INTRODUCTION

To practising bonpos—and nowadays it has become comparatively easy to meet them if one knows where to look among the many tens of thousands of Tibetans who have arrived as refugees in India and Nepal—BON simply means the true religion of Tibet. To the far greater number of other Tibetans, who are not bonpos, BON refers to the false teachings and practices that were prevalent in Tibet before Buddhism finally succeeded in gaining a firm hold on the country. Bonpos are regarded as pagans—and as such they have suffered serious hostility in the past—and nowadays others take as little account of their existence as possible. By western scholars BON is generally understood as referring to the pre-Buddhist beliefs and practices of the Tibetans. Several scholars have discussed the actual meaning of the term.1 By the few bonpos who know their texts well BON is explained as the Tibetan equivalent of the ‘Zaṅ-śuṅg term’ gyer which means ‘chant’. Textual ‘evidence’ can be shown for this in the titles of works said to be translated from the language of Zaṅ-śuṅg into Tibetan. Here bon is regularly glossed by gyer. This is the original meaning they say, for they know that bon now covers all the meanings of the Tibetan Buddhist term chos. As is well known, chos simply translates Sanskrit dharma in all its Buddhist meanings. There is no word for ‘Buddhism’ in Tibetan. Tibetans are either chos-pa (followers of chos) or bon-pa (followers of bon). They both use the term sans-rgyas (literally: ‘amply purified’) to define a perfected sage, a buddha. Thus in translation of bonpo texts I continue to use such terms as ‘buddha’ and ‘buddhahood’. Any readers who are new to the subject will therefore assume that BON is a form of Buddhism, and that it has certainly developed as such there is no doubt. In this work I am bound to understand BON in the full bonpo sense and that includes all their gradual adaptation of Buddhist doctrine and practice.2 They themselves

1 See Helmut Hoffmann, Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bon-Religion, Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, 1950, p. 137. See Simon, ‘A Note on Tibetan Bon’ in Asia Major, v, 1956, pp. 5-8. See Uray, ‘The Old Tibetan Verb bon’ in Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, xvii, 1964, pp. 323-34. This discussion would seem to leave us with at least two homonyms bon, (i) meaning ‘in-voke’ and ‘invoker’ of which Simon (followed by Uray) understands the original meaning to be ‘entreat’ or ‘invite’, and (ii) meaning ‘seed’. There remains always the possibility of Bon as an alternative for Bod (Tibet), but this merely invites inquiry into the origin of the term Bod, so far attempted by none. See p. 20, fn. 2.

2 In his The Religions of Tibet, London, 1961, Hoffmann distinguishes between ‘The Old Bon Religion’ (Chapter I) and ‘The Systematized Bon Religion’ (Chapter V). Such a distinction is perhaps helpful, so long as we do not think in the clear-cut terms of pure indigenous bon and Buddhist-influenced bon. The historical development of bon has been far more complex. It is a composite growth where native and foreign elements of all kinds are mingled together.
INTRODUCTION

Do not acknowledge these Buddhist elements as adaptations. Lacking the necessary historical sense, they persist in claiming that all their teachings and doctrines are the true original bon, partly promulgated direct in Tibet by gSen-rab, their founder, but mainly received through translations from the language of Zan-ziun of ancient western Tibet. The ultimate source of their teachings is sTag-gsigs, a country situated rather vaguely still further to the west. They would claim that it is the chos-pa, the 'Buddhists' of Tibet, who are the adapters and the plagiarists. Without accepting their claims, we are nevertheless bound to accept their interpretation of terms, in presenting an account of their teachings and practices, and this is the primary intention of the present volume. In giving an account of any religion we cannot ignore what the practisers have to say about themselves; thus in giving an historical account of Buddhism itself, we cannot ignore, for example, the eighty-four Sddhas, however different their doctrines and practices may be from those of the early Buddhists. We cannot deny the term Buddhist to the Newars of the Nepal Valley, however much they may seem to be influenced by Brahmanical practice. We can merely observe that their form of Buddhism represents a very special development of this religion. Likewise in the case of the bonpos we have to accept them and understand them as they are, while still trying to unravel the historical developments of their religion. An understanding of them on their own terms is all the more important nowadays, because we need the assistance of their few remaining scholars in order to understand something of their early texts. Tibetans who can help with these texts are now very rare indeed. Educated bonpo monks are brought up in the dGe-lugs-pa ('Yellow Hat') Way, trained in conventional Buddhist philosophy and logic and receiving after examination by debate the academic degree of dGe-bsin. They know their monastic liturgies and the names of their own bonpo gods, but very rarely indeed are they at all experienced in reading the sort of bonpo texts in which we most need assistance, namely material which represents 'pre-Buddhist' traditions. This lack of familiarity on the part of present-day bonpos with what Western scholars would regard as real bon material, may come as a disappointment. It also explains why there still remain terms and ideas not yet properly interpreted in this present work.

Among the three bonpo monks who accompanied me to England in 1961 was Tenzin Namdak, once Lopön (slob-dpon), best translated as 'Chief Teacher', at sMan-ri.1 Tenzin Namdak, who has now returned to India after three years in England, is a devoted bonpo, firm in his doctrines as well as his vows. Initiated primarily in a threefold bon tantra, the

Ma-rgyud sah-srgyus rgyud gsum, he was practised in the meditations and teachings of the VIIIth Way. Remaining celibate, he continued to adhere to the rules of the VIth Way, or rather he adhered to them as far as possible in a foreign western setting. We have read through many texts together, and it was on his suggestion that we set to work to produce a concise account of the 'Nine Ways of Bon', and it was he who selected the extracts which serve as the substance of the present account.

The source of these extracts is a work entitled hdu-pa rin-po-che dri-med-pa gzi-brjyd rab-tu hbar-bahi mdo 'The Precious Compendium the Blazing Sutra Immaculate and Glorious', in short referred to simply as gZi-brjyd 'The Glorious'. This work seems to be quite unknown outside Tibet. gSen-rab's 'biography' is written in three versions, one long, one of medium length, and one short. gZi-brjyd in twelve volumes is the long version. gZer-mig in two volumes is the medium version. mDo-hdu in one volume is the short one. gZer-mig is known of by Western scholars since A. H. Francke edited and translated the first seven chapters, which are published in Asia Major, 1924, 1926, 1927, 1930, and 1939. Professor Hoffmann has also used gZer-mig for the brief account that he gives of gSen-rab's life in his The Religions of Tibet (pp. 85-97). mDo-hdu remains unknown in the West, although there may be a copy somewhere in India.

These three works are all classed by the bonpos as 'Kanjur' (the term is borrowed from the Buddhists), that is to say as the inspired word of their early sages as translated from the language of Zan-ziun. gZi-brjyd is further classed as 'oral tradition' (sphan-rgyud). It is believed that rTaän-ches mtha-gyer-med, a disciple of the sage Dran-pa nam-mkhas (eighth century), transmitted it in a vision to Blo-lidan sìin-po, who compiled it in its present form.1 The 'Great Incarnation' (mchog-sprul) Blo-lidan sìin-po of Khri-sur-po in Khams is a well-known literary figure of the bonpos. He was a close contemporary of Tsön-kha-pa, for he was born about A.D. 1360. He is said to have died in his twenty-fifth year.2

Thus gZi-brjyd would seem to have been compiled towards the end of the fourteenth century, and the contents of the work bear out this tradition. By that time the bonpos had absorbed the vast variety of Indian Buddhist

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1 The bonpos, like the rrin-ma-pas, were busy 'rediscovering' their 'original' teachings, which had been hidden or lost during the persecutions of the eighth century. The main sources of this process of rediscovery were the 'hidden texts' (gter-ma) which were now brought to light (gZer-mig belongs to this category), and the visionary revelations through which lost texts were 'passed on orally' (sphan-rgyud).

2 This information concerning the authorship of gZi-brjyd derives from oral information of my bonpo assistants here in London. The date A.D. 1360 is calculated from the bstan-ris ('Doctrinal Dates') of Sn-ma bstan-ldzin, once abbot of sMan-ri. This useful little work has just been published (1964), thanks to Tenzin Namdak, together with a Zan-ziun word-list, at the Lahore Press, Jama Masjid, Delhi 6.
INTRODUCTION

teachings, and so were able to restate them as the substance of their high
disciples of the 'Nine Ways' with the conviction that can only come from
that experience and knowledge that is based upon well learned lesser
combined with practical experience. At the same time they had preserved
through their own oral and literary traditions large quantities of indigenous
material which goes back to the eighth century and earlier. But by the
fourteenth century bonpos had long since forgotten the meanings of many
of the earlier names and terms. From the manner in which he orders his
material in the first two 'Ways', it is clear that the compiler was by no
means so sure of himself as when he was dealing with the later Buddhist
material.

The copy of gZi-brjod used by us came from Samling Monastery in
Dolpo. According to its brief colophon, the lama responsible for our
manuscript was Yan-ston Nam-mkhas-ba rin-chen and it was written at Klu
brag. Fortunately, he writes more about his family in the 'preface' (dkar
chags) to the manuscript. He praises his nephews Sris-dar nam-rgyal
Rin-chen, and KKhro-ba, and especially his elder brother Yan-ston Tsul
khris nam-rgyal, who consecrated the finished manuscript. Thus despite
the difference in name, these relationships identify him firmly with the Lama
Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan, who is referred to in the genealogy of the lamas of
Samling as a great producer of books. gZi-brjod is specifically mentioned
'It was the measure of an arrow (in size), and as a sign of (this lama's)
phenomenal powers each time the pen was dipped in the inkpot a whole
string of words was written.' Unfortunately, the scanty references to date
in this genealogy leave the period uncertain. It is, however, possible to
calculate that this Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan belonged to the ninth generation
from Yan-ston rGyal-mtshan rin-chen, the founder-lama of Samling
who must have lived in the thirteenth century. Thus, our manuscript is
1 It was brought to England by Geshey Sanye Tenzin Jontong in 1961. Concerning
Samling see my Himalayan Pilgrimage, Oxford, 1961, pp. 120 ff. I made a second visit
in 1961.
2 Klu-brag is the name of a monastery and village which is situated up a steep side
valley of the Kali Gandaki just south of Kārbānī. It is marked as 'Lubra' on the Survey
of India maps of the region (ref. 8°31' E., 28°45' N.). Since Samling was founded from
Klu-brag, it remained the main source for their texts.
3 Folio 39a of the genealogy of the lamas of Samling, entitled rGyal-gim Yan-nal ga
bkah-bryug byi guzh-rga 'Genealogy of the religious line of the noble priests of Ya-nal'.
4 The lamas of Samling, like the lamas of Klu-brag, are an hereditary line of the
Ya-nal family. The title Yan-ston, which they are frequently given, is presumably an
abbreviation of Ya-nal-ston pa 'Yan-nal Teacher'. Some of them have been married men,
but some have been celibate. Thus the line has passed sometimes from father to son, and
sometimes from uncle to nephew. Although so far I have no firm confirmation of this,
The Klu-brag Monastery was probably founded by a certain brHa-rtsi rgyal-mtshan, who is
usually referred to as 'The Man of Klu-brag Protector of Sentient Beings' ([Ggro-mgon
Klu-brag-pa). He was the son of a renowned bonpo lama Yan-ston chen-po Ser-rab rgyal
mtshan. Brief biographies are given in the rnam-thar section of the Zan-tshun grwa-drugs
of Ser-rab rgyal-mtshan, of two of his sons, [Bum-rtsi and Klu-bra-pa, and of a grandson
tRogs-ltan dbo-pa hun-bzang (of whom more below). No dates of any kind are given, but
probably about 400 years old. It was copied from an existing manuscript
at Klu-brag and then brought to Samling.
5 The text is arranged in sixty-one chapters, and a list of these chapters will give
some idea of the scope of this composite work:

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<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
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<td>1</td>
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The 'Teacher descends from the gods of Pure Light' (ston-pa hod-gsal-lha las bab pa'i lehu dan-po)
'The Teacher turns the Wheel of Bon for the non-gods' (ston-pa lha-min la bon-bhkhor bskor ba'i lehu)
'The stūra of the coming of the doctrine of the buddhas' (santis-rgyas bstan-pa chag phabs pha'i mdo)
The 'stūra of gSen-rab's taking birth' (glen-rab kyi skyi-ba bzes pa'i mdo)
The 'stūra of the young prince's play sport' (rgyal-bu gsal-nu rol-rtes kyi mdo)
The 'stūra of the prince's enthronement' (rgyal-bu rgyal-sar phyun bahi mdo)
The 'stūra of the prince's law-giving' (rgyal-bus bkah-khrims stsal bahi mdo)
The 'stūra of the 11th Way of the Shen of the Visual World' (theg-pa gnis-pa sna-n-glen gyi mdo)
The 'stūra of the 111th Way of the Shen of Illusion' (theg-pa gum-pa phbrul-glen gyi mdo)
The 'stūra explaining the Way of the Shen of Existence' (srid-glen theg-pa gnam la phabs pa'i mdo)
The 'stūra that teaches the meaning of the mandala of the five universal (buddha)-bodies' (kun-dbyin sku lha dbyul-
Bhikkhu giy do bstan pa'i mdo)

we are told that Klu-brag-pa studied in gTsas, where he received vows and consecrations
from two well-known bonpo lamas. Ye-las blo-gros and SMan-gon-pa, for both of whom
dates are given in the bstan-rtsis of 'Sn-ba bstan-las (see p. 3, n. 2). According to this
Ye-las blo-gros founded the Academy (gtsug-lag-khan) of Dar-lha-rgs-po in A.D. 1173,
and SMan-gon-pa was born in A.D. 1123. Thus we may safely deduce that Klu-brag-pa
was studying as a young man in gTshan in the twelfth century. It is upon this
calculation that all my subsequent calculations depend.

The eldest son of Klu-brag-pa was known as the 'Tantric Lama' (bla-ma stags-pa) and
he was the first of the line to go to Bi-cher in Dolpo. (This place is variously spelt as Bi-cher
or Byi-byer. It appears on the Survey of India maps as Phuqorga. See my Himalayan
Pilgrimage, p. 129.) This 'Tantric Lama' had three children, two sons and a daughter.
The elder son died young. The younger son became a monk. The daughter left and
married elsewhere. Being anxious to establish a line of illustrious lamas at Bi-cher,
the 'Tantric Lama' invited rTog-rtse in Upper gTshan a boy of eight who belonged to a
parallel branch of the family. This boy was rGyal-mtshan rin-chen, who founded Samling
Monastery near Bi-cher. He himself remained celibate, and the line of Samling lamas
descended from his younger brother. rGyal-mtshan rin-chen's teacher was rTog-ltan
dbo-pa kun-bzang, who was the pupil and nephew of the 'Man of Klu-brag', for whom we
have approximate dates. Thus the son of the 'Man of Klu-brag' brought rGyal-mtshan
rin-chen to Bi-cher, and the nephew of this same 'Man of Klu-brag' was his teacher. There-
fore he must have been active at Bi-cher and Samling during the first half of the thirteenth
century.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>The sūtra explaining the Way of the Virtuous Adherer (dge-bšiṃṅ theg-pa ṭan la phab-pahī mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>The sūtra explaining the Way of the Great Ascetics (dārṇī theg-pa ṭan la phab-pahī mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>The sūtra of the VIITH Way of Pure Sound (theg-pa bdun-a-dkar gyi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>The sūtra of the VIIITH Way of the Primaeval Shen (theg-pa brya-yad-pa ye-glen gyi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>The sūtra of the IXTH and Supreme Way (theg-pa dge-rgyal bla-med kyi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>The sūtra explaining the bon of the various translations (shad-bhey-so-soh bon bstan pahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>The sūtra of spreading the doctrine by converting those who are hard to convert (gdu ldah ṭuṅ nas bstan pa spel bahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>The sūtra of the mandala of the Loving Conqueror (byams-ladan rgyal bahi dkyil-khkor gyi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>The sūtra of the very firm and precious doctrine (ston-pa rin-chen rab-tu bstan pahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>The sūtra of the three tenets taught by the Teacher (ston-pa ta pehu-te rnam-pa gsum bstan-pahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>The sūtra of the spreading rays that convert sentient beings (byaṅ ḥul ḥul zer spro-bahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>The sūtra explaining cause and effect (rgya lṅbras rnam-pa bhyed pahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>The sūtra of the Teacher drawing beings to salvation (stue thar pas ḥgro-la thar-bar dran-bahi mdo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>The sūtra of the light of the Blessed All-Knowing (bde-ba glog-pa kun-rig sgron-maḥi mdo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>The liturgy of the All-Good the Ocean of Victory (kun-la baṅ-ṇa rgyal-ba rgya-mtsho cho-ga)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>The sūtra of the washing away of the sins of King Gu-me da (gu-ṃer rgyal-pahi sgrī-ph pa sbyāns pahi mdo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>The sūtra of the Teacher's taking the most glorious of wives (ston-pas khab-kyi dpal-bhar bṣes-pahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>The sūtra of the Teacher's producing the offspring of Method and Wisdom (ston-pas thabs dan sṛes-bahy sra sprul bahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>The sūtra of the Teacher's assumption of royal power (ston-pas cheb-riṅ ḥḍzin-pahi mdo)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>The sūtra of the producing of offspring who convert sentient beings (byaṅ ḥul śras sprul-bahi mdo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>The sūtra of the Teacher teaching bon to the gods (ston-pa lha la bon ston-pahi mdo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>The spell of the Fierce Destroyer (byaṅ-ba rnam-pa ḥjoms pahi gzwis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Mandala of the liturgy of the God of Medicine (sman-lḥa cho-gahi dkyil-khkor)</td>
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</table>
The titles of these chapters will indicate at once to any (non-Tibetan) Buddhist scholar the dependence of this work upon Buddhist material. Although the study of gZer-mig remains incomplete, there has never been any doubt that the inspiration and the framework for the legend of gSer-rab have been derived from the life of Śākyamuni. Yet this framework has been filled with indigenous Tibetan legendary material which still awaits serious study.

In this present work we have made a very restricted use of gZi-brjul, extracting excerpts relevant to the bonpo doctrines of the ‘Nine Ways’. The Tibetan term theg-pa, as all Buddhist scholars of Tibetan will know, simply represents the Sanskrit Buddhist term yāna, and I translate it sometimes as ‘Way’ and sometimes as ‘Vehicle’. However, there are very few Tibetans, however well educated, who know the original meaning of theg-pa (as connected with the verb bdegs-pa and its various roots meaning ‘raise’ or ‘sustain’), and who thus understand it in the meaning of ‘vehicle’. No Tibetan Buddhist would think of accusing the bonpos of having appropriated terms that were originally Buddhist. To all Tibetans, whether Buddhist or bonpo, their religious vocabulary is just part of their own language to be used as they please. But the non-Tibetan Buddhist scholar readily recognizes those terms which were once specially coined as the Tibetan equivalents of Indian Buddhist technical terms. He is thus able to pass judgement on bonpo material in a way which no Tibetan has yet thought of doing.

The brief extracts here edited have been taken from Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16.

In editing we have not hesitated to emend the text as seemed desirable. The original manuscript spellings are shown in the case of all ‘main word’ changes, but we have not recorded every ‘particle’ (tshig-phrad) emendation. Connecting particles (kyi, gyi, etc.) are often written instead of the corresponding instrumental particles (khyis, gyis, etc.) and vice versa. The particles te, ste, de are sometimes used incorrectly (e.g. yin-ste instead of yin-te), and la is written for las and vice versa. It would be tedious and misleading for any student to follow the text from the translation if such corrections were not made.

The text is written in dbu-med and abbreviated compounds are quite frequent. Numerals are normally written in figures and not in letters, and since I have spelt out the numerals in every case, it will be obvious how for example ‘eight’ may be safely corrected to ‘two’. Written as numerals, only the top hook distinguishes Tibetan 2 from 8. After final vowels (not only after a) h is regularly added, as in gtoh, dbye, etc. In conformity with later Tibetan practice, I have omitted h except after final a.

Generally, the manuscript is clear and remarkably accurate. Some mistakes tend to be regular. For example glien ‘a fury’ is regularly written as gien; kluu-hta (= rluu-hta, see note 10 of the text) is regularly written as rnuu-hta. Certain spellings, which may appear unusual to other scholars, we have, however, preserved, for example, sgra-bla for dgra-lha (see note 20 of the text).

From the mistakes he makes, the scribe was clearly far less sure of himself when dealing with the material of the first two ‘Veiches’, and this bears out what was said above concerning the unfamiliarity of later generations of bonpos with the really early material.

I present the translation in the hope that interested readers will assist me in identifying the associations that may be apparent to them in much of the material, for I do not pretend to have solved all the problems. A brief survey of the ‘Nine Ways’ may assist comprehension.

1. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF THE PREDICTION (phyea-gien theg-pa)

This describes fairly coherently four methods of prediction:

(a) sortilege (mo)
(b) astrological calculation (rtsis)
(c) ritual (gto)
(d) medical diagnosis (dpyad).

II. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF THE VISUAL WORLD (ma-ni-gien theg-pa)

This is the longest and most difficult section of our work. It is concerned with overpowering or placating the gods and demons of this world, but I suspect that even the original compiler of the work was already unfamiliar with many of the divinities and rites to which he refers. Thus the account
INTRODUCTION

is not really coherent, but it makes quite sufficient sense. The various practices are arranged into four parts:

1. The lore of exorcism (employing the ‘great exposition’ of existence (I have written on ‘exposition’ smra s in note 9 of the text. The manner of the rite is clearly described on pp. 49–51.) The text then goes on to describe various types of divinities, the thug-khar, the veer-ma, and others. Some are described in great detail, and some, such as the can-señ and iug-mgon, scarcely mentioned except by name. Finally, we are told the ‘lore of the stream of existence’ (sri-pahi rgyud gsbis). This is presumably all part of the ‘exposition’ (smra s) of the officiating priest.

2. This deals with demons (dpas) and vampires (mris), their origin, nature, and the ways of suppressing them.

3. This deals with ransoms of all kinds. Their extraordinary variety testifies to their importance in early Tibetan religion. Tenzin Namdak can identify very few of them, and I doubt if any other living Tibetan can do much better. My translations of the many unfamiliar terms are as literal as possible, but they do not pretend to be explanatory.

4. This deals with fates (phyva) and furies (gpan) and local divinities generally (sa-bdag, gdod, lha, dbal, etc.), and the offerings due to them.

III. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF ILLUSION (khrul-gien theg-pa)

This is concerned with rites for disposing of enemies of all kinds. The rites described here are to be found in the bon tantras, e.g. those of dBal-gyas and the khro-bahi rgyud drug, which we have on microfilms. Similar practices are referred to in Buddhist tantras, e.g. Hevajra-Tantra, 1. xi.

IV. THE WAY OF THE SHEN OF EXISTENCE (gri-gien theg-pa)

This deals with beings in the ‘Intermediate State’ (bar-do) between death and rebirth, and ways of leading them towards salvation.

V. THE WAY OF THE VIRTUOUS ADHERERS (dge-bsiñ theg-pa)

dge-bsiñ is the normal Tibetan term for upāsaka which in India referred to the Buddhist layman. Similarly, here it refers to those who follow the practice of the ten virtues and the ten perfections, and who build and worship stupas.

VI. THE WAY OF THE GREAT ASCETICS (drañ-sron theg-pa)

drañ-sron translates rṣi which in India refers to the great seers of the past. drañ-sron is used by bonpos to refer to fully qualified monks, corresponding to the Buddhist term dge-slo ( = bhikṣu). This is the way of strict ascetic discipline. The whole inspiration is Buddhist, but many of the arguments and even the substance of some of the rules are manifestly not Buddhist.

VII. THE WAY OF PURE SOUND (A-dkar theg-pa)

This deals with higher tantric practice. It gives a very good account of the tantric theory of ‘transformation’ through the mandala. (I have already summarized these ideas in my introduction to the Hevajra-Tantra, pp. 29 ff.) It then goes on to refer briefly to the union of Method and Wisdom as realized by the practitioner and his feminine partner. This anticipates VIII. The section ends with concise lists of nine ‘reliances’, eighteen ‘performances’, and nine ‘acts’. The ‘reliances’ comprise a list of primary needs, the ‘performances’ resume the whole process of ritual of the mandala, and the ‘acts’ represent the total power that accrues to one from mastering all the Nine Vehicles.

VIII. THE WAY OF THE PRIMEVAL SHEN (ye-gien theg-pa)

This deals with the need for a suitable master, a suitable partner, and a suitable site. The preparation of the mandala is then described in detail together with important admonitions not to forget the local divinities (sa-bdag). The process of meditation (known as the ‘Process of Emanation’—in Sanskrit utpattikrama) is recounted.1

The last part of this section describes the ‘Process of Realization’ (Sanskrit nispannakrama), which is the ‘super-rational’ state of the perfected sage. His behaviour might often be mistaken for that of a madman.

IX. THE SUPREME WAY (bla-med theg-pa)

This describes the absolute, referred to as the ‘basis’ (gáî corresponding to Sanskrit alaya), from which ‘release’ and ‘delusion’ are both derived. ‘Release’ is interpreted as the state of fivefold buddhahood, and ‘delusion’ as the false conceptions of erring beings in the ‘Intermediate State’ (bar-do). The ‘Way’ is then described as mind in its absolute state, as the pure ‘Thought of Enlightenment’. The ‘Fruit’ or final effect is then finally described in terms of the special powers of the perfected sage. The whole subject-matter is then resumed under the four conventional headings of insight, contemplation, practice, and achievement.

The categories and ideas elaborated in this IXth Vehicle are usually referred to as the teachings of the ‘Great Perfection’ (rdzogs-chen).

What is remarkable about these ‘Nine Ways of Bon’ is the succinct manner in which they resume the whole range of Tibetan religious practices: methods of prediction, to which Tibetans of all religious orders and

1 This whole passage from pp. 102–7 describes at the same time the normal course of worship of the great beings as it is performed in any Tibetan temple of any religious order, be it or Buddhist. See my comments on the relationship between ritual and meditation in Buddhist Himálaya, Cassier, Oxford, 1957, P. 234.
of all ranks of society are addicted; placating and repelling local divinities of all kinds of whose existence all Tibetans, lay and religious, are equally convinced; destroying enemies by fierce tantric rites, practices in which Buddhists and bonpos are equally interested; guiding the consciousness through the 'Intermediate State', powers claimed equally by the older orders of Tibetan Buddhism and by the bonpos; moral discipline of devout believers and strict discipline of monastic orders, ways that have followed in all orders of Tibetan religion; tantric theory and ritual, fundamental to the iconography and the worship of all Tibetan religious communities; tales of perfected wonder-working sages, typical again of the older order of Tibetan Buddhism as well as bonpos. All that is missed out of this list is the religious life of academic learning which is now typical of educated monks of the dGe-lugs-pa ('Yellow Hat') order. This is only omitted because when the list of 'Nine Ways' was elaborated, the dGe-lugs-pa way had not yet come into existence. But nowadays the bonpos have this, too, with their scholars of philosophy and logic and their academic honours and titles. Nor are they just dressed in others' plumes. They really have developed the practices of all these diverse ways over the last thirteen centuries or so, and they have produced a very large literature of their own in support of all the various ways of their practice. Much of this literature, e.g. some of their sūtras and especially the 'Perfection of Wisdom' teachings, has been copied quite shamelessly from the Buddhists, but by far the greater part would seem to have been absorbed through learning and then retold, and this is not just plagiarism.

In listing the four lower ways as 'bon of cause' and the five higher ways as 'bon of effect', they were trying sincerely to relate the old ways of magic ritual to the new ways of morality and meditation. If one practises even the rites of the 1st Way intent on the 'Thought of Enlightenment', benefit will come to all living beings (see p. 29). Likewise the 2nd Way is something for delighting living beings with benefits and happiness, but it is important to have as basis the raising of one's thoughts (to enlightenment) (p. 97). The 3rd Way, if practised properly, reaches out towards the 8th Way, achieving the effect where Method and Wisdom are indivisible (p. 113). The practiser of the 4th Way, concerned as he is with rescuing others who wander in the 'Intermediate State', is effectively preparing himself for buddhahood. Conversely, the rites of the lower ways are still indispensable even when one has reached the higher ones. Fertile fields and good harvests, extent of royal power and spread of dominion, although some half (of such effects) is ordained by previous actions (viz. karmic effect), the other half comes from the powerful "lords of the soil"—so you must attend to the "lords of the soil", the serpents and the furies (p. 199). Now every Tibetan, whatever his religious order, believes this, but—to my knowledge—only the bonpos have formulated this belief as doctrine.

Buddhist ideas certainly pervade bon throughout: the definition of truth as absolute and relative (this was a useful idea for the bonpos as it could provide a justification for the lower ways of magic ritual, e.g. see p. 27 and p. 101); the realization of the 'Thought of Enlightenment' as the coalescence of Method and Wisdom; the whole conception of living beings revolving through the six spheres of existence; the notion of buddhahood as fivefold and the whole gamut of tantric theory and practice. Some might be tempted—when there is still so much else of interest in Tibetan civilization that awaits investigation—to neglect this developed and elaborate bon as mere second-hand Buddhism. But there have been also serious scholars who conversely would regard Buddhism in Tibet as little more than demonological priestcraft. Waddell's remarkable book, Lamaiism, which contains so much precise information about Tibetan Buddhist practices of all kinds, provides evidence enough that bon and Buddhism in Tibet are in their theories and practices one and the same. What Waddell perhaps failed to appreciate is that Tibetan Buddhism—and for that matter bon too—is often sincerely practised by Tibetans as a moral and spiritual discipline.

We are thus concerned not only with pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, but with Tibetan religion regarded as one single cultural complex. The bonpos merely pose the problem nicely for us by having arranged all types of Tibetan religious practice within the framework of their 'Nine Ways'. Regarded in this way, bon might indeed claim to be the true religion of Tibet. Accepting everything, refusing nothing through the centuries, it is the one all-embracing form of Tibetan religion. Its few remaining educated representatives seem to be still motivated by its spirit. Western scholars of Tibetan well know how difficult it is to persuade an indigenous Tibetan scholar to take any interest in forms of Tibetan literature that lie outside his particular school. Normally a dGe-lugs-pa ('Yellow Hat') scholar would be ashamed at the idea of reading a work of any other Tibetan Buddhist order, let alone a bonpo work. Yet educated bonpo monks clearly have no such inhibitions. They will learn wherever they can, and given time they will absorb and readapt what they have learned.

Regarded in this way bon is a strange phenomenon, and what we really want to know is how it began to develop in its early stages. The bonpos themselves concede that their religion as practised in Tibet consisted in the

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1 In a recent book Religious Observances in Tibet, which is concerned with Tibetan religion as it is practised nowadays, Robert B. Ekwall makes the most misleading statements about bon and its relationship to Buddhism. He writes nothing of the 'higher ways' of bon and nothing of the 'lower ways' of Buddhism.
first place of little more than ritual magic, and they believed that gShen-rab himself established these practices there. A clear account is given of the story in Chapter XII of gZer-mig, which recounts how the demon Khyab-pa lag-rii sends his followers who steal the seven horses of gShen-rab from the sacred city of hol-mo luu-lii. In the previous chapter it was related how this demon had carried off gShen-rab’s daughter gShen-bsal ne-chu and forcibly married her. Their two children were then abducted by gShen-rab and concealed at hol-mo luu-lii. At the beginning of Chapter XII the demon sends his followers to see where the children are. They cannot be found, so he gives orders for the theft of the horses as a form of reprisal. Rather than keep the horses in his own realm (bdu-dul mun-pa’i glii), he plans to keep them in rKong-po, and he sends messengers to make arrangements with the two rulers of rKong-po, named rKong-rje dkar-po and rKong-rje dmar-po. gShen-rab himself together with four followers come after them, not (as he explains) in order to get the horses only, but because the time has come to spread the doctrine in Zan-su and Tibet. The demons block his way with snow, then fire, then water, and then sand, but he disperses them and reaches Zan-su.

• gShen-rab gave to the bonpos of Zan-su as bon (doctrine) the ‘inspired teaching’ (luth) about bombs and spells, and as ritual items he instructed them in the ‘Divine Countenance of the Celestial Ray’ and in black and white ‘thread-crosses’. Then he went on to Bye-ma luu-ma dgu-gyes (‘The Ninefold Spreading of the Desert Spring’) in gTsang, where he pronounced this prayer: ‘Now it is not the occasion for establishing the doctrine among all the bonpos of Tibet, but may “Bon of the Nine Stage Way” spread and be practised there some time.’ As he said this, a group of demons was subjected to him. gShen-rab gave to the bonpos of Tibet as bon (doctrine) the ‘inspired teaching’ concerning prayers to the gods and the expelling of demons, and as ritual items he showed them various small aromatic shrubs, the use of barley as a sacrificial item and libations of chang. Nowadays the bonpos of Tibet, summoning all gods and demons by means of bon, get their protection, and by worshipping them send them about their tasks, and by striking them prevail over them. This is the proof of gShen-rab’s having subjugated them when they beheld his countenance.

In historical terms this account simply means that before Indian religious ways spread to Tibet, Tibetan religion consisted of magical rituals (of the kind enumerated in the Second Way of bon) performed by priests known as bon and as gien. The full doctrine (referred to as the ‘bon of the Nine Stage Way’) came later and—except for the rituals that were already practised in Tibet—through translations. The bonpos were certainly impressed by the need for translations. Thus bon teachings, they claim, were translated into 360 languages and taught throughout the known world, which for them consisted of India generally, the states of north-west India in particular, Central Asian states and peoples, Nepal, and China. Lastly, it reached Tibet, again from the west through translations from the language of Zan-su.

This bon that spread west and south and north of Tibet was of course Buddhism, and it is quite conceivable that the Tibetans of western Tibet, whose ancestors first made contact with the forms of Buddhism popularly practised in Jalandhara (za-hor) and Kashmir (kha-che), in Uddiyana (o-rgyan) and Gilgit (bru-la), were unaware of its direct connexion with the Buddhism officially introduced into Tibet in the eighth century by King Khri-sron-lde-btsan. The bonpos are insistent that their teachings came from the west, and there are good reasons for believing that Buddhist yogins and hermits, and probably Hindu ascetics as well, had already familiarized the villagers of western Tibet with Indian teachings and practices before Buddhism was formally introduced by the Tibetan religious kings. Moreover, these ‘informal’ contacts continued over several centuries. Perhaps the main original difference between bonpos and rin-ma-pas (Tibetan Buddhists of the ‘Old Order’) consists in the fact that the rin-ma-pas acknowledged that their doctrines, despite their earlier promulgation, were nevertheless Buddhist, and that the bonpos never would make this admission. Fundamental to an elucidation of this interesting problem is a comparative study of the tantras and the rDzoogs-chen (‘Great Perfection’) literature of these two oldest ‘Tibetan Buddhist’ groups.

1 It is generally agreed that the story of gShen-rab’s life is a deliberate fabrication, for which the inspiration was the life of Sakyamuni. gShen-rab just means ‘Best of gShen’. But a study of the local traditions and legendary material from which the story has been pieced together would be a worthwhile literary task. The story of the ‘religious hero’ gShen-rab is in effect another great Tibetan epic, comparable in importance with the great epic of Gesar, which thanks to the intensive studies of R. A. Stein, is now far better known. Yet gShen-rab’s legend is supported by a whole complex system of religious practices, altogether an extraordinary phenomenon.

2 The countries given in the srid pa rgyud kyi bha byan chen mo (Richardson’s MS., t. 7a onwards) are: zan-su, stag-rgigs, phrom, rgya-gar, rgya-nag, kha-che, za-hor, o-rgyan, ladan-ma, bslu-yul, sum-pa’i yul, a-sa’i yul, bshik-yul, phran, th-yul, and me-yul.
The organizing of their religious practices into ‘Nine Ways’ must have come somewhat later, perhaps by the tenth century. The riini-ma-pa set of nine begins with the three ‘ways’ of conventional Indian Buddhism, the śrāvakayāna, the pratyekabuddhayāna, and the bodhisattvayāna. The other six ‘ways’ are ever higher stages of tantric practice, viz. kriyātantra, upāyatantra, and yogatantra, and finally, the mahāyogatantra, anuyogatantra, and atiyogatantra. Thus the riini-ma-pas, recognizing their connexions with the newly established official religion, were content to organize themselves as tantric adepts of Buddhism. The bonpos, despite their ever increasing cultural and literary contacts with the official religion, persisted in claiming that this religion had really been theirs from the start. Driven very early, certainly already in the eighth century, into a position of opposition, they set to work to organize a full-scale religion of their own, using all their own remembered indigenous resources and all they could acquire from their opponents. The magnitude of the task was really astounding, if judged only by the vast bulk of literature which they so speedily accumulated. The ‘Nine Ways of bon’ is a mere summary of their achievements.

The bonpos often refer to their full complement of doctrines and practices not only as the ‘bon of the Nine Stage Way’, but also as the bon of the ‘Four bon Portals and the Treasury as Fifth’:

bon sgo bai mdzad hia dan theg pa rim dugi bon.

This term sgo bai mdzad hia has no easy explanation. The four ‘portals’ are dpon-gsas, chab-nag, chab-dkar, and hphan-yul. The first, dpon-gsas, may be safely translated as ‘Master Sage’. It is the term used for the hermitages of the zaan-ṣūn stian-rgyud. As one of the four ‘portals’ of bon it refers to their teachings of the ‘Great Perfection’ (rdo gsal-chen). As for chab-dkar and chab-nag, chab remains uncertain in meaning. Tenzin Namdak accepts these names as technical terms without any proper meaning, and so, while he and other educated bonpos know what the terms refer to, they remain quite uninterested in the origin of the terms themselves. Chab has two different meanings: (i) royal sway or power and (ii) the honorific term for water. The compound chab-sgo means an ‘imperial portal’ and perhaps this might encourage us to choose the first meaning. The ‘White Sway’ and the ‘Black Sway’ would make quite good translations. But in our selected texts (p. 42, line 33 onwards) chab is clearly interpreted as though it meant ‘water’. I have therefore taken the term provisionally in this meaning. The term is used only as a label in any case. The ‘White Waters’ refer to higher tantric practice and the ‘Black Waters’ to magic rites of all kinds. European writers have often referred to ‘White Bon’ and ‘Black Bon’, but clearly without any intended reference to chab-dkar and chab-nag.

hPhan-yul is a well-known place-name in Central Tibet, but once again my bonpo helpers insist that this term which refers to their ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ teachings, has nothing to do with the hPhan-yul Valley. But I think they are mistaken. The name hPhan-yul often occurs in bonpo texts both as a place-name and as a term referring to particular doctrines. Before the ‘Teacher gSen-rab’ spread the teachings in the world of men he is supposed to have taught hPhan-yul texts in the realms of the serpents (klu), furies (gkan), mountain-gods (sa-bdag), and rock-gods (gto). One wonders if there is some connexion here with the well-known story of Nāgijñāna’s visit to the nāgas (=Tibetan klu) to obtain his ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ teachings. There is no doubt that in bonpo usage hPhan-yul means ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ texts, and therefore it might have seemed suitable to give this name to texts which gSen-rab was supposed to teach to serpents and others. I mention this possibility merely since I suspect that it is just such a haphazard association of ideas that often accounts for the use of many terms in bonpo material, and we may well be wasting our time looking for more scholarly associations. As for the special meaning that the bonpos gave to hPhan-yul, perhaps it was here in this place, which was certainly important in the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet, that they first learned and studied ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ literature. It is perhaps fair to add that Tenzin Namdak discounts such an idea altogether. As for the special bonpo meanings of these terms, he has kindly drawn my attention to some very good definitions occurring in gZer-mig:

The ‘Master Sage’ belongs to the bon of precepts and inspired teachings. It purifies the stream of knowledge, avoids words and concentrates on the meaning.

The ‘Black Waters’ belong to the bon of the stream of existence. It purifies the stream of knowledge. By means of the many verbal accounts which arise there, much is accumulated for the good of living beings under three (headings):

1. In the rGyal-rabs bon gyi sbyin-gnas it is listed as one of the thirteen centres of bon in Central Tibet, viz. Das, p. 37. hphan yul chab (Das writes grub) dkar bon gyi gnas. In the srid-po rgyud kyi kha byan chen-mo it is clearly referred to as yul hphan-yul (p. 28a). In this context it refers to a group of three sets of teachings, hphan-yul rgyas-po, dpon gsas sngon, and a-bo sngon-ba. Is a-bo connected with Sanskrit dipha ‘waters’, thus corresponding to Tibetan chab in chab-dkar and chab-nag?

2. rdzong, vol. kh, f. 97a onwards: dpon gsas man nang gyi bon du gto gi pa ni / sers rdg rgyud sbyin tshig bor don la sgon pa /

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the outer stream of death rites and funeral rites, the inner stream of sickness rites and ransom rites, and the middle stream of diagnosis rites and rituals.\(^1\)

The vast kPhan-yul belongs to the BON of the Hundred Thousand (Verse Ten) in the Sūtras. It purifies the stream of knowledge. It tells of monastic discipline and vows. This BON has two aspects, as a series (Skr. pariwarta) and as recitation. Again the series has two aspects, the series of the phenomenal world and the series of passing from sorrow (Skr. nirvāṇa). The recitation is of two kinds again, recitation that enunciates and originates in the words of enunciation, and enunciation that is consecrated to the good of living beings and serves for ceremonies. Being read and recited, it accumulates much (merit) for living beings, and it should be used for ceremonies.\(^2\)

The ‘White Waters’ belong to the BON of potent precepts and spells. It purifies the deep stream of knowledge. It embraces the profound ‘reliance’ and ‘performance’. As for this BON, when one has been consecrated, one becomes one of the self-nature of fivefold buddhahood. As effect one has in the Body the five symbolic gestures of the self-nature (of buddhahood): as effect in the Speech one recites spells continuously: as effect in the Mind one practises the profound meditation of the ‘Process of Emanation’ and the ‘Process of Realization’. As effect in one’s Accomplishments one accumulates and delights in ritual items. As effect in one’s Acts one praises the budha-names in recitation.\(^3\)

Defined in this way, the ‘Four Portals’ cover all the types of religious practice included in the ‘Nine Ways’.

The ‘Master Sage’ Portal represents the Ninth Way.
The ‘Black Waters’ Portal represents the First, Second, and Fourth Ways.
The kPhan-yul Portal represents the Fifth and Sixth Ways.
The ‘White Waters’ Portal represents the Seventh and Eighth Ways. It also includes the Third Way in so far as this is directed towards the ‘Bon of Effect’.

Thus these ‘Four Portals’ seem to represent an earlier and quite coherent attempt by the bonpos to arrange their accumulated religious materials into four groups:

1. Precepts and teachings of sages and hermits, e.g. žan-śuṅ mi sūa-saṇ-rgyud and other rdzogs-chen literature.
2. Ways of prediction, death ceremonies, and magical rites of all kinds (viz. the ‘original’ bonpo material.

1 chab nag srid pa rgyud kyi bon du gtsos pa ni / ies rab rgyud sbyas-tahig gi lo rgyud ma / po skey pa phyi rgyud gji thabs gzhur thabs dan / rin rgyud na thabs gnas gzhur thabs dan / bar sgyud rgyud gzhur thabs gzhur thabs gnas / sams can don ma bza / po thogs par sgyur / 2 bpham yul rgyud pa mdo khus bshum gi bon du gtsos pa ni / ies rab rgyud sbya-tahig gi / hdu khrims dpam po gsnang ba / bun ni thigs bsdod pa / gnyis rgyud gzhur thabs gzhur thabs gnas / bzhok bha bshes gzhur / mya nang las gshas pa / gshis rgyud gzhur / sams can don ma bza / bzhok gshis bzhed gzhur / sams can don ma bza / po thogs par sgyur / 3 chab dkar ma nang drag po stod sgyur kyi bon du gtsos pa ni / ies rab ma bza / bnyis rgyud sbyas-tahig gi / hung sgrub zab mo bza / po rgyud gzhur / sams can don ma bza / po thogs par sgyur / 4 gtsan mtho thog / 5 kha'i cing bhan debyi chad byed ci / yid la bon bsam snyi / kha dan las / sines la snyid / (Das, p. 59).

3. Texts and practices connected with monastic religion. (One may observe that the reading of ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ literature as a meritorious rite was as popular then as now.)
4. Texts and practices of the tantrams.

As for the ‘Treasury which makes the fifth’, this is the ‘Pure Summit’ (gtsan mtho thog), which once again is best defined by a quotation from gZer-mig:

As for the ‘Pure Summit’, it goes everywhere. As insight it belongs to the BON which is a universal cutting off. It purifies the stream of knowledge in all the ‘Four Portals’. It simply involves that insight into the non-substantiality of appearances. It understands the deluding nature of the ‘outer vessel’ as relative truth. It knows, too, the empty atomic nature of the ‘inner essences’. In terms of absolute truth non-substance, too, is an absurdity.\(^1\)

Thus ‘bon of the Nine Stage Way’ and the ‘Four Bon Portals with the Treasury as Fifth’ are simply two different ways of grouping the different types of BON practice. It has already been observed (p. 13 above) that the practices and doctrines described in these groups might with very little change serve equally well as a description of Tibetan Buddhism. Bon and Buddhism have pervaded one another completely, yet each persists in denying the debt it owes to the other. The dGe-legs-pas (‘Yellow Hats’) would be most offended if one suggested that the Great Oracle of gNas-chu, to whom the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Cabinet would so often resort, really belonged as a religious practice to BON Way I, the ‘Way of the Shen of Prediction’. The writer of the rGyal-rabs bon gyi hbyun-gnas observes that as a result of Khri-sron-ide-btsan’s persecution of the bonpos ‘some agreed to be Buddhist monks, but in their mind they reflected on BON, and in word and act they performedchos (dharmma).\(^2\) But even this has proved an understatement, for most Tibetans are still bonpos at heart and they have recourse to BON of all kinds, not only in their minds, but in words and acts as well.

It is noteworthy that so far as their activities are concerned, the bonpos have seemingly preserved little of the ‘original BON’ which has not also been incorporated by other Tibetan Buddhists in the many rites and ceremonies and strange practices which form part of Tibetan social and religious life. But in their texts they have preserved quantities of early legendary material and of ritual utterances. They still hold to the legends,
certainly those that have been associated with the life of gzShen-rab, but the ritual utterances would seem to have little significance to the bonpos of today. These ritual utterances were proclaimed originally as an 'exposition' (smyan) of the 'archetype' (dpe-srol), and it was this exposition which gave validity to the rite (see page 50, line 6). The Gurungs of Nepal, a people of early Tibetan origin, still practise these kinds of rites, as we now know from the interesting oral material collected by the late Bernard Pignédu. Their recitations of the 'archetype' are known as pté, pronounced like the Tibetan word dpe, still used in the meaning of 'example'. Some 'original bon' survived in oral traditions, and it was just such ancient oral traditions that bonpo scholars of ten centuries ago were incorporating into their new composite works.

Although bon has often been understood by Western scholars as referring primarily to certain (never clearly specified) pre-Buddhist religious practices of the Tibetans, vaguely described sometimes as animism or shamanism, the term bon is in fact never used in early Tibetan works with any such meaning. The bon were just one class of priests among others, whose practices and beliefs are covered by the general term of lha-chos, which may be translated perhaps as 'sacred conventions'. The term bon, as referring to a whole set of religious practices, would seem to have come into use at a latter stage in deliberate opposition to the new use of chos, which now had the meaning of Sanskrit dharma limited specifically to the religion of Śākyamuni. Thus there is probably no such thing as pre-Buddhist bon, for from the start the followers of bon were anxious to accept and readapt religious teachings and practices of all kinds, whether indigenous or foreign. It was not Buddhist teachings that they objected to, but rather the claim that all these teachings had first been taught by the Indian Sage Śākyamuni. Nor were they entirely wrong, as we know well now, for the Buddhism that reached Tibet more than a thousand years after the death of its founder comprised a whole range of teachings and practices that he would have found very strange indeed. If one understands the term bon as the bonpos understand it, one will not be surprised or disappointed to discover that bon literature includes a very large amount of material that is normally regarded as Buddhist.

Western scholars have been misled to some extent by the non-bonpo Buddhists of Tibet (the chos-pa), who have identified the bon which they knew as their only serious rival in later centuries as the same rite against which the first Buddhists had to fight in Tibet, while the (later) bonpos have merely added to the confusion by assuming that they were not only the original rives of the chos-pa, but that they already possessed in the earlier period all the developed (Buddhist) teachings which they had in fact only gradually incorporated in the course of the eighth to thirteenth centuries. Bon (meaning 'priest who invokes') is one thing, and bonpo meaning 'follower of bon' ('Tibetan religion') is another. The early Buddhists certainly came into conflict with the Bon (priests who invoke) who were active in Tibet long before Buddhist doctrines were introduced, but their real long-term rivals were the bonpos who were busy constituting their bon ('Tibetan religion') while the Buddhists (chos-pa) were busy constituting their chos (Dharma). The development of bon and chos were parallel processes, and both bonpos and chos-pas were using the same literary language within the same cultural surroundings. It would be naive to expect bonpo literature to be totally different from Buddhist literature. On the contrary, it is rather remarkable that bonpo texts contain so much comprehensible pre-Buddhist material, and it is not surprising that bonpo composers of texts (even perhaps as early as the eighth or ninth century) were already uncertain of the meanings of many names and terms of the indigenous (entirely oral) tradition. Some indigenous material, especially the beliefs and practices associated with the early kings, may be better preserved by the Buddhists than the bonpos, for the Buddhists were able to claim in retrospect the whole line of historical kings, except Glang-dar-ma, as Buddhist. But for information concerning the whole range of pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion, it is better to investigate bonpo literature rather than Buddhist, for even when Buddhist writers are not trying deliberately to denigrate their rivals, their accounts are slipshod and often unintelligible.


2 I would not hesitate to connect bon in the sense of 'priest' with the verb hbd-pa (to invoke (see p. 1 fn. 1). Such a bon (invoker) would have been competent in the earliest important ritual of the 'exposition of the archetype' (see p. 256), bon in the sense of 'Tibetan religion' is probably connected with Bodd (even occasionally written Bon in early texts) meaning 'Tibet', and possibly with bon as in sa-bon 'seed'. The original meaning may be 'autochthonous', and so was used for the 'people of the homeland' in much the same way that the Germans refer to themselves as 'Deutsch', a term which simply means originally 'the people (of the homeland)'. See also Marcelle Lalou, 'Tibétains Anciens bon/Bon', Journal Asiatique, 1953, pp. 275-6.

3 The term chos I would connect with the verb bka'-chos-ba, etc. 'make or construct' and with such cognate terms as chos 'things or requisites', and bcos-pa 'modified or affected'.