

Recenzje / Reviews

Drenpa's Proclamation: the Rise and Decline of the Bön Religion in Tibet Presented and Translated by Per Kvaerne and Dan Martin. In Collaboration with Joanna Białek and Charles Ramble, Vajra Academic vol. III, Vajra Books, Kathmandu 2023, 656 pp.

Long awaited edition and annotated translation of one of the most interesting Tibetan primary sources written in the Bön milieu was prepared after many years of studies by Per Kvaerne and Dan Martin, two eminent Tibetologists, and world specialists in Bön studies, in collaboration with Joanna Białek, an authority in Old Tibetan, and Charles Ramble, anthropologist and great expert of Bön rituals. Kvaerne and Martin acknowledged the help and assistance of other scholars, as well, however, there is no doubt that the core work was done by the two of them. Per Kvaerne as the author of the Introduction, undertook the leading role in showing how the project developed and took the final shape. It should be stressed that the volume offers much more than an annotated edition of the Tibetan text from the 12th century and its study. It is an encyclopaedic work that encompasses the current state of knowledge of the ancestral religion of the Tibetans, what the authors call it, and more.

The volume starts with the Preface (IX–XII) followed by information on the transcription and transliteration methods employed in the book titled “Tibetan Words” (XIII–XV). The elucidating Introduction (pp. 1–85) is a true study of all topics connected with the Tibetan text. It is divided into subchapters: ‘The *bsGrags pa glings grags* – a History of Bön’ (pp. 1–30) ‘The Ancestral Religion of Tibet According to the *GLG*’ (pp. 30–62) and ‘The Text’ (pp. 62–85). The core part of the work is the annotated ‘Translation’ (pp. 87–334) followed by the ‘Tibetan Text’ (in Wylie transliteration, pp. 337–540). After the Bibliography (pp. 541–588) comes an Appendix with excerpts from the sources that were recognized by the editors, presented in the Wylie transliteration (pp. 589–627). Next is the Glossary with rare words and terms prepared by Joanna Białek (pp. 629–638) and, finally, an Index (pp. 639–656).



The *Drenpa's Proclamation* is the English title of a Tibetan work titled *Drakpa Lingdrak* or in Wylie transliteration *bsGrags pa gling grags* (abbreviated as *GLG*), which is a short title of what could be read (based on different versions) as *g.Yung drung bon gyi gling bzhi bsgrags pa'i kha (byang)* i.e. ‘The Proclaimed Certificate of the Context of Eternal Bön’ (p. 79). The unknown author aimed to present “a coherent narrative of how, and why, it came to pass that Bön – regarded by its adherents in the 12th century (and still today) as the ancestral religion of Tibet, and, indeed, as a timeless and universal religion of all mankind – was suppressed by the Tibetan King T’risong Detsen (Khri-srong lDe-btsan) in the 8th century C.E.” (p. IX). Kvaerne and Martin treat this work as “the earliest known example of this genre” and date it to the second half of the 12th century (p. IX, 12), certainly after 1108. This date was established by Dan Martin who recognized a citation from “The Root Verses” (*rTsa tshigs*), a text discovered as a Treasure (*gter ma*) in 1108 by Gyer-mi Nyi-'od and rMa-ston Srid-'dzin. “The Root Verses” is included in the collection titled *Gal mdo* which encompasses texts on the philosophical and yoga practice movement called The Great Perfection (*rdzogs-chen*) (p. 12) which is characterised by “its non-dogmatic and syncretistic practice” (p. 13).

According to Kvaerne and Martin such ideas were expressed by Drenpa Namkha (Dran-pa Nam-kha'), the main Bön protagonist of the studied work (*GLG*). He was stated as its author, however, since he was “a Bön priest believed to have been active [...] in the second half of the 8th century C.E.” (p. 11) this claim was made by the true author, who remains unknown and who must have lived in the 12th century. Another indication of the date of the composition of the *GLG* in one of the passages is a reference made to a danger coming from China which may refer to the Mongol invasion around 1220 or 1240 (p. 14).

The editors of the work mention that Drenpa Namkha, styled as the author of the *GLG* was once a Bön priest who ordained himself as a Buddhist monk and “repeatedly emphasises the ultimate identity of Bon and Buddhism” (p. 13). The subject of teachings of Bön in the work is treated by Kvaerne and Martin in the first subchapter “Identifying Bön” (pp. 1–8). The priority given to this subject and the long explanations show the importance of this topic both for the author of the original composition and for the modern editors.

More information about Drenpa Namkha is provided in the third chapter of the Introduction (The Text). Here it is explained that there could have been two or even three different individuals referred to as Drenpa Namkha. One with the patronym Gyungyar was the earlier Drenpa Namkha, a native of Zhangzhung who was active during Mut'ri Tsenpo and hid Bön texts when Drigung Tsenpo persecuted Bön (pp. 64–65). The later Drenpa Namkha was called Khöpung (Khod-spungs, the meaning not being clear, p. 65). The Buddhists referred to Drenpa Namkha as a “translator”. He was said to have been invited by King T'risong Detsen to the Samye monastery to translate Bön texts. When the Bön priests were banished he became a Buddhist monk. In the *GLG* there is a similar account which contains also a long prophecy listing calamities to appear in Tibet due to the suppression of Bön (p. 66).

What is Bön and which Bön appeared in the text is discussed in detail. The editors write: “The *GLG* will therefore be regarded as contemporaneous with – and having numerous characteristics in common with – the resurgence, the *chidar* (*phyi dar*), ‘the latter spread’ of Buddhism in the 11th century, reflecting a religious system that was deeply influenced by a Buddhist worldview, but whose adherents insist on its unbroken continuity with the non-Buddhist courtly religion of the Imperial Period” (p. 9). The focal point of the work will be “the ritual activities and magical powers of the priests [which] are described in detail, and the privileges and titles conferred on them by the kings... as well as the punishments to be inflicted on those who harm them or steal their possessions” (p. 10).

In the Introduction, the “Central topics” of the work are covered in a separate subchapter (pp. 19–30). They include Mount Tisé and Lake Mapang, Zhangzhung, Śakyamuni and Dharma, Nyatri Tsenpo and the first king of Tibet, King Drigum Tsenpo and the first suppression of Bon, King Songtsen Gampo, the Three Indian beggars and the stupa Chari Khashor, Padmasambhava, Śāntarakṣita and King T’risong Detsen, King T’risong Detsen and the second suppression of Bön). The titles do not always cover all that is explained within those topics.

The second chapter of the Introduction deals with “The Ancestral Religion of Tibet According to the *GLG*” (pp. 30–62). It shows the core interest of the editors who explored the 12th-century work to learn about its exposition of the religion from the Imperial Period. This is a mine of information about the priests, including male and female religious specialists (*bon-po*, *bon-mo*, *gshen*, *lha bon po*, *rig ’dzin*, *bla ma* etc.), privileges and compensations, rituals, deities and demons, eschatology and funerary rituals, religious buildings, monuments, and places, to mention just those which are labeling the headings to organize the vast material presented. This chapter can be treated as a new summa of knowledge about ancestral religious practices of 12th-century Tibet.

The third chapter of the Introduction deals finally with the work itself, its sources, and manuscripts titled “The Text”. Some basic data were already provided in the book Preface. It is not the first time that this Tibetan work was edited or translated, however, for the first time the edition was based on five manuscripts, and the translation included detailed and scholarly-based explanations. Per Kvaerne’s interest in translating this work arose in the early 1970s when the text was found by him in the University of Oslo Library while cataloguing the Tibetan non-canonical collection. The manuscript was brought to Norway by a missionary Theo Sørensen and first used by Samten G. Karmay in his work *Treasury of Good Sayings* (1972), (pp. IX–X). The current volume which uses Karmay’s numerous studies is dedicated to him “in gratitude for his manifold contributions to Tibetan studies, especially to the study of Bön”. Kvaerne mentioned also that Anne-Marie Blondeau published the first papers on this work in 1981, and 1990, and studies by other scholars followed (p. X).

The five manuscripts that served for preparing the current edition are not always complete and they differ in their length and content. They were labeled as A, B, C, D, E, however, Kvaerne and Martin call them, as well, according to their provenience, i.e. the

Dolanji ms, the Oslo ms, the Nagchu ms, the Bön Tenjur ms, and the Gyérong ms. Understandably, letters A, B, C, D, and E are easier to fit on a page while presenting the collated Tibetan text (in the form of transliteration in Wylie) than the whole words, even abbreviated to “Oslo ms.”. Nevertheless, I think that letters that are naturally associated with the manuscript’s provenience, such as O, D, N, T, and G could have been used. Such a practice is also well known, especially to those Tibetologists who are familiar with the Tibetan Kanjur studies.

According to the rules of text criticism, one would expect the editors to point to additional words, fragments, and mistakes dividing or uniting the manuscripts so that they can be grouped into those related to each other closer (archetype) and some stemmatic order (*stemma codicum*) can be suggested. After collecting and collating the manuscripts (*recensio*), there should be the phase of examining (*examination*), an attempt to establish the earliest possible version of the text, and correcting the text (*emendatio*), when none of the surviving manuscripts appears to preserve the correct reading; this may include making a conjecture (amendment).¹ However, the editors of the current work write clearly that they will not engage in such text-critical analysis. Instead, they state that their edition should be treated as a “diplomatic edition” (p. 81) and no suggestions for correct reading will be proposed (p. 82). Nevertheless, on p. 72 there are remarks about “stemmata” suggesting that mss. A (Dolanji) and B (Oslo) seem to be related closer to each other, while ms. C (Nagchu) contains added fragments, longer than inserted passages in D (Bön Tenjur) and E (Gyérong). On the other hand, ms. B (Oslo) also contains one long passage, being a more recent addition.

The measurements of the manuscripts were not provided. The length of the five manuscripts as well as the number of lines to the page are different: the Dolanji manuscript consists of 37 folios (9 lines), the Oslo ms. – 95 (6 lines), the Nag chu ms. – 68 (7 lines), the Bön Tenjur ms. – 55 (7 lines), and the Gyérong ms. consists of 30 folios (2–8 lines). Only the Oslo manuscript (B) is complete but Kvaerne and Martin believe that it was not an autograph (Urtext, p. 72) since it contains certain paragraphs missing in other versions and many spelling mistakes indicating that this version could have been written down by a copyist not familiar with the Bön terminology and perhaps the text was dictated and noted down (p. 70). While the authors might be very correct in their judgment, nevertheless, the fact that the manuscript contains fragments not found in other versions does not necessarily mean that it is a copy written down later. There are many examples of works that were abbreviated due to different reasons, such as political, moral, or lack of understanding of certain passages. Therefore, it would be interesting to learn more about the arguments for this decision. The added/omitted fragments may differ in their language, orthography, etc., which might have led to such conclusions. The Oslo manuscript has a colophon with the date of completing the copying of the text: 1 May 1919.

¹ ‘Textual Criticism as Applied to Classical and Biblical Texts’, Viewed 3 November 2023, <<https://archive.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/4742.1-textual-criticism-as-applied-to-biblical-and-classical-texts>>.

The main version of the current edition is the manuscript from Dolanji (A), which is incomplete, however, passages from other manuscripts are added in the edited text in smaller font to show the differences and additions to the Dolanji version. The manuscript “was brought from Dolpo, Nepal to the Bön monastery at Dolanji, H.P. India, presumably in the late-1970’s or early-1980’s” (p. 69). It was available to the editors in the form of black and white photographs but without a photo of the title page. Kvaerne and Martin state that “it seems to be the most concise version, lacking numerous passages found in mss. C, D, and E. As a working hypothesis, A is therefore taken to be the oldest version presently available” (p. 69). Going back to the text-critical terminology it could have been called archetype A, from which other versions (witnesses), i.e. B, C, D, E emerged at different times and in different circumstances. The editors suggest that “three chronological stages in the genesis of the text may be posited” (p. 73).

The studied text, *bsGrags pa glings grags* (GLG), was published six times. The first edition was printed in Dolanji in the 1980s, in 91 folios based on the Oslo manuscript, with some corrections made “to conform to standard spelling” (p. 73). The second edition was most probably based on the Bön Tenjur ms. available since 1998 and printed in Beijing in 2009, however, the editors found that it differed from the possible original (D?) in numerous details (p. 73). The third printed version published in Lhasa in 2010, used the Nagchu ms. as the basis, however, Dolanji ms. and Oslo ms. have been consulted and some changes were made by the editors (p. 74). The fourth edition printed in Chengdu in 2016 is based on the second, i.e. Beijing 2009, with minor differences in spelling (p. 74). The fifth print was part of a bigger project, the Study and Development Centre of Zhang-Bod Culture, printed in China in 2018 and based on the edition of Chengdu 2016 (p. 74). The sixth printed version was based on the two previous ones, 2016 and 2018, and “its ultimate source is the Lhasa 1998 Bön Tenjur edition” (p. 75). As no satisfactory editorial work was undertaken by the editors of those publications, understandably, the printed versions were not of big help to the editors of the current volume.

The main part of the work is devoted to the translation of *bsGrags pa gling grags* (GLG), or the *Drenpa’s Proclamation*. Throughout the translated text the beginnings of new folios of the five manuscripts are marked with folio numbers which let the reader find the exact passage in the manuscripts, as well as in the transliterated version of the collated text that follows (pp. 337–540). Numerous footnotes show detailed and deep knowledge of the editors, who comment and explain both the content and the wording of their translations. They refer to the history of the text composition, geographical and mythical places, political and cultural events, people, practices, and objects, as well as language issues. Many primary and secondary sources are provided to help to contextualize the text. The authors can be congratulated for making this difficult text available to the readers in the best possible way.

A minor critical remark can be made regarding the way of providing data in the volume. Some information is given only in the Introduction and is not repeated in the comments to the Translation. For example, on p. 89 the author of the Tibetan text is mentioned as Gyungyar Lach’en Khöpung without any references. If someone misses the relevant

information in the Introduction (p. 63) then will not be able to learn anything about this person in the ‘Translation’ part. Therefore a short reference to the relevant place in the Introduction would be useful especially since the Index of people’s names (titled 5. Humans) is divided into eight categories. If someone is not sure whether Gyungyar Lach’en Khöpfung should be located under the heading “Tönpa Sherap, his family, entourage, and emanations” (5.1), or “Kings and royalty” (5.2), “Ministers” (5.3), “Priests (*bon po, gshen po, sku gshen*)” (5.4), “Priestesses (*bon mo*)” (5.5), “Buddhist Monks and Masters” (5.6), “Buddhist Nuns” (5.7), or “Other persons” (5.8), one will have to look under a few categories. The alternative solution would be to have all humans, or even all the names, gathered in one list and the additional information about the category they belong to could have been given after the name.

Not being a specialist in Bön studies I would like to refer to that part of the Tibetan work which takes an example from the Tibetan Buddhist works’ framework, especially chronicles. The repeating feature of the Tibetan historical writings is the citation or some kind of reference to Buddhist cosmology. In the *GLG*, as well, some fragments were recognized by Dan Martin as very similar to the respective parts of the *Lokaprajñapti*, the Buddhist treatise that was translated into Tibetan as ‘*Jig rten gzhas pa* in the 9th century by Jinamitra, Prajnavarman, and Ye-shes sDe. The issue of similarity of some parts of the *GLG* to the account of the *Lokaprajñapti* is mentioned in the Introduction as “inspiration for the cosmological description in the *GLG* (...)” (p. 67). Martin provides also references to the *Lokaprajñapti* in the Translation since one passage seems very close to the Tibetan version of this treatise (pp. 112–113, the Derge edition of the Buddhist Tanjur), and many others are compared and commented on their similarities and differences with the Buddhist source (pp. 107–113). One longer fragment from the Tibetan version of the *Lokaprajñapti* is given in the Appendix (p. 593).² Kvaerne and Martin do not exclude the possibility that the author of the *GLG* used the Tibetan translation of the *Lokaprajñapti* or a text based on it (esp. p. 67 in the Introduction and p. 113, footnote 131 of the Translation). Understandably, it was not the focus of the current editors of the *GLG*, however, perhaps further research will spring after this publication and will help to establish the place of the *GLG* in the chain of transmission of the cosmological parts from the *Lokaprajñapti*. There are numerous studies on Tibetan Buddhist cosmology based on the Abhidharmic sources including those on the Tibetan *Lokaprajñapti*.³

² It can be mentioned that the *Lokaprajñapti* does not appear in the Index, although it is mentioned in the ‘Introduction’ (p. 67), ‘Translation’ (pp. 107–113 thirteen times), and in the ‘Appendix’ (p. 593). References are made either to page numbers of *Lokaprajñapti*, for example on p. 107 to p. 73, or the folios, for example on p. 113, in the footnote 131 to folio 52 recto of the Derge Tanjur, but in footnote 132 the reference is made to pp. 36.6 ff of the *Lokaprajñapti*. In the Appendix pp. 36–38 of the *Lokaprajñapti* are given. In the Bibliography the reference is made to the Derge edition of the Tibetan Tanjur, vol. 1 [vol. 139], fols. 1v1–93r7 (i.e. to the whole text).

³ Studies by Siglinde Dietz can be mentioned (not listed in the Bibliography), for example, ‘Cosmogony as Presented in Tibetan Historical Literature and its Sources’, in: *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989*, Narita 1992, pp. 435–438 or ‘The ‘*Jig Rten Gzhas Pa* in the Kanjur Manuscript of the Newark Museum’, in: *Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the IATS, 2000. Volume 10: The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, Leiden 2022, pp. 13–19 and other works.

It can be added that in 1278 the Abhidharmic treatise *Shes bya rab tu gsal ba*⁴ by 'Phags pa bla ma Blo gros rgyal mtshan was composed for the Mongolian prince Činggim in which the *Lokaprajñapti* was also mentioned as one of the sources. This work was then used by Tibetans and Mongols in the initial parts of their historical works.⁵ Therefore using the *Lokaprajñapti* in the Bön work may signal certain authority of this text as well as the fact that the author of the *GLG* was well-versed in the Buddhist sources.

There is no doubt that the current publication of the *bsGrags pa gling grags* as *Drenpa's Proclamation* will instigate many new studies and will start a new stage not only in the Bön studies but in the Tibetan studies (Tibetology) as a whole. It unities research and researchers working on Imperial Tibet, ancestral religion with its principles and practices, and Buddhist studies, especially in the aspect of changing Bön into Chos (Dharma), to which a lot of space was devoted in the work, as well as other topics such as Tibetan way of understanding geography and position of Tibet in the world, Old Tibetan language and many, many more.

One should wish that similarly to the non-sectarian approach of the Tibetan author who showed an inclination to encompass Bön and Buddhism, the volume under review with its erudite explanations, references, and elucidating comments, with a sincere attitude to bring closer the understanding of Tibetan civilization, and with deep sympathy towards Tibetan people and their culture will serve all Tibetologists and everyone interested in Tibet.

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⁴ *Sa skya bka' bum*, ed. Toyo Bunko, Tokyo 1968, vol. 6, f. 3r3–21v5.

⁵ See English translation by C. Hoog, *Prince Jiñ-gim's Textbook*, Leiden 1983. On the Mongolian version see the edition by V. Uspensky: "Explanation of the Knowable" by 'Phags-pa bla-ma Blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (1235–1280). Facsimile of the Mongolian Translation with Transliteration and Notes by V. Uspensky, Tokyo 2006. On the related work, *Čiqula kereglegči* (with a quotation from the *Lokaprajñapti*) see studies by A. Bareja-Starzyńska, for example, 'Brief Study of the Mongolian Transmission of the Buddhist Treatise *Śes bya rab gsal* by 'Phags pa bla ma Blo gros rgyal mtshan', in: *Tractata Tibetica et Mongolica. Festschrift für Klaus Sagaster zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. K. Kollmar-Paulenz and C. Peter, Wiesbaden 2002, pp. 13–20.