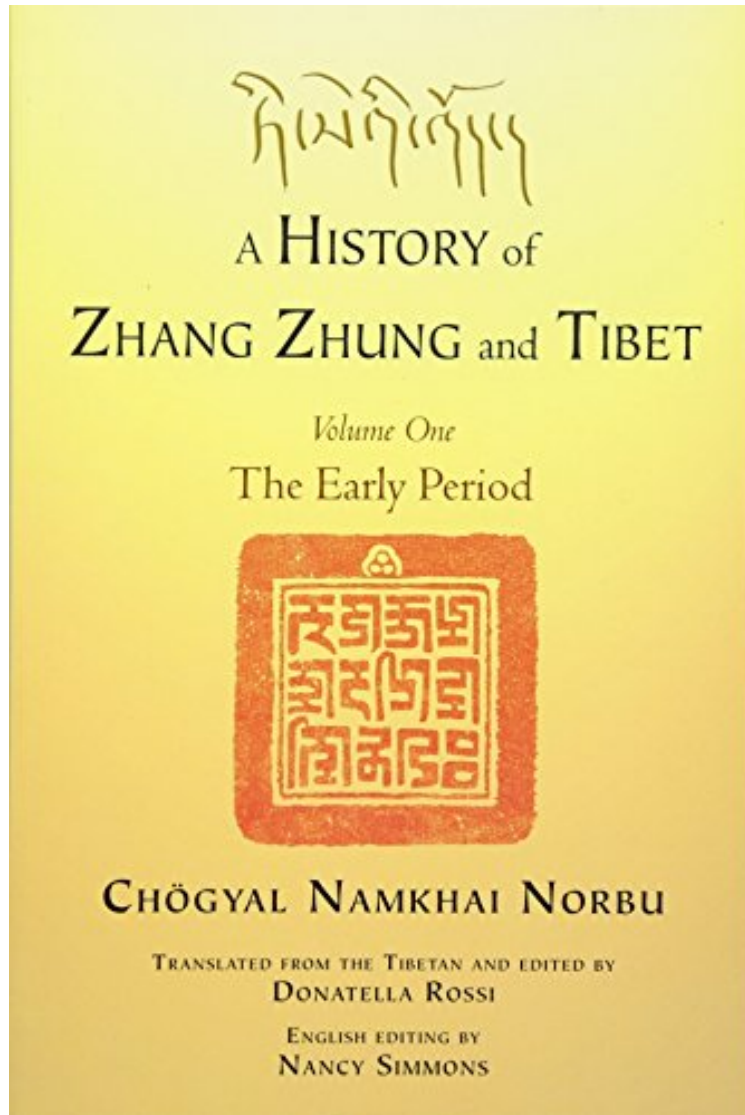


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A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet, Volume One: The Early Period

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu

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#704856 in Books North Atlantic Books 2013-05-14 2013-05-14 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.99 x .64 x 6.011, .95 #File Name: 1583946101264 pages North Atlantic Books | File size: 16.Mb

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu : A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet, Volume One: The Early Period before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet, Volume One: The Early Period:

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Zhang Zhung cultural antecedents of Tibetan civilization By inner exiledrawing predominantly, yet not exclusively, on Bon written sources compiled in the last millenium or so, which -

in Western terms, at least - fall in the category of mythology. We have every reason to believe some portions of these narratives were based on ancient oral tradition(s) well preceding the invention of Tibetan alphabet and script, by the 640s CE the latest, which historically has been attributed to THon-Mi Sambhota ("Fine Tibetan [from the] Thon clan"). Also factor in the lore passed down among local equivalents of bairds and minstrels (Tib. sGrung-mKhan)."The text was originally conceived as a set of university lectures that Chgyal Namkhai Norbu was invited to give at the University of Nationalities in Beijing...in 1988. The contents of the lectures formed a first abridged version "[The Precious Mirror.] A[n Ancient] History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet" [ZHang Bod gNa'-Rabs-kyi Lo-rGyus Nor-Bu'i Me-Long, 1990 Chengdu], which was subsequently enlarged and expanded by the author after further research, until the manuscript, written in his unique calligraphy, became a work of 1,900 pages, divided in three volumes" (p. 10).The final version bearing the title 'ZHang Bod-kyi Lo-rGyus Ti-Se'i 'Od' ("The Light of Kailash. A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet") appeared in block print in China (1996 Beijing), but as it "presents some omissions and imprecisions...was not used as a main source, though at times it was consulted" (p. 12). The material is presented in a format of quoted passages being followed by the Dzogchenpa author's explanations of various length and depth, coupled with his footnotes, as well as those of the translator Donatella Rossi.I. (pp. 15-75) discusses cosmogonies (emptiness + clear light, self-originating wind giving birth to other three basic elements ('Byung-ba) and their interactions, creating their respective mandalas, with space having preceded all four; cosmic eggs of varying number, etc.); sacred geography that can be interpreted on several levels (i.e., outer, inner, secret), with the mighty Kailash mountain at its heart (mNGa'-Ris: "Royal Domain" in southwestern Tibet); theogony, to a lesser extent (various classes of nonhuman/supernatural beings affecting mankind); primordial White Man known under many names, such as Sangs-po 'Bum-KHri, Ye-sMon rGyal-po; four (or six) original great clans (Rus CHen bZHi: lDong, r/dMu, sTong, [b]Se) and the six family lines of early human generations (Mi'u gDung Drug).II. (pp. 77-123): r/dMu gSHen-Rab Mi-Bo-CHe ("Great Human. Excellent Ritual Expert [of the] rMu [family]"), the originator of g.Yung-Drung ("Eternal/Swastika") Bon, is treated as a historical figure who - based on Tibetan calculation - lived between 1917 and 1836 BCE (!) (p. 123). Not mentioned in the present book but in Drung, Deu and Bon: Narrations, Symbolic Languages and the Bon Tradition on Ancient Tibet (1995 Dharamsala), Namkhai Norbu quotes on page 39 the founder of 'Bri-Gung bKa'-brGyud ('Jig-rTen mGon-po, 1143-1217) to the effect that said gSHen-Rab was born much later in dBus province, during the reign of one KHri lDe bTSan. What's more, he is said to have acquired his magic powers during the time of those missing 13 years being shared with some unspecified nonhuman beings (Mi-Ma-Yin) who kidnapped him at the age of 13. Furthermore, when gSHen-Rab was summoned to perform funerary rites for the famous legendary king Gri-gum ("Slain by Sword"), he had the following to say: "Even though I practice many kinds of Bn, they can all be arranged in three fundamental types: the rites to suppress the Dre and the Si (spirits) below, those to worship ancestral deities above, and those to guard domestic hearth in the middle. I do not possess other Bn, and I do not know the funerary rites for the slain."In this chapter we can also read about how he is credited with the introduction of sacrificial cakes (gTor-ma) and ritual ransom (gLud) to bypass the custom of blood offerings to harmful entities/demons; the classification of Bon scripture in the "Four Portals and the Treasure as the Fifth" (sGo bZHi mDZod dang lNGa). The author argues that elemental astrology ('Byung rTSis as per sMe-ba and sPar-KHa) originated in the land of Zhang Zhung, not in China (cf. ba gua), with gSHen-Rab and/or ancient Bnpos; and that the name of Kong-TSe 'PHrul-rGyal in Tibetan sources was mistakenly identified with Confucius (see pp. 118-22).III. Ancient (mythological) royal lineages of Zhang Zhung (pp. 125-48): 18 Bya-Ru-can ("[equipped] with eagle[-like] horns") kings; division of the country into Outer, Inner, and Middle regions; list of twelve minor principalities (rGyal-PHran bCu-gNYis).IV. Written language (pp. 149-66): magical creation of an alphabet from the five powerful seed-syllables; Namkhai Norbu challenges the notion propagated by some 'new Bnpos', according to which the sPungs script of sTag-gZig gave birth to the alleged Zhang Zhung script. Instead, he says the original one is the so-called sMar (see the seal of king Lig-Mi-rKya, a titular rather than a personal name, on the book cover and pp. 163-4). The only problem is that so far no evidence has come to light in support of the theory that Zhang Zhung script predates, or at least is cotemporal with, Tibetan writing, unless we consider a manuscript from the Dunhuang cave-library: see Tsuguhito Takeuchi - Ai Nishida's "The Present Stage of Deciphering Old Zhangzhung," pp. 151-65 in Issues in Tibeto-Burman Historical Linguisticsw (Senri Ethnological Studies, 75) 2009 Osaka. (Related to this very chapter is Siegbert Hummel's interesting little book On Zhang-Zhung, 2000 Dharamsala.)V. (pp. 167-219): prehistoric artefacts, such as precious gZi-stones, amulets - especially those representing KHyung-eagle/garuda - made of meteoric iron (THog lCags), some rock carvings. Various divination (mo) methods, some of which are associated with PHYwa gSHen strand of Bon, used for diagnosis and healing, to clarify hidden circumstances and the intentions of imperceptible supernatural beings of different dispositions, to avert impediments or bestow fortune, etc. These include gTo, divination by cords and knots (Ju-THig) or 42 magic pebbles (rDe'u 'PHrul), symbolic images (brDa), scapulimancy (Sog-Mo), CHo-Lo dominoes, etc. To be honest, I prefer the author's discussion of the same topic in the relevant chapters of his already cited title from 1995.I think it would have been great to hear Norbu Rinpoche's opinion about megalithic sites in the respective area, or maybe that's reserved for the upcoming two volumes. At any rate, Tarthang Tulku (Ancient Tibet (Tibetan History Series) 1986 Berkeley: p. 97) has the following to say in this regard:

"Megaliths have been found...in the far west at sPu, Shab-dge-sdings, gZhi-sde-mkhar, and Byi'u near Ma-pham [Manasarowar] lake. Close to Pang-gong lake in the northwest are eighteen parallel rows of standing stones aligned in an east-west fashion with circles of stones arranged at the end of each row...Near Dang-ra lake are also large standing stones encircled by slabs, as well as sites that appear to be ancient square tombs."Bibliography of Tibetan titles (pp. 221-8), detailed index (229-61), plus - relative to how you count them - more than 30 or 60 bw illustrations, + 9 charts. Miniscule suggestions, inconsistencies: Some geographical names on page 23 can be clarified without any difficulty: "in the southeast, there is 'Jang' - this must be referring to the state of Nanzhao, known to Tang China and Yarlung Dynasty ruled Tibet, in what today is Yunnan; "in the northeast, the country of Hor" - depending on the given epoch, this term may designate various Turkic or Mongolic peoples, residing - most probably - in the Kokonor/mTSho sNGon/Qinghai area. It is beyond my modest comprehension how aural transmission (sNYan rGyud, lit. "thread [via] hearing") was possible between one dMu-TSHa Gyer-med, living in the 8th century CE, and a bLo-IDan sNYing-po (b. 1360), bridging some six centuries (p. 102). Isn't it about "clear vision" (Dag sNang), rather? The regular type of Tibetan script is incorrectly spelled twice as 'dbu chen' ("big head") on pp. 157-8, and once correctly as 'dbu can' ("[equipped] with head"). 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Yetigood reading 1 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Two Stars By Joe O'Laughlin Hews too closely to religious texts that are boring in translation.

A History of Zhang Zhung and Tibet, Volume One explores ancient Tibet's Zhang Zhung kingdom and Bon religion that preceded the advent of Buddhism in the seventh century. Countering the long-held idea that Tibet's pre-Buddhist indigenous culture was primitive and undeveloped, this book shares the rich cultural origins of the kingdom of Zhang Zhung--the "cradle of Tibetan culture," which encompassed a vast area of Western and Northern Tibet in an area that includes sacred Mount Kailash. Presenting the meticulous research of internationally known Dzogchen Buddhist teacher and scholar Chgyal Namkhai Norbu, the book investigates the mysteries of Zhang Zhung's Bon religion, a set of shamanistic and animistic beliefs and practices only recently studied by a handful of academic scholars. Offering a critical analysis of a vast array of literary and primary sources, Norbu discusses the role of the Bon traditions within Zhang Zhung's lineages, dynasties, and culture. Examining Zhang Zhung's written language, sacred ornaments, rock carvings, healing practices, music, and magical divination techniques, Norbu contributes to an understanding of the roots of Tibetan Buddhist culture and modern-day Bon religion--a practice followed by an estimated ten percent of Tibetans. Table of Contents: Translator's Foreword; A Technical Note about the Translation; I. The Human Generations of Ancient Zhang Zhung; II. The Bon Lineages of Ancient Zhang Zhung; III. The Royal Lineages of Ancient Zhang Zhung; IV. The Written Language of Ancient Zhang Zhung; V. The Civilization of Ancient Zhang Zhung; Indexes--Tibetan and Zhang Zhung Names and Terms, Textual Sources, Sanskrit Names and Terms, Chinese Names and Terms

"Chgyal Namkhai Norbu is one the foremost masters of Tibetan religions and recognized as a teacher and scholar. This book demonstrates his profound knowledge of Tibets antiquity and shows the complex and sophisticated tradition of the Zhang Zhung civilization that flourished on the Tibetan plateau in ancient times." Tsering Shakya, PhD, Canadian research chair in religion and contemporary society in Asia at the Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia. Scholars and students of early Tibet will welcome the publication in English of this first volume of Chgyal Namkhai Norbu's trilogy on the history of Zhang Zhung and Tibet. Accurately and carefully translated by Donatella Rossi, this book draws on a wide range of Bon sources and chronicles that shed light on the creation mythology, geography, lineages, and cultural legacy of ancient Zhang Zhung. Gyurme Dorje, leading Tibetan scholar, translator, and author Using traditional sources in an original way, this work paints a fascinating picture of the history and culture of the Zhang Zhung kingdom of early Tibet. Sam van Schaik, PhD, Tibetologist and research project manager for the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) at the British Library "For many of us in the academic community who have been trying to keep a pulse on the phenomenon of Zhang Zhung, it's a relief that scholarly opinion is finally starting to shift from the previously standard view that the period of Songtsen Gampo's reign when Buddhism was beginning to be introduced defines the roots of much of Tibetan culture. It is now fairly clear that, to the contrary, much of what makes Tibet Tibetan for example, an emphasis on bardic songs; a cohesive, spiritual taxonomy for transmissions of alphabets, scripts, and systems of writing; historically long-enduring divination practices; distinctive frameworks of medicine (including moxibustion); signature practices of fine arts; and even contemplative methods for dreaming derives from the Zhang Zhung civilization." J.I. Abbot, Mandala. About the Author Born in Eastern Tibet in 1938, CHOGYAL NAMKHAI NORBU is an internationally known Dzogchen Buddhist teacher and author. The direct descendant of the first Dzogchen Tibetan master of Tibet, Norbu is a former professor of Tibetan and Mongolian language and literature at the University of Naples L'Orientale. He is the founder of two nonprofit organizations including the Shang Shung Institute, which is dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan culture. The author lives in Arcidosso, Italy.