ordering of the various parts of the manuscript proved a formidable feat. Not only were frames of the text haphazardly reattached by former owners, more than half the total number of them are now missing.

Part II

Part II of this study examines the two Old Tibetan funerary documents deposited in the Dga'-thang 'bum-pa (hereinafter called Gathang Bumpa) of Lho-kha: *Rnel drĭ 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* and *Sha ru shul ston rabs la sogs pa*. These manuscripts were recovered from inside this *mchod-rten* and published in 2007.[5] The Old Tibetan materials from Gathang Bumpa, while not very extensive, probably constitute the most important cache of ancient texts discovered in Tibet in many years.[6] The two Gathang Bumpa texts of this study contain an extraordinary selection of origin myths and ritual regimens designed to extricate those who died from violent causes (*dri* / *gri*) from the grasp of demons. As with other formal proclamations of ritual origins (*smrang*), these tales of the beginning were designed to legitimize and empower the funerals in which they were recited. As I shall show in due course, these manuscripts appear to have been written circa 850–1000 CE.

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[3] The contemporary Baima of Wen County in Gansu and Pingwu County in Sichuan have illuminated funerary manuscripts, but this art is very different from that of the manuscript studied in this paper. The *bon* priests of the Baima still make and use such texts. Other funerary rituals of the Baima are carried out by Buddhist monks, *rdol-bon* shamans and Taoist priests, illustrating the syncretistic nature of their religious culture. This information on the Baima primarily came from Mikio Miyamoto (in personal communication). I am also indebted to Miyamoto for sending me images of Baima illuminated folios. The Nakhi (Naxi) of southwestern China have illuminated funerary cards, but these are different in style and content from the illuminated funerary manuscript. For illustrations of a set of these cards, see Mathieu and Ho 2011, pp. 176, 177. The Naxi also have illuminated funerary scrolls. Rock (1955: 210, 215) describes the Hä-zhi-p'i (Hei Zhi Pi) ritual system, which employs scrolls that may reach ten meters or more in length. On the third and final day of a Naxi funeral, the Hei Zhi Pi scroll is unrolled in a northeastern direction from the head of the coffin. It is thought to assist the deceased in crossing the nine mountain spurs and seven great waters of the postmortem realm. These scrolls are illuminated with deities, priests, ritual objects, and geographic entities in a style heavily influenced by Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist art. For images of a Hei Zhi Pi scroll, see *ibid*., pls. vi–x; Brauen 2011, pp. 38, 39; Mathieu and Ho 2011, pp. 178–191.

[4] Among more than a dozen Naxi funerary rituals listed by Rock (1955: 3–5) are several dedicated to women.

[5] The manuscripts of the Gathang Bumpa were discovered in 2006 and published in the book *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar du rnyed pa'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdams bsgrigs* (eds. Pa-tshab pa-sangs dbang-'dus (Pasang Wangdui) and Glang-ru nor-bu tshe-ring), 2007. For information on the physical source of these texts, see Karmay 2009, pp. 55–63; Bellezza 2010a, p. 32 (n. 6).

[6] Karmay (2009: 57) sees the significance of this discovery as comparable to that of the Dunhuang texts.

The manuscript with the nominal title of *Rnel drĭ 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* (*Various Methods of Subjugating the Rnel-drĭ*) now consists of twenty-four folios.[7] Unfortunately, folios belonging to the beginning and end of this aptly named text are missing. This document is primarily focused on women who died in childbirth or from violent means while pregnant with child. The text scrutinizes the supernatural causes of these kinds of misfortune and proffers ritual methods for successfully coping with them.[8]

A perusal of the contents of *Rnel drĭ 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* demonstrates that the obsolete term *rnel-dri* / *rnel-gri* denotes violent and tragic causes of death, whatever their source, in women who are pregnant or delivering a child. These anthropomorphized agents of death also lead to the demise of children carried by afflicted mothers. Furthermore, the term *rnel-dri* refers to the deceased herself, the one who has died through this set of causes and who has become a demoness.

It was through strict adherence to the archaic funerary tradition,[9] as laid out in *Rnel drĭ 'dul ba'i thabs sogs*, that *rnel-dri* were overcome. From what has been written, these pernicious forces were seen as a major vector of chronic misfortune in ancient Tibetan society. Consequently, extraordinary ritual measures were adopted to neutralize and repulse them. The object of these practical and mystic undertakings was the rehabilitation of the dead and the security of the living.[10] In the text, *rnel-dri* are subject to various potent exorcistic exercises in the same basic way as would be treated any other troublesome demon. Through ritual subjugation of the *rnel-dri*, ill-fated females were transformed into ancestral deities (*mtshun*), opening the way to their ascent into the afterlife.

Like other archaic ritual texts discovered in the Gathang Bumpa, *Rnel drĭ 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* sets out a sequence of *smrang*. These origins tales can be divided into three distinctive parts or chapters. Chapter I (now incomplete) is comprised of several interconnected origins tales, which are concerned with ritual actions that liberate the deceased as *rnel-dri* from the underworld. Chapter II contains fifteen origins myths that expound upon the various types of unnatural death that lead to the appearance of *rnel-dri*. In recounting these tales of women who perished during pregnancy and childbirth, the text progressively propounds the elaborate ritual system that is thought to have brought about their liberation. Chapter III diverges from the primary theme of

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[7] For the facsimile of this document, see *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che* 2007, pp. 131–178; for the transcript, *ibid*., pp. 33–59. For a list of major parts of this work, see *ibid*., s.v., index.

[8] This text, characterized as one of wretched stories about women who died in childbirth and who require special purification rites, is noted in Karmay 2009, pp. 63, 64. Karmay (*ibid*.) observes that he has never encountered such a ritual text in the Eternal Bon corpus. Dotson (2008: 45 (n. 23), 62, 63) also notes the text.

[9] In contrast, Samten Karmay, in his highly informative papers (2009, 2010), refers to the archaic ritual systems in the texts of Gathang Bumpa and Dunhuang as 'Bon'. Karmay explains (*ibid*., 63) that ritual traditions of the imperial period and post-11th century CE milieu were never totally interrupted, thus the same term for them is applicable. While the historical continuity he postulates is undeniable, I decline from designating archaic cultural materials with the proper noun (Bon) to avoid confusing the institutional structures and historical circumstances of the early historic period (650–1000 CE) with those of later times. I employ the common noun (*bon*) to denote the archaic class of priests, ritual traditions and cosmological motifs to which it is specifically applied. My usage of the term therefore is more in line with the understanding of R. A. Stein (2010). As Stein (*ibid*., Antiqua III: 188) also notes, there is no real break between the ritual materials of the Dunhuang manuscripts and later Tibetan tradition. This is a cardinal point: continuities in the historical development of Tibetan funerary traditions are evident throughout this work. For more on the semantic framing of the term *bon*, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 206, 501 (n. 482).

[10] That the ancient funerary rites were designed for the benefit of both the dead and the living was recognized by Tucci (1980: 231) and by Haarh (1969: 367).

rnel-dri formation and subjugation to present the origins of the funerary rite for elderly women who died of natural causes. The second and final origins tale of Chapter III consists of a long but fragmentary account of the identification and defeat of an anthropomorphized agent of violent death (*dri-ma*).

The manuscript *Sha ru shul ston rabs la sogs pa* (*Various Origins Myths of the Horned Deer that Shows the Way*) is another work rich in archaic funerary lore.[11] It now consists of sixteen folios; however, an examination of the text demonstrates that at least two additional folios are missing from the extant document. This work delineates the origins of the stag that functioned as a vessel for the *dri*, those mortals who have died from violent and accidental causes. As such, this deer is called the *dri-sha*. Other parts of the text describe the *chu-dri*, agents of waterborne death.

Sha ru shul ston rabs can be divided into two separate but complementary chapters. Chapter I is comprised of just one origins myth. It begins by enunciating the wide purview of the types of *dri*. It then relates how in the beginning of time cervids and humans were of mutual benefit to one another. Various people tried to entice the deer to come with them, but it is a *dri-bon* who finally wins his trust. This funerary priest guided the horned deer through the various stages of the underworld and up into the idealized otherworld. The stag then returned to the world of humans to act as their lodestar to paradise. This origins tale constitutes one of the most extensive and lucid accounts of the postmortem journey in Old Tibetan literature, filling a crucial void in our understanding of early historic-period (650–1000 CE) eschatology.

Chapter II of *Sha ru shul ston rabs* can be divided into ten interrelated origins myths mainly given over to the *dri* and other creatures responsible for the death of humans. The grotesque origins of various *dri* from the Upper Tibetan region are colorfully described in the text. These aquatic spirits and the people they confront resided in and around the four great rivers of southwestern Tibet (Indus, Sutlej, Karnali, and Brahmaputra). This localization of the etiologic myths lends credence to claims made in Classical Tibetan literature that this headwaters region (as part of what is traditionally seen as the kingdom of Zhang-zhung) was a fountainhead for many of the death rites that spread across Tibet.

Funerary ritual activities for those who died accidentally or violently in water (*chu-dri*) are specified in several of the origins tales in *Sha ru shul ston rabs*. However, coverage of ritual procedures in this text is not nearly as comprehensive as in *Rnel drĭ 'dul ba'i thabs sogs*. The key funerary priest of Chapter II is the *dri-bon* Dbal-lcags, who is probably the psychopomp featured in Chapter I as well. In one tale, an 'island of existence' is mentioned as the homeland of the *dri-sha* (sacrificial deer psychopomp) and his spirit companion. Treated as a place with an actual physical geography, this location may well refer to one of the islands in the great lakes of Upper Tibet. These islands were once important cultural centers.

Among the most prominent human personalities in Chapter II of *Sha ru shul ston rabs* are those carrying what appears to be a clan appellation: Spug / Sbug. While the Spug are associated with Upper Tibet in this text, no such clan still seems to exist in the modern-day region. The text also regales us with the mythic origins of the four rivers of southwestern Tibet. In the penultimate

[11] For the facsimile of this manuscript, see *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che* 2007, pp. 179–211; for the transcript, *ibid*., pp. 60–75. Karmay (2009: 58, 64) reads this title as *Stories Showing the Way to the Deer*. His reading comes from treating the noun *ru* (horn) as a case sign, a misunderstanding of the signification of the title.

narrative, a type of water monster known as a *chu-srin* from one of these rivers contributes to the creation of a cosmogonic god.[12] Even today in upland Tibet, lakes and their resident aquatic spirits such as the *klu* and *sman* are commonly credited with procreative powers. The final origins myth in *Sha ru shul ston rabs* deals with the sky-ocean nexus that gave rise to both *dri* and humans. The sky and water, as binary generative forces, are widely attributed with the creation of all sorts of beings and things in the oral tradition and in Eternal Bon literature.

Part III

Part III of this book pertains to three different manuscripts of the Dunhuang collections (French and British). These documents and others from Dunhuang represent the oldest known literary sources for the study of Tibetan archaic funerary traditions. Their tremendous historical value is primarily derived from the fact that they were composed without recourse to Buddhist influences. They comprise the finest literary record we have of what appear to be longstanding cultural and religious practices.[13] Moreover, the conceptual and material structures described in Dunhuang manuscripts are critical in tracing cognate materials in other textual resources to the early historic period. Although written in Old Tibetan as well, the two manuscripts of the Gathang Bumpa featured in this work postdate many of the archaic funerary rituals of the Dunhuang collections. As shall be explained in the course of this work, the paleography, grammar and format of the relevant Dunhuang manuscripts are indicative of greater age.

Selected for translation and analysis in Part III are materials particularizing the mythic origins and ritual deployment of sheep and horses, the zoomorphic psychopomps of the archaic funerary rite. These cardinal narratives propounding the wellspring of the funerary tradition are incorporated in the manuscripts designated Pt 1194, Pt 1134 and ITJ 731r.[14] Part III begins with the first division of Pt 1194, an explication of the origins of the *skyibs-lug*, the sheep that guides the dead across the funereal expanses of the postmortem realm. The fifth origins tale of Pt 1134 is then examined. This is a story about the redemption of the first individual to be a recipient of *do-ma*, the horses that mystically transport the dead through the provisional hell after death. The portion of ITJ 731r highlighted in this study is its first section, a synopsis of the ritual performance for *do-ma*, a many-colored affair.

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[12] The use in this work of English terms such as 'god', 'deity', 'divinity', 'spirit', 'demon', etc. to describe supernatural personalities of a positive or negative character should be seen as merely a literary convention. The Tibetan equivalents assigned to these culturally laden terms are provided in the translations so as to avoid semantic confusion.

[13] Still valid is Stein's (2010, Antiqua III: 187) observation that no document dating to the pre-Buddhist period has ever been discovered. As I have discussed elsewhere, epigraphic evidence assembled in the field to date continues to make such a discovery an unlikely prospect. Stein (*ibid*., Antiqua V: 232) also considered the possibility that the contents of certain Dunhuang manuscripts may predate the 7th or 8th centuries CE, adding, "However, this will never be anything more than a hypothesis." On philological grounds, his position is entirely justified. Nevertheless, there remains the promise of hard archaeological evidence addressing some of the questions surrounding the etiology and chronology of Old Tibetan funerary traditions. For archaeological data suggestive of a prehistoric antiquity for certain archaic funerary traditions recorded in Dunhuang texts, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 544–557.

[14] I have relied on facsimiles of Pt 1134 and Pt 1194 published in Imaeda *et al*. 2000. My copy of IOL Tib J 731 recto (henceforth abbreviated ITJ 731r) came from a microfilm facsimile obtained at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The shortened form of the accession code for India Office Library Tibetan works (ITJ) is used throughout this monograph.

The first origins myth of Pt 1194 recounts the creation of the *skyibs-lug* with the aid of three funerary priests of legendary status: Gshen-rab myi-bo, Dur-shen rma-da and Sgal-gshen tho'u-yug. This text is one of seven known Old Tibetan sources for lore about Gshen-rab myi-bo.[15] However, Pt 1194 is the only source for the mythic origins of the psychopomp sheep that seems to have survived in Old Tibetan literature, endowing it with great historical value. By establishing the new 'religious custom' (*chos*) of the *skyibs-lug*, the funerary priests are framed in the story as great benefactors of humanity.[16] They initiate a covenant between sheep and humanity, culturally exalting the sheep by assigning it a role well beyond mundane economic functions. In order to create the first sheep guide of the dead, the funerary priests had to win it back from a dissembling and murderous *srin* demon. The priests do this through evocation and instruction. The making of the *skyibs-lug* was done in collaboration with its mother, and this child sheep must be enticed with delicious food offerings. Once the sheep was ritually secured by the funerary priests, it could act as the surrogate relative of the deceased in the traverse of the postmortem barrier. Thus the way to the hereafter was opened.

The fifth and longest origins myth in Pt 1134 is primarily occupied with the *do-ma* funerary transport horses. The two main characters of the story are the patriarch 'Gon-tsun phywa and his ill-destined son Lhe'u yang-ka rje. In the text 'Gon-tsun phywa is depicted as an archetypal *bon* ritualist and divine figure. The son was an individual of fine qualities, who passed away after a fatal dispute with his maternal uncle. 'Gon-tsun phywa went to great lengths to revive Lhe'u yang-ka rje, but it was to no avail. In the end, he turned to a funerary priest (*gshin-gshen*) to help conduct the burial rite. A part of this rite involved two horses, the *do-ma*. However, these horses were frightened by a crafty wolf and ran away. 'Gon-tsun phywa chased the horses over huge distances and even tried to trap them but he was unable to apprehend these animals. The two equids were finally caught by a lord of the Dmu lineage. Noble in spirit, the horses agreed to serve as the *do-ma* for Lhe'u yang-ka rje; even though they knew that their mission meant sure death. With the *do-ma* in the proper place, the burial of the son could go ahead. The horses were outfitted with ritual ornaments, and they were instructed by 'Gon-tsun phywa to pass through the postmortem murk and to reach the celestial paradise along with their human charge. As the prototypic carriers of the dead, the *do-ma* were successful in carrying out their work. These mounts along with the *skyibs-lug* beacon and Lhe'u yang-ka rje were established in their new abode above the nine layers of the sky.

The *do-ma* ritual in manuscript ITJ 731r brings to light ceremonial procedures and cultural lore not well represented in other Old Tibetan sources. This ritual was part of the last stage of the ancient Tibetan funerary rite. It occurred after the deceased had undergone psychological stabilization through mystic reconditioning of his consciousness. The text begins by definitively segregating deathful mischance from the good luck incumbent in livestock and other economic foundations.

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[15] The other six are Pt 1068, Pt 1134, Pt 1136, Pt 1289, ITJ 731r, and the *byol-rabs* (the origins myth of a type of ransom offering) text of the Gathang Bumpa collection. These six works form the focus of study in Bellezza 2010a.

[16] There is a long held Tibetological belief that the early historic-period religious specialists (*bon-po* and *gshen*) who carried out rituals such as funerals belonged to a cult almost exclusively devoted to serving the king and his court. Recently, Kværne (2009: 23) put forward this view, adding that such priests were typical of an agricultural society with a centralized government. Although there is no question that *bon* and *gshen* priests were active in serving the spiritual needs of royalty, the Dunhuang and Gathang Bumpa funerary documents indicate that they were also engaged with a much wider cross-section of society. As observed by Dotson (2008: 67), the *bon* ritual systems in Pt 1285 and other Dunhuang manuscripts cannot be distilled down to a royal or state religion. It should also be noted that a good many origins myths integrated into the Old Tibetan ritual tradition are set in pastoral or venatic regions of Tibet. Like today, in the early historic period, the higher reaches of the Tibetan Plateau were primarily given over to stock rearing and hunting.

This ritual segregation was believed to separate the social success required by the living from the malefic forces of death. The second part of the *do-ma* ritual revolves around the propitiation of stellar and planetary demons, which could interfere with passage to the empyrean. As part of this sequence, the *do-ma* are warned not to eat offerings designed for the stars and planets and not to be misled by these uranic beings. The third part of the ritual covers genealogical precedents of the person for whom it is being executed. The next section of the *do-ma* performance persuades the departed to well and truly accept the fact of death. A series of powerful metaphors are used to convey this blunt message. With nowhere else to turn, the deceased was seen as ready for the final journey. The text tells us that together with the *do-ma* the dead person fords the river and climbs the pass, demarcating the postmortem stage of existence from paradise. In the last instance, the expired one apprehends a rainbow, signaling his entry into paradise, a world utterly cut off from the one in which the living reside.

Other Sources

Other ritual manuscripts of the Dunhuang collections are also investigated in this book. Ancillary to this study, these documents clarify narrative elements and ritual operations described in the illuminated manuscript, Gathang Bumpa and Dunhuang manuscripts featured in Part III. These supporting works elaborate upon fundamental eschatological themes, adding to an overall appreciation of death rituals in ancient Tibet. Those Dunhuang references derived from secondary sources are tucked away in footnotes, as are supplementary Dunhuang passages that are paraphrased or translated in this book. Of special note is material pertaining to salvation in ITJ 733, the cosmic origins of the *do-ma* in Pt 1060, and healing rituals in Pt 1285.

A number of primary sources derived from the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur[17] collection also underpin this book. The Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur is an Eternal Bon assemblage of over one hundred individual texts incorporated in both the New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten* (vol. 6) and the Bon *bka'* (vols. 31 and 39). Devoted to many aspects of funerary ritual history and performance, this body of literature is a compilation of archaic and Buddhist-style lore and praxis. It began to be assembled circa the 11th century CE.[18] Written in Classical Tibetan, the codification and editorial bent of the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur were tailored to serve the tenets of Eternal Bon, a religion that has much in common with Tibetan Buddhism. Traditionally, the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur is attributed to the prehistoric *gshen* Mu-cho ldem-drug and his father Ston-pa gshen-rab.[19] Some of its texts are thought to have been rediscovered by Thog-thog lhung-lha and other unnamed treasure finders (*gter-ston*).

Although the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur contains a number of philosophical constructs and ritual methods that can be attributed to the early historic period, it is very much a body of literature composed to suit the religious purposes and *Zeitgeist* of the early second millennium CE. Replete with ritual knowledge of varied sorts, much of this collection is devoted to exorcistic

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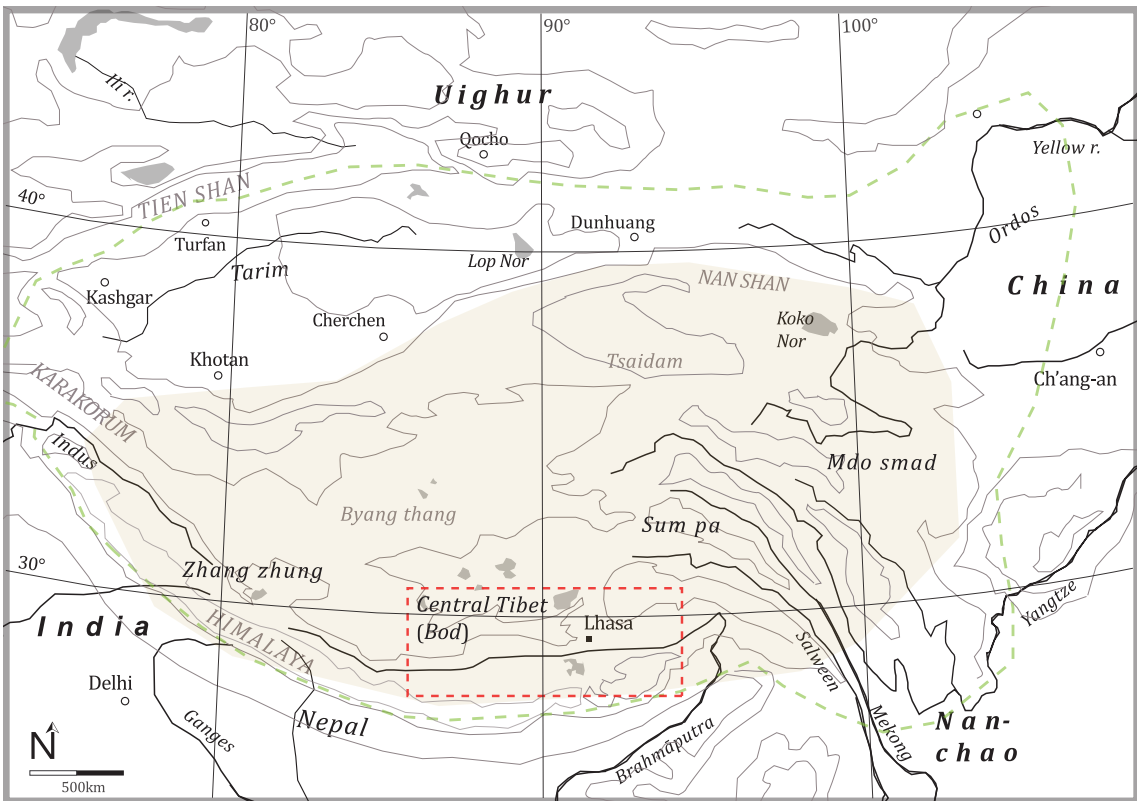
[17] Great Funeral Ritual Multitude of Mu-cho. Karmay (2009: 63) translates the word *khrom* in this title as 'public', but this is not strictly correct. For a clarification of this term, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 367, 377, 380.

[18] For a comprehensive introduction to the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur literature, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 367–372; Martin *et al*. 2003, pp. 540–571.

[19] On the identity of Gshen-rab myi-bo in Old Tibetan (O.T.) sources, see Bellezza 2008; 2010a; Stein 2010 (Antiqua V), pp. 255–258; Stein 1971, pp. 485 (n. 13), 490, 520, 522. Studies published on his Eternal Bon counterpart, Ston-pa gshen-rab, include (among others) Karmay 1998, pp. 108–113; Karmay 1972, pp. xvii–xxi; Karmay 2005, pp. 139–210; Kværne 1995, pp. 17–21; Hoffman 1961, pp. 85–97.

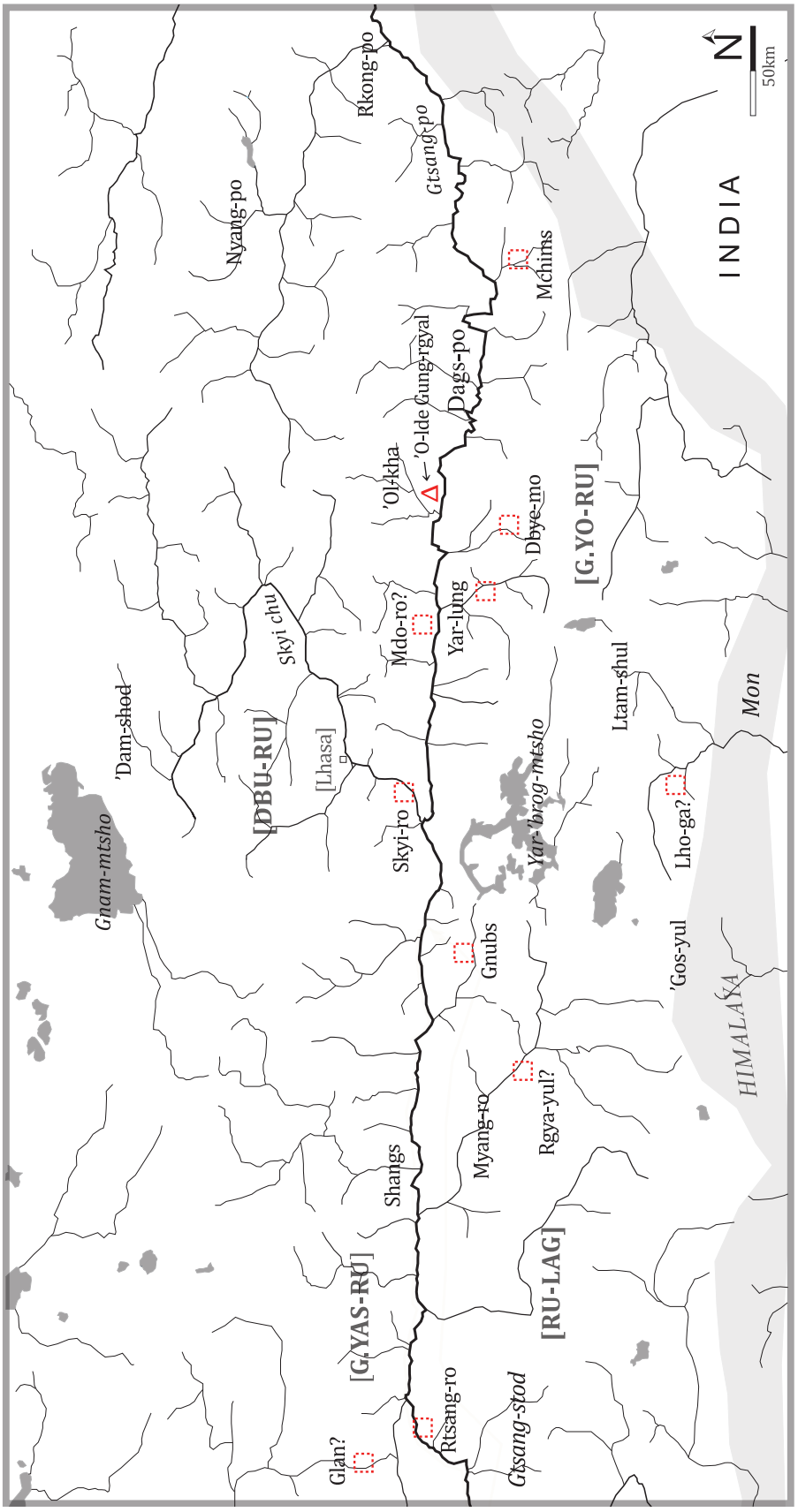
rituals designed to uncouple the demons of death (*gshed*) from the soul or consciousness principle of the deceased.[20] According to the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur, the consciousness principle was a bipartite phenomenon consisting of the *bla* and *yid* or *bka'* and *thugs*. The *bka'* as an utterance or aspiration is the equivalent of the *bla*, the soul or animating force that is the seat of the personality. The *yid* or *thugs* is the mind, the prime perceptual and cognitive faculty of an individual.[21] Nevertheless, in Old Tibetan literature, the *yid*, *thugs* or *bla* mostly occur separately as a singular consciousness principle that endures *post obitum*. As regards the Tibetan funerary universe, innovation abounds in Classical Tibetan literature but so do much older eschatological concepts and mythic motifs.



Map 1. The Tibetan Highlands

[20] In the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur text *Mi rab* (= *rabs*) *mchad gsum khro bo'i gshad 'dul dbus phyogs bzhugs pa legs so* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 6, Nos. 1131–1163, anonymous), there is a vibrant description of the male *gshed* (there are also female *gshed* or *gshed-ma*), who come in the form of animals, and the common grouping of elemental spirits known as *lha-srin sde-brgyad* (Nos. 1156, ln. 6 to 1157, ln. 1): "This oath-breaking *gshed-po* of evil activities at times manifests as birds, wild ungulates and livestock, and at other times it manifests as different aquatic animals. All the *lha-srin sde-brgyad* assume any manner of manifestation" (*lan re 'dab chag ri dags* (C.T. = *dwags*) *g.yung dags* (C.T. = *dwags*) *sprul* / *lan re chu gnas dag tu sprul* / *dam nyams gshed po las ngan 'di* / *lha srin sde brgyad thams cad la* / *ma sprul pa ni gcig kyang med* /).

[21] For further information on the consciousness principle, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 363, 364.



Map 2. The core areas of Central Tibet, with major place names featured in the texts

PART I

The Illuminated Funerary Manuscript

Philological and Historical Analysis of the Illuminated Funerary Manuscript

On the basis of its grammatical and orthographic peculiarities, I have estimated that the illuminated funerary manuscript was written between 1000 and 1250 CE. It may be that some of its linguistic curiosities are vernacularisms rather than survivals from the Old Tibetan language. Nevertheless, the nature of the language supplies convincing evidence for the considerable antiquity of the manuscript. Although decidedly composed in Classical Tibetan, the text is infiltrated by Old Tibetan grammatical and orthographic matter of the kind exhibited in the funerary texts of the Dunhuang and Gathang Bumpa corpora. As reflected in the composition of the illuminated funerary manuscript, we might therefore speak of a transitional period and language in non-Buddhist ritual traditions that existed in Tibet in the early first millennium CE. The periodization of the document arrived at relying upon linguistic methodologies has been corroborated by chronometric analysis of a piece of its fabric (Figs. 1, 2).[22] The results obtained indicate that the manuscript was written in the 11th or first half of the 12th century CE.

A number of orthographic and grammatical features can be used to adduce the antiquity of the illuminated funerary manuscript. That the text exemplifies a literary language with survivals from Old Tibetan is seen in the concurrent usage of spellings such as *rin-cen* and *rin-chen* (jewel) or *dra-tsugs* and *dra-tshugs* (supporting latticework). They exist in this manuscript as anachronisms. Its other relict features can be summed up as follows:

1. The use of the *ya-btags* with the letter *ma* (e.g., *myi* for *mi*, *mye* for *me*)
2. The absence of the *d*, *s* and *l* prefixes in certain words (e.g., *kar* for *dkar*, *ngar* for *sngar*, 'O-de for 'O-lde)
3. The choice of the prefix *r* instead of *d* (e.g., *rgongs* for *dgongs*)
4. The use of the suffixed *s* in the old manner (e.g., *rings* for *ring*, *yags* for *yag*)
5. The tendency to suffix the so-called 'small a' (*a-chung*) to a word ending in *a*, *i* or *u* (e.g., *rdzi'* for *rdzi* (herder), *zhags-pa'* for *zhags-pa* (lasso), *grub-pa'* for *grub-pa* (to accomplish), *dmu'* for *dmu* (sky, a type of spirit), *'di'* for *'di* (a pronoun), *na'* for *na* (a locative case sign), *la'* for *la* [a postposition])[23]
6. The detachment of the postpositive particle *'i* from the affixable noun (e.g., *sbrul 'i* for *sbrul gyi*)

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[22] A fragment of the manuscript that had been removed from the rest of the text by a former owner was used as the sample. It contained portions of typically rendered illustrations and was subject to AMS analysis: Sample No. Beta-272516; conventional radiocarbon age: 960 BP + /- 40 (viz., number of years before 1950 CE); 2 Sigma calibrated result (95% probability): Cal 1010 to 1170 CE; intercept of radiocarbon age with calibration curve Cal 1040 CE. Ideally, it now remains for the manuscript to undergo complementary scientific testing.

[23] On the possible variable phonetic value of the *a-chung* in Old Tibetan literature, see Hill 2005; Coblin 2002.

7. The use of obsolete liaisons (e.g., *stingsu* for *steng su*, *'tshamsu* for *mtshams su*)
8. The presence of Old Tibetan verb forms (e.g., *gshags* as related to *gshegs*, *bsrid* as related to *srid*)

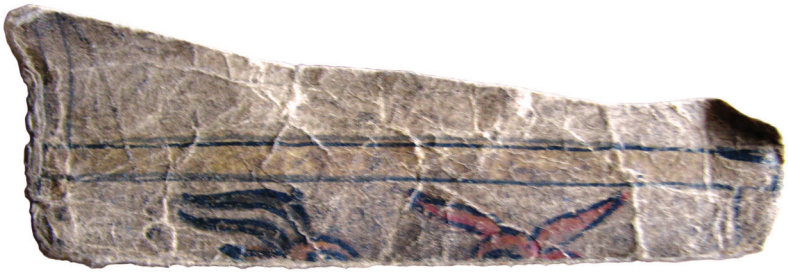

Fig. 1. The recto side of the assayed manuscript fragment. The two figures appear to have been part of the Ja-3r frame, divine gazelles found in the first half (invocation and propitiation of the psychopomps) part of the death ritual

Fig. 2. The verso side of the fragment of the manuscript submitted for chronometric analysis. The three hatted figures in this illustration probably belonged to the Ja-3v frame; they represent deities who carry out a funerary ritual tradition known as ste'u

The type of script employed in the illuminated funerary manuscript also furnishes us with some evidence for its age. It belongs to a paleographic stratum characterized by the transition from *dbu-can* to *dbu-med* scripts. Most of the strokes that form the letters are quite well formed, but the lineation producing the tops of letters tends to be attenuated. The letter *sa* in particular has evolved into a *dbu-med* form. An older transitional script is represented in the archaic ritual texts of the Gathang Bumpa collection; this style of calligraphy is more florid, the letter *ba* more rounded (as in some Dunhuang manuscripts and Upper Tibetan rock inscriptions, etc.), and it generally has a more cursive quality than that of the manuscript. Also, as regards the letter *dza*, it is sometimes written idiosyncratically so as to resemble the letter *ja*, while the letter *ja* has been contracted to resemble the letter *nga*. Some other letters of the illuminated manuscript also have a more or less non-standard appearance. Another peculiarity of the text is the rendering of the affix *'i* without the *a-chung*.

An excellent indication of the illuminated manuscript's antiquity is its very contents. The divine personalities and ritual structures of the text dovetail with its old-fashioned spellings, grammar and syntax. The ritual guides of the deceased are a series of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic

deities, which are endowed with an elementary identity and iconography. The appellations of these figures match their character, in that they belong to an obsolete onomasticon. Of all the special terminology presented in the manuscript, the word *lhe'u* (literally 'little god') stands out most prominently. This term is used as an epithet for humans, clearly an allusion to their divine pedigree.[24] Calling human beings 'little gods' also alludes to their return to a divine realm or status after death, as part of a belief system I have called a 'closed teleological cycle'.[25] In the illuminated manuscript the term *lhe'u* is also appended to 'castle' or 'fortress', the place in which the dead reside in companionship with their ancestral deities. The prototypic *lhe'u* personality is Lhe'u yang-ka rje of Pt 1134. His demise figures in one of several Old Tibetan accounts explaining the use and significance of horses and sheep in the archaic funerary rite.

It is curious that although written just nine or ten centuries ago, the illuminated funerary manuscript betrays no hint of Buddhist or Eternal Bon philosophy and praxis. Evidently, it was part of a stream of eschatological tradition differing in significant ways from the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur or the Buddhist *bar-do* complex. In other words, it represents a funerary tradition that exhibits no signs of a formalized Lamaist framework. In the extant text, there are no lineage lamas to venerate, no sectarian doctrines to uphold, and no recognition directly or indirectly of a supreme Buddha figure.

The precise nature of the relationship of the illuminated manuscript with the funerary materials of Gathang Bumpa and Dunhuang presented in this study is not obvious. Although these respective works share homologous eschatological motifs and ritual practices, it is not explicit that they were used in the same evolving body of funerary rites. It is possible that the illuminated manuscript and the Old Tibetan texts of this study belonged to different streams of Tibetan tradition, those followed by different social, linguistic or regional groups. At this stage in the inquiry, little else can be said about the provenance of the illuminated manuscript.

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[24] According to Stein (2010, Antiqua III: 149, 150), the kindredness of the Tibetan kings and *lha* was often expressed using the diminutive: *lhe'u*. In a soul evocation text of the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur entitled *Bla 'bod 'bring po*, the descent from the deities is stated explicitly: "In the beginning, as you descended from the *lha*, your clan (*gdung-rus*) is noble. Intermediately, as you appeared as the 'mighty one',* your engendering lineage (*ske-rgyud*) is high. Lastly, you were born in a commoner caste (*smang*) in the society of humans" (*khyod dang po lha la grol ba'i* (= *bas*) *gdung rus btsun* / *bar du gnyan la shar ba'i* (= *bas*) *skye rgyud mtho* / *tha ma smang* (= *dmangs*) *la 'khrungs pa mi yi rigs* /). See Bellezza 2008, pp. 417, 419. As regards the origins of ancient rites, the regent (*sde-srid*) Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho credits the god Spyan-ras-gzigs with saying, "The lineage of men should descend from the gods [like] a lineage of rivers touches glaciers" (Stein 2010, Antiqua III: 179). Furthermore, *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum* affirms that in the beginning there was no separation between the gods and men (*ibid*., 178). On this primal connection between humans and divinities, see also Bellezza 2005, pp. 428, 429. Furthermore, see Haarh's masterful study (1969: 318). For *lhe'u* as part of the proper name of a human figure, see Lhe'u btsan-pa in Pt 1068 (lns. 6, 9, 20; Stein 1971: 525; Bellezza 2008: 504). For deities that carry *lhe'u* / *le'u* as part of their names, see Lhe'u-rje zin-tags / Le'u-rje zing-po in Pt 1043 (Stein 2010, Antiqua III: p. 150 [n. 50]), as well as Lhe'u yang-ka-rje in Pt 1134 (*ibid*.; Stein 1971: 491; Bellezza 2008: 384 (n. 93); *infra*, pp. 221–234). The Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur text *Bon 'di gyer 'go legs so* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 6, Nos. 491–496, anonymous), Nos. 495, ln. 6 to 496, ln. 1, expresses the inseparability of two classes of divinities and the 'little gods'. It states: "The *lha* and *gsas* and *lhe'u*, the three brothers" (*lha dang gsas dang lhe'u sras gsum* /).

* *Gnyan*. A type of spirit that lives in the intermediate realm between the heavens and underworld. In the cosmogonic text *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags* (written in the 13th century CE), attributed to King Khri-srong lde'u-btsan (742–797 CE), a divine grandfather (*A-mye*) named Khri-to chen-po married three women who belonged to the *gnyan*, *dmu* and *srin* classes of elemental spirits. Union with his three wives gave rise to the 'Six Clans of Tibet' (Bod-mi'u gdung-drug). For this myth, see Karmay 1998, pp. 271–273; Bellezza 2005, pp. 405–409; Haarh 1969, p. 282.

[25] For further elaboration, see Bellezza 2008, p. 525 (n. 591).

The prose of the illuminated funerary manuscript is highly condensed, with its major procedures, historical background and eschatological orientation presented in an abbreviated manner. This extreme brevity has added to the challenge of deciphering the signification of its constituent lines. We can expect that when this text was read at a funeral there were a number of ancillary provisions that accompanied it. For instance, the participating deities were probably feted with a relatively broad range of edible and non-edible objects. Moreover, the intricate procedural aspects enshrined in other archaic funerary literature suggest that a number of different rituals were conducted as part and parcel of the entire funeral. These may have included the reconditioning of the corpse and consciousness of the deceased (*gsos-ba*), the evocation of the consciousness principle of the deceased (*bla-'bod*), the containment of the consciousness principle in special receptacles (*bla-rten*), and the final consignment of the dead to the other world (*grub-pa*).[26]

The illuminations of the manuscript were probably used in conjunction with receptacles conceived of as enshrining the soul or consciousness principle of the deceased at the funeral venue. The depictions themselves were envisaged as aiding the dead in their passage to the afterlife, functioning as visual guides to the divine beings that serve as psychopomps. More than fifty gods and goddesses, many in pairs and triads, are depicted in the illuminations of the funerary manuscript. Each of them possesses Tibetan facial features and styles of dress. The attributes of the deities and objects found in the paintings are also of Tibetan origin, as a perusal of the text indicates. Direct reference to these various props is made in the readings. Similarly, the menagerie of animals introduced in the manuscript is of direct relevance to the dispensations being carried out. The species by name are mentioned in most cases.

The forty largely intact frames of the illuminated funerary manuscript are arrayed on its recto and verso sides. Each full frame measures around eleven centimeters by sixteen centimeters, with the smallest of them having dimensions of eleven centimeters by thirteen centimeters.[27] Ten additional frames are now highly fragmentary, with only small parts of their illumination or text intact, bringing the total to fifty. What remains of these other frames is so insignificant that they are not indexed separately in this work. The manuscript can be divided into two major parts: the psychopomp ritual (twenty recto frames) and the *ste'u* ritual (twenty verso frames). The two parts of the manuscript consist of a series of illuminations and accompanying passages that form narrative and performative sequences. There are written indications showing that each half of the manuscript originally had thirteen series. Most if not all of these twenty-six series consisted of four frames each. This means that the manuscript may have been comprised of at least one hundred and four frames, or fifty-four more than the entire present number. Additionally, the text may have been provisioned with prefatory material that introduced the ritual pedigree and performance, as minimal as this may have been. Possibly, there was a concluding portion to the funerary ritual as well. Despite the fragmentary nature of the illuminated manuscript, enough of it has endured to furnish us with a wide cross-section of its philosophic and procedural elements. This death ritual for women is simple in form and unique in nature but, as we shall see, it has close thematic links to other Tibetan archaic funerary texts.

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[26] For a summary of funerary ritual structures of a syncretistic nature (containing both archaic and Lamaist elements) in the widely encompassing Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur collection, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 389–411.

[27] These frames bear some resemblance to the funerary *tsag-li* of Eternal Bon; although *tsag-li* are individual cards on separate sheets of paper. In both the illuminations of our manuscript and the *tsag-li* there are depictions of funerary divinities and animals gifted to the deceased. However, the *tsag-li* are part of a genre of death rituals in which Buddhist-style eschatological constructs predominate. In the Eternal Bon funeral, the *tsag-li* are displayed before a *byang-bu* (a stereotypic depiction of the deceased used as the seat of his or her consciousness or *rnam-shes*) to assist the departed one in achieving liberation. For a study of Eternal Bon *tsag-li*, see Kværne 1985.

In total, eighteen different series (nine rectos and nine versos) in the illuminated funerary manuscript are identifiable. However, only two of the eighteen extant series possess all four frames in full. Although this text is highly fragmentary, the sequence in which each constellation of paintings and words is presented below appears to be the correct one. That is to say, the unfolding of the text adhered to in this work conforms to the progression intended by its authors. The placement of individual series in the sequence was carried out using alphabetical and numerical indices provided in the text, the contiguity of frames on the same strip of paper, narrative carryover, and the matching of cut lines of text and images. Each of the eighteen series of the manuscript is designated with a Tibetan letter corresponding to the remnant of the original alphanumerical indexing system still found on the recto side. Individual frames have been assigned a number denoting their relative position in a series. A correspondence between the recto and verso sequences is maintained in this work.

Time has not been kind to the illuminated funerary manuscript. In addition to having many missing sections, it has been arbitrarily cut, soiled, creased, and frayed. An inspection of the paper at points of damage reveals that it is composed of four layers of extremely fine material, which were bonded together. The durability of this four-ply pasteboard is at once apparent. What type of adhesive, if any, was used to produce this high quality paper is not known.

The colors used in the paintings are various shades of red, yellow, orange, green, brown, tan, blue, gray, and white. Nonetheless, some fading of the pigments and degradation of the paper has occurred, thus an accurate assessment of the original palette is not always possible. For instance, some of what now appears as olive green in hue seems to have originally been a brighter color in the teal range. Much of the white pigment used has ablated, but most other paints are still strongly fixed to the paper. Some parts of figures were not filled in with paint and are merely demarcated with the same black ink used to draw the outlines of all subjects. We can assume that blank spaces were used to give the effect of a beige tone. The text appears to have been written with the same ink used in the sketches. However, no scientific analysis of the pigments, ink or paper has yet been undertaken.

Each illumination possesses a thick border that sets it apart from the text. These borders vary considerably, setting each frame apart just like the individualistic figures in the paintings. The borders were painted with one to three colors or were drawn in black ink only. Some borders are decorated with parallel diagonal lines or matching curvilinear strokes drawn in ink. Most of the paintings have plain backgrounds devoid of color and embellishment, limiting the context in which the various figures are seen. Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions. In the Ca-1r frame, a pair of deities is depicted suspended over what appears to be a range of mountains. In another frame (Pa-4r), a solitary goddess is surrounded by yellow mounds (heaps of gold and jewels?) and wavy green lines (earth or water?). Two other recto paintings were rendered with solid orange or gold backgrounds (Nga-4r, Nya-3r).

Although a reading of the text demonstrates that its users must have perceived its divine anthropomorphic figures as possessing great power and ability, their understated appearance in the illustrations masks this quite effectively. The simplicity of the apparel worn by the divinities

in the manuscript contrasts with the often lavish presentation of deities in Lamaist iconography.[28] There are fifty-four such gods and goddesses (including fragmentary examples) in the extant text. Their austere portrayal may be specially related to their function as protectors of the dead, the starkest of human conditions. All anthropomorphic figures have staid or stern countenances, but none are overtly wrathful or wildly expressive. In fact, the gods and goddesses represented in the funerary manuscript seem quite ordinary, the antetypes of the living and the deceased human beings with whom they ritually interact. The dress of the deities mirrors their composure; it is elegant but simple in appearance. The hue of the textiles is rich but never loud, and many of the color combinations employed seem rather muted. Some of this somber quality, however, is the result of the darkening of the pigments over the centuries. What material the costumes were envisioned as being made of is debatable, with wool, silk, cotton and other types of textiles all credible. Whether attired in shirts, tunics or long robes, the clothes worn on the torsos of the deities open down the middle with the left side tucked under the right side. This style of wearing dress has clear imperial-period precedents.[29] In more recent times, most Tibetan upper garments (*phyu-pa*, *stod-thung*, etc.) have the right panel lying underneath the left panel.

Where a lack of headgear permits close examination, the gods are all shown with short hair or closely shaven heads. Goddesses wear their sparse hair long and probably unbound. This lack of hair may have been a symbol of hoary age, the result of the deities having long ago taken up residence in the parallel world of the dead. Jewelry is also conspicuously absent from the bodies of the divine beings, as is elaborate footwear. That this rather severe iconography is representative of deities belonging to the far side of existence is established in the Nga-4v frame. Here a divine couple who died in what was probably conceived of as primal times, presides over the funeral and help endow the living with newborn children. These are critical functions of funerary deities in the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur as well.

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[28] I have not been able to pinpoint analogous iconographic representations in Lamaist art. However, contemporaneous and somewhat later human figures attired in a manner fairly reminiscent of the deities of the illuminated funerary manuscript are known. These ancillary figures are found in the frescoes of the Ta-po and A-lci monasteries and include nuns (?), pilgrims and noblemen. See, for example, Klimburg-Salter 1997, pp. 86 (figs. 48, 49), 87 (fig. 50), 124 (fig. 121), 140 (fig. 140), 168 (fig. 183), 169 (fig. 185); Goepper 1996, pp. 137, 166. The dress in these Buddhist murals seems to include matching shirts and pants, but the cut and fit of these items of clothing, as part of a style of art exhibiting Iranian, Indian and Central Asian cultural influences, is different from the illustrations in the manuscript. The costumes of the figures in the illuminated manuscript are more comparable to those on painted coffins unearthed at the Guolimu cemetery, on the northeastern Tibetan Plateau, and dated to the 8th century CE. For the Guolimu painted coffins see *op. cit.* Tong and Wertmann 2010. Although the robes of the Guolimu burial art are more opulent and varied in style, some have trim in contrasting colors and open down the middle, not unlike those of the illuminated manuscript. Also, underrobes appear to be depicted in the illustrations of both sources. For more on the painted coffins of Guolimu, see *infra*, pp. 243–246. Some of the robes of our text are comparable to fancier ones of Sassanian style found in a fresco at Qizil, in the Tarim Basin. The four figures of this depiction are identified as 'Tocharian donors' and dated to the 6th century CE. For this image, see Wikipedia contributors 2007. It would appear therefore that clothing worn by deities of the illuminated funerary manuscript, while fundamentally of indigenous design, may have been influenced by types of attire that circulated beyond the Tibetan Plateau in the second half of the first millennium CE. A cosmopolitan orientation is also a signature of certain early Tibetan ritual texts, where various nations are cited as part of the offerings regimen.

[29] As noted, this same manner of wearing robes is found in figures portrayed on the painted coffins of Guolimu. For the clearest example, see Tong and Wertmann 2010, p. 198 (fig. 13). Also, see the sketch of three Tibetan figures in Dunhuang cave 359 (Tong 2008: 431 [fig. 6.5.2-6]). The jacket of the *rgya-lu-chas* costume (used by lay officials for ceremonial occasions), which is thought to be based on an ancient prototype, had a central closure (cf. Heller 2002). Heller (*ibid.*) notes that Chinese vestmental protocol indicates that imperial-period Tibetans closed their garments right over left. Three frescoes from the extremely important Byang-mo grottoes (in Gting-skyes County), Cave IK1, which can probably be dated to the 9th or 10th century CE, also depict figures whose garments open down the center. See *op. cit.* Chinese Archaeology 2012.