

Alexander Kingsbury Smith, *Divination in Exile. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Ritual Prognostication in the Tibetan Bon Tradition*, Leiden/London (Brill), 2021. xi+195 pp. [Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, Vol. 47].

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Documented in written sources from the Tibetan imperial period (7th-9th centuries CE), divination remains an important element of daily life for many Tibetans. Nevertheless, until recently, divination has received relatively slight attention from scholars. This, however, has to some extent been changing over the last decade, especially among anthropologists. Alexander K. Smith's study is a major contribution to this trend.

Divination in Exile is an important study for two reasons: it is a detailed textual study of *lde'u 'phrul*, a specific – and hitherto unstudied – technique of divination using a set number of black and white pebbles, only practised, it seems, within the Bön religion, and, secondly it adopts an anthropological approach pioneered by Barbara Gerke's study, *Long Lives and Untimely Deaths: Life-Span Concepts and Longevity Practices Among Tibetans in the Darjeeling Hills, India* (2011), but in doing so it draws on a wide range of anthropological studies of divination in other cultures, in particular in contemporary African societies, as a way to better understand the meaning and dynamics of Tibetan divinatory practice, thus demonstrating the benefits of a broad comparative approach in fieldwork-based Tibetan studies.

The author provides a very useful overview of previous research on Tibetan divination and discusses various theoretical approaches to the anthropological study of divination in general. In his book, Smith demonstrates the benefits of combining fieldwork and textual studies, not only in the sense of penetrating the intricacies of Tibetan divination manuals with the help of expert Tibetan teachers, but also in observing and analysing the interaction between the specialist diviner and his clients, the clients' understanding of the significance and validity of the divination, and the diviner's interpretation and adaptation of the explanations provided by the manual consulted.

Turning to details, there are some minor flaws, and, in a few instances, additional information may be offered. To take the least important, but unfortunately rather visible, flaw first: the volume suffers from a lack of proof reading – a defect which in the final analysis is the publisher's responsibility, not that of the author or the editors. Not least is the Bibliography replete with printing errors and inconsistencies. A comprehensive list would be long and tedious as well as

useless, but at the very least the names of persons quoted should be correct. Thus Giraule (and Dieterlen) should be Griaule, and the work in question was published in 1963, not 1945 (p. 30); Italo (Calvino) should be Italo (p. 37); (Elisabeth) Stuchbury should be Stutchbury (p. 43), and so on, adding up to a rather long list.

On p. 41 ff., the name of the Tibetan emperor Srong btsan sgam po is everywhere (with one exception) misspelt Srong *bstan* sgam po. On p. 54, there is a misspelling of the name of the late Abbot of sMan-ri Monastery, the Bön monastery in Himachal Pradesh: Lung rtogs bstan pa'i *rnyi* ma should be ... bstan pa'i *nyi* ma. On p. 55, the Tibetan term *dge shes* should be corrected to *dge bshes*. These points are in themselves trivial, but they are mentioned as they would go unnoticed by interested scholars outside Tibetan studies. On p. 15, "elevates anxiety" should be corrected to "eliminates anxiety" (as is found correctly on p. 21). On p. 16, reference is made to Dieter Schuh's "seminar work" where "seminal work" is surely intended.

A more substantial error is located on p. 66. Smith refers to "the Bon *dkar chag* edited by Dan Martin, Yasuhiko Nagano, and Per Kvaerne (2001)". The same reference is repeated on p. 67. The volume that these three scholars edited was, however, published in 2003, and is correctly listed in the Bibliography (p. 183). That volume is, however, not relevant on p. 66, where the context is not that of the Bön Kanjur, with which the 2003 volume is concerned, but the catalogue of the Bön Tenjur, which was published in 2001, not by Martin, Nagano and Kvaerne, nor as Smith mistakenly claims in the Bibliography (p. 184) by Nagano and Kvaerne, but by Samten G. Karmay and Y. Nagano. The confusion between these two important catalogues – the 2001 and the 2003 one – is therefore complete.

The reference on p. 66 serves to introduce a series of divination texts, listed on p. 67, found in the Bön Tenjur. However, the numeric citations provided by Smith do not correspond to those found in the 2001 catalogue (Karmay and Nagano), as one would expect, but to the code numbers used to identify the texts in the BDRC/TBRC (Buddhist Digital Resource Centre, formerly Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre) data base. This fact is, as far as I can see, not mentioned by Smith, which may give rise to confusion. The references to the Tenjur catalogue will, however, be found as the last four digits of the respective BDRC/TBRC codes.

There is a further mistake on p. 66. Smith refers to the two collections of canonical texts in the Bön religion, known as the *bKa' 'gyur*, the 'Word' of the Enlightened Teacher, and the *brTen 'gyur*, the collection of commentaries, respectively. He correctly notes that the name of the latter collection is spelt differently from the spelling used by Buddhists for their corresponding collection, viz. the *bsTan 'gyur*.

However, he then states that, "Combining these two sections together, the canon is frequently described using the compound noun *bka' brten*". This is in fact not the case, as is clearly explained by the Tibetan scholar sGa-ston Tshul-khrims rGyal-mtshan (14th century), who provides a definition, quoted in my article "The Canon of the Tibetan Bonpos" (*IJJ* 16:1-2, 1974) (and reproduced by Smith): the *bKa' brten* is thus called "As it has been composed in dependence (*rten*) on the Word (*bka'*) of the Teacher", this being a precise definition of commentaries. The term *bKa' brten* unequivocally refers to the *brTen 'gyur*.

In his presentation of Bönpos in the contemporary diaspora community, Smith refers to Krystyna Cech's DPhil dissertation (Oxford 1987), *The Social and Religious Identity of the Tibetan Bonpos with Special Reference to a North-West Himalayan Settlement*. This is an excellent study, but should be supplemented by an equally valuable and more recent PhD dissertation, unfortunately likewise unpublished: Yushan Liu, *A Minority Within a Minority. Being Bonpo in the Tibetan Community in Exile* (Edinburgh 2012).

A minor addition to the Bibliography could be made: for bibliographical information concerning the author of one of the divination texts listed by Smith (p. 68), the Bönpo scholar Hor btsun bsTan 'dzin Blo gros rgya mtsho (1889-1975), the most complete biographical source is Per Kværne, "Hor btsun bstan 'dzin blo gros rgya mtsho (1889-1975): A Little-known Bön Scholar from Amdo", in: Ute Walenböck, Ute, Bianca Horlemann, and Jarmila Ptáčková (eds.), *Mapping Amdo. Dynamics of Power, Archiv Orientální*, Supplementa XI, 2019, pp. 57-63.

In a couple of instances, apparently puzzling names can be understood as the result of scribal errors in the manuscripts. Thus, "the land of Ye nyag" (p. 75), listed after China, Zhang Zhung and China, is almost certainly "Me nyag", the Tibetan name of the Tangut empire, as *ye* and *me* are very easily confused. In the name of "the Indian *rishi shi' la nga wa dza*" to whom two divination texts are attributed (pp. 68-69), *nga* is either a misreading of or a scribal error for *da* – the two syllables are very easily confused in manuscript. The name should be reconstructed as Śiladhvaja, which translates into Tibetan as Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan. As Tibetan monastic scholars were in the habit of converting their Tibetan names into Sanskrit, the name could refer to one of several Bön lamas by the name of Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan: gNyon ston Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, b. 1144; sGa-ston Tshul-khrims rgyal-mtshan, 14th century, referred to above; an abbot of sMan ri Monastery who was enthroned in 1511; a lama born in 1893; or 'Gru sgom Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, b. 1898. The colophon of the first text states that the author was *gshen gyi drang srong*

(Karmay and Nagano 2001, p. 933), thus a fully ordained Bönpo monk (*drang srong* not indicating an "Indian *rishi*", but being the title corresponding to the Buddhist *dge slong*, a *bhikṣu* or fully ordained monk). Unfortunately, further identification of this lama cannot be made at present, although the first candidate on the list, gNyon ston, is unlikely to have been a *drang srong*, leaving us with four candidates, among whom sGa-ston and the abbot of sMan ri monastery are probably the strongest candidates.

The title of the book, "Divination in Exile", would, or so it seems to the present reviewer, indicate that the focus of the volume is on the Tibetan diaspora community, primarily in India. However, although the author's study of divination over many years was located in the Bönpo monastery in India, which as such is part of the diaspora community, this does not *ipso facto* make the book a study of divination "in exile", the more so as Smith's chief interlocutor, the head teacher of the monastery, was born in Dolpo in Nepal, is a Nepalese citizen, and hence does not belong to the Tibetan exile community. His clients likewise have various origins, and even consult him by mobile phone from inside Tibet. In fact, the monastic community in question is of mixed origin: Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, Dolpo and Mustang in Nepal, and Tibet itself, with only a minority belonging to the Tibetan exile community. One might expect that the book would focus on ways in which divination is understood and practised specifically "in exile", in other words, that there was a focus on change and development as compared to divination in Tibet in pre-modern times. However, such change does not seem to have been particularly conspicuous in the Tibetan diaspora community. In fact, with regard to the manuals used by the Tibetan diviner with whom the author studied, "many aspects relevant to modern life are absent from the *lde'u 'phrul's* interpretive framework" (p. 102). This leads Smith to the question of "how, specifically, do diviners work to re-signify pre-modern textual prognostics in order to suit the social and ethical complexities of life in modern Tibetan societies?" (p. 103). Drawing upon comparative material from Botswana, Smith suggests that the diviner, while having considerable scope for "*ex post facto* elaboration", places the client's queries "within a traditional cosmological schema, which serves to re-affirm – rather than challenge – pre-modern epistemological values" (*ibid.*). This could be a very fruitful line of further research, applicable not only to divination, but also to other sectors of contemporary Tibetan belief systems in the diaspora, but it is not pursued further in the present volume.

Returning to the substance of the book, the merits of which far outweigh the imperfections mentioned above, I would emphasise, as Smith himself does, that one reason for choosing a collection of divi-

nation texts from the Bön rather than the Buddhist religion, is that "Bon narratives outlining the introduction and usage of divination have been almost entirely overlooked by Western scholarship" (p. 41). Moreover, Smith points out that an important Bön text, the *mDo dri med gzi brjid*, dating to the 14th century, "offers the only extant pre-modern taxonomy of divination practices and their relationship to other forms of ritual action" (p. 59). This taxonomy is carefully studied and explained by Smith (pp. 59-64) and will no doubt be useful for future studies of Tibetan divination. Smith provides translation and transliteration of selected passages from several relevant texts, and a complete translation, transliteration, and facsimile edition of one of the texts dealing with *lde'u 'phrul* divination. As Smith points out, "to date there has been very little scholarly interest in the comparative study of post-11th century divination manuscripts" (p. 140). Since these texts were written "to respond to questions posed by the diviners' clientele", they are a unique source to Tibetan everyday social life through the centuries.

Divination in Exile is a carefully researched study, and, as far as divination is concerned, without any real precedent in Tibetan studies. Anyone wishing to undertake further exploration of this field must engage with this book. Smith's broad comparative approach cannot be sufficiently recommended, and his short conclusive essay, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Tibetan Divination", points to the way to proceed, exemplified by his book, by "studying both ethnographic literature and indigenous etiological narratives", as well as "working closely with diviners in contemporary ethnographic environments" (p. 139).

