

A Preliminary Report on Investigations into (*Bon nyid*) '*Od gsal* and *Zhi khro bar do* in Earlier *Zhang zhung sNyan rgyud* and *sNyan rgyud* Literature¹

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In this article, I shall give a preview of ideas that I intend to discuss in greater detail in a monograph that I am presently³ preparing on possible Bon origins of Tibetan speculations regarding a post-mortem state of 'reality as it is'.⁴ At this early stage, before attempting a (relative) chronology⁵ of the materials on the subject that are extant in Buddhist and Bon traditions, I here will try to accommodate my discussion of Bon (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* material in a wider background of Buddhist speculations, in the hope that this will allow the characteristics of these specific Bon *rDzogs chen* speculations to stand out more distinctly. Occasionally, I shall refer to relevant results from earlier researches on the *kar gling zhi khro*, the peaceful and wrathful deities according to Karma gling pa, and on *chos nyid bar do*, the intermediate state of 'reality as it is', and also, where necessary, provide, more or less in the manner of an update, additional Buddhist

¹ I should like to extend my sincere thanks to several colleagues who have provided thoughtful comments and useful references, especially Bryan Jare Cuevas and Dan Martin. I also owe a particularly large debt of gratitude to Geshe Namgyal Nyima Dagkar, who in the beginning of 1998 kindly assisted me for three months of painstaking work. With his characteristic energy, dedication and sharp intellect he helped straighten out both readings and meanings of several earlier *Bon bar do*-texts. Namgyal Nyima's valuable contribution will be even more conspicuous in the text-editions that, as separate publications, will accompany the mentioned forthcoming book on *Bon*-origin of Tibetan speculations regarding a post-mortem state of 'reality as it is'. [This research and attendance at the seminar were facilitated by a fellowship at the *International Institute for Asian Studies*, 1997–2000.]

² [This article was originally contributed to the proceedings of the Eighth Seminar of the *International Association for Tibetan Studies*, which convened in Bloomington, Indiana, late July 1998. Because of obstacles largely beyond the powers of the convenor of that seminar, the proceedings have not yet seen the light of day. Since several colleagues have already worked and quoted from this article in the form that had it in 1999, when it was submitted for the IATS proceedings, I decided it would be best to reproduce the article as it is, without additions and with only very minor emendations [meta-communications, such as this note, appear in square brackets]. I am of course aware that some of the information may now appear antiquated, certainly after subsequent publication by Philippe Cornu (Ph.D. thesis 2006), David Germano (2005; based on his paper for the IATS 8 seminar), Cuevas (2000/2003), and others. For a proper genealogy of knowledge, it seems nonetheless useful to make this article available for future reference in the form in which it has informally circulated ever since its first submission, with all the shortcomings of a preliminary report—which it was originally intended to be, ten years ago. The editors of RET have most kindly agreed to make it accessible for publication. I should like to thank my colleague Jean-Luc Achard and the other editors of RET, for finally resolving the issue of access to my early work on this topic. I should also like to thank the convenor of the Bloomington IATS, Elliot Sperling, for graciously condoning this breach of IATS procedure.]

³ [The adverb "presently" here as elsewhere pertains to the years 1998/99, when this article was written.]

⁴ [See postscript.]

⁵ Considering the insecurities with regard to dates in early Bon and also rNying ma traditions, this chronology will necessarily be a relative one. I propose to take the stage of development of the concept of an intermediate state of 'reality as it is' as something like a '*Leitfossil*'.

materials from both rNying ma and 'bKa' (b)rgyud⁶ traditions that are relevant to the theses of this article and the wider research objectives. Due to the limits of this article, I cannot present or discuss in detail the Tibetan text of the relevant passages. We have to content ourselves with a general survey, leaving the finer points, as they emerge from a detailed discussion of the concrete texts, for the mentioned forthcoming monograph.

When perusing the following discussion about *bar do* systems of diverse rNying ma, Bon and 'bKa' rgyud' traditions, I should like to recommend referring to the conspectus of classifications of *bar do*-s appended below, this may help to keep track of correspondences, divergences and distinctive features in the plethora of *bar do* speculations addressed. It is not an analytical tool, also not quite a Rorschachtest, but a visual aid designed to assist surveying the mass of data and search for meaningful patterns.

1-1. Embedding in Previous Research

In recent research [1993-97], I attempted to trace a conceptual history of the tantric Buddhist concept of *zhi khro* in a *chos nyid bar do* with some reference to Bon equivalents of a (*bon nyid*) 'od gsal (clear light of 'reality as it is') and *zhi khro bar do*.⁷ Almost all of the descriptions of *chos nyid bar do* that I am aware of do at least refer to, and at times even explicitly describe, a *zhi khro maṇḍala*.⁸ As far as my evidence now goes, the first Buddhist text that features a full description of a *zhi khro maṇḍala* in relation to (*chos nyid*) *bar do* might be the fairly well-known *Kar gling zhi khro* text, called *Chos nyid bar do'i gsal* [or *gsol*] 'debs thos grol chen mo'.⁹ Yet I should point here to an undated rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum text, the *Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa rgyal ba'i bka' zhes bya ba'i rgyud*, which might be earlier (which in its present redaction I doubt is the case) or at least preserve an earlier form of the core materials (which seems quite likely). A preliminary discussion of this interesting text has appeared elsewhere.¹⁰ Here I will only briefly resume that discussion and then proceed with other rNying ma materials.

1-2. Intermezzo I, Some More rNying ma Material

A brief update is necessary on material contained in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*.¹¹ First of all, I should like to mention the *Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa rgyal ba'i bka' zhes bya ba'i rgyud* (MNg), unfortunately anonymous and not yet dated. About half of the eight-chapter version of the MNg consists of phrases it shares almost verbatim with the *Bar do thos grol Chos nyid bar do'i gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo* (ChB) and *Srid pa bar do'i ngo sprod gsal 'debs thos*

⁶ [The scare quotes indicate that some traditions claimed by bKa' rgyud pa-s precede their historical formation.]

⁷ See Blezer 1997.

⁸ So far, I am aware of only a few exceptions, the concrete titles will be mentioned later.

⁹ Page-numbers pertain to the Kalsang Lhundup-edition (1969), for further bibliographical references, see Blezer (1997), pp. 133 and 136.

¹⁰ See reference below.

¹¹ My sincere thanks go to Bryan Jare Cuevas for pointing me to most of these additional texts.

grol chen mo (SB) texts. The exact chronology is difficult to establish, not in the last place because the editions of the *MNg* do not seem to be homogenous products, they rather appear rough edged collations and probably not all chapters are of the same date. I attempted a preliminary comparison of the *Mng* with the *ChB* and *SB* elsewhere, in a separate article, forthcoming in the 1998 yearbook of the IIAS.¹² In brief, my main conclusion is that comparison of the *Mng* with the *ChB* & *SB* allows us hypothetically to posit and to an extent even ‘reconstruct’ an earlier source (or redaction) on which both the *MNg* and the *ChB* & *SB* have drawn or from which they might have developed.¹³ I shall not attempt to summarise in one paragraph the finer points, which took about fifty pages to lay out in some (read: preliminary) detail.

This much as to possibly earlier evidence than the *ChB* for a full description of *zhi khro* in a separate *bar do*. A next point would be that some texts in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* and *rNying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun* do not, as in most of the Buddhist descriptions of *chos nyid bar do* that I am familiar with, directly refer to *zhi khro* in this context. The *bar do* discussions in the texts listed below are rather brief, so the absence of an explicit reference to *zhi khro* might at times be due to mere conciseness rather than to dogmatic intent. Unless indicated otherwise, all texts are from the Taipei edition, *casu quo* the *mTshams sbrag rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*.

Several texts do not mention *zhi khro*:

- No reference at all in the very brief *Rin po che 'phags lam bkod pa'i rgyud*¹⁴. The text refers to *chos nyid gsal ba'i bar do*. A list of six *bar do*-s is presented: *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do*, *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do*, *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do*, *de bzhin srid pa'i bar do*, *rmi lam gnyid kyi bar do*, *chos nyid gsal ba'i bar do*¹⁵. The *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do* is briefly characterised as: *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do la/ /ye shes ngo yis 'dzin mdzad na/ /mun khung sgron me bteg pa bzhin/ /mtshon pa'i tshig gis don rtogs pas/ /rten 'brel 'dzom pa'i ye shes kyi/ /rmongs pa'i mun pa sangs par 'gyur/ /*¹⁶
- No direct reference in the *sKu thams cad kyi snang ba ston pa dbang rdzogs pa rang byung chen po'i rgyud*¹⁷. The text refers to *chos nyid rang snang bar do*. A list of four *bar do*-s is presented: *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do*, *chos nyid rang snang bar do*, *rmi lam 'dzin pa'i bar do*, *srid par 'khyams pa'i bar do*¹⁸. The *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* is briefly characterised as: *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do la/ /chos nyid gsang ba'i don rtogs nas/ /ma chags shes rab pha rol phyin/ /de nas lus 'di bor ba dang/ /...*¹⁹

¹² [Now published as Blezer (2003, cf. also 2001).]

¹³ [But now see also an impressive and very detailed Ph.D. thesis by Philippe Cornu (2006), who managed to date a version of the text to before *Klong chen pa* (1306/8–63), which, depending on the precise dates of *Karma gling pa* in the fourteenth century, might support at least a slightly earlier date for the *MNg*.]

¹⁴ Vol. LIV (Tib.Vol. *ka*), no.4504 (= *gTing skyes* no.64), pp. 120/837(3) – 124/863.

¹⁵ P. 123/858(5f).

¹⁶ P. 123/859(7) – 860(2).

¹⁷ Vol. LVI (Tib.Vol. *da*), no.4740 (= *gTing skyes* no.143), pp. 1/2 – 43/298(1).

¹⁸ P. 3/17(1f).

¹⁹ P. 3/17(2f).

- *sPros bral don gsal chen po'i rgyud* and *Thig le kun gsal chen po'i rgyud*.²⁰ The texts refer to *chos nyid 'od gsal (gyi) bar do*. A list of four *bar do*-s is presented: *rang bzhin dag pa'i(/ dag gi) bar do*, *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do*, *chos nyid 'od gsal (gyi) bar do*, *srid pa'i bar do*.²¹ The *rang bzhin dag pa'i bar do* is briefly characterised as *de la rang bzhin bar do ni/ da lta'i 'khrul snang 'di nyid yin/ /*.²² The first text is said to be a *gter ma* of Guru chos dbang (1212–70), ultimately attributed to Padmasambhava, dGa' rab rdo rje?, 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen, Śrīsiṃha, and Padma(?). The *bar do*-section is, so far as I checked, identical to the one in the second title. The second title is attributed to dGa' rab rdo rje?, 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen, Śrīsiṃha, and Vairocana.

Some texts do mention *zhi khro*,

- *Nyi ma dang zla ba kha sbyor ba chen po gsang ba'i rgyud*, in the *rNying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*.²³ Four *bar do*-s are treated in the several chapters, *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do*, *'chi kha bar do*, *srid pa'i bar do* and *chos nyid bar do*. This text has been discussed elsewhere.²⁴
- *Chos thams cad kyi don bstan pa rdzogs chen thig le nyag gcig ye nas bya rtsal bral ba* (= *Theg pa'i spyi phud klong chen rab 'byams kyi rgyud*).²⁵ The text refers to *chos nyid zhi khro'i bar do*. A list of four *bar do*-s is presented: *skye gnas bar do*, *'chi kha sdug bsngal bar do*, *chos nyid zhi khro'i bar do*, *srid par 'khyams pa'i bar do*.²⁶ The text is said to be a *gter ma* of rDo rje gling pa (1346–1406).

Texts that, like the *Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod*,²⁷ do not mention a *chos nyid bar do* are also extant in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, some examples are:

- *rDzogs pa chen po bar do gsang ba'i rgyud*.²⁸ A list of five *bar do*-s is presented: *rang bzhin gnas kyi bar do*, *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do*, *rmi lam dag gi bar do*, *skye shi dag gi bar do*, *srid pa dag gi bar do*.²⁹ The *skye shi dag gi bar do* is, like in the *Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod*, defined as a *ḥar do* of dying: *'chi ba'i dus su shes par bya/ /*. The text is attributed to Śrīsiṃha and rDo rje yang dbang gter.
- *Byang chub sems kyi man ngag rin po che sgron ma 'bar ba'i rgyud*.³⁰ A list of four *bar do*-s is presented: *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do*, *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do*, *ting 'dzin snga phyi bar do*, *srid pa dag gi bar do*.³¹ The *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* is clarified as: *kun bzhin sdong po bcud la bor/ sbrul gyi rkang lag 'byung ba bzhin/* and the *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do* is here

²⁰ Vol. LVI (Tib.Vol. *pa*), no.4757 (= *gTing skyes* no.110), pp. 229/2 – 270/288(6).

²¹ P. 3/17(1f).

²² P. 3/236(6).

²³ Vol. II, pp. 153–233, esp. p. 220, l.2 – p. 227, l.6.

²⁴ Orofino (1990), Blezer (1997).

²⁵ Vol. LV (Tib.Vol. *nya*), no.4643 (= *gTing skyes* no.65), pp. 301/290(3) – 343/586(7).

²⁶ P. 339/558(4f).

²⁷ A text from the *Ka dag rang 'byung rang shar*-cycle associated with Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408), the text claims an 8th c. AD origin.

²⁸ Vol. LIV (Tib.Vol. *nga*), no.4558, pp. 465/526(6) – 465/531(7).

²⁹ P. 465/527(4–6).

³⁰ Vol. LIV (Tib.Vol. *ca*), no.4587, pp. 543/267(1) – 553/338(6).

³¹ P. 548/305(3–5).

associated with *thog ma'i ye shes ngos gzung la/ /dwa phrug ma dang phrad pa bzhin/ /*. The text is attributed to Vimalamitra and sNyags Jñāna(kumāra).

I should also briefly like to discuss an interesting text from the *Ma ni bka' 'bum*³² that omits a *chos nyid bar do*, the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*.³³ Per Sørensen dates this text no later than 1150–60.³⁴ Among the six *bar do*-s listed (*rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do*, *skye shi'i bar do*, *shes pa snga phyi'i bar do*, *rmi lam gyi bar do*, *'chi kha'i bar do*, *srid pa'i bar do*)³⁵ we find *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* and *skye shi'i bar do* listed together, both of which, elsewhere, frequently refer to an intermediate state of life. The *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* is unambiguously explained as the process of straying from *gzhi'i gnas lugs*, the fundamental natural state.³⁶ The *skye shi'i bar do* clearly refers to a regular *bar do* of life in which one can practice under the guidance of a compassionate *bla ma*.³⁷ A similar feature we shall also encounter in the *mGur 'bum*,³⁸ texts by Yang dgon pa (1213–58) and in the Bon Zhang zhung snyan rgyud text, the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag*, all of which will be discussed below.

The term *shes pa snga phyi'i bar do* refers to clarifying conceptual thinking as wisdom, to let conceptual thought liberate of itself and arise as wisdom.³⁹ A substantial discussion of this *bar do*, or at least of *bar do*-s with similar names and descriptions, appears in a text attributed Mi la ras pa (1040/53–1123/35), the *Lam blo nas gcod pa bar do ngo sprod kyi gdams pa zab mo*, and in the *Bar do lam khyer 'khor 'das rgyun gcod kyi gdams ngag* (which does not refer to an author, but until further notice I will assume it is also attributed to Mi la ras pa), both are discussed below.

But the most remarkable feature of this text is that the *srid pa'i bar do* is divided into three parts, each associated with one of the *buddhakāya*-s, the first week with *chos sku* (pertaining to those of the highest capacities), the second with *longs sku* (pertaining to those of mediocre capacities), and the third onward with *sprul sku* (pertaining to those of the lowest capacities).⁴⁰ Usually, that is, in rNying ma texts that feature *chos nyid bar do* (*rdzogs sku*) and a *bar do* of dying (*chos sku*), the *srid pa'i bar do* would be associated with *sprul sku*, or, like we frequently find in 'bKa' rgyud' texts—no (after-death) *chos nyid bar do* present—it would pertain to *rdzogs sku* (the *bar do* of entering a womb would then be associated with *sprul sku*; the *bar do* of dying, of course, again, with *chos sku*). The text continues with a very elaborate presentation of *srid pa'i bar do*, discussing each consecutive week of seven,

³² A text from the *Gab pa mngon phyung*, brought to my attention by Dan Martin.

³³ The title is taken from the colophon.

³⁴ Sørensen (1994), p. 586, thanks to Dan Martin for pointing me to Sørensen's discussion.

³⁵ I consulted the Dharamsala-edition in two volumes, Vol. II, p. 365, l.6 – p. 387, l.2. On p. 375, l.6 – p. 376, l.2, Dharamsala 1995.

³⁶ P. 376, l.2 – p. 379, l.6.

³⁷ P. 379, l.6 – p. 380, l.5.

³⁸ The *mgur* are said to derive from Mi la ras pa, but were compiled much later by the madman from gTsang, gTsang smyon He ru ka Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan (1452–1507), and are not of uniform antiquity.

³⁹ P. 380, l.5 – p. 381, l.2.

⁴⁰ P. 383, l.5 – p. 385, l.3.

the last part, from the fourteenth day onward, pertains to *sprul sku* and those of the lowest capacities, (*dbang po tha ma*).

An interesting point, to which I shall return a little later, is that in this rNying ma material a '*chi kha'i bar do*' is not always referred to by that name; actually, often it is not even (explicitly) mentioned at all. In the *rDzogs pa chen po bar do gsang ba'i rgyud*, for instance, it is, like in the *Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod*, referred to by another name, *skye shi dag gi bar do* (or *skye shi bar do*, successively). This *skye shi bar do* does in this case not have the meaning of an intermediate phase of life, which, at least among 'bKa' rgyud pa-s', would be a more usual denotation. Instead *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* here apparently covers a *bar do* of life. Especially amongst rNying ma pa-s, *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* is indeed a standard reference to a phase of life. In other texts the process of dying seems to be subsumed under the heading for a phase of life, that is, under *rang bzhin gyi bar do* or *skye shi'i bar do*. But other variation also exists. Later, when briefly updating 'bKa' rgyud' material, we shall see that Phag mo gru pa (1110–70), following La va pa, describes *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* quite unambiguously as '*chi kha'i bar do*'. Apparently a *bar do* of dying was often thought to be associated with, or implied in, an intermediate phase of life, eventually even borrowing the designation(s) for such a *bar do* of life as a specific reference to the process of dying.

1-3. Further Embedding in Previous Research

After this first intermezzo, allow me to continue accommodating my current work a little further in previous research. The Bon *zhi khro bar do* as described in the *sNyan brgyud bar do thos grol gsal sgron chen mo*⁴¹ seems, at least as far as the dates of textual fixation/ discovery are concerned (Dam pa rang grol, born 1149 AD), to predate the description of a *chos nyid bar do* in the *ChB* (Karma gling pa, 14th AD). The *sNyan rgyud bar do thos grol* texts are highly ritualistic, more so than the somewhat more theoretical Buddhist *ChB*, but both put equally much emphasis on the description of a *zhi khro maṇḍala*. In general, though, there does not seem to be much overlap between the Buddhist and Bon *Bar do thos grol* texts. In my *Kar gling Zhi khro*, I concluded that a comparison of the *maṇḍala-s* of the *ChB* (and the *Zhi khro nges don snying po*)⁴² and the *sNyan rgyud bar do thos grol* texts, given that only the most generic similarities occur, does not yield enough common ground for establishing any sound hypothesis concerning a positive affiliation between these texts. Moreover, also apart from the descriptions of the *maṇḍala-s*, the *ChB* and the *sNyan rgyud bar do thos grol* texts do not suggest much of a relation of borrowing (or shared resources), that is, except for a rather conspicuous match in the summarising prayer formulas that conclude the descriptions of the groups of deities in the *maṇḍala-s* of both. As I reported there, these prayers seem to derive from a probably older version, as it might have been preserved in the *Bar do 'phrang sgröl gyi smon lam*.⁴³ In both instances the prayers show signs of editing and deviate from the

⁴¹ Cf. other recensions of this text, called *Zhi khro bar do 'phrang grol gyi thos grol las byang bag chags rang grol* and *sNyan rgyud thos grol bar do 'phrang grol chen po*; see bibliography.

⁴² By Ngag dbang kun dga' bstan 'dzin (1680–1728), for further data, see Blezer (1997), p. 3.

⁴³ For bibliographical references see Blezer (1997), p. 187.

version preserved in the *Bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi smon lam*. The shared prayers do not suggest a direct borrowing either way but rather a common source. I have not yet been able to pinpoint a source text beyond the *Bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi smon lam* (and I am not sure if I ever will).

Even though there is a rather strong connection between the Buddhist *chos nyid bar do* (and the Bon *zhi khro bar do*) and *zhi khro maṇḍala-s*, I nevertheless tried to be prudent in my *Kar gling Zhi khro* not to overstate the link between the *chos nyid (/bon nyid) bar do* and *zhi khro maṇḍala-s* in general. This is mainly because I suspect that those of the *bar do* variants which feature a more explicitly described *maṇḍala* might represent relatively late developments. To be more precise, even though most of the Buddhist *chos nyid bar do* descriptions that I am familiar with do at least refer to a *zhi khro maṇḍala* (so far I found only a few exceptions, mostly in very brief descriptions), I do think that certainly as far as older Bon literature and a (*bon nyid*) '*od gsal gyi bar do* is concerned it would be incorrect to identify the introduction of a *maṇḍala* with the conception of a (*bon nyid*) '*od gsal gyi bar do* as such.

2-1. Present Research, Bon (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* Material

In my current⁴⁴ research, I investigate early Bon texts on *bon nyid* and *zhi khro bar do*. The larger hypothesis of my project, in which the preliminary research results presented here are instrumental, is to provide a history of ideas and, as part of that, evidence for a possible temporal precedence of Bon (*bon nyid*) '*od gsal gyi bar do* over Buddhist *chos nyid bar do* speculations (at the moment the most likely hypothesis).

For this article, I shall specifically focus on texts from (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* traditions. Besides the *sNyan rgyud bar do thos grol* texts that I discussed in an earlier publication, I am also looking at other relatively early *sNyan rgyud* texts on these *bar do-s*, amongst others the *Ma bcos gnyug ma'i don bstan pa'i gdams pa* and *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* (13th AD),⁴⁵ at a *sNyan rgyud rig pa gcer mthong* text, to wit, the *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma* (12th AD),⁴⁶ and at an old and better known *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* text, the *sGron ma drug gi gdams pa* (traditionally dated to the 8th AD, but may be even

⁴⁴ [See introduction above.]

⁴⁵ One manuscript edition available, the texts were most probably recorded in the 13th AD; see bibliography.

⁴⁶ Two manuscript editions are available. The *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma* was apparently committed to writing in the 12th c. AD. One manuscript is reproduced in an edition of the *sNyan rgyud rig pa gcer mthong*-cycle, attributed to Bon zhig khyung nag (1103–83); see bibliography. The orthography and grammar of this text are exceptionally poor. Many passages show corruption in transmission. Interestingly enough these not only pertain to scribal errors that conform with the particular script in which these manuscripts tend to be written but they also often involve remarkable “phonetic” mistakes that could indeed be indicative of an oral transmission. If I may I should like to add that both the corruptions and the poor command of orthography and grammar provide interesting information regarding the people and traditions transmitting these rare texts. The other manuscript was reproduced in *Rare Bonpo Texts Belonging to the Abhidharma and sNyan rgyud rig pa gcer mthong Cycles*; see bibliography. The two manuscript editions differ very much and do not seem to relate directly.

as late as the 11th c. AD?)⁴⁷ and its two commentaries *sGron ma'i 'grel pa nyi 'od rgyan* (12th AD)⁴⁸ and *sGron ma drug gi dgongs don 'grel pa*.⁴⁹ Furthermore some brief *bar do* discussions are included in other *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* texts, like the *Byang chub sems kyi gnad drug ces bya ba'i lag len*,⁵⁰ *'Khor lo bzhi sbrag*⁵¹, *Man ngag le'u brgyad pa*.⁵²

2-1-1. *Zhi khro*

As far as I can see now, evidence indeed confirms that (possibly) older conceptions of a (*bon nyid*) *'od gsal gyi bar do* do not focus on a *zhi khro maṇḍala*, actually, the ones that I have examined so far do not even mention 'visions' of such a *maṇḍala* for this *bar do* (at least not directly)—though I noticed that a reference to, most probably geometric, luminous forms and *maṇḍala-s* (so, not *zhi khro maṇḍala-s!*) does occur in the *'Khor lo bzhi sbrag*.⁵³ More evidence will be reviewed later. This might then differentiate the Bon *zhi khro bar do* of the Bon *Bar do thos grol* texts on a relative scale from an, in origin, (probably) older and more 'generic' concept of a *bon nyid ('od gsal gyi) bar do*, the first possibly being a later, more specific elaboration of the latter. I must state emphatically that the provisional dates connected with a written fixation of the material examined would at this stage not encourage, nor even allow, such a hypothesis. According to tradition (and as far as I can see this may well be true),⁵⁴ some (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* texts have been transmitted orally for some time.

In general the *chos nyid bar do* as it is presented in the *Nyi zla kha sbyor* and some of the (other) *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* texts mentioned, in many respects—e.g. the point of arising of an 'experience' of luminosity at death, the focus on generic 'experiences' of *sgra 'od zer gsum* rather than on an (elaborately described) *zhi khro maṇḍala*—shows more resemblance to early Bon presentations of a (*bon nyid*) *'od gsal gyi bar do* than to that of the *chos nyid bar do* as we find it described in the *ChB*.

⁴⁷ Partly edited and translated by Orofino (1990); traditional claim 8th AD: it is said to have been received in vision by Gyer spungs chen po snang bzher lod po from Ta pi hri tsa; see bibliography.

⁴⁸ Also partly edited and translated by Orofino (1990); compiled by Uri bsod nams rgyal mtshan (died 1133 AD); see bibliography.

⁴⁹ Probably somewhere in the late 13th c. AD, written by 'Og blon sgom chen bKra shis shes rab for Bru sgom rgyal ba g-yung drung (1242–1290)? See bibliography.

⁵⁰ See esp. p. 447, l.4 – p. 448; attributed to Bla ma Ya ngal (gong bkra ba chen po); see bibliography.

⁵¹ See esp. p. 462, l.4 – p. 464; thanks to dGe bshes rNam rgyal Nyi ma brag dkar and Donatella Rossi for bringing this interesting text to my attention; see bibliography.

⁵² See esp. p. 500, l.1 – p. 501; also said to have been received in vision by Gyer spungs chen po snang bzher lod po from Kun tu bzang po in the form of Ta pi hri tsa; see bibliography.

⁵³ On this text see Karmay (1998), pp. 85–102, esp. pp. 97f.

⁵⁴ Compare for instance the *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma* (1972), p. 219, ll.6f., this is part of an elaboration on *sgra 'od zer gsum* at death, and the *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma* (1976), p. 368, l.10 – p. 369, l.1.

2-1-2. Doubling of 'Od gsal 'Experience'

This issue moreover seems to relate to a perceived 'inconsistency' in Buddhist *chos nyid bar do* traditions regarding the supposed position of an 'experience' of 'od gsal, which I already briefly noted in my *Kar gling Zhi khro*, i.e., whether the (first) confrontation with (the) clear light (of death) is placed at the end of the 'chi kha'i bar do or at the beginning of the *chos nyid bar do*.⁵⁵ If the former is the case, like, e.g., in the *ChB* and Klong chen pa's (1306/8–63) 'Chi kha'i bar do'i gsal 'debs,⁵⁶ different forms are distinguished, in this case a 'chi ba'i and *chos nyid kyi 'od gsal*. The disparity regarding this between texts like the *Nyi zla kha sbyor*,⁵⁷ but also other *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* texts⁵⁸ and the *ChB*, reflects a difference in focus. The *Nyi zla kha sbyor* is apparently more geared toward generic 'experiences' of sound, light and rays, *sgra 'od zer gsum*, and has the 'od gsal/ *chos nyid* 'experience' as a central theme in the *chos nyid bar do*. In the *ChB*, on the other hand, the emphasis has shifted toward highly diversified 'experiences' of *zhi khro*, while featuring the first 'experience' of ('chi ba'i) 'od gsal in another, the 'chi kha'i bar do (which, regarding the stages of dissolution at death, seems a logical position for such an 'experience'). The disruption of a more coherent description of a *chos nyid bar do* in (seven) stages by the insertion of a fully described *zhi khro maṇḍala* in the *ChB* is, as I noted earlier,⁵⁹ still very much apparent in the redaction of the text.

The (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* presentations of the arising of a vision of *kun gzhi* in the context of death that I have seen also do not show such an

⁵⁵ Blezer (1997), pp. 104f.

⁵⁶ The 'Chi kha'i bar do'i gsal 'debs by Klong chen pa dri med 'od zer (1306/8–63), in his *sNying thig ya bzhi*. Even though the text cites the *Nyi zla kha sbyor*, a *thun mong du 'char ba'i 'od gsal* and a *lhun grub rin po che'i (snang ba longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku'i) 'od gsal* are distinguished (in the first and second *bar do*-s respectively).

⁵⁷ See bibliography, pp. 153–233, esp. p. 203, l.6 – p. 220, l.1, and p. 220, l.2 – p. 227, l.6.

⁵⁸ Taipei-edition (see bibliography), discussed in more detail above:

- *Rin po che 'phags lam bkod pa'i rgyud*, see esp. p. 123/858(5f), p. 123/859(3–5), and p. 123/859(7) – 860(2); no specific 'chi kha'i bar do mentioned, just a generic *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do* (without the specific meaning of a *bar do* of dying like e.g. in the *Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod*; see Blezer (1997), p. 37);
- *sKu thams cad kyi snang ba ston pa dbang rdzogs pa rang byung chen po'i rgyud*, see esp. p. 3/17(1f), p. 3/17(2f & 3–5), and p. 7/44(3) – 45(1); no specific 'chi kha'i bar do mentioned, just a generic *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* (though briefly referring to leaving the body behind (*de nas lus 'di bor ba//...*) but without the specific meaning of a *bar do* of dying such as in the text of Phag mo gru pa discussed later);
- *Chos thams cad kyi don bstan pa rdzogs chen thig le nyag gcig ye nas bya rtsal bral ba (= Theg pa'i spyi phud klong chen rab 'byams kyi rgyud)*, see esp. p. 339/558(4f), p. 339/559(4f & 6f) & 560(3f & 5f), p. 340/561(3) – 565(1), and 340/565(2) – 341/569(7), a 'chi kha sduḡ bsngal gyi bar do is mentioned;
- *sPros bral don gsal chen po'i rgyud*, esp. p. 262/236(5f, 6 & 7) and pp. 262/237(6ff), no specific 'chi kha'i bar do mentioned, just a generic *rang bzhin dag pa'i bar do* (without the specific meaning of a *bar do* of dying like e.g. in the *Slob dpon chen po la ba pa'i bar do rnam pa gsum* of Phag mo gru pa discussed later), the *bar do*-section is identical to the one in:
- *Thig le kun gsal chen po'i rgyud*, see esp. p. 292/443(5f & 7) and pp. 292/444(6ff).

I must repeat here that considering the brevity of the *bar do*-discussions and the absence of a specific 'chi kha'i bar do in most of these texts, I should rather not give too much weight to this evidence.

⁵⁹ Blezer (1997), pp. 124f.

awkward double reference. In the commentaries to the *sGron ma drug gi gdams pa*, for instance, more elaborate and explicit descriptions are appended to a brief reference to the last dissolution at death,⁶⁰ but the elaboration on *kun gzhi* is not explicitly separated from the *bon nyid 'od gsal* descriptions that follow, in the sense of being viewed as a 'first arising' clearly set apart from a 'second one', so, here too, a double reference does not feature prominently. I shall review some more evidence later.

A most interesting point is that the commentaries, the *sGron ma'i 'grel pa nyi 'od rgyan* and the *sGron ma drug gi dgongs don 'grel pa*, reserve a special name for this last phase of dying, they style this phase *ye shes kyi bar do*,⁶¹ as if it were another, separate *bar do*, which is however not counted or listed, that is to say, it is most probably a descriptive designation rather than a separate category. It does, however, resonate with the casual way in which, as we shall see later, in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag a bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do* is distinguished at the beginning of a *srid pa'i bar do*, while it does, in fact, not appear in the list of *bar do*-s of this text.⁶²

2-1-3. *Bar do* of Dying and *Bar do* of 'Reality as It Is'

Needless to say, textual evidence supports that a *kun gzhi/ 'od gsal*-like 'experience' as such would indeed conclude the process of dying. What might be more worthy of mention here is that a *bon nyid* or *chos nyid bar do* may well be a specific elaboration on a theme from that (last) part of a *bar do* of dying, elaborating and projecting a *kun gzhi/ 'od gsal* 'experience' into 'the' after-death state (originally: *bar ma do'i srid pa, srid pa'i bar do*) as an 'experience' of *bon nyid/ chos nyid*, which in due course came to be distinguished as a separate (*bon nyid*) *'od gsal/ chos nyid kyi bar do*.

This already reflects clearly in the names used in Bon texts for an intermediate state of reality as it is, to wit, *bon nyid 'od gsal (gyi) bar do*, but too, and more pregnantly, in the above designation *'od gsal gyi bar do*,⁶³ and also in the concrete descriptions of that *bar do*. That name would, e.g., in 'bKa' rgyud' texts, rather be associated with a *bar do* of dying.

The above hypothesis moreover receives support from the curiously casual reference to a *bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do* in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* (13th AD?).⁶⁴ The *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* lists six *bar do*-s (*gnas pa gzhi'i bar do, skye shi gnyis kyi bar do, rmi lam bag chags kyi bar do, nyams su len pa ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do, mi rtag 'gyur ba 'chi kha'i bar*

⁶⁰ See p. 289, 1.4, the *sGron ma'i 'grel pa nyi 'od rgyan* comments on this phrase on p. 345, 1.6 – p. 346, 1.1 and the *sGron ma drug gi dgongs don 'grel pa* on p. 411, 11.3–5.

⁶¹ See the references to the *sGron ma drug*-commentaries above, see also the *sGron ma'i 'grel pa nyi 'od rgyan* on p. 349, 1.4.

⁶² The *Byang chub sems kyi gnad drug ces bya ba'i lag len* also briefly describes a (*bon nyid*) *'od gsal gyi bar do* on p. 447, 1.4 – p. 448, 1.1. See also The '*Khor lo bzhi sbrag*, which like the *sGron ma drug gi gdams pa* has a more elaborate version on p. 462, 1.4 – p. 464, 1.1. I should like to note here that the *Byang chub sems kyi gnad drug ces bya ba'i lag len* and the '*Khor lo bzhi sbrag* do speak of *'od gsal gyi bar do*, instead of, or, as far as the latter is concerned, alongside, a *bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do*.

⁶³ See for instance the *sGron ma'i 'grel pa nyi 'od rgyan* on p. 349, 11.1&5, the *Byang chub sems kyi gnad drug ces bya ba'i lag len* on p. 447, 1.6, and the '*Khor lo bzhi sbrag*, p. 462, 11.4f.

⁶⁴ A more elaborate discussion regarding this date will follow in my forthcoming book on the intermediate state of reality as it is.

do, and *shi nas pha rol 'phos pa srid pa'i bar do*)⁶⁵ but does not include a *bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do* in the list, while later, almost on an aside, such a *bar do* is nevertheless distinguished at the end of the *bar do* of dying and the beginning of the *srid pa'i bar do*.⁶⁶

Another interesting point is the inclusion of *gnas pa gzhi'i bar do* next to *skye shi gnyis kyi bar do* in the same list, a phenomenon that we also find in the Buddhist *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams* (*Gab pa mngon phyung, Ma ni bka' 'bum*), but that is also present in 'Mi la ras pa's' *mGur 'bum* and in Yang dgon pa's *Bar do 'phrang sgrol*. The *gnas pa gzhi'i bar do* here does not refer to *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* as a *bar do* of life, but to a process of straying from *kun gzhi*.⁶⁷ This meaning might, in a more general sense, well be implicit in the designation *rang bzhin* of *rang bzhin gnas pa (gzhi)'i bar do* as such. There is moreover no doubt that *skye shi'i bar do* refers to a phase of life here.⁶⁸

Lastly, I should like to point out briefly that this text features an oblique reference to *zhi khro'i lha* in the description of '*chi kha'i bar do* when referring to the relevant preparatory practices one could or should do while still alive.⁶⁹

Compare the list of *bar do*-s in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* to the slightly different set of *bar do*-s listed in the 12th c. AD(?) *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma*⁷⁰ (to wit: *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do, ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do, rmi lam gyi bar do, skye shi'i bar do, bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do, and srid pa'i bar do*).⁷¹ Noteworthy is that one edition (the 1976 one) reads a curious '*jig rten gyi bar do* instead of *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do* (maybe a convergence with the '*jigs pa dus kyi bar do* mentioned later?).

In this text, too, *rang bzhin gnas pa gzhi'i bar do* and *skye shi'i bar do* appear in the same list. Unlike in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag*, however, *rang bzhin gnas pa gzhi'i bar do* here seems to refer to a phase of life,⁷² while *skye shi'i bar do* here clearly refers to a phase of dying;⁷³ the name '*chi kha'i bar do* is not mentioned.

Also interesting is a reference to four more *bar do*-s that are not included in the discussion here (*chags pa gzhi'i bar do, gnas pa tshe'i bar do, 'jigs pa dus kyi bar do, stong pa srid pa'i bar do*).⁷⁴ This set of four *bar do*-s is discussed in the *sNyan rgyud rig pa gcer mthong gi gzhung*.⁷⁵ The text then proceeds to explain (only) four *bar do*-s of the first list further, to wit, *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do, skye shi'i bar do, bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do, and srid pa'i bar do*.

When we follow the text of the *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma* from the description of *skye shi'i bar do* as it continues into the first part of *bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do*,⁷⁶ no such awkward double reference to *kun gzhi* or '*od gsal*

⁶⁵ P. 345, ll.1–3.

⁶⁶ P. 356, ll.2–7.

⁶⁷ See the description on p. 345, l.3 – p. 346, l.1.

⁶⁸ Cf. p. 346, ll.1f.

⁶⁹ See p. 346, l.6 – p. 347, l.3.

⁷⁰ See a very helpful article by Achard (1998) on Bon zhig khyung nag (1103–83) and the *Rig pa gcer mthong*, which is the cycle that this text belongs to.

⁷¹ P. 377, l.9 (1976) and p. 236, ll.3f (1972).

⁷² P. 378, l.1 (1976) and p. 236, l.6 (1972).

⁷³ P. 378, l.2 (1976) and p. 237, l.1 (1972).

⁷⁴ P. 377, ll.9f (1976) and p. 236, ll.4f (1972).

⁷⁵ P. 440, l.2 – p. 442, l.2.

⁷⁶ P. 378, l.3 – p. 379, l.9 (1976) and p. 237, l.1 – p. 239, l.5 (1972).

arising occurs. Moreover there is a tantalising brief reference to deities ('bring gis <'od lnga> rigs lnga longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku rnam shes par'⁷⁷ bya'o), stating that mediocre (no derogatory connotation implied) practitioners should understand the five lights as the *rigs lnga*, note well, it does not state that these five classes of deities would be arising as visions (a similar reference also appears in a Bon text from a different *rDzogs chen* tradition, the *Bar do'i ngo sprod kyi gdams pa* in the *Yang rtse klong chen* cycle discovered by gZhod ston dngos grub grags 'bar in 1088)!⁷⁸ This clearly shows at which point deities might have entered such a *bar do*, i.e., at the description of the 'experiences' of coloured lights; even the redaction of a relatively late text like the *ChB* still clearly shows how the insertion of a full description of the *maṇḍala* explodes a more coherent series of (seven) stages that describe general 'experiences' of luminosity (which features in most of the Buddhist and Bon descriptions).⁷⁹

It is fascinating to see how the (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* material adduced above in its peculiarities addresses and provides hints at possible developments, and at times even clarifies problems in later Buddhist presentations, like, for instance, in the *ChB*. But up to now this has very much been a finger painting session, allowing a large distance to the concrete historical contexts of the concepts that appear in these several texts. Most of the details of transmission and the concrete points of exchange still remain to be established at this point. What I hope to have made clear so far is that a bird's eye view of speculations on the subject reveals a framework and some directions in which to start working out further details. Especially with regard to the double reference to 'od gsal, as an 'experience' that the process of dying culminates in and as an important ingredient for speculations on an intermediate state of 'reality as it is', a closer examination of descriptions of the last phases of dying in 'bKa' rgyud' material will be revealing.

2.2 Intermezzo II, 'bKa' rgyud' Material

If one is interested in the position of 'od gsal in relation to *bar do*, a closer look at the writings of early bKa' rgyud pa-s and their ancestors is indispensable. In 'bKa' rgyud' texts, against a background of various versions of *chos drug*, we find very clear and elaborate descriptions of a 'chi kha'i bar do (though not necessarily under that very name) and 'od gsal 'experiences'. Not rarely 'od gsal 'experiences' are divided there into (two/three) separate categories.

In general, 'bKa' rgyud' material in its *bar do* presentations strikes me as fairly faithful to *abhidharma*. Both the descriptions and the classification of *bar do*-s are strongly reminiscent of presentations in texts like the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, quite often they have incorporated literal quotes. As I have noted elsewhere,⁸⁰ the most remarkable feature of early 'bKa' rgyud' discussions of *bar do*-s that I have been able to consult so far is that a *chos*

⁷⁷ Emend: *rnam shes par*.

⁷⁸ See the *Bla med rdzogs pa chen po yang rtse klong chen gyi khrid gzhung cha lag dang bcas pa'i gsung pod*, edited by Sherab Wangyal, Vol. I, p. 673, l.4 – p. 674, l.1, Dolanji 1973.

⁷⁹ See Blezer (1997), pp. 124f.

⁸⁰ See Blezer (1997), pp. 28f., esp. n.128, based on a few telling samples (*Mi la ras pa'i mgur 'bum* and a version of the *Nā ro pa'i rnam thar*).

nyid bar do as a separate phase does not seem to be distinguished, the *chos nyid bar do* rather seems to be a specific *rDzogs chen* development. The additional evidence adduced here has confirmed my earlier impressions, but more, early material needs to be studied to be absolutely sure. Typically one will find a trio of *bar do*-s (one or two with regard to death and dying), and even though the nomenclature is not always consistent, the material I have examined so far fits well into Vasubandhu-s scheme of (*pūrvakālabhava*), *mṛtyu-* or *marāṇabhava*, *antarābhava* and *upapattibhava*. Moreover the *bar do*-s are often characterised or distinguished on basis of the practices of (especially) the *chos drug* they are associated with (but also by the kind of subtle body being purified and, of course, the *buddhakāya* being realised, which is, in turn, related to the level of the practitioner). Descriptions of the stages of dissolution at death are most elaborate in texts of 'bKa' rgyud pa-s' and the stages are usually spelled out meticulously; a *bar do* of dying and 'experiences' of 'od *gsal* seems to be very much in focus.

Apart from the texts adduced in my 'Kar *gling Zhi khro*' (mainly the *Chos drug gi man ngag*, 'Mi la ras pa's' *mGur 'bum* and *Nā ro pa's rNam thar*)⁸¹ I should like to adduce some more early but also some later material here. The first text that I should like to discuss is attributed to Khyung po rnal 'byor (probably 11th–12th AD), to wit, the *Bar do rnam gsum gyi zhal gdams*.⁸² A list of three *bar do*-s appears: *skye shi'i bar do*, *rmi lam bar do*, and *srid pa bar do*.⁸³ This text features a listing of (four) phases of dissolution of gross and subtle (states of) conceptual thought that deviates from the regular scheme of three (*snang mched thob gsum*),⁸⁴ the last phase, i.e. *nye bar thob pa*, is, as far as my present knowledge goes, usually not distinguished. We do find a distinction of 'od *gsal* into *sgom pa'i 'od gsal* and *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal*, but both clearly pertain to a phase of dying, so there is no doubling of an 'od *gsal* 'experience' over different *bar do*-s.⁸⁵

Mi la ras pa (1040/53–1123/35) is supposed to have written a text specifically on *bar do*, to wit, the *bDe mchog snyan brgyud kyi lam blo nas gcod pa bar do ngo sprod kyi gdams ngag zab mo*⁸⁶ and the *Lam blo nas gcod pa bar do ngo sprod kyi gdams pa zab mo*,⁸⁷ but the authorship particularly of the latter is not completely clear. The colophon of the first-mentioned version identifies the text as an instruction by Mi la ras pa to Ras chung rdo rje brags pa (1084–1161).⁸⁸ There is no clear indication of authorship in the second version, even though I remain alerted by this datum, I shall, as for now, rely on the attribution of the other version. Like in the *mGur 'bum*, the classification of *bar do*-s is not demarcated very clearly. The term *bar do* seems to be used somewhat more fluidly and metaphorically here for all kinds of transitional situations. Even though three *bar do*-s appear as a basic pattern, other *bar do*-s

⁸¹ See Blezer (1997), pp. 26–31.

⁸² See bibliography.

⁸³ P. 264, ll.2f. This list is briefly explained on p. 264, ll.3–6 when the basis of purification is explained.

⁸⁴ P. 266, l.1.

⁸⁵ P. 268, l.5 – p. 270, l.2, explaining *nye bar thob pa*.

⁸⁶ See bibliography.

⁸⁷ Other edition of the same text; see bibliography.

⁸⁸ See the colophon, after the colophon title on p. 73, l.3 (i.e. on p. 73, l.3 – p. 76, l.2) the text is identified as an instruction by Mi la ras pa to Ras chung rdo rje brags pa (1084–1161), see esp. p. 76, l.2.

are also distinguished. Thus we can, for instance, find three familiar-sounding *bar do*-s listed and discussed briefly, to wit: *skye shi'i bar do*, *bag chags rmi lam gyi bar do*, and *snang mun srid pa'i bar do*,⁸⁹ all in relation to the first category of a more generic classification of *bar do*-s into three main groups: *lus ldan gzhi'i bar do*, *nges shes rtags kyi bar do*, and *ngo sprod 'bras bu'i bar do*.⁹⁰

With regard to the other headings all kinds of further types of '*bar do*' are mentioned as well, some of these are of the more familiar kind, for instance *srid pa 'chi ka ma'i bar do*,⁹¹ but also more curious and at times confusing categories appear, like a *chos nyid bar do*,⁹² which here, quite clearly, pertains to being introduced to *chos nyid* while being alive and not to a phase immediately after death. The *skye shi shes pa snga phyi'i bar do* is associated with the conceptual vacuum between two thoughts (*shes pa snga phyi gnyis kyi bar ...*).⁹³ Such a *shes pa snga phyi gnyis kyi bar do* also appears in the *Bar do lam khyer 'khor 'das rgyun gcod kyi gdams ngag*, which will be discussed anon, but it is especially prominent in the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*, which we discussed at the end of the presentation of rNying ma material. The classification is rather complicated; I shall not discuss it here. Three types of '*od gsal*' are distinguished, '*chi ka'i 'od gsal*', *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal*, and '*bras bu'i 'od gsal*', all of these pertain to a *bar do* of dying.⁹⁴ The text furthermore describes a *snang mun srid pa bar do*,⁹⁵ an '*od gsal*' 'experience' is not described for this phase. A (*rigs mthun*) *mngal gyi bar do* is also discussed.⁹⁶

See also another text in the same volume, the *Bar do lam khyer 'khor 'das rgyun gcod kyi gdams ngag* (as said, I found no indication of the author).⁹⁷ Here we find a related discussion with a similar free use of the term *bar do*. There is no separate listing or discussion, but the basic distinction seems to be again into three, *skye shi'i bar do*, *rmi lam bar do*, *srid pa bar do*. *Srid pa 'chi ka ma'i bar do* is also mentioned⁹⁸ as is *shes pa snga phyi'i bar do*. The last-mentioned *bar do* features more prominently in the previous text and, as said, especially in the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*, discussed above.

In the *Bar do'i dmar khrid*⁹⁹ sGam po pa (1079–1153) distinguishes three *bar do*-s: a so-called 'first', 'second' and 'third'. They correspond to a *bar do* of dying (associated with understanding '*od gsal*'), to a *srid pa'i bar do* (associated with understanding *sgyu lus*) and to a *bar do* of being reborn (associated with closing the door of the womb, *mngal sgo 'gag pa*).¹⁰⁰ sGam po pa appends this division to a quote from the *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma zhes bya ba mkha' 'gro ma'i man ngag*, which is attributed to Ti lo pa (988–1069).¹⁰¹

⁸⁹ P. 100, l.2 – p. 101, l.3.

⁹⁰ P. 100, ll.1f.

⁹¹ E.g. on p. 103, l.2.

⁹² E.g. on p. 103, l.3.

⁹³ See p. 105, ll.3ff.

⁹⁴ P. 111, l.5 – p.113, l.1, esp. the last two lines.

⁹⁵ For the *snang mun* part in the name of this *bar do* see, for instance, p. 116, l.2.

⁹⁶ P. 115, ll.4f, discussed further on p. 121, ll.1ff.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 129–142.

⁹⁸ E.g. p. 137, l.2.

⁹⁹ In his collected works, see bibliography.

¹⁰⁰ P. 54, l.7 – p. 55, l.2 (see also p. 55, ll.2–4).

¹⁰¹ P. 53, ll.4f (see also ll.5f).

That text indeed clearly discusses such a threefold *bar do* system in the preceding part (which is absent in the anonymous *bsTan 'gyur* version, see bibliography); but there is some reason for doubt about the direct attribution to Ti lo pa.¹⁰² In the *Bar do'i dmar khrid* we find a distinction into the clear light realised in meditative practice and the ground luminosity that dawns at death, which in other texts is usually classified as son and mother clear light. '*Od gsal* is not differentiated here any further.

Another text attributed to sGam po pa, the *Bar do'i man ngag*,¹⁰³ also distinguishes three *bar do-s*,¹⁰⁴ but distinguishes the 'experiences' of luminosity of the second *bar do* as a separate category of '*od gsal, rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal*. It thus distinguishes three '*od gsal* 'experiences': *goms pa'i 'od gsal, bsam gtan gyi 'od gsal*, and *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal ba*.¹⁰⁵ Here we see a distinction similar to that in the *ChB* and *Klong chen pa's 'Chi kha'i bar do'i gsal 'debs*, one '*od gsal* 'experience', the *rang bzhin gyi 'od gsal*, is associated with the *bar do* following the phase of dying, in this case, of course, the *srid pa'i bar do*.

In sGam po pa's *Bar do bzhi gdams pa*¹⁰⁶ we find a minimal list of three *bar do-s* that is reminiscent of the one associated with Nā ro pa (1016–1100)¹⁰⁷ (*skye shi'i bar do, rmi lam bar do, and srid pa bar do*).¹⁰⁸ In another text, the *Bar do gsum gyi gdams pa lags*,¹⁰⁹ this scheme is indeed explicitly associated with Nā ro pa and described more elaborately.¹¹⁰ These two texts show the difference between the classifications attributed to Nā ro pa and Ti lo pa; compare also the system attributed to La va pa below.

We should also have a brief look at texts by Phag mo gru pa (1110–70) (quoting La va pa) and Zhang g-yu brag pa (1123–93).¹¹¹ In his collected works, Phag mo gru pa, like sGam po pa, also distinguishes three *bar do-s*, the first associated with '*od gsal*, the second with *sgyu lus*, the third with closing the door of the womb (*mngal sgo 'gag pa*).¹¹² He follows a classification attributed to La va pa.

Apparently, the text got corrupted at the enumeration of *bar do-s*, there seems to be evidence of a conflation of different schemes. Unfortunately, I do not have the text at hand, let alone different versions to consult, so the following must necessarily remain very tentative. There seems to be a scheme of three *bar do-s* discussed in which the first *bar do*, designated as a *bsgom pa'i bar do*, apparently refers to a *bar do* of life in which practice and

¹⁰² Many thanks to Dan Martin for identifying this text as the source; the quote is on f.9r, l.6 – f.9v., l.1, Kalimpong 1962, I-Tib-75. The preceding part, f.9r, ll.2–6, esp. l.2, clearly identifies the system of three *bar do-s* as indeed deriving from Ti lo pa. Yet the colophon indicates that the text was not actually *written* by Ti lo pa, but by Nā ro pa (1016–1100) (and Mar pa (1012–99)), which should leave some room for doubt.

¹⁰³ Vol.II, pp. 344–348.

¹⁰⁴ P. 344, ll.5–7.

¹⁰⁵ P. 344, l.7 – p. 345, l.1.

¹⁰⁶ Vol.II, p. 418, ll.3–6.

¹⁰⁷ See Blezer (1997), pp. 27f., see also the following text.

¹⁰⁸ P. 418, ll.3f.

¹⁰⁹ Vol.II, pp. 428f.

¹¹⁰ P. 229, ll.1–3.

¹¹¹ Thanks again to Dan Martin for pointing me to these texts and sharing an electronic and a photocopied version, and for providing bibliographical data.

¹¹² See bibliography. Since I do not have the original text at hand right now I have to rely on Dan Martin's e-text. See Vol. III, ff.209–211.

purification can take place. A second *bar do* is mentioned, a *srid pa'i bar do*, which is divided into three: *rang bzhin gnas kyi bar do*, *sgyu lus bsgoms pa'i bar do*, and *mngal gyi grong khyer dgag pa*, two of which, to wit, the ones pertaining to an 'intermediate state' proper and a phase of being reborn, one would indeed expect being expounded here. The text then continues discussing these three subdivisions, never finishing the main enumeration. Though such a subdivision of *bar ma do'i srid pa* or *srid pa bar do* seems well possible in theory (but also in a concrete text, e.g., *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*), I suspect that conflation has occurred. What immediately comes to mind is the quite common differentiation of individual capacities regarding *bar do* (practice) into three categories, to wit, practitioners of a best, mediocre and lower capacity. This may here have erroneously been read as another distinction into three *bar do-s*, which, as we saw above, 'bKa' rgyud pa-s', here and elsewhere, believe to hinge upon the very issue of capacity.

Such a differentiation into different capacities, in general, is used very frequently in *bar do* discussions. In 'bKa' rgyud' tradition it seems to be rather common to make a distinction into a superior class that should focus on 'od gsal, a mediocre class that should concentrate on *sgyu lus*, and an inferior class that should attempt to close the door of the womb.¹¹³ Anyway, regarding the seemingly poor transmission of the text, I am not sure whether what is here ascribed to Phag mo gru pa is actually faithfully representing a set of *bar do-s* of La va pa.

A most curious point is that the *bar do* of dying is, as was briefly mentioned above in Intermezzo I, clearly designated as *gnas pa'i gzhi'i bar do* here.

Zhang rin po che, in his *Nā ro pa'i bar do'i gdam ngag la bar do rnam pa gsum*,¹¹⁴ adheres to the minimal tripartite *bar do* classification that by now is already familiar from *Nā ro pa* (*skye shi bar do*, *rmi lam bar do*, *srid pa'i bar do*) and lists them with due reference to *Nā ro pa*.¹¹⁵

In the *Bar do 'phrang sgröl* texts contained in the collected works of Yang dgon pa rgyal mtshan dpal (1213–58)¹¹⁶ we can find a longer list of six *bar do-s*: *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do*, *rnam smin skye shi'i bar do*, *ting nge 'dzin bsam gtan gyi bar do*, *bag chags rmi lam gyi bar do*, *lugs zlog 'chi ka'i bar do*, and *lugs 'byung srid pa'i bar do*.¹¹⁷ Like in the Bon texts, the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* and *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma*, a *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* is listed together with a *skye shi'i bar do*. Apparently, like in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* (but unlike in the *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma*), here too, the former seems to refer to straying from (or being established in) *kun gzhi*¹¹⁸ and the latter to an intermediate phase of life.¹¹⁹ The same phenomenon also occurs in the *mGur 'bum* attributed to Mi la ras pa and in the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*.

¹¹³ See, e.g., Zhang Rin po che in the *Nā ro pa'i bar do gdam ngag la bar do rnam pa gsum*, f.182r, l.5 – v, l.1.

¹¹⁴ See bibliography.

¹¹⁵ F.181v, ll.4f.

¹¹⁶ See bibliography.

¹¹⁷ See the *Bar do 'phrang sgröl gyi gzhung gdam pa* (see bibliography). On p. 563, l.5 – p. 564, l.3.

¹¹⁸ See pp. 564, l.4ff.

¹¹⁹ Pp. 567, ll.6ff.

Yang dgon pa, in his description of dying, clearly refers to the arising of 'od gsal but does not distinguish several types, as sGam po pa does.¹²⁰ The *Bar do 'phrang sgrol* texts by Yang dgon pa provide an elaborate discussion of the last phase of death and an 'experience' of 'od gsal, but, from the present perspective, not too many new ideas are added to the stock that is already extant in earlier texts and which Yang dgon pa (partly) draws upon.¹²¹

Conclusions

A *bon nyid* and *chos nyid bar do* 'experience' after death is obviously (thematically) connected to a 'chi ba'i 'od gsal 'experience' and can, as I already indicated in my *Kar gling Zhi khro*,¹²² be seen as an enlargement of the very first part of the more archaic concept of a *bar ma do'i srid pa* or *srid pa'i bar do*. The increased focus of attention was probably largely due to the prominence of practices dealing with *bon nyid/ chos nyid/ kun gzhi/ 'od gsal*. Later still, more elaborate visions of *zhi khro* may have been introduced under the influence of certain tantric and *rDzogs chen* practices,¹²³ giving rise to, for instance, a specific *zhi khro bar do* in Bon speculation and the *chos nyid bar do* as we know it from the *ChB*.

Moreover, at the moment it does not seem unlikely to me that the doubling of the 'od gsal 'experience' in the *ChB* is due to the time and circumstances of compilation of this highly composite text, developing at a time when speculations on *chos nyid bar do* and *zhi khro bar do* (and, of course, on a 'chi kha'i bar do and cognates) were already common knowledge, and combining a version of a *bar do* of dying—I am inclined to look at 'bKa' rgyud' traditions here (which the allotted space for this article does not permit me to present now)—that includes explicit reference to 'od gsal 'experience' with a fully developed *zhi khro bar do*-like *chos nyid bar do* that, of course, also features a reference to 'od gsal/ chos nyid, but has re-focused on a description of *zhi khro*. All this apparently without being any longer aware of the fact that a 'zhi khro bar do' as such derives from descriptions of *chos nyid kyi 'od gsal*, which thematically are again strongly indebted to the 'od gsal episodes from descriptions of the process of dying; thus juxtaposing two similar topics. This would—unless, of course, the diversification of 'od gsal would be doctrinal and intended rather than a result or by-product of compilation—support the eclectic nature of the *ChB* as compared to, for instance, the *Nyi zla kha sbyor*. It also suggests a later date of fixation, which, I guess, not many would doubt anyway), and would further underline the conclusion already forwarded in my *Kar gling Zhi khro*,¹²⁴ that the *ChB* shows many signs of editing and compilation.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ See pp. 600, 1.2ff. and p. 606, 1.2ff.

¹²¹ An interesting text in this collection, which also deserves to be briefly mentioned here, is the *Bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi lo rgyus tshé rings ma'i zhus len* (see bibliography), it presents some historical considerations.

¹²² With reference to Back (1979).

¹²³ Regarding which I shall not elaborate here, as this will be the subject of subsequent research to be published in later work. See also Germano (1994).

¹²⁴ See Blezer (1997), e.g. p. 93.

¹²⁵ [See publication, then forthcoming, now published as Blezer (2003).]

In this conclusion I also should like to summarise the general listings of *bar do-s* as they have surfaced in the texts discussed and referred to in this article. This is, of course, by no means a complete and exhaustive conspectus of *bar do* speculations between the eighth and fourteenth centuries (especially *bar do* discussions conceived during and shortly after the fourteenth century are poorly represented), but it might, its limited scope notwithstanding, nevertheless serve to indicate some lines in the variance perceived so far and reveal some directions for further hypotheses and research. Some general features do indeed seem to stand out. Again, kindly refer to the conspectus in the appendix when reading the following discussion.

Most of the possibly early¹²⁶ presentations in the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* and *rNying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*, tend to list four or five *bar do-s*. They typically include a *bar do* of life and death and a *bar do* of death is sometimes (two out of five) included here; more often than not (three out of five) a *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do* is included; less often (two out of five) a *rmi lam bar do*; also a *chos nyid bar do* is often included (three out of five); a *srid pa'i bar do* here as in other texts is usually mentioned. These texts always prefer a designation like *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* for an intermediate state of life. For a *bar do* of death the designation *skye shi bar do* is preferred (two out of three texts that explicitly list such). Moreover, in those texts that most probably constitute the earliest material, *zhi khro* are quite often (two out of three) not explicitly mentioned—but, as noted before, because of the concise nature of some of the presentations we should not attach too much weight to this evidence. I should moreover like to point out that the classification of the *Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod*¹²⁷ matches the one presented in the *rDzogs pa chen po bar do gsang ba'i rgyud* very well. The *Rin po che 'phags lam bkod pa'i rgyud* was not taken into account here, but it might well be an early text; based on its general characteristics; however, I provisionally arranged the brief discussion in this text with fourteenth century material. The *sPros bral don gsal chen po'i rgyud* and the *Thig le kun gsal chen po'i rgyud*, which, as far as I checked, feature identical descriptions, are weighed as one.

In possibly later (12th – 14th AD?) *rNying ma* presentations we find four to six *bar do-s* listed. A *chos nyid bar do* is usually present (three out of four) and *zhi khro* are, at least, referred to. A *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do* (and possible cognates) and a *rmi lam gyi bar do* appear in half of the sampled texts and moreover appear together. Remarkable is the appearance of the locution *skye gnas* in the designation for a *bar do* of life (two out of four), a phrase that in the *mGur 'bum* is connected with a *bar do* of birth. A *bar do* of death is now more consistently styled *'chi kha'i bar do* (three quarters of a desperately small sample of four). While the list in the *Rin po che 'phags lam bkod pa'i rgyud*—I have no clue yet as to the date of this text, I have arranged it into this group purely based on the characteristics of its *bar do*-list—comes quite close to the *ChB*, the list in the *Chos thams cad kyi don bstan pa rdzogs chen thig le nyag gcig ye nas bya rtsal bral ba* (= *Theg pa'i spyi phud klong chen rab 'byams kyi rgyud*) matches the system in the *sNying thig ya bzhi* of *Klong chen pa* very well (what's in a name). But I have to emphasise here once more that

¹²⁶ Traditionally dated to the 8th c. AD, though some, first and foremost Germano, have tentatively suggested to move most of these to the 11th c. AD?

¹²⁷ From the *Ka dag rang 'byung rang shar*-cycle, which is associated with *Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can* (1337–1408) but claims an 8th c. AD origin.

the narrow sample of texts, and, not in the last place, the at times conjectural ordering of them, does not allow reliable conclusions regarding the groups of texts that have been put together here (read: but might not deserve to be grouped together at all). The relation to other (more convincing) groups, however, might, regarding the suggested dating, still be of some relevance here.

The *Ma ni bka' 'bum* text, the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*, shows in its listing of *bar do*-s a strong affinity with 'bKa' rgyud' material:

- A *bar do* of life is styled *skye shi'i bar do*; this would be the only rNying ma text that I know of that does this.
- It describes *rang bzhin gnas pa'i bar do* as a *bar do* of straying from *gzhi'i rang bzhin*.
- And, lastly, it gives a prominent place to *shes pa snga phyi'i bar do*, a *bar do* which so far I only encountered in 'bKa' rgyud' texts.

This might make the (indeed likely) attribution of the *Gab pa mngon phyung* to rNying ma and *rDzogs chen* circles in Sørensen (1994, p. 586) stand in need of a small footnote.

In Bon (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* texts that present a list of *bar do*-s, especially in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag*, we find a remarkable and quite surprising affinity to later bKa' rgyud material (as represented, for example, in Yang dgon pa's work). There are several arguments in favour of this:

- The ambiguity of the presence of a *bon nyid 'od gsal gyi bar do*—not listed but still described in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* (as far as its dating goes it should be closely contemporary with Yang dgon pa)—suggests interesting relationships to bKa' rgyud traditions, which, as said, also do not list a *chos nyid bar do*.
- The presence of a *bar do* of straying from *kun gzhi* in both traditions. As far as I can see now, this *bar do* of straying from *rang bzhin* occurs most frequently in 'bKa' rgyud' material (but again note the curious position of the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams* in this respect).
- The resemblance is moreover born out by the concrete *bar do* lists in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* and in Yang dgon pa's *Bar do'i 'phrang sgrol* texts.
- The use of the name *skye shi bar do* for a *bar do* of life in the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag* also clearly points to writings of 'bKa' rgyud pa-s' (the *Thugs rje chen po'i bar do mun gsal sgron me'i zhal gdams*, again, uniquely complies).
- Last but not least, the resemblance receives very convincing support from remarkably detailed descriptions of the stages of dissolution at death, which, at such an early date, seem to figure very prominently in exactly these two traditions (a closer investigation of *Kālacakra* presentations on the subject of dying and *rtsa rlung yoga* seems a most worth-while investment in this respect, actually a quite obvious step, I should say).

The list of *bar do*-s in the *Bar do dus kyi sgron ma* seems to align better with the *Rin po che 'phags lam bkod pa'i rgyud* and the *ChB*, though Yang dgon pa here too provides a fine match.

So, some remarkable points indeed, seem to have come out of this survey. The earliest *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* material examined so far does not provide explicit lists of *bar do*-s nor distinguish too many of them (only the *sGron ma drug* and commentaries present a modest group of three *bar do*-s). Later presentations do present more elaborate lists. But then, quite surprisingly, the nature of these later *bar do* lists and also parts of the concrete descriptions (especially of the *Bar do 'od lnga ngos bzung ba'i man ngag*) are quite distinct from the earlier descriptions and point in other directions than one would initially have expected, that is, for instance, not only to rNying ma but also to 'bKa' rgyud' traditions! So, the earliest texts tend to show convergence with rNying ma material and late medieval material tends to show some measure of affinity with roughly contemporaneous bKa' rgyud traditions. Many more texts need to be examined, not in the last place also from other Bon traditions on *bar do*, in order to be able to draw any more definite conclusions, but the evidence adduced so far does give some very interesting suggestions and directions and focus for further research, I dare say.

In 'bKa' rgyud' material, typically, two sets of three *bar do*-s are listed: one associated with La va pa (and Ti lo pa), the other with Nā ro pa. Most frequent are references to a *bar do* of death (six out of nine), a *srid pa'i bar do* (in all instances) and less frequently a *bar do* pertaining to rebirth (five out of nine), a *bar do* of life (five out of nine) and a *bar do* of dream (also five out of nine). Lists of six *bar do*-s also occur, such are, for instance, the list(s) attributed to Mi la ras pa (1040/53 1123/35), but these lists are not very clear and consistent; as I noted earlier (above and Blezer 1997:28f), the term *bar do* seems to be used rather freely in the *mGur 'bum*, but also in the *Lam blo nas gcod pa bar do ngo sprod kyi gdams pa zab mo*; these two texts, perhaps connected with Mi la ras pa, have been weighed as one. This total number also occurs in the late presentation of Yang dgon pa, which features a consistent list of six *bar do*-s (by the way, his are the only bKa' rgyud texts that I know of that list *ting nge 'dzin gyi bar do*).

In general, the most characteristic features of the 'bKa' rgyud' material examined are that a *chos nyid bar do* as a phase after death is not listed in any of the texts and that most of the texts list a *bar do* of birth. The latter does not appear in texts of other traditions (as far as the sample goes). In the Buddhist *Bar do thos grol*, for instance, it appears as part of the *srid pa'i bar do*. The 'bKa' rgyud' texts are very detailed in their descriptions of stages of dying. Another typical feature is that a *bar do* of life is always referred to as *skye shi bar do*, while the designations for a *bar do* of death vary widely. Lastly, I should like to point to the fact that *rang bzhin bar do* here does not refer to a *bar do* of life but rather to a *bar do* of straying from *rang bzhin*, and also, and most curiously, to a *bar do* of death (La va pa, Phag mo gru pa).

So, to summarise, the main hypotheses that I am currently forwarding are that in the earliest layers of speculation a *bon nyid ('od gsal gyi) bar do* and a *chos nyid kyi bar do*, true to their name, focused (in contrast to the presentation of a *chos nyid bar do* in the *ChB*) on an 'experience' of *bon nyid / chos nyid / 'od gsal* rather than on a *zhi khro maṇḍala*, the latter being a later

and more specific elaboration, in which case in a Bon context the term *zhi khro bar do* was preferred (though the Buddhist term *chos nyid zhi khro'i bar do* does occur in the *Chos thams cad kyi don bstan pa rdzogs chen thig le nyag gcig ye nas bya rtsal bral ba* (= *Theg pa'i spyi phud klong chen rab 'byams kyi rgyud*)). The conspicuous absence of (direct) references to *zhi khro* in the *bon nyid* ('*od gsal gyi*) *bar do* descriptions of the (*Zhang zhung*) *sNyan rgyud* texts that were examined so far would suggest a greater antiquity for the concept employed there as compared to that/those in most of the Buddhist *chos nyid bar do* descriptions that I am familiar with. And, however evident that might seem, I should also like to point out once more that, considering the fact that an '*od gsal* 'experience' would conclude a *bar do* of dying, the *bon nyid/ chos nyid bar do* can be seen as an elaboration on or projection of '*od gsal* 'experiences' into the beginning of a phase after death.

[Postscript]

The original, longer and more detailed study—of which this article is a mere summary—includes extensive quotes and also collations of the main versions. It was slated to appear around 2000. Due to organisational work on the Ninth Seminar of the IATS in Leiden (late June 2000) and its voluminous proceedings, publication has been delayed. Meanwhile, Philippe Cornu, with admirable stamina, has taken up work on a post-mortem state of 'reality as it is' in Bon and Buddhism. He continued the investigations and followed up suggestions for future research, in my thesis and elsewhere, including the present article. This resulted in a truly impressive 1200-page Ph.D.-thesis and recently in a paper, presented at an international Bon conference in *Shenten Dargye Ling*, Blou, France, 2008, forthcoming in *East & West*. I applaud academic synergies, especially when work is done well and conscientiously.¹²⁸

Echoing Germano's own words: his work also contributes much of importance to this discussion—reportedly even more in its unpublished parts—even though it may be somewhat flawed in its emphasis on the historical debt of these ideas to the earlier Great Perfection—and especially *sNying thig*—materials (2005:5); but perhaps we should be more careful than to use such rash qualifications (without further discussion ...). His angle indeed easily induces reification of a retrospective *snying thig* rubric and commitment to a Seminal Heart-centered view of the period and phenomena, which also pervades some other publication on the topic; a point of departure that may relate to the history of research interests (thesis). Intellectually and occasionally also exegetically these analyses and perspectives on past Great Perfection trends, almost in a teleological manner, seem to anticipate on Klong chen pa's writings, as a 'natural' culmination of *rDzogs chen* developments, or as Germano puts it: "the triumph of the Seminal Heart synthesis" (2005:27); this in spite of his more recent cautionings "that the category Great Perfection came to constitute a vast

¹²⁸ Under these circumstances, it of course does not make sense anymore to pursue the publication project as I had originally planned it. *Deo volente*, some of my unpublished materials may still appear in updated and rewritten form in publication on continuity and change in Bon ideas, under grateful reference to Cornu and others.

meta-rubric concealing the heterogeneity of an extremely diverse array of traditions" (2005:7)—needless to say, I could not agree more.

Naturally, I also agree with Germano's reminder of the "importance of commitment to a broader historical analysis of early treasure traditions for the assessment of the significance of particular doctrinal, ritual, and rhetorical elements in individual texts" (2005:28). Yet, working hypotheses regarding a probable history of ideas should not, *vice versa*, become used as *a priori* for the study of individual cases, at the exclusion of other possible framings; one would risk overlooking the evidence that does not suit one's points of departure. To avoid such methodological circularities, I should *not* advise to start from following, adjusting, or even construing grand narratives for later *rDzogs chen* doxographical categories (indeed deriving from those same categorisations!) *before* having studied individual texts in their own right, in in-depth case studies *without making any such assumptions*, and also not before understanding when, how and why exactly emic doxographical categories were designed the way they are. As Germano is aware, projecting doxography onto history, explicitly or implied, usually is a fragile exercise, fraught with difficulty. Also, assuming that developments that in retrospect, in a certain light, appear similar may also historically relate, before or without ascertaining the interface of exchange in greater philological and historical detail, while often an unavoidable starting point (such as also in this article in fact), is risky as well.

For example, I do not think we should start from subsuming what came to pass in the early community around Karma gling pa, under a grand scheme of developments epitomised by Klong chen pa's writing. It may well turn out to be true, one day, but the work needed to establish that affiliation or crossover at the present moment still needs to be done. For many Karma gling treasures it is unclear what exactly *his* contribution was. Central and probably early texts in his revelation do not fit *rDzogs chen* doxographical categories well. Also, *Man ngag gi sde* doctrinal affiliations of later additions, by his followers and family, should not be written into his record. We do not even know when exactly he lived. His dates quoted in secondary sources go back to the sexagesimal cycle in which his birth date is roughly located (1327–87, probably based on Dudjom Rinpoche) and do not indicate his life span. The scant available biographical sketches of him suggest that he was precocious and died young: he probably was pushing daisies before pushing 60. Moreover, I have discussed pre-existing, poorly organised materials that provide substantial overlap with work attributed to Karma gling pa (Blezer 2003). Those materials clearly predate Klong chen pa; in fact, Cornu (2006) shows that the latter also quotes from such a text in several of his works. We would therefore be ill advised to start from the assumption that Karma gling pa's revelations represent a consolidation of that 'triumph', epitomised by Klong chen pa. However seductive grand unified theories are, we should not lose sight of refractory philological and historical detail; in fact, one should, as a matter of methodological principle, probably specifically venture out and look for the cracks in theory, rather than attempt to find confirmation of preconceived notions.

The early evidence that we now have for a *bar do* of 'reality as it is', also from Bon traditions, recommends a very cautious approach. It seems advisable to evaluate the impact of continuity and change in expertise on death, dying, and funerary rites and on a *bar do* of 'reality as it is' based on

its own merits, rather than to frame it according to a retrospective grand narrative of the *Werdegang* of dominant trends in the Great Perfection. Appreciating that *sNying thig* is deeply constituted by funerary expertise is one step removed from considering the possibility that some developments subsumed under *rDzogs chen* such as *sNying thig* materials may have a (more) significant pedigree in expertise on death and dying and maybe were even sparked off by that—in *casu* this may even provide a more impartial and balanced angle on the problematic. The long history of continuity and change in thanatology in these cultural areas may provide more firmly grounded and relevant alternative framing: expertise on death and dying as a *Leitfaden*, shaped by the interests of the day. Much will be in the eye of the beholder, but the fact that thanatology, or even just *bar do* discourse, encompass much wider phenomena than the mentioned *rDzogs chen* trends should alert us. In fact, doctrinally speaking, *bar do*-s, are *not* for (serious) *rDzogs chen* pa-s at all.

But rather than arguing for alternative framings, I should recommend bottom-up case studies of individual textual traditions and avoid starting out by first trying to ‘read’ these cases from historicising perspectives that follow traditional doxographical sensibilities: one could thus easily miss or gloss over important distinctions. *sNying thig* may resume, posthoc, under its name, some earlier developments relating to death and dying: say, Germano’s funerary Buddhism, which now, inversely, is largely considered a main feature of *sNying thig*, at the cost of other strands of intellectual history that it forms a relevant and integral part of. That is the nature of history: it is always someone’s history. The world according to Shar rdza or the world according to Klong chen pa. The history of death-related ideas, such as a *bar do* of ‘reality as it is’, in any case ought to be as much about their autonomous development as it is about their emergence in literature classified as *sNying thig*. I am wary of framing, and particularly of emic framings, and have been from the very start of my analyses in *casu* (cf. 1997 Ph.D. thesis); some may indeed construe this reservation as a flaw, but I consider it a methodological point of departure, that eventually may reveal something new, something that we do not already know from religious doxography or other forms of received wisdom. When publishing my full research materials, I hope to show in more detail why it may not always be wise to make the history of such *rDzogs chen* rubrics the main framework for understanding the topic studied; a discussion which I could only summarily preview here.

I am again completely with Germano (2005), when he cautions us against ordering *rDzogs chen* history of ideas according to doxographical categories of late canonical collections, as if they were chronological categories. While later hierarchical classifications do usually suggest or at least imply relative chronologies, its individual categories do not necessarily neatly map unto a diachrony, they largely are posthoc (mostly 18th c. AD) scholastic classifications and hierarchically organise developments that at least are partly synchronic and are more deeply involved with co-existing, reactive, factional identities than with implied historical antecedence per se (see, e.g., Germano’s evaluation of the “Crown Pith’s [*sPyi ti*, HB] reactionary orientation”).]

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- *Bar do'i ngo sprod kyi gdams pa*, Vol. I, pp. 667–725.

And in the *rDzogs pa chen po zab lam gnad kyi gdams pa bsgrags pa skor gsum ma bu cha lag dan bcas pa*, Dolanji 1973, two other short texts on *bar do* discovered by gZhod ston are included:

- *Bar do'i gdams pa*, pp. 611–14;
- *sMar byañ bar do'i gdams pa*, pp. 615–18.

BUDDHIST

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- Cf. *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma zhes bya ba mkha' 'gro ma'i man ngag*, Kalimpong 1962.
- Cf. also *bKa' yang dag pa'i tshad ma zhes bya ba mkha' 'gro ma'i man ngag* in the Taipei edition of the *sDe dge bsTan 'gyur* (Tôhoku 2331), Vol.28, p. 243/541.3 – 243/545.3), NB. this is a different and much shorter text as the above.

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- *Chos dags po lha rje'i gsung/ 'pho ba'i gdams pa* (Vol. II, pp. 418–28);
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- *'Chi kha'i bar do'i gsal 'debs*, Vol. III, text k, p. 183, l.6 – p. 191, l.2;
- *Chos nyid bar do yon tan*, Vol. III, text l, p. 191, l.2 – p. 195, l.6;
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APPENDIX. CONSPECTUS OF BAR DO LISTINGS IN TEXTS DISCUSSED OR REFERRED TO IN THIS ARTICLE

author/ tradition/ text	#	own nature	life & death	absorption dco.	dream	death	reality as it is	becoming	birth	c. AD ¹⁹⁶
<i>Abhihitamakośabhāṣya</i>	4		<i>śārnvalāla</i>			<i>marāṇā</i>		<i>antavā</i>	<i>upapatti</i>	4-5
BIKA RGYUD ANDEARLY 'BIKA RGYUD'										
La va pa (8 th c. AD?)	3					<i>rang bzhin</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>	(<i>mngal-sgo</i>)	8 ⁹⁷
Ti lo pa (988-1069)	3					[<i>ba gsal</i>]		<i>srīd pa</i>	(<i>mngal-sgo</i>)	10-11
Nā ro pa (1016-1100)	3	<i>skye shi</i>			<i>rmi lam</i>			<i>srīd pa</i>		11
Kiṅtung po rnal 'byor (probably 11 th -12 th AD)	3	<i>skye shi</i>			<i>rmi lam</i>			<i>srīd pa</i>		11-12
Mi la nas pa (1040/83-1123/55). Bar do rgo sprod	6	(several?) ¹⁹⁸	<i>skye shi</i>	(several?)	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>bhi kha ma</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>	<i>mngal</i>	11-12
mGur bsum (fānifāi to Mfīla nas pa?)	6	<i>rang bzhin</i> ¹⁹⁹	<i>skye shi</i>		<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>bhi ba</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>	<i>skye gnas</i>	11-12
śānam pa (1079-1153)	3					<i>dang po</i>		<i>gnyis pa</i>	<i>gsam pa</i>	11-12
Phang mo gru pa (1110-70)	3					<i>rang bzhin</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>	(<i>mngal-sgo</i>)	12
Zhang g-yu bmg pa (1123-93)	3		<i>skye shi</i>		<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>rang bzhin</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>		12
Yang dgeon pa (1213-58)	6	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>bhi kha</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>		13
HON/ZHANG ZHUNG/SNYAN RGYUD										
sGron ma dng gi gdams pa	3					[<i>bhi dka</i>]	<i>bon nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 117
Bar do dka kyī sgron ma	6	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>bon nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		12
Bar do 'ba lnga ngos bzang ba'i man ngag	6	<i>gnas gzhī</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i> ²⁰⁰	<i>rmi lam</i> ²⁰¹	<i>bhi kha</i>	(<i>bon nyid</i>)	<i>srīd pa</i>		13
RYŨNG MA										
Nyi zla kha śhyor [<i>yang gang</i> ?]	4	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>			<i>bhi kha</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 117
... Rang byang chen po'i rgyud [<i>yang gang</i> ?]	4	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>		<i>rmi lam</i>		<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 10-13?
sProz bral don gsal chen po'i rgyud [<i>yang n</i> ?]	4	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>			<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 13
Thig le kun gsal chen po'i rgyud [<i>yang</i> ?]	4	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>			<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 13
... sGron ma bar bo'i rgyud [<i>yang gang</i> ?]	4	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>		<i>skye shi</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 117
... Bar do gang bo'i rgyud [<i>byat</i> or ' <i>yang shor</i> ?]	5	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>skye shi</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 9/10??
Bar do lnga rgo sprod [<i>wang sde</i> ?]	5	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>skye shi</i>		<i>srīd pa</i>		8 ⁷ 14/15
... Bar do mun gsal sgron me [<i>maric</i> ?]	6	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>bhi kha</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		mad 13??
Rin po che 'phags lam bkaod po'i rgyud [<i>wang sde</i> ?]	6	<i>rang bzhin</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i>	<i>rmi lam</i>	<i>skye shi</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		??
Kamma gling pa (14 th) [<i>maric</i> ?; ' <i>ndags chen</i> ?]	6	<i>rang bzhin</i> ¹⁹³	<i>skye gnas</i>	<i>rang 'dzin</i> ²⁰²	<i>rmi lam</i> ²⁰³	<i>bhi kha</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		14?
Klong chen pa (1306/8-1363) [<i>yang gang</i> ?]	4	<i>skye gnas</i>	<i>skye gnas</i>			<i>bhi kha</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		14
... Thig le nyag geig ye nas ... [<i>yang gang</i> ?]	4	<i>skye gnas</i>	<i>skye gnas</i>			<i>bhi kha</i>	<i>chos nyid</i>	<i>srīd pa</i>		14/15

¹⁹⁷ Question marks indicate conjectural or traditional (additional italics) dates. It is of course highly doubtful that any of these texts in the present form predate the 11th c. AD. The order within each section, for reasons of uncertainty of dates, is not strictly chronological, but regulates dates and other matters of *bar do* 'systems'.
¹⁹⁸ Several *bar do*-s, like the *skye shi shes pa ngo phyi bar do* or the *chos nyid kyī bar do* or the *chos nyid kyī bar do*, might belong here, or under the heading absorption etc.
¹⁹⁹ See r/ā bisun mi la nas pa'i man thar rgyas pa phyi ba ngar bsum, Icar 28:536.3, F.165v, l.1. For more information, see Blezer (1997), Appendix II.
²⁰⁰ NB: *rang bzhin skye gnas*.