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Tibetan Bonpo *Mendrup*: the Precious Formula's Transmission

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1. INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT ISSUE of *History of Science in South Asia* is dedicated to longevity and rejuvenation practices in South and Inner Asian medical, alchemical and yogic traditions, with a particular focus on their mutual relatedness and interconnectedness. This study presents the emic textual history of the Bonpo *mendrup* (Wylie: *sman sgrub*)¹ ritual, a Tibetan practice of presumably Indian origin² embodying and intertwining all these spheres of knowledge and their principles.

The Tibetan religious tradition “Bon” in its current monastic form heavily draws on Buddhist doctrine and practice, and hence can stand as one of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The *mendrup* ritual epitomises this milieu. Nevertheless, the designation “Bon” can be in certain instances viewed also in contrast to Buddhism, when it is understood in relation to Tibetan pre-Buddhist cults (i.e., predating the seventh century CE), or to the non-Buddhist elements of both historical and contemporary Tibetan culture, especially Tibetan popular religion.³ Some of the contrasting elements may be best understood as deliberate inversions of Buddhist categories in a process of establishing a unique and cultur-

¹ For names, I have used the recognised Tibetan phonetic transcription with the exception of a few established forms: Bonpo (instead of Bönpo), Tashi Menri (instead of Trashi Menri), Triten Norbutse (Triten Norbutsé), and Menri Trindzin (Menri Tridzin). The phonetic transcription is followed by the Wylie transliteration in brackets. In

some cases, I have added Sanskrit terms commonly used, or referred to, by Tibetan practitioners.

² See Cantwell 2015 and Cantwell 2017 (in this volume) and Garrett 2009, 2010.

³ For discussion of the term “Bon,” see Kværne 1995 and van Schaik 2013.

ally effective interpretation.⁴ Contemporary Bonpos, monks of Bonpo monasteries and their lay communities, adopt many Buddhist precepts, often expressed with original variations, while maintaining a great deal of Tibetan non-Buddhist ideas. Currently, Bonpos are found all across cultural Tibet and the Himalayas. The largest communities exist in Eastern Tibet (Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces of China) and in the Nepali Himalayas (the regions of Mustang and Dolpo, the Kathmandu valley).⁵ Significant Bonpo centres have recently also been established in the West, in Europe (mainly France), the USA and Mexico.

The Bonpo *mendrup* ritual is a tantric meditative practice (Sanskrit: *sādhana*) and consecration rite of transforming substances into a most effective healing mixture. *Sādhana* implies the basic tantric exercises of visualising and self-identifying with a tantric deity in order to achieve meditative accomplishment.⁶ *Mendrup* practice lets an adept attain such an inner transformation and spiritual progress, while also transforming material ingredients into empowered and consecrated substances. Such substances are then believed to hold special virtues, powers, and qualities of awakening (Tibetan *byang chub*, Sanskrit *bodhi*).⁷ Both the *mendrup* ritual process and the produced “medicine,” *men* (*sman*), are considered extremely efficacious for healing, rejuvenation, and longevity, as well as for promoting spiritual progress. As such, the ritual is similar to other *mendrup* rituals and practices in Tibet, as well as to *chülen* (*bcud len*), *mani rilbu* (*ma ṇi ril bu*), precious pills’ (*rin chen ril bu*) processing, etc.⁸ The appellation “*mendrup*” is a compound of two words: 1. *men* (*sman*), denoting “medicine,” a healing substance or in general something beneficial,⁹ and 2. *drup* (*sgrub*) meaning “to achieve, attain, accomplish,” which is also a term for the yogic and tantric practice of *sādhana*. The name of the ritual can thus be translated as “medicinal accomplishment,” or “achievement of medicine,” “medicinal

4 For instance, the right-hand circumambulation in the Tibetan Buddhist context has a left-hand alternation in the Bonpo context. Similarly, the colours associated with individual cardinal points of a mandala have switched locations for the Bonpos, as will be shown below.

5 See Karmay and Nagano 2003.

6 On the meditative and spiritual element of *mendrup* in the Nyingma context see Cantwell 2015 and Cantwell 2017 (in this volume) and Garrett 2009, 2010.

7 Bentor 1996, 1997.

8 On *mendrup*, see Cantwell 2015 and Cantwell 2017 (in this volume); Donden and Hopkins 1997; Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho et

al. 2007; Garrett 2009, 2010; Craig 2011, 2012; Blaikie 2013, 2014; Blaikie et al. 2015. On *chülen* (*bcud len*), see Gerke 2013; Parfionovitch, Dorje, and Meyer 1992: I, 119–22 and II, 275–78; Oliphant 2015, 2016: 205 f. (for a *chülen* close to the *mendrup* described here). On *mani rilbu* (*ma ṇi ril bu*), see Kohn 1988. On the processing of precious pills (*rin chen ril bu*), see Aschoff and Tashigang 2001, 2004; Gerke 2012; Czaja 2013; Gerke 2013; Blaikie 2015; Czaja 2015; Gerke 2017 (in this volume) and Millard unpublished. On these and other comparable practices, see Samuel 2010 and Schaeffer 2002.

9 Cf. Das 1902.

practice,” “practice of medicine,” or “medicinal *sādhana*”.¹⁰ Within its immense complexity, the Bonpo *mendrup* ritual combines Indian tantrism, Buddhism and its soteriological ideas, the Tibetan medical tradition (*Sowa rigpa*, *gso ba rig pa*), alchemy and Tibetan indigenous religious notions. The ritual is centred on the inner-personal transformation through meditation upon tantric deities, accompanied by the production and consumption of the specially empowered substance. The substance is called “medicine” and is compounded following rules of Tibetan medicinal drugs and ritual knowledge. The medicine created in this context acquires such epithets as “the nectar of immortality” (*‘chi med bdud rtsi*), “the medicine overcoming poison” (*dug ‘joms pa’i sman*), “the precious nectar” (*bdud rtsi rin po che*), “the great nectar” (*bdud rtsi chen po*), “the secret nectar” (*bdud rtsi gsang ba*), “the nectar of wisdom” (*ye shes bdud rtsi*), etc.¹¹

In general, in both Tibetan Buddhism and Bon, the performance of the *mendrup* ritual can vary from being a small yearly rite for the enhancement of drug efficacy in medical clinics or other institutions producing medicines, further as an irregular village event, or as an extended monastic celebration, as the one presented later in this article.¹² The Bonpo *mendrup* when performed on a large scale, represents one of the most elaborate healing rituals of the present Tibetan realm. It is also probably one of the rarest, special, most demanding and expensive Tibetan rituals. The Bonpo community believe it to be extremely powerful, an event one should witness at least once in a lifetime.

2. THE BONPO MENDRUP RITUAL PRACTICE

HISTORICALLY, THE PRACTICE of the extended Bonpo *mendrup* ritual in the monastic setting used to be restricted to a single performance in the life of each abbot of Tashi Menri monastery (bKra shis sman ri, founded in 1405) in Central Tibet, the leading monastery of Bon (Figure 1). The interval between performances is said to have averaged around sixty years. Nowadays, the practice is much more frequent due to increasing (and global) sponsorship and facilitated

¹⁰ For a broader etymological excursus on the term, see Garrett 2009.

¹¹ MS Kathmandu, Tritten Norbutse monastery (containing *‘Od zer ‘khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung lags s+ho*); dKar ru Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa’i nyi ma 1998a: v.168, text 1, 1998b: v.230, text 22; dPon slob Rin po che tshangs pa bstan ‘dzin et al. 2014. For a discussion of the expression and concept of “nectar” in Buddhist *mendrup* contexts, see Garrett 2009, 2010.

¹² On *mendrup* as a small yearly rite for the enhancement of drug efficacy in medical clinics, see Craig 2011, 2012; in other institutions producing medicines, see Blaikie 2013, 2014; Blaikie et al. 2015. Kind (2002) provides an example of *mendrup* as an irregular village event from Dolpo, Nepal. And see Cantwell 2015 and Cantwell 2017 (in this volume) for *mendrup* as an extended monastic celebration.



Figure 1: Tashi Menri monastery in Central Tibet.

logistics for the purchase of the required medicinal ingredients and substances. It particularly flourishes in the exile, in the substitute Tashi Menri monastery (founded 1969) in Himachal Pradesh, India, and the second most prominent exile monastery, Triten Norbutse (Khri brtan nor bu rtse, initiated in 1986, founded 1992) in Kathmandu, Nepal (Figure 2).¹³

All Bonpo *mendrup* rituals are dedicated to a specific tutelary deity, *yidam*, (Tibetan (Wylie): *yi dam/ yi dam gyi lha*, Sanskrit: *iṣṭa-devatā*) and the deity's specific cycle of teachings. Different teaching lineages¹⁴ of the Bonpos have their own *mendrup* rituals of different *yidam* deities, i.e., of particular and often individually attributed tantric deities to be meditated upon in order to guide the adepts to awakening. For the prevailing Bonpo Dru (Bru, also spelled Gru, 'Bru, 'Gru) lineage,¹⁵ inherently tied to the Menri monastery, the two main *yidams* for a *mendrup* ritual are the deities Trowo Tsochok Khagying (Khro bo gtso mchog

¹³ The ritual in Menri was mentioned by Cech (1988), and in Triten Norbutse by Tsetan (1998).

¹⁴ The liturgic and teaching lineages of the Bonpos originated from hereditary family father-son transmission lineages. Only a small number of the original six main lines

have survived, and had to adapt to the monastic system. On the lineages see Karmay 1998, 2007 and rMe'u tsha bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal 2014.

¹⁵ See Karmay 2007 and rMe'u tsha bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal 2014.



Figure 2: Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal, during the *mendrup* ceremony in December 2012.

mkha' 'gying), "Wrathful One, Supreme Lord Towering the Sky",¹⁶ and Purwa (*Phur ba*, Sanskrit: *kīla*), "Dagger." Medicinal empowerment (*sman dbang*) of the peaceful and wrathful deities (*zhi tro*, *zhi khro*), specifically connected to one of the respective wrathful *yidams* in each case, is integral for the practice. The *mendrup* particularly examined in this article is the one dedicated to Trowo Tsochok Khagying, called "the light-swirled *mendrup*" (*sman sgrub 'od zer 'khyil ba*).

Within the Bonpo tradition, the big monastic performances of *mendrup* have become synonymous with the designation *drupchen* (*sgrub chen*), which generally denotes "a Major Practice session or intensive communal tantric practice focused on attaining realisation, held over a number of days, and typically requiring a large team of lamas¹⁷ and ritualists as the principal practitioners."¹⁸ The *drupchen* practice can function without a *mendrup*,¹⁹ but for the main monasteries of Bon,

¹⁶ Kværne 1995: 75–77 and 88–90. "The Supreme Lord Poised with Majestic Splendor in Space" translation of Triten Norbutse (Yungdrung 2012).

¹⁷ *Lama* (*bla ma*) is an honorary title for esteemed Tibetan monks.

¹⁸ Cantwell 2015: 90.

¹⁹ Cantwell (2015, 2017: in this volume) observed that for the Nyingma school, *drupchen* principally exists without *mendrup*, and the latter is a possible addition to the former.

the two have become conflated to a certain extent. The word *drupchen* is thus, and especially in colloquial expression for the Bonpos, usually understood to refer to elaborate *mendrup* monastic celebrations, and differentiates them from minor *mendrup* rites conducted yearly or at another higher frequency,²⁰ or in village settings.²¹

The following descriptions of the contemporary execution of *mendrup* are primarily based on the last exile performance in Triten Norbutse monastery in Kathmandu in 2012, supplemented by the ritual's scriptures and other sources.²² The event represented "the light-swirled *mendrup*" of the deity Trowo Tsochok Khagying. The *mendrup* ceremony is very complicated and is divided into three main phases by the Bonpos:

1. Preliminary activities (*sngon 'gro*) of purifications, enhancing auspiciousness and creating suitable conditions for the major practice, gathering the prescribed substances, which count over a hundred, and compounding the *mendrup* medicine;
2. The central activities of accomplishing and empowering the medicine, and attaining spiritual accomplishments in a meditational state upon Trowo Tsochok Khagying and the peaceful and wrathful deities;
3. The final medicinal empowerment (*sman dbang*), along with an empowerment for long life (*tshe sgrub gyi dbang*) and the *mendrup* medicine distribution.

The *mendrup* act itself is constituted of the middle and longest part and the concluding empowerments. This second section lasts no less than fifteen days, during which chanting cannot cease and the main *mendrup* "medicinal mantra," *mendzap* (*sman 'dzab*), resonates many times. Various other mantras, special invocations, dances, hand gestures, and music and melodies accompany the extensive texts' recitations. Twenty-four selected monks receive exclusive training prior to each enactment to enable its performance.

The focus and material centre of the whole ritual is the medicine. It is placed in nine vessels (*bum pa, ga'u*) and bags on and around the mandala (Tibetan: *dkyil 'khor*, Sanskrit: *maṇḍala*) of the ritual, enclosed and firmly sealed by cloth. The

²⁰ Such a ritual conducted in Menri, India, in 1985 was briefly described by Cech (1987: 272 f).

²¹ As the one studied by Kind (2002).

²² MS Kathmandu, Triten Norbutse monastery (containing 'Od zer 'khyil ba bdud

rtsi sman gyi gzhung lags s+ho); dKar ru Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma 1998a: v. 168, text 1, 1998b: v. 230, text 22; dPon slob Rin po che tshangs pa bstan 'dzin et al. 2014. More details in Sehnalova 2013, 2015, In press.

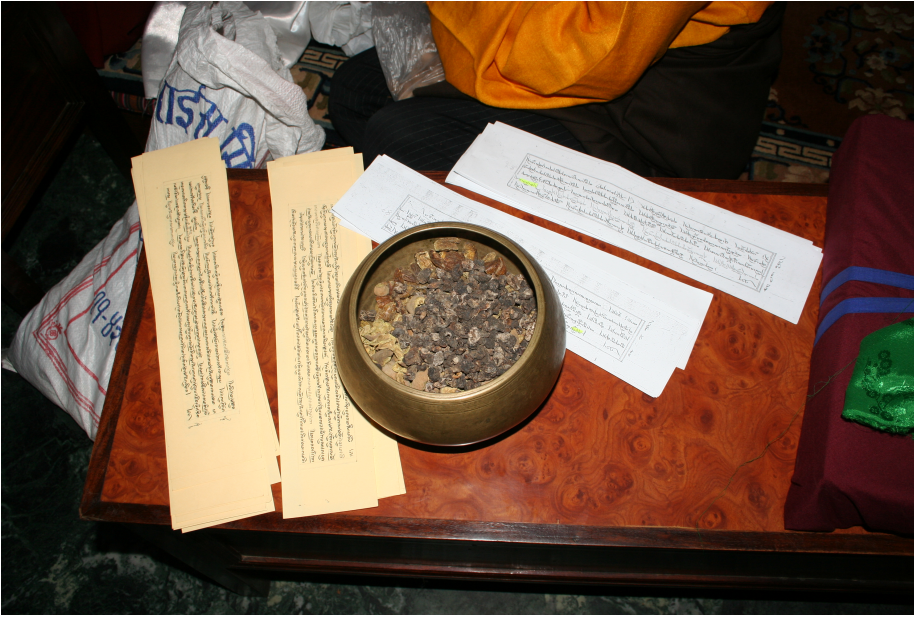


Figure 3: Assembling the medicines in the respective vessels strictly follows the ritual text's prescription.

nine vessels, one in the centre, four in the main and four in the intermediate cardinal points of the mandala, are prescribed to contain specially assorted medicines of specific properties. Their compounding follows a precise recipe in the ritual's texts, for which a person knowledgeable in medical pharmaceuticals (following the Tibetan *Sowa rigpa* medical tradition) has to be put in charge (Figures 3, 4). The ritual requires that mixed raw ingredients undergo the first half of the second phase (number 2. above) of the ritual, before being ground to pursue the next stage of bestowing accomplishments (the second half of the second phase). For the sake of time and easier production, almost all of the *mendrup* medicine is nowadays powdered mechanically well in advance, and only a part of the medicinal vessels on the mandala contain unprocessed ingredients at the beginning of the ritual. These are ground manually by pestle and mortar at the given middle phase of the celebration. At this moment, the ground and unground ingredients are carefully mixed. Afterwards, the medicine is returned onto and around the mandala, and the ritual continues.

The central medicinal container is on the mandala, accompanied by the medicinal yeast *papta* (*phabs gta'*, also *sman phabs*), the "fermenting agent" of the whole ritual and its medicine.²³ It is also a medicinal mixture believed to come from

²³ For a discussion of this substance and its

appellation see Sehnalova (forthcoming).



Figure 4: The monastery's practitioner of traditional Tibetan medicine, helped by monks, prepares the vessels of medicine in the five cardinal points' colours to be placed on the mandala of the ritual.

deities and old masters, bringing their powers and assuring the efficacy of the ritual. From the centre of the mandala, a "spell cord" (*byang thag*, *gzungs thag*, Figure 5)²⁴ leads to the elevated seats of the two presiding monks, bound to the Bonpo ritual sceptre (*chag shing*).²⁵ The thread helps to concentrate and navigate the powers of the deities on the mandala and the medicine. The produced medicine is considered extraordinarily efficacious. Up to one thousand people arrived at Triten Norbutse to receive the medicine and the final empowerment. The compound is taken orally, and various rules apply to its consumption and preservation. It is kept in monasteries and families for decades as a unique blessing helping to achieve awakening, and a drug for any disease, illness or disorder. It is perceived to work for all beings and the environment.

TRANSMISSION AND CONTINUATION OF THE BONPO MENDRUP RITUAL

According to contemporary Bonpos' narratives, the *mendrup* of Trowo Tsochok Khagying originates with the Primordial Buddha, Küntu zangpo (Kun tu bz-

²⁴ The etymological explanation might be as follows: *Thag* means "rope, cord," *byang* denotes "to purify," and *gzungs* "a spell." The literal translation would thus be a "puri-

ficatory cord" or a "spell cord."

²⁵ Alternative, less correct spellings: '*chag shing*, *phyag shing*.



Figure 5: The arrangement of the mandala with the nine medicinal vessels and various offerings placed on its top. The vessels carry the colours of the given directions: white in the centre, yellow in the East, green in the North, red in the West, and blue in the South. Yellow also stands for the four intermediate points. The threads of corresponding colours are led upwards to eventually compose the spell cord. The mandala is sealed and closed for most of the duration of the ritual.

ang po, Sanskrit: Samantabhadra). He is believed to have bestowed the ritual's practice and expertise to the deity Shenlha Ökar (gShen lha 'od dkar), who then taught it to the famous Bonpo master Drenpa Namkha (Dran pa nam mkha', eighth century).²⁶ Drenpa Namkha is understood to have concealed the text (along with many others) during a time of persecution of Bon, as a treasure (*gter ma*) to be rediscovered in more favourable times. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the treasure revealers Shenchen Luga (gShen chen klu dga', 996–1035), and also Rindzin Chenpo Gyermi Nyiö (Rig 'dzin chen po gyer mi nyi 'od, eleventh–twelfth century) or Matön Sindzin (rMa ston srin 'dzin, aka Matön Söldzin, rMa ston srol 'dzin, b. 1092) unearthed the *mendrup* texts as well as the essential “fermenting agent” *papta*, considered the medicinal core of the *mendrup*.²⁷ Thus, both the ritual's text and its old medicine are perceived as treas-

²⁶ Dating according to Karmay (2007: 213).

²⁷ Dates based on Kværne 1971. The accounts of the discovery differ. Accord-

ing to Kværne (1971: 230), Gyermi Nyiö and Matön Sindzin found the treasure together in 1108. Millard and Yungdrung (un-



Figure 6: The mandala being hidden behind cloth in its special structure. White bags of additional medicine placed around are clearly visible. The ritual's practitioners, pilgrims and visitors would circumambulate the whole construction anticlockwise, as well as prostrate to its sacred content, while reciting the *mendrup's* mantra called *mendzap*.



Figure 7: At a certain stage of the ritual, the nine medicinal vessels and the rest of the *mendrup* medicine are ceremoniously circumambulated in the Bonpo anticlockwise direction around the temple of the mandala as the centre of the *mendrup* ritual action.

ures of divine origin.²⁸

Upon its discovery, this particular *mendrup* is said to have been practiced in Yéru Wensaka (g.Yas ru dben sa kha), the first Bonpo monastery established in 1072 and from the early fifteenth century in its successor Tashi Menri monastery. *Mendrup* was also adopted by the nearby Yungdrung Ling monastery (g.Yung drung gling, founded in 1834). The practice continues in both institutions, the most recent performance took place in 2013 at Yungdrung Ling.²⁹

With the flight of Tibetan refugees since the 1950s, their rituals travelled with them in their memories and in textual form on their backs. In exile, *mendrup* was reinstituted in 1988, first in Menri, and later, in 1998, in Tritten Norbutse.³⁰ Further performances of the ritual were conducted in 2009 (Menri) and 2012 (Tritten Norbutse). The individual enactments varied according to the particular *yidam* and the deity's textual corpus. *Mendrup* was often scheduled to mark important events requiring powerful ritual action, such as the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Tritten Norbutse monastery in 2012, or the *mendrup* planned for the 90th birthday of Menri Trindzin, the highest authority of contemporary Bon, for April 2018. Sadly, His Holiness Menri Trindzin, aka Lungtok Tenpai Nyima, passed away in September 2017.³¹ The *mendrup* ceremony also expresses the prestige, political power and economic significance of the leading monasteries of Bon.

3. THE BONPO MENDRUP RITUAL IN BONPO HISTORICAL SOURCES

LET US TURN TO EXAMINING Bonpo textual evidence of the *mendrup* ritual. In the historical textual corpus, various kinds of documents feature: myths and rituals, recordings of visions, accounts on the origin of Bonpo teachings (*bstan*

published) describe a transmission of the former's discovery to the latter. This version accords with Khud spungs pa dBra ston Ngag dbang skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan 2017: p. 17, f. 42; p. 72, fol. 234. A third narrative states that Matön Sindzin made the discovery upon Gyermi Nyiö's prophecy (dPon slob Rin po che tshangs pa bstan 'dzin et al. 2014: 2). A more detailed lineage of transmission is given by Millard and Yungdrung (unpublished). Gyermi Nyiö's bibliography by sKyang 'phags does not contain an explicit mention of the discovery (sKyang 'phags 1998: v. 200, text 1). Cf. Martin 2017.

28 This paragraph intends to demonstrate the commonly transmitted oral knowledge on "the light-swirled *mendrup*." For written historical evidence, see the discussion below.

29 A dpal bzang 2013a,b.

30 These big *mendrup* performances in 1985 in Menri were preceded by a smaller *mendrup*, the first ever conducted in the new Bonpo exile monastic community. See Cech 1987: 272 f.

31 In January 2018, the Menri monastery in India had not decided whether to carry out a *mendrup* in the near future or not.

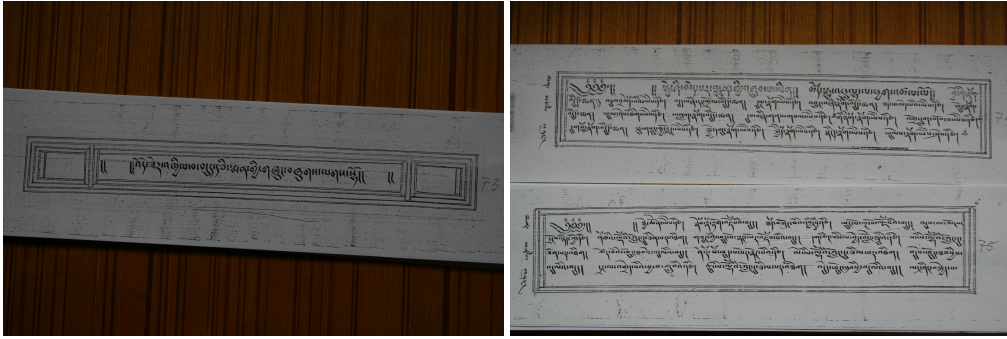


Figure 8: Opening pages of the principal text of the *mendrup* of the deity Trowo Tsochok Khagying, *The Main Text of the Light-Swirled Nectar Medicine*.

'byung),³² prophecies (*lung bstan*), biographies and hagiographies (*rnam thar*). Some dates can be established on the basis of chronological works (*bstan rtsis*).³³

SOURCES FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

The Bonpos themselves believe that the authoritative scripture for the *mendrup* ritual of Trowo Tsochok Khagying, *The Main Text of the Light-Swirled Nectar Medicine* ('Od zer 'khyil pa bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung bzhugs lags s+ho, Figure 8),³⁴ was found as a treasure in the eleventh to twelfth century. Contemporary leading scholars on Tibetan treasure literature use the dates of such supposed discoveries as an approximate (and sometimes the latest possible) dating for the time of the given texts' composition. The language of this text also indicates the likely origin in this period.

This dating is also supported by another treasure text discovered in the twelfth century. This scripture, *The Transmission of Knowledge of Family Holders* (*Rigs 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud.*),³⁵ contains myths about origin of the world, deities, Bonpo teachings, and ritual instructions. As such, it is neither a healing practice, nor a tantric *sādhana* text. Like the *mendrup* text and ritual, the work is again attributed to the deity Küntu Zangpo as its original source, then to Drenpa Namkha as its supposed receiver, and finally to a master of the Ma (rMa) family

³² The Bonpo term and genre are analogous to the Buddhist *chos 'byung*.

³³ Kværne 1971 and Martin 2017. Further work on the sources by the author is in progress.

³⁴ MS Kathmandu, Triten Norbutse monastery (containing 'Od zer 'khyil ba bdud

rtsi sman gyi gzhung lags s+ho); dKar ru Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma 1998a: v. 168, text 1, 1998b: v. 230, text 22.

³⁵ The standard spelling of the beginning would be *rig 'dzin*. *Rigs 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud* (Anon. 1972b: ff. 186–237).

dated to the twelfth century, Matön Shéráp Senggé, possibly Matön Sindzin's grandson, as its discoverer.³⁶ Further, other close similarities to the *mendrup* can be observed. The same classes of deities are important here – the *zhi tro*, the forty-five peaceful and eighty-six wrathful deities, among them Trowo Tsochok Khagying. Throughout the work, more categories corresponding to the *mendrup* occur, such as the opposition of harmful poison (*dug*) and beneficial medicine (*smān*) or nectar (*bdud rtsi*), and the notion of possible transformation of the former into the latter through the power of certain divinities (*dug smān du bsgyur*).³⁷ The former is linked to the five mental poisons or afflictions (*nyon mongs dug lnga*).³⁸ This contrast and the intended conversion into the five wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*),³⁹ which are also mentioned, form the key element of the *mendrup*. The text also touches upon *rasayana* medicine (*ra sa ya na smān*),⁴⁰ possibly mercury,⁴¹ which plays a role in the *mendrup* ritual as well. Thus, both *The Main Text of the Light-Swirled Nectar Medicine* of the *mendrup* and *The Transmission of Knowledge of Family Holders* at the least partly derive from a shared body of knowledge and traditions, and likely reflect the Bonpo intellectual environment of the twelfth century.

A much stronger support for this possible dating of the *mendrup* ritual and text is found in *The Biography of Lama Shen* (*Bla ma gshen gyi rnam thar*) dated to the thirteenth century.⁴² This relatively short composition presents the history of the famous Shen (gShen) family lineage and its transmissions of teachings.⁴³ The title evokes the family's most prominent character, master Shenchen Luga, who is strongly associated with *mendrup* by the Bonpo tradition.⁴⁴ Here, we find the earliest historical account of Bonpo *mendrup* I am aware of. Pönsé Dzamling (dPon gsas 'dzam gling, b. 1259/1271),⁴⁵ a direct descendant of Shenchen Luga after a few generations, figures in the following account (translation by Dan Martin):

36 Martin 2017 and Karmay 1972: 170 f.

37 "Rigs 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud," (Anon. 1972b: ff. 201–2 and 209). Further in Sehnalova *In press*.

38 "Rigs 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud," (Anon. 1972b: f. 192).

39 "Rigs 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud," (Anon. 1972b: f. 188).

40 "Rigs 'dzin rig pa'i thugs rgyud," (Anon. 1972b: f. 215).

41 The exact meaning of the term remains a speculation: actual mercury, a mercury-based medicine, another substance, or a certain healing or other practice. The *smān*

("medicine") syllable is likely to indicate a material substance. Cantwell 2017 (in this volume) elaborates on the complexity of the word *ra sa ya na* (Sanskrit: *rasāyana*).

42 "Bla ma gshen gyi rnam thar," (Anon. 1972a: ff. 238–44), dated by Martin (2001).

43 For further information on the lineage, see Karmay 2007 and rMe'u tsha bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal 2014.

44 Moreover, he is associated with both main *mendrup* rituals of the Bru lineage, of both the deities Trowo Tsochok Khagying and Purwa.

45 Dating in Martin 2001: 77.

He [Pönsé Dzamling]⁴⁶ obtained the essential scriptures, blessings and empowerments of the past masters, including ‘uncle and nephew’ (*khu dbon*) lamas. He performed the *Zhi-khro* (“Peaceful Wrathful”) and Medicine practices (*smān sgrub*)⁴⁷ and became a great master in the transmission of blessings.⁴⁸ His mental continuum was thoroughly tamed and his thoughts were immaculately pure. He was completely free of erroneous conceptions of the subjective and objective and devoid of attachment to partial perspectives that come from holding on to the ‘self’ and one’s own special qualities. Therefore, he could overpower and control other peoples’ experience of the phenomenal world. Because of his blessings and compassion, he could overpower all hindrances and injuries.⁴⁹

Mendrup appears as powerful ritual knowledge, which is continued from the past and transmitted by the Shen lineage as one of their main practices. It is explicitly listed as one of the chief achievements of master Pönsé Dzamling. As the text indicates, Pönsé Dzamling was granted the practice, performed it, excelled in it, was entitled to hand it over, and is believed to have gained extraordinary skills from the practice. The necessity of acquiring the given text and empowerment, along with the previous masters’ blessings, for performing and further bestowing the practice, are stressed, as they are today. In addition, the connection of the *mendrup* practice with the *zhi khro*, peaceful and wrathful deities, is clearly visible.

Relying on the examined sources and their plausible dating, it can be stated that the Bonpo *mendrup* ritual and its scriptures very likely existed before the thirteenth century, and probably originated between the eleventh and thirteenth century. This dating would correspond with the emergence of the Nyingma *mendrup* rituals.⁵⁰

SOURCES FROM THE FOURTEENTH TO SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

The evidence for the existence of the Bonpo *mendrup* ritual by the thirteenth century is further strengthened by the only known commentary on the ritual and its

⁴⁶ My insertion.

⁴⁷ My insertion.

⁴⁸ I suggest an alternate translation: “He became a great master of the lineage of blessings of [the practices of] the peaceful and wrathful deities and the *mendrup* [associated with them], as well as other [practices].” (*zhi khro dang smān sgrub la swogs pa/*

bying brlabs rgyud pa’i dpon gsas chen por gyur cig/). “*Bla ma gshen gyi rnam thar*,” (Anon. 1972a: f. 243).

⁴⁹ “*Bla ma gshen gyi rnam thar*,” (Anon. 1972a: f. 243), tr. by Martin (2001: 77 f.).

⁵⁰ Cantwell 2017 (in this volume) and Garrett 2009, 2010.

Main Text of the Light-Swirled Nectar Medicine. The commentary comes from the pen of the eminent Bonpo master Nyö Tsültrim Gyeltsen (gNyos Tshul khriṃs rgyal mtshan), active in Yéru Wensaka monastery in the fourteenth century. The work is entitled *The Mirror Illuminating the Practice of Good Qualities of the Light-Swirled Nectar* ('Od zer 'khyil pa bdud rtsi yon tan gyi phyag bzhes gsal byed me long bzhugs so.).⁵¹ Apart from the *mendrup* text itself, this writing constitutes the first extensive historical evidence of the Bonpo *mendrup* ritual in general, and of the *mendrup* of Trowo Tsochok Khagying in particular. It gives detailed instructions on the ritual's performance, is very technical and prescriptive, and is considered very authoritative. The work has codified the practice of the ritual and is followed in contemporary performances. It is regarded as the main work on the ritual within the Bonpo tradition. The commentary frames the ritual into a very formalised structure of a Buddhist *sādhana* and organised, large-scale monastic ritual practices with many stages and substages, elaborated preliminary activities, various sequences of the main activities, etc. Moreover, it imposes a clearer Buddhist cosmological and ritual framework to create the whole as an extended and coherent unit. The manual gives accurate guidance throughout the rite, which suggests that the *mendrup* ritual's practice might have not significantly changed since the time of Nyö Tsültrim Gyeltsen. The individual stages of the ritual as we know it today might have been expanded, elaborated, etc., but not created anew, and still follow Nyö Tsültrim Gyeltsen's writing.

From a slightly later period, from between the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries,⁵² come two short mentions of *mendrup* in the historical work *The Lamp Illuminating the Explanations and Developments of the Teachings* (*bsTan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal ba'i sgron ma zhes bya ba bzhugs*),⁵³ written by the famous scholar Patön Tengyel Zangpo (sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po).⁵⁴ The work enumerates transmitted teachings and practices of Bon and organises them into lists of groups and subgroups. The *mendrup* here appears under its common epithet as "the nectar medicine" (*bdud rtsi sman*) and is listed among cycles of the tantras of the *zhi tro*, the peaceful and wrathful divinities.⁵⁵

Similarly, a biography of Nyammé Shérab Gyeltsen (mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, 1356–1415),⁵⁶ one of the chief leading figures of Bon in its history,

51 MS Kathmandu, Triten Norbutse monastery (containing 'Od zer 'khyil pa bdud rtsi yon tan gyi phyag bzhes gsal byed me long bzhugs so by gNyos tshul khriṃs rgyal mtshan) (attribution of the work in its colophon); Millard and Yungdrung (unpublished) provide an English translation.

52 See the discussion on its time of composition in Martin 1997: 78 f.

53 Spa-ston Bstan-rgyal-bzang-po 1972: ff. 498–769, sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po 2010: 187–364. Cf. Martin 1997: 78 f.

54 Dating in Martin 1997: 78 f. and Karmay 2007: 72.

55 Spa-ston Bstan-rgyal-bzang-po 1972: ff. 519–25, sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po 2010: 204–5.

56 Dating in Karmay 2007.

has *mendrup* performed in a list of various practices. Nyammé Shéráp Gyeltsen was an extremely influential Bonpo scholar, who is credited with establishing the principal Bonpo Tashi Menri monastery in Central Tibet in 1405, and with transforming Bon into its current institutionalised monastic form. In *The Splendorous Lotus Rosary Biography of the Omniscient Precious Lord, the Great One-eyed Master* (rJe rin po che thams cad mkhyen pa slob dpon spyan gcig pa chen po'i rnam thar ngo mtshar pad mo'i phreng ba.),⁵⁷ one of the several accounts of his life,⁵⁸ the empowerment of Trowo Tsochok Khagying and "medicinal ritual arrangements" (*sman gyi chog khrigs*) feature among the recorded activities master Nyammé Shéráp Gyeltsen engaged in.⁵⁹ The account is supposed to have been composed by Drakpa Gyeltsen (Grags pa rgyal mtshan), a disciple of the master's spiritual son Gyeltsap Rinchen Gyeltsen (rGyal tshab Rin chen rgyal mtshan, b. 1360/4),⁶⁰ and hence can presumably be dated to the late fourteenth or fifteenth century.

The dating of two other writings significant to the endeavour of tracing the Bonpo *mendrup* ritual remains very problematic. In my estimation, they might be included into this period of the fourteenth to seventeenth century, or into slightly later times. Both compositions deal with important Bonpo historical figures who at least are datable. The first is Druchen Namkha Yungdrung (Bru chen Nam mkha' g.yung drung, 994/999–1054),⁶¹ one of the most prominent masters of the Dru lineage, and the second the above-mentioned treasure revealer Matön Shéráp Senggé (twelfth century) who figures in both works. Namkha Yungdrung, aka Druchen, "the Great Dru [lineage master]," the alleged founder of the Yéru Wensaka monastery, is the central figure of the explicitly-titled *The Biography of Lama Druchen* (*Bla ma gru chen po'i rnam thar bzhugs so.*),⁶² authored by a certain Tazhi Dülwa Senggé (Mtha' bzhi 'Dul ba seng ge), who is difficult to trace. The work presents Namkha Yungdrung's life story, and within it records the very first performance of the *mendrup* ritual. The text records how, from a young age, the master travelled, meeting teachers and requesting teachings from them.⁶³ Having acquired a diverse education and experience of practice, he himself became a teacher followed by a number of disciples. Among them was Matön Shéráp Senggé. In a group with two other students, Darma Drogön Azha (Dar ma 'Gro 'gon 'a zha) and Pönsé (dPon gsas), he approached the master and requested the outer, inner and secret empowerments and transmissions

57 Tshe ring bkra shis 2004: 20–69.

58 Cf. Tshe ring bkra shis 2004.

59 Tshe ring bkra shis 2004: 40.

60 Tshe ring bkra shis 2004: 3–4. The birth year 1364 in Tshe ring bkra shis 2004, 1360 in Achard 2004: 256, Kværne 1971: 232 and cf. Karmay 1972: 143 f.

61 Kværne (1971: 229) lists the wood horse year of 994, whereas *The Biography* itself (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: f. 239) places the birth into a pig year, which would be 999 (Vostrikov 1970: 238 f.).

62 (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: ff. 438–57).

63 (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: ff. 440).

of *bdam skar*.⁶⁴ The text remains silent about the possible inclusion of *mendrup* among them. Reading further, the transmission of this specific practice seems to have been confined to a single chosen disciple. In a section of the biography recording the master's bestowed practices and empowerments, their recipients, and eventually the payments made for them, the transmission of *mendrup* is explicitly registered as granted to student Pönsé:

In [the place of] Zhikha (bZhis kha),⁶⁵ the above-mentioned Biri Agom (Bi ri a sgom) offered a part of a nomadic estate [to master Druchen]. At that great place, [master Druchen] practised the familiarisation and accomplishment (*snyen (bsnyen) sgrub*) and concentrated practice (*nyams len*). According to the prophecy of Sipé Gyelmo (Srid pa'i rgyal mo),⁶⁶ he gave the instructions (*lung nos*) for the nectar medicinal accomplishment (*bdud rtsi sman grub* [sic]) to master Pönsé.⁶⁷

Then again, Pönsé was honoured by receiving the practice from the master at another location:

In [the place of] Chi (sPyi) [master Druchen] offered the nectar medicinal accomplishment (*bdud rtsi sman bsgrub* [sic]) to master Pönsé, and [the rites] of the earth demons and sky demons, as well as many other selected practices, to Rikdzin khandro (Rigs 'dzin mkha' 'gro) and others.⁶⁸

Yet, the most interesting is the reference to the very first celebration of the *mendrup* ritual, with which master Druchen is credited:

[Master Druchen] led the first *mendrup* ritual (*sman sgrub* [sic]). Having conducted it five times,⁶⁹ he collected the various medicines

⁶⁴ The word *bdam skar* remains unclear, it might refer to a certain name (possibly derived from a star constellation, as *skar* means star). *de dus bla ma dar ma 'gro 'gon 'a zha/bla ma rma sher seng (shes rab seng ge)/bla ma dpon gsas dang bzhi bar 'dzom pa la/phyi nang gsang ba'i dbang lung dang/ bdam skar mtha' dag zhus/ (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: f. 441).*

⁶⁵ Probably in Central Tibet.

⁶⁶ One of the main protectors of Bon (Kværne 1995: 107 f., 113).

⁶⁷ *bzhis kha la snga ba bi ri a sgom gyis 'brog bzhis (gzhis) dum cig phul/ gnas chen der*

snyen (bsnyen) sgrub dang/nyams len grims par mdzad pas/ srid rgyal gyis (srid pa rgyal mos) lung stan (bstan) nas/ bla ma dpon gsas la bdud rtsi sman grub [sic] gi (kyi) lung nos gsung/ (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: f. 442).

⁶⁸ *spyi ru bla ma'i (ma) dpon gsas la bdud rtsi sman bsgrub [sic] dang/ rigs 'dzin mkha' 'gro la swogs pa/ sa gdon dang gnam gdon/ gzhan yang bdams pa'i bzhug rnams mang du zhus/ (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: f. 442).*

⁶⁹ The source does not provide any details of the mentioned five performances of the *mendrup* ritual.

(*sman rnam*s), and many good signs appeared. The welfare of beings spread and increased, and [all] the four lands were blessed. In Shubar (Shu bar), close to the teacher Śrī Vajrapāṇi, he enslaved (tamed) demons [hindering] men and eliminated those [demons] who opposed. In Wensaka and Chi, offerings were presented [to the master] several times. [Also] the Bonpos of the pastoralist lands invited [the master] in order to tame [the harmful demons there]. [By this the master] showed kindness to all. [Master Druchen then] performed the familiarisation and accomplishment of the peaceful and wrathful deities (*zhi khro'i snyen (bsnyen) sgrub*), and the accomplishment of liberation by eating nectar (*bdud rtsi zos grol sgrub pa*). [Subsequently,] the big violent spirits together with their retinues, the to-be-tamed rock demoness Dakpa Shago (bDag pa sha 'go, 'The deer-headed one'), the lords of the land (*gzhi bdag*) of Droshong (Gro shong), and others, were truly and completely bound by oath to the Doctrine (*bka'*).⁷⁰

This passage ascribes Druchen with the orchestration of the first *mendrup*. It emphasizes that there are a number of different medicines which must be acquired before the ritual can commence. The ritual is depicted as bringing universal prosperity and blessings; this is also the way it is understood by the contemporary Bonpo community. Druchen performs the ritual for lay communities in response to their request and offerings, in this case along with other ritual services. In this context, Druchen also pacifies malevolent forces of the environment, and tames them into the protectors of the Doctrine, suggesting that the *mendrup* performance itself might have been perceived as effecting these actions. It is now difficult to prove such claims, yet the capability of the *mendrup* ritual to balance and pacify the whole environment is overtly stressed by Bonpos during contemporary performances.

⁷⁰ In the Bonpo context, the term *ka* (*bka'*), "Word," refers to the teachings of the supposed founder of the religious tradition of Bon, Tönpa Shenrap Mibo (sTon pa gShen rab mi bo). In the Buddhist context, the "Word" signifies the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, see Kværne 1995.

sman sgrub [sic] *dang po'i sna drangs nas/* *thengs lnga mdzad pas/ sman rnam slongs* (*slong*) *cing bzang rtags du ma byung/ 'gro don rgyas par 'phel cing sa bzhi byin gyis rlabs/ shu*

bar du bha vadzra pa ni stan pa'i dra ru langs pa la/ mi bdud bran du bkol nas 'gal byed cham la phab/ dben tsha kha dang spyi ru 'bul ba rnam gzhas thengs 'ga' mdzad/ 'brog phyogs bon pos tul gyur spyen drangs kun la bka' drin gnam/ zhi khro'o snyen (bsnyen) sgrub dang/ bdud rtsi zos grol sgrub pa mdzad nas/ che btsun sde 'khor dang/ tul kyu'i brag srin bdag pa sha (shwa) 'go la swogs/ gro shod kyi bzhi bdag rnam dngos su yongs nas bka' dang dam la btags/ (Mtha'-bzhi-'Dul-seng 1972: f. 446).

Throughout the quotes, the *mendrup* ritual is referred to as the “nectar medicinal accomplishment” or the “practice of the nectar medicine” (*bdud rtsi sman sgrub*). In the last example, the rite is attributed with the capacity of liberating, i.e., achieving awakening, through digestion, which refers to the Tibetan practice of liberation through the sense of taste (*myong grol*). The *mendrup* practice is again connected to the peaceful and wrathful deities. Both master Druchen Namkha Yungdrung and the *mendrup* are placed into the area of the first known Bonpo monastery Yéru Wensaka in Central Tibet. This locality of the initial *mendrup* performances, as well as their link to the Dru lineage, are similarly accentuated by the contemporary oral histories of Bonpos. The supposed dating of Druchen (994/999–1054) and Shenchen Luga (996–1035), the alleged discoverer of a part of the *mendrup* practice, make them contemporary and thus make this story possible. However, the two other discoverers of other bits of the *mendrup*, Rindzin Chenpo Gyermi Nyiö (eleventh to twelfth century) and Matön Sindzin (b. 1092), post-date Druchen. This indicates that parts of the *mendrup* practice might be of different periods and origin (authorship), or simply that its precise dating remains difficult. Alternatively, we might be dealing with two distinct *mendrup* rituals, each having its own history of discovery and transmission. Nevertheless, this does not seem likely in the context of the other sources presented below.

Another hard-to-date text relevant for the understanding of the history of the Bonpo *mendrup* are the *Visions of Matön Shérap Senggé* (*rMa ston shes rab seng gi gzigs snang lags so*).⁷¹ by Zhötön Sönam Drakpa (*gZhod ston bSod nams grags pa*). As the straightforward title indicates, the tract deals with various visions received by the master and treasure revealer Matön Shérap Senggé (twelfth century) in dreams and during his spiritual practice at varied locations. The narration is presented in the first person and reads as a succinct diary or autobiography. Matön Shérap Senggé, and not his grandfather Matön Sindzin, acts here as the acquirer of the *mendrup* text. Matön Shérap Senggé recounts his procurement of the text, as well as of the practical knowledge for performing the ritual, in detail:

Then, [I] stayed at the rock in Goklung (*sGog lung*). One day, while entering a narrow passage [of the rock], [I] experienced a vision. That time, the previous[ly encountered] master was there, all dressed in cotton robes. He had returned again and come to his companion (i.e., myself) and said: [Where] the mouth of the rock cave faces East, inside [of the cave] there is an opening. In the middle [of its inside],

⁷¹ Gzhod-ston Bsod-nams-grags-pa
1972: ff. 310–24, gZhod ston bSod nams
grags pa 1981: 162–75, gZhod ston bSod

nams grags pa 1998: ff. 310–24, exactly the
same as the first edition.

there is a mandala. Nine vessels are spread [on it]. To the central vessel there are eight vessels on the edges [of the mandala], [all] joined by a spell cord (*bzungs thag*). In the four cardinal points and in the four corners of the mandala there are eight men coming forth. Stretching the spell cord, they stand in a row. On the crowns of their heads they have a tied, plaited tuft of hair. They stand facing [the mandala].⁷² In the four corners of the mandala, silk ribbons in the four [colours of] white, yellow, red, and blue, are tied to the neck (i.e., upper part) of the four vultures' victory banners.⁷³ The sé vessel in the centre is wrapped in fine silk.⁷⁴ Many offerings are arranged [there]. In the West there is a big throne, the master is on its top. Also plenty of *chang*⁷⁵ is [arranged] there." [Then,] the master said: "This place is a garden of the jewel of turquoise, and this rock is a sé rock of heaped jewels. The cave and the rock are in union [like] the sun and the moon. Here, the nectar medicine will be accomplished (*bdud rtsi sman du bsgrub*). It is a practice (*sgrub*) in order to [be] without (i.e., overcome) birth and death," he said.

[Upon that,] I requested: "How should the place [of the practice] be accomplished (i.e., established, *sgrub*)? As for the accomplishment of nectar medicine, what are the root (i.e., main) and the branch (i.e., minor) [ingredients of the practice]? How to master the general meaning of the practice? How to accomplish the manual of the main text [of the practice] (*sgrub bzhung lag khrigs*)? How to accomplish the main purpose [of the practice]? What is the [actual] practice (*lag len*) of the [ritual] activities? [How] to observe the particular kinds of the medicines? How [to accomplish] the special *siddhi* of the medicinal empowerment (*sman dbang*)? How to gather the three ways of accumulation?"⁷⁶ To that [the master] said: "This place is a garden of the spontaneously achieved turquoise realm [to] accomplish the nectar without birth and death. As for the accomplishment of the nectar medicine, there are five root (i.e., main) and eight branch (i.e., minor) [ingredients]. I have collected them. The general meaning is to accomplish [the state] without birth and death. He explained all the methods of the practice (*lag len bya thabs*) of the lower door (i.e.,

⁷² This is a tentative translation.

⁷³ This refers to the arrangement of paraphernalia on the mandala.

⁷⁴ The sé (*bse*) material can denote rhinoceros or other animal horn, a type of stone or copper, or leather. See Jäschke 1881; Das

1902; Zhang 1993.

⁷⁵ Barley beer or another alcoholic beverage as an offering to the deities.

⁷⁶ The three ways likely refer to the following methods proposed by the master.

esoteric instructions of the lower gate of the body), and the means of accumulating *siddhi* of the medicinal empowerment (*smān dbang*). It was explained in the *Key of Medicine* (i.e., of medicinal practice) (*smān gyi lde mig*).

"Who are these eight men? Don't you have any helpers?" [I asked.] [After the master] explained how to prepare the vessels, and how to tame (*btul*) the medicine, the eight men acted as the eight *vidyā-dharas* (*rig 'dzin brgyad*) pressing the ground as a swastika.⁷⁷ The one in the East performed the peaceful medicinal accomplishment (*smān sgrub*) of meditation on deities. The one in the North accomplished the medicine of life without dying (*ma dur tshe smān sgrub pa*).⁷⁸ The one in the West accomplished the medicine of the empowerment of Dawa Gyeltsen (Zla ba rgyal mtshan). The one in the South accomplished the life empowerment (*tshe'i dbang*) of activities illuminating the meaning of eternity (*gyung drung don gsal phrin las*). The one in the southeast accomplished the spontaneous accomplishment of the earth medicine of [the deity] Mupung Seldang (Mu spungs gsal dangs [dwangs]). The one in the northeast accomplished the lifting action of the lifting hollowness of the wind of Zarang Mébar (Za rang me 'bar). The one in the northwest accomplished the ripening of the medicinal heat (*smān drod smin pa*) of Mutsa Gyemé (dMu tsha gyer med). The one in the southwest accomplished the water medicine of Mugyel Tsukpü (dMu rgyal rtsug phud). Their purpose was the accomplishment of space (*dbyings sgrub*). [The action of] increasing (*rgyas pa*) was explained in the *Key*. [The master] also bestowed the medicinal yeast (*smān phabs*). [I] also attained the medicinal empowerment (*smān dbang*). Thus is the sixth false word of a beggar.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Probably refers to the pattern of their distribution in the four cardinal and the four intermediate points, by which they form the shape of a swastika.

⁷⁸ Literally "not burying" (*ma dur*).

⁷⁹ Due to likely misspellings in the original, the translation remains tentative. Gzhod-ston Bsod-nams-grags-pa 1972: ff. 318–20, gZhod ston bSod nams grags pa 1981: 171–73, gZhod ston bSod nams grags pa 1998: ff. 310–24, are exactly the same as the first edition. The transliteration is based on the first edition, supplemented by corrections according to the second marked

by a small cross.

(318/171) *de nas sgog lung gi brang la yod tsam na// nang cig bseb t(gseb) du phyin tsa na// snang ba phyed yengs nas 'dug/ de dus sngon gyi bla ma de// ras kyi na bza' kun ka 'dug/ yang yongs zla la 'deng dang gsung// brag phug kha shar du lta pa nang phyed ba cig 'dug/ dkyil na dkyil (319) 'khor cig 'dug/ bum pa dgu spram t(skram) nas 'dug/ dkyil gyi bum pa'i mtha' bum pa rgyad (brgyad) kyi bzungs t(bzung) thag sbrel nas 'dug/ dkyil 'khor phyogs bzhi zur bzhi na/ mi brgyad rtsog ge bzhuks nas/ zungs thag*

In this vision, Matön Shéráp Senggé met a master and interacted with him in a dialogue. The master revealed the *mendrup* mandala to him, all the medicinal vessels on top of it, and their layout together with the spell cord. He gave advice on how to compose the ritual's complex medicinal mixture. As in the *mendrup* text itself, the various ingredients are referred to as root and branch, major and minor, ingredients. The structure of the *mendrup* medicine recipe is alluded to as well, as the ingredients in it are divided into the main fivefold cluster organised according to the five elements, and a minor second cluster of an eightfold pattern reflecting the eight classes of consciousness (*rnam shes brgyad*).⁸⁰ Importantly, the master also granted the medicinal yeast (*sman phabs*) and the medicinal empowerment (*sman dbang*) crucial for the success of the ritual. Shéráp Senggé received complex instructions upon his multiple questions. He was also rewarded by seeing the firm arrangement of the mandala based on the elements along with their respective properties and medicines in each cardinal point.⁸¹ This organisation is typical for Bon: the element of earth and the medicine of earth in the

'phyan t('thin) na 'grangs t(bgrangs) nas 'dug/
spyi bo na thor cog bcings t(bcng) nas 'dug/
bdong t(gdong) pa 'phyan na bcug nas 'dug/
dkyil 'khor zur bzhi na/ bya rgod rgyal mtshan
(172) bzhi la/ skye (ske) na dar dkar ser dmar
sngo bzhi btags nas 'dug/ dkyil na bse'i ga 'u
t(ga'u) la dar t(der) zab kyis bril nas 'dug/
mchod rdzas mang bar bshams nas 'dug/ nub
phyogs na khri che ba cig 'dug/ de'i kha na bla
ma de brda t(gda')// chang yang mang bar brda
t(gda')// bla ma de'i zhal nas/ gnas 'di rin chen
g.yu sdings kyi t(sding gi) 'tshal t(tshal)/ brag
'di bse brag rin chen spungs pa yin// brag phug
nyi zla kha sbyor yin// 'di na bdud rtsi sman du
bsgrub// skye shi med pa'i don sgrub yin gsung//
bdag gis zhus pa/ gnas ji ltar sgrub pa'i don
lags/ bdud rtsi sman du sgrub pa ni/ rtas ba
yan lag gang lags/ sgrub pa'i spyi gang la bd-
ags t(bdag)// sgrub bzhung lag khrigs gang la
sgrub// de'i rgyu mtshan ci la sgrub// bya ba'i lag
len gang ltar lags// sman gyi bye brag du t(tu)
yis srung// sman dbang dngos grub ci ltar lags//
sdu (bsdu) thabs rnam gsum gang la sdu// de la
yang gsungs pa/ gnas 'di lhun grub g.yu sdings
t(sding) 'tshal (tshal)// skye shi med pa'i bdud
rtsi sgrub// bdud rtsi sman du bsgrub pa la/ rtas
ba lnga la yan lag rgyad// nying (nyid) lag stod
du sog pa yin// spyi ni skye shi med par sgrub//
'og sgo la lag len bya thabs (320) sman dbang
dngos grub sdu thabs kun gsungs te/ sman gyi

lde mig na bsal t(gsal)/ mi brgyad po 'di gang
lags/ khyed la las 'khan t(mkhan) mi (173) t(mi)
bdog gam/ ga'u 'cha' na ji ltar 'cha'// sman gyi
btul thabs ji ltar btul gsungs pas/ mi brgyad po
'di g.yung drung sa non rigs 'dzin t(rig 'dzin)
brgyad bya ba yin/ shar na 'dug pa 'di lha sgom
zhi ba'i sman sgrub bya ba yin// byang na 'dug
pa 'di ma dur tshe sman sgrub pa yin/ nub na
'dug pa 'di zla ba rgyal mtshan dbang gi sman
sgrub pa yin/ lho na 'dug pa 'di g.yung drung
don gsar phrin las tshe'i dbang sgrub pa yin/
lho shar na 'dug pa 'di/ mu spungs gsar dangs
t(dwangs) sa sman sgrub lhun grub tu sgrub
pa yin/ byang shar 'dug pa 'di/ za rang me 'bar
rlung 'deg pa'i sbubs 'deg bya ba byed pa las
su sgrub pa yin// byang nub na 'dug pa 'di/ dmu
tsha gyér med sman drod smin par grub pa yin/
lho nub na 'dug pa 'di/ dmu rgyal rtsug phud
chu sman du sgrub pa yin// 'di rnam kyi don la
dbyings sgrub pa yin// rgyas pa lde mig na gsar/
sman phabs yang gnam/ sman dbang yang thob/
sprang po'i rdzun tshig drug pa pa t(pa) yin//

⁸⁰ MS Kathmandu, Tritten Norbutse mon-
astery (containing 'Od zer 'khyil ba bdud
rtsi sman gyi gzhung lags s+ho); dKar ru
Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma
1998a: v. 168, text 1, 1998b: v. 230, text 22.

⁸¹ On the role of elements in the Tibetan
medical tradition, see, for example, Gerke
2014; Hofer 2014.

East, wind in the North, fire in the West, and water for the East. In this text, the elements have slightly moved to cover the intermediate directions as well. The complementing fifth element, space, is placed into the middle of the mandala.⁸² The cardinal points are personified by eight divinities referred to as *vidyādhara*s, “holders of magical power”,⁸³ each of whom is responsible for accomplishing a given ritual action and medicine of the direction.⁸⁴ The story closes declaring the event to be a “false word of a beggar,” by which master Shéráp Senggé is depicted as adhering to the social code of modesty, actually conveying his greatness.

The comprehensiveness of this account suggests that its author was very familiar with the *mendrup* rite. The Zhötön Sönam Drakpa’s text, as yet undated, accords in the key features, ritual arrangement and paraphernalia of the *mendrup* practice rendered in *The Main Text of the Light-Swirled Nectar Medicine* (*’Od zer ’khyil pa bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung bzhugs lags s+ho*) and still performed today.

The *mendrup* ritual is also mentioned in later historical works which are easier to date with certainty.

MENDRUP IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

There are several relevant passages in *The Treasury of Wish-fulfilling Jewels Yielding all Desired on the General Origin of the Buddha’s Teachings* (*Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi ’byung khung yid bzhin nor bu ’dod pa ’jo ba’i gter mdzod*) by Kündröl Drakpa (Kun grol grags pa, b. 1700), which is likely to have been written in 1766.⁸⁵ This text presents the gradual development of the world, the Bonpo doctrine and its spread. The chronicle mentions several *mendrup* treasure discoveries by different adepts, likely referring to the *mendrup* rituals specific to individual Bonpo lineages.⁸⁶ Thus, the text seems to capture a rare piece of information on the diversification of the practice within Bon.

It contains a section on treasure traditions which consists of short passages listing the name of each discoverer and the texts and teaching cycles which the individual revealed. A certain Dranga Rinchen Dampa (Dra nga Rin chen dam

82 The same is found in the main *mendrup* text *’Od zer ’khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung lags s+ho*, transmitted in MS Kathmandu, Tritten Norbutse monastery (containing *’Od zer ’khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung lags s+ho*); dKar ru Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa’i nyi ma 1998a: v. 168, text 1, 1998b: v. 230, text 22, more in Sehnalova 2013 and Sehnalova *In press*.

83 Snellgrove 1987: 135.

84 In the Nyingma *mendrup* analysed by Cantwell 2015 and Cantwell 2017 (in this volume), the *vidyādhara*s play a similar role.

85 Kun-grol-grags-pa 1974: ff. 197–552. The dates are also based on this publication and the work’s colophon.

86 Kun-grol-grags-pa 1974: ff. 325, 326–7, 338, 356 and 400–401. On the lineages see Karmay 1998, 2007 and rMe’u tsha bstan ’dzin rnam rgyal 2014.

pa) from Samyé (bSam yas) is attributed with introducing the practice of “*amaraya* nectar medicine” (*a ma ra ya bdud rtsi sman*).⁸⁷ The term *amaraya* is usually understood to refer to the *mendrup* ritual specific to the Bonpo Shen lineage.⁸⁸ The individual ritual lineages of Bon had the tendency to develop their own *mendrup* practices, just as the main Dru lineage cultivated the so called “light-swirled *mendrup*” coined for the *mendrup* of the deity Trowo Tsochok Khagying. The source thus witnesses the diversity of *mendrup* within Bon.

In this chronicle, Matön Söldzin, already known to us as Matön Sindzin (the grandfather of Matön Shérap Senggé) and the discoverer of the “light-swirled *mendrup*,” is recorded as the revealer of a treasure containing scriptures of the accomplishment of peaceful and wrathful deities (*zhi sgrub khro sgrub*).⁸⁹ These are likely to involve *mendrup* as well, although no *mendrup* practices are explicitly attributed to him in this document.

Also, someone called Butso Sipé Gyelpo (Bu mtsho srid pa'i rgyal po) is recorded to have found the “nine lineages of nectar medicine” (*bdud rtsi sman gyi rgyud dgu*).⁹⁰ It is possible that various traditions of *mendrup* are being referred to by this phrase, but it could (perhaps more likely) refer to the organisation within the *mendrup* ritual itself, namely the nine distinct medicinal containers to be placed on the mandala. The writer mentions the nine vessels and also describes the pattern of the *mendrup* based on the division of space into the centre and eight cardinal points – this is a very common practice in Tibetan (and tantric) ritual, as has been described for *mendrup* above.

MENDRUP IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The next known textual accounts of *mendrup* are found in early twentieth-century writing. The same story is detailed in two important historical works of this period. The first is the *Ketaka* chronicle by Lungtok Gyatso (Lung rtogs rgya mtsho), a distinguished master of the Yungdrung Ling monastery. The work has been dated to 1917, and holds the elaborate title *The Necklace of Ketaka Jewels Distinguishing the Knowledge on the Origin of the Teachings* (*bsTan 'byung rig pa'i shan 'byed nor bu ke ta ka'i do shal zhas bya ba bzhugs*).⁹¹ The second is the well-known *Treasury of Good Sayings*, authored by Shardza Trashi Gyeltsen (Shar rdza

87 Kun-grol-grags-pa 1974: f. 320.

88 The word *amaraya* is explained by contemporary Bonpo monastics as probably deriving from the Sanskrit *amṛta*, and thus as synonymous to *bdud rtsi*, “nectar.”

89 Kun-grol-grags-pa 1974: f. 322.

90 Kun-grol-grags-pa 1974: f. 325 and the same story is found in Karmay 1972: 170.

91 mKhas grub Lung rtogs rgya mtsho

2010: 449–557 and in Martin 1997: 15. The word *ketaka* is likely of Indian origin and in Tibetan denotes “a gem which has the property of purifying water,” or alternatively “a great mountain situated north of the great forest plain.” See Das 1902; Zhang 1993. In Sanskrit, *ketaka* or *ketakī* refers to the Pandanus tree. See Charles University 1998–2009, under *Pandanus fascicularis* Lam..

bKra shis rgyal mtshan, 1859–1933), one of the main Bonpo scholars of modern times,⁹² and translated into English by Samten Karmay. According to Karmay, Gyeltsen's compilation was begun in 1922. The full name of the work reads *The Precious Treasury of Good Sayings, Pleasant Rain for the Wise* (*Legs bshad rin po che'i mdzod dpyod ldan dga' ba'i char*).⁹³ As both scripts come from approximately the same time, it is unclear if one copied the other or if both used a third (so far unknown) source.

The *Ketaka* chronicle reads:

From the [Pa, sPa] lineage, Patön Pelchok [(sPa ston dpal mchog, b. 1014)]⁹⁴ appeared at the same time as Shenchen Luga (i.e., they were contemporaries). After Patön Pelchok heard that Shenchen Luga had discovered a treasure, he went to Driksam ('Brig mtshams) to see him. When he arrived and met him, the master [Shenchen Luga] was of poor health. Having proclaimed him [Patön Pelchok] a master of tantric teachings destined by his karma, he [Shenchen Luga] bestowed the empowerment of Trowo [Tsochok Khagying] on him. He instructed him in detail on how to obtain the blessed objects, the texts with their treatises and supplements from Dzibön Wanggyel ('Dzi bon dbang rgyal, aka 'Dzi ston, Dzitön).⁹⁵

In the *Treasury*, the same account is in Karmay's translation worded as follows:

How the Tantric Teachings were commissioned. 'Dzi-bon 'Phanrgyal entreated the Teacher [Shenchen Luga]⁹⁶ to impart the *Khro-bo dbang-chen*⁹⁷ to him. The Teacher gave even the (master) copy to him. He also gave him the cup containing the lees of the elixirs (*bdud rtsi ga'u dang ru ma*).⁹⁸ He gave him the name of dBang-gi rGyal-mtshan. Some have said that since sPa-ston dPal-mchog (Patön Pelchok)⁹⁹ did not meet gShen-sgur [i.e., Shenchen Luga],¹⁰⁰ he got in touch

92 See Achard 2008.

93 Karmay's translation in Karmay 1972.

94 Dating in Karmay 2007: 60.

95 *de'i gdung las spa ston dpal mchog byon pa dang gshen chen klu dga' byon pa dus mnyam ste/ spa ston nyid gshen chen gyis gter thon pa thos nas 'brig mtshams su mjal du byon skabs/ bla ma sku bsnungs bzhes pa dang thug/ las can gsang sngags kyi bdag po zhig 'dug gi gsungs nas khro bo'i dbang bskur/ byin rlabs kyi rdzas rnams dang/ dpe dang cha lag bkrol byang rnams zhib par 'dzi bon dbang rgyal la mmos shig gsung nas lung bstan/ mKhas grub Lung rtogs rgya*

mtsho 2010: 520 and cf. Martin 2001: 67–9.

96 The bracketed insertion is mine.

97 The word *Khro-bo dbang-chen* (Khro bo dbang chen), Trowo Wangchen, can denote both, an epithet of the deity Trowo Tsochok Khagying (meaning 'The Great Wrathful Powerful One') and refer to the linked practices, or the great empowerment (*dbang chen*) of Trowo Tsochok Khagying.

98 My insertion.

99 My insertion.

100 My insertion.

with 'Dzi-bon and Me-nyag. But (in fact) when gShen-sgur was ill he bestowed the consecration of the *Khro-bo dbang-chen* to him. He proclaimed him a worthy master of Tantric teachings and instructed him in detail to receive the sacred objects, the copy of the text and its supplementary texts; and the treatises on them from 'Dzi-bon.¹⁰¹

The section immediately following the above text accords almost word-for-word in both the *Ketaka* and the *Treasury*.¹⁰² Hence, I cite Karmay's translation of the *Treasury* to continue the above-cited extracts of both works:

Then, dPal-mchog (Patön Pelchok)¹⁰³ met 'Dzi-bon and requested the texts, the medical specimen of the 'pledge' (*phud gta' sman phab*)¹⁰⁴ which had been used (by the teachers) from 'Chi-med gTsug-phud up to the "Four scholars." 'Dzi-bon also gave dPal-mchog the "Dance-spear" and the cup (*gar mdung dang bsve'i ga'u*) and appointed him to be in charge of the Tantric Teachings. Then he [sPa ston dpal mchog / Patön Pelchok]¹⁰⁵ practised the *Khro-bo dbang-chen* in the solitude of Yang-dban¹⁰⁶ and beheld the countenance of Srid-rgyal¹⁰⁷ according (to the representation of) the basic liturgy. Once he saw her face with lightning issuing from her eyes, whirlwinds from her nose, roaring thunder from her ears, her hair being like masses of clouds. (212b) She was adorned with ornaments of cemetery-bones; her eyes were upturned, her nose was wrinkled up and her mouth was wide open. As she tore her chest with her hands he saw distinctly without any obstruction the body of gTso-mchog (Trowo Tsochok Khagying)¹⁰⁸ in the centre of the wheel of her heart which is one of the six wheels of the three vital channels in her body. While he performed the medicinal rite of the *Phur-bu dgu* drops of nectar descended (into his mystic circle) (*phur bu dgu'i sman sgrub la bdud rtsi'i zil thigs babs*).¹⁰⁹

I propose to amend the translation of the last sentence to: "The drops of nectar then descended into the medicinal accomplishment of the nine vessels".¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ Karmay 1972: 135, transliteration of the Tibetan original.

¹⁰² Apart from very few syllable and letter alternations, the *Treasury* omits three syllable clusters within its verses that appear in the *Ketaka*, whereas the *Ketaka* skips a few syllables of the *Treasury*.

¹⁰³ My insertion.

¹⁰⁴ Insertions of the Tibetan original are mine.

¹⁰⁵ My insertion.

¹⁰⁶ More likely: "in the Wensaka (dBen sa kha) monastery" (*de nas yang dben dgon par*). Karmay 1972: 297 and mKhas grub Lung rtogs rgya mtsho 2010: 520.

¹⁰⁷ See note 66.

¹⁰⁸ My insertion.

¹⁰⁹ My insertion. Karmay 1972: 135–136, Tibetan original 297.

¹¹⁰ Based on the spelling in mKhas grub Lung rtogs rgya mtsho 2010: 520: *bum dgu'i sman sgrub la bdud rtsi'i zil thigs babs*.

The passages record the transmission of the *mendrup* of Trowo Tsochok Khagying within the Pa lineage directly from its revealer Shenchén Luga.¹¹¹ Besides the scriptures, special attention is paid to describing the essential material objects of the ritual. Master Patön Pelchok procured the crucial “yeast,” *papta*, here translated as “medical specimen of the ‘pledge,’ ” along with its cup container, and a “spear.” Such a ritual spear with ribbons in five colours is still used in circumambulating the *mendrup* medicine during the ritual today. In both versions, Patön Pelchok was also given the task to continue the *mendrup* practice by an empowerment from Shenchén Luga himself. Later in Wensaka, he had a vision of Trowo Tsochok Khagying, in which the medicinal nectar of *mendrup* descended into its nine vessels. This has fully authorised Patön Pelchok to become the bearer and transmitter of the *mendrup* of Trowo Tsochok Khagying.

After the hagiographic genealogies of the Pa lineage, the *Ketaka* continues with the history of the Meu (rMe'u) family. Their members are recorded to have travelled around Central Tibet in the search of teachings, including Trowo Tsochok Khagying's *mendrup*:

When Denpakpa Zigompa (Dan 'phags pa zi sgom pa) requested the great empowerment of Trowo [Tsochok Khagying] (*khro bo dbang chen*),¹¹² for a few moments he saw the master (not identified) having the complete appearance, ornaments and attributes of Trowo Tsochok Khagying. When he came with his request to the master to the cave of Kyikharngo (sKyid mkhar sngo), he crossed the Yéru (g.Yas ru) river¹¹³ without any boat. When he performed the accomplishment of the nectar medicine (*bdud rtsi sman sgrub*) in Sébao (Se ba 'o), one [of the performers] was seated on a throne. One led the recitation of the main *mendrup* mantra (*sman 'dzab*), while performing a circumambulation [around the medicinal mandala]. One went to a tavern, offered a libation, and seen by all, became inspired, realising that he was a *trülku* (*sprul sku*, a reincarnated master).¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ The same story is also found in Karmay 1972: 10, 2007: 60–61, 70; Martin 2001: 68–70.

¹¹² See note 97.

¹¹³ This might refer to the famous Bonpo meditation caves of mKhar sna (*skyid* as an attribute would mean “of happiness”) close to Menri, Yungdrung Ling and former Wensaka monasteries, as well as the Yéru river.

¹¹⁴ *dan 'phag ba zi sgom pas khro bo'i dbang chen zhiḡ zhus skabs bla ma'i sku gtso mchog mkha' 'gying rgyan dang cha lugs rdzogs pa zhiḡ*

skad cig gsum gyi yun du mthong/ skyid mkhar sngo phug tu bla ma zhu yi mdun du phebs dus/ g.yas ru gtsang po'i kha nas gru gzings gang la'ang ma brten nas chu yi pha kir phebs/ se ba 'o ru bdud rtsi sman sgrub mdzad dus sku cig bzhugs khrir bzhugs/ gcig gis sman 'dzab kyi sna drangs nas bskor ba mdzad/ gcig chang tshang du phebs nas skyems gsol ba kun gyis mthong bas mos pa tshud cing sprul sku yin par shes so/ mKhas grub Lung rtogs rgya mtsho 2010: 523.

As can be seen, the *Ketaka* chronicle recorded the practice of the *mendrup* ritual itself and the related miracles happening. The author Lungtok Gyatso paid attention to various aspects of the act. He mentioned the required unceasing recitation of the main *mendrup* mantra and texts during the performance. He also noted some of the accompanying offerings (libation) and the elevated throne of the principal master during the ritual, as is done today. The auspicious rite of *mendrup* is probably concluded by a fellow monk realising himself to be a re-incarnated master. Again, the writer must have been well-acquainted with the practice, and may possibly have taken part in it himself.

In 1929, *mendrup* found another expression in a few lines of the chronological work *The Lineage Succession* (by full title: *The Immaculate Crystal Rosary of the Lineage Succession of the Collected Precious Kangyur, the Teachings of the Teacher of the Three Bodies, Transmissions*),¹¹⁵ written by Khüpfungpa Ratön Ngakwang Kelzang Tenpé Gyeltsen (Khud spungs pa dBra ston Ngag dbang skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan). Once again, *mendrup* is described as among important practices at Bonpo monasteries. Ten types of *mendrup* are suggested, and the text describes auspicious signs occurring during the performances, such as rainbows appearing in the sky and a diffusing fragrant smell.¹¹⁶

Among the scriptures of medical knowledge cited in this chronicle, the recovery of a treasure of nine precious vessels (*rin chen bum pa gdu*) by Butso Sipé Gyelpo is recorded, as in the work from the eighteenth century discussed above. These then gave origin to the nine lineages of the nectar medicine (*bdud rtsi sman gyi rgyud dgu*),¹¹⁷ i.e., *mendrup*. Again, the quote sounds like it is alluding to diverse *mendrup* rituals, but more plausibly, it is describing one ritual and its nine prescribed containers of nectar medicine.

By the early twentieth century, *mendrup* is clearly presented as an integral component of Bonpo teachings.

4. CONCLUSIONS

IT SEEMS PROBABLE that the practice of the Bonpo *mendrup* ritual can be traced back to the twelfth, or at least the thirteenth century in Central Tibet. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were also a crucial time for the establishment

¹¹⁵ Khud spungs pa dBra ston Ngag dbang skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan 2017. I am indebted to Dan Martin for kindly sharing his introduction and laborious transcription of the work.

¹¹⁶ Khud spungs pa dBra ston Ngag

dbang skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan 2017: ff. 25, 27).

¹¹⁷ Khud spungs pa dBra ston Ngag dbang skal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan 2017: f. 98).

of the Tibetan medical *Sowa rigpa* tradition.¹¹⁸ The complex *mendrup* ritual exemplifies the rich and diverse intellectual milieu in Central Tibet of that time, in which the spheres of tantra, medicine, alchemy, Buddhist philosophy and soteriology, as well as Tibetan autochthonous notions, merged and mixed to produce new complex structures. The *mendrup* ritual combines the knowledge and practices of all these elements and its dating accords with Buddhist *mendrup* rites, the Nyingma treasure and Yutok Nyintik (g.Yu thog rnying thig) traditions.

Reference to the *mendrup* ritual in scattered textual sources indicates that *mendrup* has mainly been transmitted by Bonpo teacher-student lineages in Central Tibet, where it has been also preserved until modern times. The sources attest a certain existing variety of the *mendrup* ritual in general, likely reflecting the multiple existing lineages of Bon. The texts suggest that over the centuries, specific lineages developed their own traditions *mendrup*, but also that even the transmission of the specific “light-swirled *mendrup*” (*sman sgrub 'od zer 'khyil ba*) dedicated to the deity Trowo Tsochok Khagying was not confined to the single Dru family line which preserves the practices today. Textual evidence suggests that this practice was transferred by and to other lineages as well, including the Shen, the Pa and the Meu.

In contrast with the Tibetan Buddhist school of Nyingma, Bonpos do not seem to have needed to create an elaborate historiography which precisely traces the evolution of certain ritual practices. Different versions of Trowo Tsochok Khagying's *mendrup*'s discovery and transmission can be traced in the texts. Shenchen Luga of the Shen family and Matön Shéráp Senggé of the Ma repeatedly figure as the ritual's revealers and tradents. Similarly, Matön Sindzin is credited with revealing a certain part of the cycle to which *mendrup* belongs. Interestingly, Rindzin Chenpo Gyermi Nyiö, who is ascribed the same role by present Bonpos, does not explicitly appear in it in the studied sources. A certain development of the recording of the practice can be observed, ranging from a short mention in the thirteenth century to the most extensive justification of the practice's lineage in the twentieth century. We have also seen that even in such an important ritual as the extended *mendrup*, contemporary Bonpos tend to rely only on one commentary from the fourteenth century. Oral knowledge and personal transmission are obviously important for the imparting of ritual knowledge. However, the textual tradition also presents remarkable details of *mendrup* practice and performance, proving the authors' close comprehension of and likely own experience with the ritual.

If we accept the assumption that the sources can build up one coherent narrative, despite the intricacies of their dating, a tentative chronological reconstruction of the development and transmission of the ritual is possible: Shenchen Luga

¹¹⁸ See Emmerick 1977; Fenner 1996; Erhard 2007.

(996–1035) found the ritual's text and paraphernalia, which appears as a clear statement already in one of the earliest documents. However, we do not learn any details. As the twentieth century's chronicles add, Shenchen Luga passed all his gains directly to Dzibön Wanggyel, who in turn had to give everything to Patön Pelchok (b. 1014), who was actually empowered by Shenchen Luga as the holder of the practice. Patön Pelchok performed it, receiving a vision of Trowo Tsochok Khagying. A little later, Druchen Namkha Yungdrung (994/999–1054) conducted the very first *mendrup* performance. For that he would have had to receive the ritual's transmission and would have also been entitled to hand it down again. He bestowed secret teachings to a student group, including Matön Shéráp Senggé (twelfth century). Of the students, a certain Pönsé was entrusted the *mendrup* practice. Here, the chronology assumed by the sources might not accord with our contemporary dating, according to which Druchen and Shéráp Senggé could not have met. Master Druchen was active in the area of the future Yéru Wensaka monastery (founded 1072), where *mendrup* is said to have then flourished.

Nevertheless, another lineage of *mendrup* transmission can be followed in the sources. Matön Sindzin (b. 1092) was recorded in the eighteenth century as a revealer of scriptures of the peaceful and wrathful deities, among which *mendrup* might have been included. His grandson Matön Shéráp Senggé then had a vision through which he was assigned the practice by an unnamed master. His so far undated account might have served as a legitimisation of the given form of the ritual's realisation. Its detailed authoritative description could have coined *mendrup* performance and its arrangements. The very early on mentioned Pönsé Dzamling (b. 1259/1271), a direct descendant of Shenchen Luga after several generations, would have come after as the *mendrup* holder and practitioner.

Nyö Tsültrim Gyeltsen's fourteenth-century commentary further codified and institutionalised the practice into an elaborate, demanding and very complex monastic performance; his instructions are still observed at the present. Similarly, the master Nyammé Shéráp Gyeltsen (1356–1415) likely engaged in the practice in his newly-established Menri monastery. The striking feature of the texts observed is the overall exclusion of Rindzin Chenpo Gyermi Nyiö (eleventh to twelfth century), one of the presumed discoverers of *mendrup* by current Bonpos. In any case, *mendrup* ritual clearly expresses the identity and continuity of Bonpo lineages, monastic seats and power structures concerned.

It is likely that more written documents mentioning the Bonpo *mendrup* will be discovered as research in the field of Tibetan studies progresses. Therefore, the dating presented should be understood as tentative, based on the sources currently available. The available evidence demonstrates that *mendrup* has been an important healing ritual practice for the Bonpo tradition for the last seven or eight hundred years.

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The photograph in Figure 6 was taken by Anja Benesch and Olga Ryznar in Triten Norbutse on 1st January 2013. All other photographs belong to the author and were taken in Triten Norbutse during the mendrup ceremony in December 2012, apart from the Figure 1, which is from Central Tibet, December 2014.

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