

## THE VINAYA OF THE BON TRADITION

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*Abstract: Historically, the monastic life of the Bon tradition of Tibet has developed side by side with that of the Tibetan Buddhists. However, the monastic code of the Bonpos is not identical with the Buddhist one. It consists of 250 rules for monks (pho khrims) and 360 rules for nuns (mo khrims) as well as shorter sets of rules for the temporary ordination of lay people, and for novices. It uses its own terminology and has its own legendary and historical transmission lineages. This article gives a brief preliminary survey of the Bon Vinaya and its literature as an important component of the Vinaya traditions of Asia.*

Within Tibetan Studies, Bon Studies is still a relatively young field, and the names of three pioneers need to be mentioned in particular in the context of its emergence as a field of academic study:<sup>1</sup> David Snellgrove, Samten Karmay, and the recipient of this volume, Per Kværne. In his “Introduction” to the volume *The Bon Religion of Tibet*, he addressed the ambiguities surrounding the very name “Bon”, distinguishing between three major ways the word is used in both academic and popular literature: (a) for the “pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet which was gradually suppressed by Buddhism in the eighth and ninth centuries”; (b) for the “vast and amorphous body of popular beliefs, including divination, the cult of local deities and conceptions of the soul” that are shared by the Tibetan Buddhists and Bonpos and should therefore rather be subsumed under Tibet’s “nameless religion”, a term coined by Rolf A. Stein; and finally (c) “a religion that appeared in Tibet in the tenth and eleventh centuries, at the same time that Buddhism, introduced once again from India after a period of decline in Tibet, became dominant” (Kværne 1995: 9–10; I have slightly modified the order).

In this small contribution, I shall follow Per Kværne’s lead in focusing on Bon in the third of the three meanings outlined above: the

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<sup>1</sup> A useful survey of Western scholarship is given in Kværne 2000. See also the bibliography in Martin 2001 and the online bibliography at <https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/wiki/bibliographies/Bon%20Bibliography.html>.

systematised form that developed alongside Buddhism around the time of the religious revival of the tenth and eleventh centuries. I shall focus on an aspect that has so far largely been neglected, partly due to the tacit assumption that there is nothing new to discover: the monastic tradition of the Bonpos and the literature related to their monastic code (*'dul ba*). Bon and Buddhist monasticism look so similar on the surface that their differences and distinctive features are easily overlooked. However, a closer examination shows that the *'dul ba* of the Bon tradition is in fact not a mere “copy” of the Buddhist Vinaya, but a fascinating original system with a vast array of literature. The present article is a first and very preliminary step in this direction, presented as a token of gratitude and appreciation to the recipient of this volume.

The systematised form of Bon is highly integrative and comprehensive, combining indigenous methods of divination, healing, and communication with the spirit world<sup>2</sup> together with elements that are very similar to their Buddhists counterparts, such as philosophy, meditation techniques, and a soteriology aiming at liberation from cyclic existence. It has been articulated in the form of the “Nine Ways (or Vehicles) of Bon”, or the (possibly more archaic) set of the “Four Gates and the Treasury as the Fifth” (*Sgo bzhi mdzod lnga*).<sup>3</sup> Within the “Nine Ways”, monasticism is part of the “paths/vehicles of the result”, which include elements that Bon shares with the Buddhist tradition, such as monastic life, philosophy, and meditation practices.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Bon of the cause:

1. *phywa gshen theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the *gshen* of prediction”
2. *snang gshen theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the *gshen* of the phenomenal world”
3. *'phrul gshen theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the *gshen* of magic transformation”
4. *srid gshen theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the *gshen* of existence”

<sup>2</sup> On these techniques see Namkhai Norbu 1995.

<sup>3</sup> This inclusive, comprehensive nature of Bon as we know it today has led David Snellgrove to remark that: “[r]egarded in this way, Bon might indeed claim to be the true religion of Tibet” (Snellgrove 1967: 13). The Bon religion that we know developed side by side with Tibetan Buddhism, and both traditions are closely intertwined and have borrowed from each other. The Fifth Dalai Lama recognised Bon as one of the official religious traditions of Tibet (Karmay 2003: 4), a stance that has been revived by the current 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.

<sup>4</sup> See Snellgrove 1967. This is based on the *lho gter* (southern treasure) tradition; the *byang gter* and *dbus gter* have a different nomenclature; see for example Rossi 2002.

## B. Bon of the result:

5. *dge bsnyen theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the lay adherents”
6. *drang srong theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the *ryis* (viz. the monks)”
7. *a dkar theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the white A (pure sound)”
8. *ye gshen theg pa* “The path/vehicle of the primeval *gshen*”

## Resulting in:

9. *bla med theg pa* “The unsurpassed path”, corresponding to *rdzogs chen*

The systematised form of Bon has thus integrated indigenous elements and elements shared with Buddhism into a whole, but we are still trying to trace the steps of its evolution and are largely in the dark about its early period. In spite of the similarities between the doctrines and practices of Tibetan Buddhism and “Bon of the result”, the historical narratives of the two traditions are radically different, and we cannot help noticing a certain competitive spirit in their accounts. While Tibetan Buddhist historiographers trace their tradition back to India, in a lineage that goes back to Buddha Śākyamuni, the Bonpos trace their religion back to their Buddha, Ston pa Gshen rab mi bo, who lived long before Buddha Śākyamuni in ’Ol mo lung ring in Stag gzig, a region west of Tibet.<sup>5</sup> From there, Bon came to many countries, including Tibet, China and India; in India, the doctrines of Bon were transmitted as the teachings of Buddha Śākyamuni;<sup>6</sup> Buddhism is therefore regarded as a derivative form of Bon.

A similar pattern applies to the history of the Vinaya within Tibet: the Tibetan Buddhists place emphasis on the fact that they have an original Indian Vinaya lineage, whereas according to Bon historiography, the Buddhists received their ordination lineage from the Bonpos. Before we can delve into the *’dul ba* itself, we therefore need to have a brief look at the historical narratives of its origin, both Buddhist and Bonpo.

## THE VINAYA IN TIBET

There is no indication that Tibet had any form of monasticism before the arrival of Buddhism. The first Buddhist monastery, Bsam yas, was founded in the late eighth century with royal support, and the Indian

<sup>5</sup> Martin 2007: 99–123.

<sup>6</sup> Kvaerne 2007: 90.

scholar Śāntarakṣita became its first abbot. The only monastic code that was ever translated into Tibetan was the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, and since then all Tibetan Buddhists adhere to this tradition.<sup>7</sup> After the collapse of the Tibetan empire and the decline of Buddhism during the second half of the ninth century, the ordination lineage was reintroduced from eastern Tibet when a group of young men from Dbus and Gtsang travelled to Mdo khams, received monastic ordination from a certain Dgongs pa rab gsal in the presence of the required quorum of five monks, and returned to Central Tibet to re-establish monasticism there. We need to return to this story shortly. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries monasticism began to flourish on a larger scale and the major Buddhist lineages emerged, often related to specific monastic seats. What is often overlooked is that it is exactly this period in which Bonpo monasticism evolved as well, so that it is advisable for any study of monasticism to look at both traditions side by side.

The story of Bon monasticism begins with a period that is hard to verify in historical terms since it begins long before the period from which we have written testimonies. According to the biographies of Ston pa Gshen rab mi bo, he spent the first part of his life as a layman, and his sons were among his earliest disciples. Although as an enlightened being he did not need the monastic path for his own sake, he became a renouncer to demonstrate how to live as a monk for the benefit of human beings. His teachings were translated into the western Himalayan language of Zhang zhung. After a longer transmission line in the kingdom of Zhang zhung, the Vinaya reached Tibet during the time of the early legendary kings, the so-called “seven heavenly thrones”; it spread in Western Tibet (Mnga’ ris) and in Central Tibet, and at some point it also reached the eastern parts of the plateau.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya dates to the late eighth to early ninth centuries. The *Vinayavastu* and *Bhikṣuṇīvibhaṅga* were translated by Dpal gyi lhun po with the Kashmiri scholars Sarvajñadeva and Dharmākara and the Indian scholar Vidyākara-prabha and revised by Ka ba dpal brtsegs and Vidyākara-prabha. The *Prātimokṣasūtras* of the monks and nuns and the *Bhikṣuvibhaṅga* were translated by Lcog ro Klu’i rgyal mtshan and Jinamitra. (For an overview, see for example Panglung 1981: XVIII.) The statement that all Tibetan Buddhists adhere to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya must be taken *cum grano salis* since it ignores the recent attempt to introduce the full *dge slong ma* ordination based on the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya.

<sup>8</sup> A detailed analysis of these early transmission lineages is given in Gurung 2011; see also the account by Shar rdza Bkra shis rgyal mtshan in Karmay 2005 [1972]: 35–39, 105–11.

As an interesting twist to the history of the Vinaya in Tibet, the Bonpos have their own version of the story about how the monastic ordination lineage survived in Tibet during the decline of monasticism in the ninth to tenth centuries. According to the Bon narrative, Buddhism had been extinguished in Central Tibet after the collapse of the Tibetan empire. However, Lha lung Dpal gyi rdo rje, the Buddhist monk who had assassinated Glang dar ma in the mid-ninth century, heard that there was a surviving Vinaya tradition in Amdo: that of the Bonpos. A group of young Buddhists travelled there, received ordination from a Bonpo monk called Dgongs pa rab gsal, and went back to Central Tibet where they founded their own Buddhist monasteries. This means that the *smad 'dul* (eastern Vinaya) lineage is shared by the Buddhists and the Bonpos, and not just that: according to the Bonpos, the Tibetan Buddhists received their monastic lineage from the Bonpos, not the other way round.

Leaving this rather hazy early period behind, we get onto firmer historical ground around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. This is a period when monasticism seems to have grown both in the Buddhist and the Bon tradition. In 1072, the Bon monastery of G.yas ru Dben sa kha near Shigatse was founded by a disciple of the famous Gshen chen Klu dga' (996–1035), and also another monastery, Snye mo Bzang ri, was founded in the same region.<sup>9</sup> It is also during this period that the first comprehensive commentary on the monastic code was written: the *'Dul ba kun las btus pa* by Me ston Shes rab 'od zer (1058–1132). Dben sa kha was destroyed by a flood in 1386. One of its monks had been away when the flood occurred, and when he returned and found his home monastery destroyed, he founded the monastery of Sman ri nearby. This monk is known as *mnyam med* (“the incomparable”) Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356–1415). He became a highly influential figure, and most Bonpo monasteries nowadays follow the monastic rules of his monastery, Sman ri.

#### BON MONASTICISM

The Vinaya (*'dul ba*) of the Bon tradition has several grades or stages of ordination. The first two are the *bsnyen gnas* and *dge bsnyen*.<sup>10</sup> These are open for lay people who wish to be ordained temporarily. They can

<sup>9</sup> See Cech 1988: 69–70 and Karmay 2003.

<sup>10</sup> The latter is the term used by Buddhists for their lay followers (*upāsaka*).

choose the period of time and can for example take the vows for just one day. They take the four “roots vows” (*rtsa ba’i sdom pa*) of not killing, not taking what has not been given, avoiding sexual misconduct and lying; the *dge bsnjen* chooses one additional vow, such as abstinence from alcohol (which makes the set of rules identical to the five *śikṣāpadas* of the Buddhist *upāsaka*).

The two higher sets of vows are reserved for monks. Before the ordination ceremony, the suitability of the candidate is tested. The candidate then takes the 25 vows of the *gtsang gtsug* (or *gtsang ma gtsug phud*) (as opposed to the nine vows of the Buddhist novice, the *śrāmaṇera*).<sup>11</sup> The full ordination comprises 250 vows for monks and 350 or 360 for nuns. Fully ordained monks and nuns are called *drang srong* and *drang srong ma*, a term that is used in Tibetan translations from the Sanskrit to render Sanskrit *ṛṣi*. The terms used for the different monastic ranks as well as the number of vows taken are therefore different from the Buddhist ones.

#### SOURCES FOR THE BON VINAYA

While the partly legendary, partly historical transmission lineages and the history of Bonpo monasteries has recently attracted a certain amount of scholarly attention, the Vinaya scriptures themselves still await a proper analysis. We can distinguish three main groups of texts that are related to the monastic code. They are:

- (a) Vinaya texts contained in the *Bka’*, sometimes called the “Kanjur” of the Bonpos, the canonical scriptures traced back to Ston pa Gshen rab mi bo.

<sup>11</sup> The 25 vows of the *gtsang gtsug* comprise the four roots vows: 1. To abstain from taking life, 2. to abstain from taking what is not given, 3. to abstain from false speech, 4. to abstain from unlawful sexual behaviour; six vows related to the avoidance of unwholesome behaviour: 5. avoidance of idle speech, 6. avoidance of bad language, 7. not causing division within the community, 8. avoiding bad thoughts about others, 9. avoiding evil intentions, 10. avoiding wrong views; four vows related to diet: 11. not to drink alcohol, 12. not to eat meat, 13. not to eat garlic, 14. not to take food after midday; six vows related to seats and worldly pleasures: 15. to avoid sitting on high seats, or 16. using colourful seat coverings, or 17. jewelled and decorated seats, 18. not to accept gold or silver, 19. not to use ornaments or perfumes, 20. not to participate in amusements and festivals; vows related to the possessions and outward appearance of the monk: 21. cutting hair and finger nails, 22. keeping clean and washing regularly, 23. using only the personal items of a monk, 24. wearing the monastic robes, 25. using the new monastic name.

(b) Commentaries related to the canonical scriptures. Some were included in the *Bka' brten* or the “Tenjur” of the Bon tradition, others were transmitted as separate works.

(c) *bca' yig* (“lists of rules”), monastic guidelines for the behaviour of the monks in a specific monastery. These texts are particularly relevant for regulating everyday monastic life. The *bca' yig* of Sman ri was adopted by other Bonpo monasteries. It has been published, translated, and analysed by Krystyna Cech (Cech 1988).<sup>12</sup>

On the following pages, I shall focus on (a) the canon and (b) selected commentaries, giving a brief overview of their contents.

(a) *The 'dul ba section in the Bonpo canon (Bka')*

Within the canon, the Vinaya texts are part of the Sūtra section.<sup>13</sup> It is currently unclear when the canon was assembled or how old the Vinaya section is. The Vinaya texts are known as the *'Dul ba rgyud drug* or “six Vinaya texts”. While the majority of texts within the *Bka'* (“Kanjur”) are regarded as *gter ma*, the Vinaya texts are regarded as *bka'* in the strict sense, i.e., the word of Ston pa Gshen rab mi bo and transmitted in an unbroken lineage.<sup>14</sup> This gives the Vinaya a special status. Another intriguing feature of the Vinaya texts are their titles in an otherwise unknown language: *ka pi ta lha'i skad*, the “divine language of Kapita” instead of the usual text titles in the language of Zhang zhung (on the significance of these languages, see Martin 2007: 115–17).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The original *bca' yig* of Sman ri was written by Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan himself; the one studied by Cech was based on this and written in 1810 by Sku mdun Bsod nams blo gros, the 22<sup>nd</sup> abbot of Sman ri. A large scale study of *bca' yig*-s in general is currently being conducted by Berthe Jansen (University of Leiden).

<sup>13</sup> The *Bka'* (“Kanjur”) is subdivided into the sections *Mdo* (Sūtra), *'Bum* (Prajñāpāramitā), *Rgyud* or *Sngags* (Tantra) and *Mdzod* or *Sems*. For its contents, see Martin, Kvaerne and Nagano 2003; for an overview of the different editions available, see Martin’s “Introduction” in Martin, Kvaerne and Nagano 2003, especially pp. 1–14.

<sup>14</sup> See Martin, Kvaerne and Nagano 2003: 190.

<sup>15</sup> Martin suggests that Kapita could refer to Kapisha in Afghanistan and we might be dealing with an Iranian language. The geographical region would match nicely with the claim of the Bonpos that their tradition comes from a region west of the Tibetan plateau. However, we are currently far from being able to analyse these titles or identify their language, in spite of the Tibetan equivalents given. An additional difficulty is created by the obvious inconsistencies in the orthography. The titles in the “language of Kapita” in the edition Chengdu 1999 are listed below, without any attempt at standardising the spelling: 1. *pa ti ka sa tsa dra mu ka ta hrang*, Tibetan: *phal chen sdom byed dam pa'i rgyud*. 2. *ba ti ka ra tse se sad pu na me drang*, Tibetan: *yongs rdzogs rnam dag sdom byed rgyud*. 3. *pa ti phyogs mu thar slan dar ga hrangs*, Tibetan: *so sor thar pa'i bye brag 'byed pa sdom pa'i rgyud*. 4. *ba ti ka kra hri ste she pra nam tse*, Tibetan: *gcig nyams gcig len las sdom rgyud*.

The title of the Vinaya collection, *'Dul ba rgyud drug*, presents us with two slightly puzzling features: first of all that they are called *rgyud*, which in the Buddhist context normally translates Sanskrit *tantra*, but here presumably simply means “text”.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the “six Vinaya texts” are not six, but seven or eight (depending on the edition). In the edition used here,<sup>17</sup> the Vinaya section is in volume 3 and comprises 338 folios. At the time of writing I have not studied these texts in detail yet. What follows can therefore only be a rough overview of their contents. The “cat.” number in the following entries refers to the catalogue numbers in Martin, Kvaerne and Nagano 2003.

1. *Bā ga yangs ma kun 'byung dbyings dag rgyud* (vol. 3, pp. 2–206, 104 fols, cat. 179.1). Also known as *'Dul ba kun 'byung rtsa ba'i rgyud*. This text is by far the longest of the Vinaya section and has more than 40 sub-chapters. It contains a section on the four root vows (*rtsa ba'i sdom pa*, see above). It also deals with other forms of behaviour a monk should refrain from, such as drinking alcohol, eating meat and garlic, wearing ornaments, attending amusements, using luxurious and high seats and beds, and eating after mid-day. These rules of behaviour are familiar from the Buddhist monastic codes. In its later chapters, however, this text continues in a different vein by moving on to topics of what we could call “psychology”. A monk must give up the five mental poisons (delusion, passion, aversion, avarice, and pride) as well as harmful speech, thinking badly of others, malicious thoughts, sloth, being dominated by hopes and fears, and similar harmful attitudes. The text

<sup>16</sup> As does the Sanskrit word, cf. titles such as *Pañcatantra*. Like Lat. *textus*, Skt. *tantra* is related to the metaphor of weaving and can be used metaphorically for the “texture” of a literary composition.

<sup>17</sup> Edition in 178 vols, edited by Smon rgyal lha sras and Gshen sras Nam mkha' dbang ldan, Chengdu 1995–99. This edition seems to be closest to the manuscript from Dbal khyung on which all modern reproductions are ultimately based (see Martin's Introduction in Martin, Kvaerne and Nagano 2003) and is therefore a relatively good textual basis. Another important witness is the earliest extant version of the *'Dul ba rgyud drug*, the Khro chen blockprint of 1760 which has been published only in part, but fortunately including the complete Vinaya section. Here, the Vinaya section is in vol. three and has 335 folios (or 670 pages). The titles are:

1. *'Dul ba phal chen rgyud* (pp. 1–82)
2. *Kun 'byung dbyings dag gi rgyud* (pp. 83–302)
3. *'Dul ba dus chen dus rtsan sdom byed rgyud* (pp. 303–82)
4. *'Dul ba bya ba yongs rdzogs las kyi rgyud* (pp. 383–464)
5. *'Dul ba so thar bye brag gi sdom pa'i rgyud* (pp. 465–531)
6. *'Dul ba gnang bkag gi las sdom pa'i rgyud* (pp. 533–92)
7. *'Dul ba spyi ltos 'gog pa phyogs sdom rgyud* (pp. 593–670)

also contains chapters on other sets of vows, such as the temporary *dge bsnyen* ordination for only one day.

2. *'Dul ba kun 'byung dbyings dag rgyud* (added in smaller script: *Phal chen sdom byed dam pa'i rgyud*) (vol. 3, pp. 207–73, 33 fols, cat. 179.2). This text has 21 sub-chapters. After an introductory section, it gives explanations of the Mahāyāna attitude in general, including topics such as generating *bodhicitta*, understanding the concept of relative truth (*kun rdzob*), and following the path towards liberation.

3. *'Dul ba dus chen dus brtsan sdom byed rgyud* (vol. 3, pp. 275–348, 37 fols, cat. 179.3). This section has 19 sub-chapters. It contains explanations of the *pratītyasamutpāda*, the effects of good and bad karma, and the benefits of morality or ethics (*tshul khrims*). Interestingly, it also includes sections on the circumambulation of holy objects, generating good karma through freeing animals (*srog bton*) and accumulating merit through donations. Like the first text, it recommends avoiding harmful attitudes such as the five mental poisons and performing the ten wholesome actions. In spite of being a Vinaya text, it addresses general considerations of ethics that apply equally to monastics and laity.

4. *'Dul ba don gyi kun brjod* (vol. 3, pp. 349–73, 12 fols; cat. 179.8). This text lists the different types of vows (*pho khrims*, *mo khrims*, *gtsang ma gtsug phud*, *dge bsnyen*, *bsnyan gnas*) and contains the ritual of confession (*gso sbyong*), including the words that are spoken on this occasion. In the edition of the canon in 192 volumes (the one catalogued in Martin, Kværne and Nagano 2003) it is placed at the end of the Vinaya section (see Martin, Kværne and Nagano 2003: 202–203).

5. *'Dul ba yongs rdzogs rnam dag sdom byed kyi rgyud* (vol. 3, pp. 375–464, 45 fols, cat. 179.4). This text has 37 sub-chapters. It deals with the ordination ceremony and the way the ordained person should behave and addresses a number of topics that correspond to the Buddhist *Vinayavastu*. It contains sections on monastic dress (*sham thabs*, *stod gos sil bu*, *bla gos*, *smad gos*, *pad zhwa*, *pad khug*) and the personal items a monk may possess (washing flask (*khrus bum*), staff (*hos ru*), begging bowl (*gzhi skur*), razor, needle, rosary and tools for making fire). While there are many similarities with the Buddhist regulations, there are also some details that are specific to the Bon tradition, such as the Bonpo “lotus hat” (*pad zhwa*), and Bon terminology such as *hos ru* for the staff and *gzhi skur* for the bowl. Like the previous texts, it then moves on to topics of general ethics. In particular it addresses avoiding

harm to other sentient beings, not splitting the community, and giving up harmful attitudes such as greed and deceit.

6. *'Dul ba so sor thar pa'i bye brag rgyud* (vol. 3, pp. 465–540, 38 fols, cat. 179.5). This text has about 20 sub-chapters. From a Buddhist point of view, the title seems to suggest that it deals with the *prātimokṣa* (Tib. *so sor thar pa*). However, it does not correspond to the Buddhist *Prātimokṣasūtra*.<sup>18</sup> Only a third of the text deals with taking the vows and the confession of offences; the remaining part deals with the need for the renunciate to give up home, country, and friends and follow the path to liberation, creating favourable conditions for the practice of the Great Vehicle.

7. (3–541) *'Dul ba'i nyams gso lam sdom rgyud / Gcig nyams gcig len las sdom rgyud* (vol. 3, pp. 541–604, 32 fols, cat. 179.6). This text has 33 chapters and contains instructions for the confession and atonement of transgressions. It is broadly subdivided into the topics of *sbyong ba* (“cleansing”) and *gso ba* (“mending, re-establishing” the vows).

8. Supplement: *'Dul ba spyi ltos 'gog pa sdom byed rgyud* (vol. 3, pp. 605–76. 36 fols, cat. 179.7). This text has 18 sub-chapters. According to the chapter headings, it deals with topics related to knowledge of the world in general, such as ignorance, cause and effect, the phenomenal world, and time.

The sets of rules for monastics that are embedded in this voluminous collection (in particular in the first and the fifth text) are similar to the Buddhist monastic rules, although not entirely identical; this point will require a much more detailed comparison than has been carried out for the present article. However, even without having undertaken a full comparison of the individual rules, it is striking how much additional material is contained in the *'Dul ba rgyud drug*. In particular, much consideration is given to the mental factors that underlie moral transgressions, such as ignorance, mental afflictions, the “five mental poisons”, and other misguided and harmful attitudes. Moreover, the

<sup>18</sup> In fact, *so sor thar pa* is also used in its literal sense as “individual liberation”. According to Bon historiography, the Tibetan transmission lineage split at an early date into Ya gong Ye shes rgyal ba's “Order of Individual Liberation” (*so sor thar pa'i sde*) who expected to reach liberation individually and Pham shi Dpal gyi dbang phyug's “Order of the Great Occasion” (*dus chen pa'i sde*) who expected to reach liberation at the end of a great *kalpa*, see Karmay 2005 [1972]: 37–38.

collection repeatedly addresses general ethics and karma as well as elements that resonate with the Mahāyāna (see in particular the second and the third text). Overall, it does not resemble a monastic law code in the strict sense. It has integrated topics that within Buddhist literature would rather be found in commentarial literature on the Vinaya, in *abhidharma* texts, or in works related to Mahāyāna ethics. The collection is therefore much more than just another version of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya; it is an independent creation with an original approach to monastic vows and transgressions and with its own specific terminology and structure.

(b) *Commentaries*

Several commentaries are found in the Bon “Tenjur”, the *Bka’ brten*; others have been transmitted as independent works. I shall here limit myself to introducing two particularly old and influential commentaries on the Vinaya. The earliest dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and is entitled *’Dul ba kun las btus pa*. It was composed by Me ston Shes rab ’od zer (1058–1132) as a commentary on the canonical Vinaya scriptures. Based on this, the founder of Sman ri, Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356–1415) wrote a commentary in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The full title is *Bstan pa’i srog shing ’dul ba’i bslab bya gsal bar byed pa’i ’grel ba ’phrul gyi sgron me*, “the miraculous lamp, a commentary illuminating the precepts of the Vinaya, which are the life tree of the doctrine” (or, in short, *The Miraculous Lamp*). The analysis of the structure of the Bonpo Vinaya in this article is largely based on this commentary, since it provides a very clear structure and sufficient explanation to understand the Bonpo Vinaya as a system.

Mnyam med’s work begins with a short history of the Bonpo Vinaya and its transmission lineage and explains the significance of monasticism for those who wish to obtain liberation. The main body of the commentary is divided into two main sections:

1. The first part deals with monastic ordination and the way the ordained person should live and behave. Subsections include topics such as shaving, washing, monastic dress, the equipment of the monk and the way the monk should acquire food, travel or stay in one place (depending on the season), eat, sleep, speak, and behave during the day and the night. These topics correspond more or less to those of the Buddhist *Vinaya-vastu*, even though the sequence of the sections is not identical with its Buddhist counterpart.

2. The second part enumerates and explains the rules for monks and nuns. In content, this section of the commentary corresponds roughly to the Buddhist *Vinayavibhaṅga*. It contains 250 rules for the monks and either 350 or 360 rules for the nuns. These figures look suspiciously round compared to the Buddhist Vinayas and we may suspect a simplification. And indeed, as a precise calculation at the end of the work shows, it requires certain arithmetic operations in order to arrive at these round numbers. Without these operations, it is possible to arrive at a figure of 258 for the monks, and this would correspond exactly to the number of rules in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.<sup>19</sup> One might therefore superficially assume that the rules are the same as those of the Buddhists.

However, a closer comparison shows that the offences in the Bonpo Vinaya are grouped in an entirely different way and have different designations (Mnyam med, pp. 182–83). The chart below shows the categories of offences in the Bon tradition and in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. For the Bon Vinaya, the actual number of the transgressions is given first; then follows the name of the category of transgression, followed by a number that indicates an internal subdivision of this category (for example there are eight types of unwholesome actions, the *mi dge ba'i sde* 8, that can lead to 63 individual transgressions).

<b>Bon Vinaya</b> <sup>20</sup>	<b><u>Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya</u></b> <b>(Tib. and Skt.)</b>
<i>Rtsa ba'i sdom pa:</i>	
4 <i>pham pa</i>	4 <i>pham par 'gyur pa rnams (pārājika)</i>

<sup>19</sup> In the calculation of the 250 vows, the seven *khirms chen* are counted as one (*khirms chen bdun gcig tu rtsis pas...*), and so are the three *thor bu* (*thor bu rnams gcig tu sdom pa*); counting them individually would lead to a total of 258. However, one could also arrive at higher numbers since the five rules regarding the seat are counted as three and the four root vows are not included in this calculation at all (*rtsa ba grangs su mi bsngo na...*); see Mnyam med 2003: 182. If all these rules are counted individually, this would make a total of 264. A closer investigation is needed to verify the exact number of rules and their correspondences with the Buddhist Vinayas.

<sup>20</sup> The rules listed here are those for the monks (*pho khirms*). The rules for nuns (*mo khirms*) are sometimes counted as 350, sometimes as 360. If they are counted as 350, they are subdivided into 8 *rtsa ba'i sdom pa*, including (in addition to the 4 above): *ngag 'khyal* (idle speech), *tshig rtsub* (harsh speech), *dbyen phra* (causing a schism), *mngan sems* (denigrating thoughts); 63 *mi dge ba'i sde* 8; 68 *nyon mongs pa'i sde* 5; 110 *khrol tsa'i sde* 12; 109 *phyin ci log gi sde* 2 (Mnyam med 2003: 182–83).

<i>Yan lag gi sdom pa:</i>	
63 <i>mi dge ba'i sde</i> 8 <sup>21</sup>	13 <i>dge 'dun lhag ma rnams</i> ( <i>samghāvaśeṣa</i> )
68 <i>nyon mongs pa'i sde</i> 5	2 <i>ma nges pa'i chos gnyis</i> ( <i>aniyata-dharma</i> )
110 <i>khrol lta'i sde</i> 12	30 <i>spang ba'i ltung byed rnams</i> ( <i>niḥsargika-pāyantika-dharma</i> )
( <i>phyin ci log gi sde</i> 2)	90 <i>ltung byed 'ba' shig tu 'gyur pa rnams</i> ( <i>pāyantika-dharma</i> )
1 <i>khrims chen gyi sde</i> 7	4 <i>so sor bshags par bya ba rnams</i> ( <i>pratideśanīya</i> )
3 <i>khri stan gyi sde</i> 5	108 <i>bslab pa'i chos mang po rnams</i> ( <i>śaikṣa-dharma</i> )
4 <i>kha zas kyi sde</i> 4	7 <i>rtsod pa zhi bar bya ba'i chos bdun</i> ( <i>adhikaraṇa-śamatha-dharma</i> )
1 <i>thor bu'i sde</i> 3	

As this comparison shows, there are no overlaps in the technical terminology apart from the term *pham pa* for the four major transgressions. Even more striking is the fact that the categories in the Bonpo Vinaya follow a totally different structuring principle. They are not listed according to the severity of the transgression and its respective punishment, but (apart from the four root transgressions) according to the attitude or mental affliction that leads to the transgression. Much more important than the practical consequence, the sanctions within the monastic community, is the long-term consequence: in each instance the reader is warned that a transgression will lead to suffering in future existences, and the types of bad rebirths that are to follow are specified for each case. The emphasis is on general considerations of karma and salvation, not on the monastic law as such.

The individual types of transgressions themselves are for the most part related to harmful mental attitudes: The 68 transgressions due to mental afflictions (*nyon mongs pa*) are based on the five mental poi-

<sup>21</sup> Other commentaries speak of six unwholesome actions (*mi dge ba*), not eight. Kun mkhyen Nyi ma bstan 'dzin lists idle talk (*ngag 'khyal*), harsh words (*tshig rtsub*), slander (*phra ma*), faultfinding (*mngan sems*), malicious thoughts (*gdug sems*), and wrong views (*log lta*). These six plus the four *pham pa* correspond almost exactly to the ten unwholesome actions of the Buddhists, but not entirely, since the standard Buddhist list contains covetousness (*brnab sems*) instead of faultfinding (*mngan sems*).

sons, delusion, anger, passion, avarice, and arrogance, and these subtypes are all ultimately based on a wrong notion of reality. The 110 transgressions classified as *'khrul lta* are related to twelve wrong mental attitudes: craving, passion, avarice, greed, *byung tshor*,<sup>22</sup> delusion, laziness, wrong aspirations, being subject to hopes and fears, being attached to *samsāra*, being easily distracted, and having erroneous ideas. For example, craving can cause ten types of transgressions, such as craving for a home, a family, material goods, and wrong activities such as killing (Mnyam med 2003: 140–41). The seven *khrims* concern the fact that a monk should not be attached to country, residence (*mkhar*), house, sons, [unworthy] disciples, wealth, and attendants [except those that are beneficial for spiritual development].

The five rules concerning the right kind of seat are: not using a seat with (colourful) rainbow decorations or a seat that is too high, too comfortable, too big, or of the wrong type. The rules concerning food and drink are not eating after mid-day and not consuming meat, garlic and alcohol. The three *thor bu* (lit. “fragments”) are not accepting gold or silver, not wearing ornaments, and avoiding worldly amusements. Needless to say, these regulations have strong resonances with the Buddhist Vinaya rules.

In its conclusion, the commentary explains that the different categories of transgressions are ultimately based on the four root transgressions, for example: “Greed derives from taking what has not been given. Pride derives from lying. Craving, passion, avarice, and greed derive from taking what has not been given. [...] [Eating] meat derives from taking life. Eating at the wrong time derives from wrong desires,” and so on (Mnyam med 2003: 181). It thus tries to establish an overarching system in which all transgressions are in the end related to the four root transgressions.

In addition to this original way of structuring the Vinaya rules, another striking feature of the Bonpo Vinaya is its Mahāyāna tone. Bon on the whole propagates the bodhisattva ideal, and wisdom (insight into the true nature of reality) and compassion towards all sentient beings play an important role. In the introductory section, Mnyam med states explicitly that the Bonpos adhere to the Great Vehicle: “[...] out of the

<sup>22</sup> *byung tshor* literally means “perceiving what has occurred, perception of what exists”. I am not sure how this expression is used; in the present context it seems to refer to an impatient or partial attitude or aversion, but I confess that the explanations in Mnyam med (pp. 142–43) are not entirely clear to me.

two, the Great and the Small Vehicle, it is the Great Vehicle that has spread in Tibet. This is what the commentators assert in general. And within this, we need to understand that this lineage of Me ston and his disciples [i.e. the Bonpo Vinaya lineage] is particularly distinguished” (Mnyam med 2003: 46). Thus, he sees the Bon Vinaya as part of the Mahāyāna. The 23<sup>rd</sup> abbot Sman ri Kun mkhyen Nyi ma bstan ’dzin (19<sup>th</sup> century) states this even more explicitly when he describes how the Indian scholar Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054) did not ordain Tibetans because they followed the Mahāyāna, while he himself had been ordained in the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghika school, which belongs to the Śrāvakayāna.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that like the canonical scriptures themselves, Mnyam med’s commentary too includes some rules for lay people, even if they don’t play a central role. He explains that certain actions are considered wrong both within the monastic code and within the lay tradition. Actions such as taking intoxicants, for example, are not only forbidden in the scriptures (*mdo las*) for the monastic community, but also in works addressed to householders (*khyim bdag gi khungs*, Mnyam med 2003: 172). His commentary thus takes a relatively wide view of ethics and vows, quite in line with its general focus on wholesome and unwholesome mental attitudes, which obviously apply both to monastics and the laity.

## CONCLUSION

What can we expect from a study of the Vinaya of the Bon tradition? In a chronological sense (and leaving the views of Bon historiography aside for the time being), we have to acknowledge that it is attested later than the Tibetan Buddhist Vinaya. For scholars who are interested in the origin and earliest forms of the Buddhist monastic discipline, the Vinaya of the Bonpos has nothing new to contribute.

However, for those interested in the spread of the Vinaya traditions in Asia or in innovations and adaptations of the monastic code in different times and social contexts, the Vinaya of the Bonpos becomes

<sup>23</sup> [...] *jo bo rje a ti sha bod du byon dus / ban btsun rnam kyis rab byung gnang rog zhus kyang / [...] de ni byang chub sems dpa’i sdom par ’dug / bdag gi ’di theg dman nyan thos kyi lugs yin / ngas mi gnang gsungs nas ma gnang zhes bon lugs kyi bstan pa’i byung khungs las bshad do.* (Nyi ma bstan ’dzin 2003: 18)

highly relevant. It must be considered as another separate Vinaya tradition, alongside the seven Buddhist Vinayas, and in this sense we should speak of eight Vinayas rather than seven.

As this preliminary survey has shown, the rules within the Vinaya of the Bon tradition are similar to those of the Buddhists, but they are arranged in an entirely different way, according to the mental defects causing them, not according to their legal consequences (i.e., the punishment for the respective transgressions). The outlook is psychological rather than legalistic, and in this respect it should rather be compared with Buddhist commentary and *abhidharma* than with the Buddhist Vinaya itself. We are therefore dealing with much more than a simple imitation of the Buddhist monastic code; quite the contrary, the Bonpos have an original approach to the monastic rules and have an entirely independent corpus of Vinaya literature.

Moreover, I believe that a closer study of this literature may give interesting insights into the adoption of monasticism in Tibet in general. It is still unclear how and when exactly the canonical Vinaya texts of the Bonpos were created and compiled. However, if we allow ourselves to speculate, the *'Dul ba rgyud drug* might be a mirror reflecting the understanding of monasticism in Tibet in a period when the concept of monkhood was still relatively new. If a Tibetan (whether Buddhist or Bonpo) had been asked to write down what monasticism was about, how the monastic community should behave, and why it was important to adhere to moral vows, the outcome could have been exactly that: a catalogue of rules of behaviour similar to those adhered to in Buddhist monasteries, but rephrased in terms of the ideas and values of the Mahāyāna that were dominant on the Tibetan plateau, and structured accordingly.<sup>24</sup>

The Bonpos explicitly describe their tradition as belonging to the Great Vehicle and have integrated Mahāyāna ideas into their Vinaya. All Buddhist Vinayas, on the other hand, belong to non-Mahāyāna schools,

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<sup>24</sup> In this context it is interesting to observe the differences between the canonical Vinaya texts and the commentary by Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan. Based on what I have read so far, my impression is that the canonical texts have more archaic or typically “Bonpo” vocabulary. Mnyam med’s commentary, on the other hand, seems more “modern” and is arranged in two main parts similar to the *Vinayavastu* and *Vinayavibhaṅga*, which may imply an awareness of the structure of the Buddhist Vinaya on his side. The *'Dul ba rgyud drug* might therefore turn out to be an early and relatively unfiltered glimpse of an original Tibetan outlook on monasticism, and deserve a much closer study than could be undertaken for the present article.

and the followers of the Mahāyāna have never created a Vinaya of their own; if they felt a need for a Mahāyāna code of behaviour, they used additional texts for this purpose.<sup>25</sup> In this sense we could say that the Bonpos are the only tradition ever to have composed a “Mahāyāna Vinaya”.

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<sup>25</sup> In China, for example, the *Brahmajālasūtra* was used in this way (see de Groot 1893 and Weller 1971). Tibet has solved the problem by using three different sets of vows (*sdom pa gsum*), the monastic vows, the bodhisattva vow and the tantric vows (see Sobisch 2002). In addition, some Mahāyāna texts serve as manuals of bodhisattva ethics; for example, the *Samantabhadracaryāprañidhāna* (“*Bhadracari*”) from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* and the *Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā* are frequently quoted in the context of Mahāyāna ethics.

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