

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 (*smān*), 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 drī '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.

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 Hā-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 gсар du rnyed pa'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdams bsgrigs* (eds. Pa-tshab pa-sangs dbang-'dus (Pasang Wangdai) 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 dri 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* (*Various Methods of Subjugating the Rnel-dri*) 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 dri 'dul ba'i thabs sogs* demonstrates that the obsolete term *rneldri* / *rneld-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 *rneldri* 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 dri 'dul ba'i thabs sogs*, that *rneldri* 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, *rneldri* 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 *rneldri*, 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 dri '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 *rneldri* from the underworld. Chapter II contains fifteen origins myths that expound upon the various types of unnatural death that lead to the appearance of *rneldri*. 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

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 Haahr (1969: 367).

rnal-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 dri '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.

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.

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-'dur¹⁷ 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*).

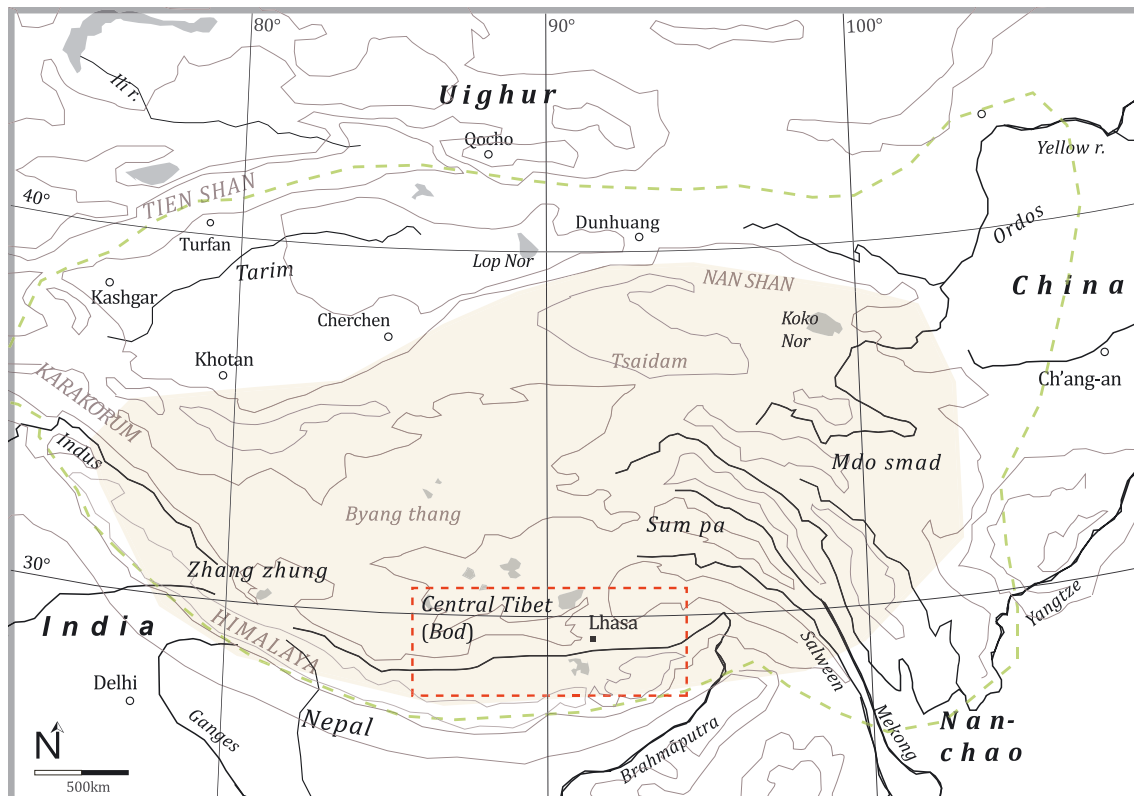
Although the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur contains a number of philosophical constructs and ritual methods that can be attributed to the early historic period, it is very much a body of literature composed to suit the religious purposes and *Zeitgeist* of the early second millennium CE. Replete with ritual knowledge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

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.

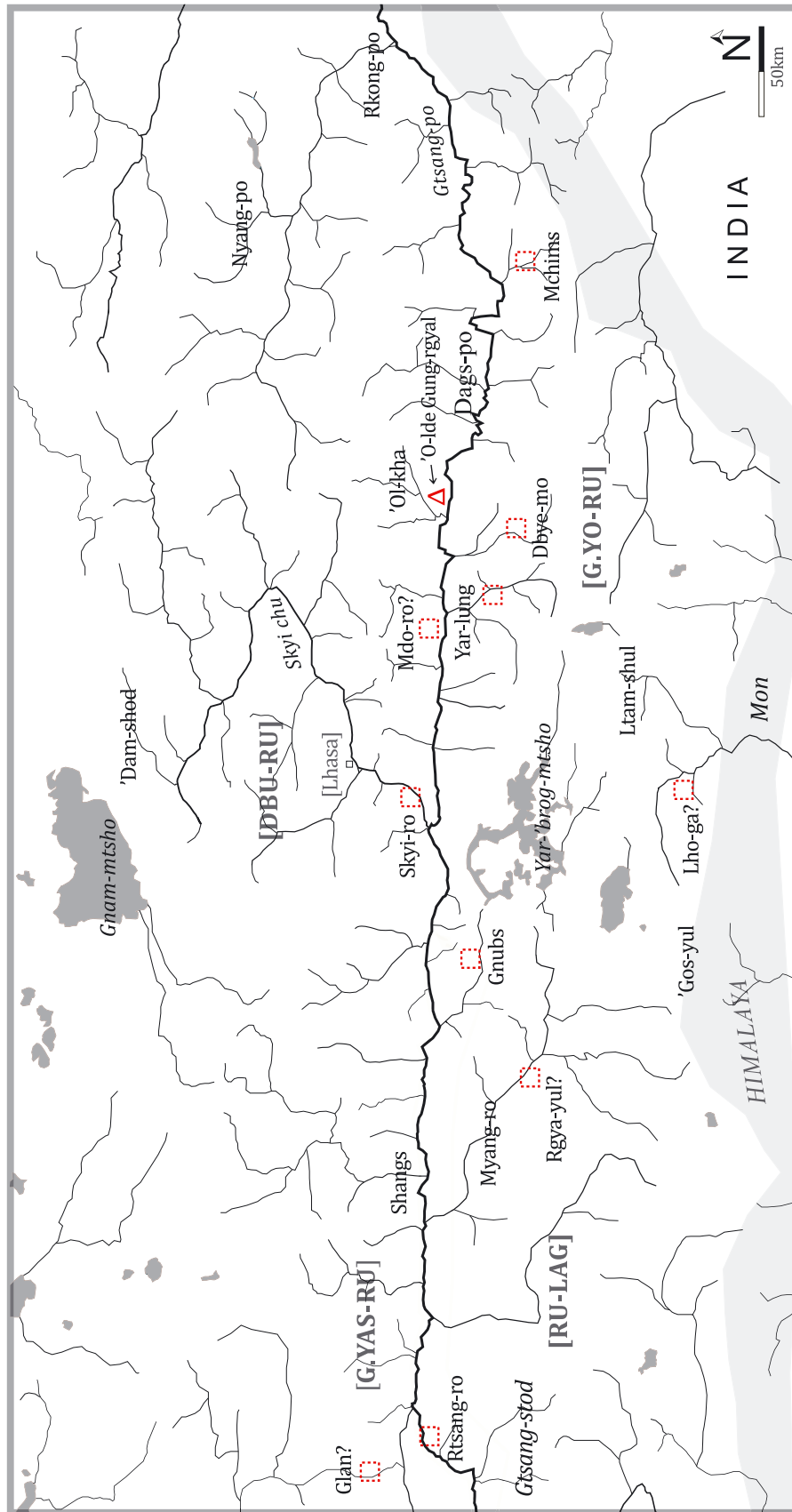
rituals designed to uncouple the demons of death (*gshed*) from the soul or consciousness principle of the deceased.²⁰ According to the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur, the consciousness principle was a bipartite phenomenon consisting of the *bla* and *yid* or *bka'* and *thugs*. The *bka'* as an utterance or aspiration 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'-bsten*, 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 l*).

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

