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Mapping Amdo III. Dynamics of Relations and  
Interaction, followed by Varia

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### *mKhas-pa lDe'u, A History of Buddhism in India and Tibet. An Expanded Version of the Dharma's Origins Made by the Learned Scholar Deyu, translated by Dan Martin*

Somerville, MA., Wisdom Publications, 2022, xvii+953 pages,  
ISBN 978-0861714728

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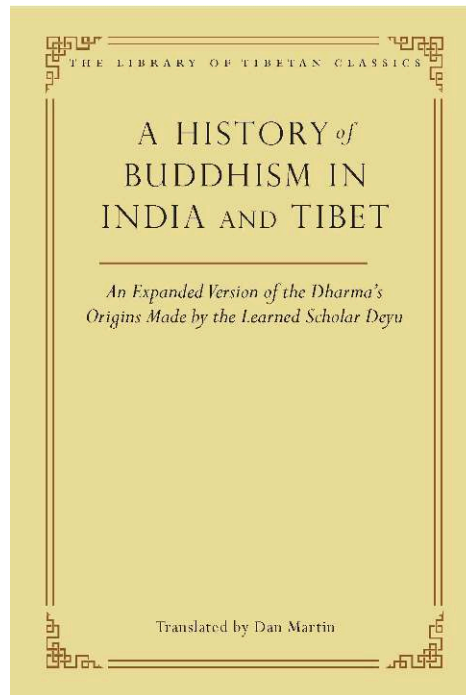
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- 1 Scholars engaged in the study of Tibetan history will be familiar with the many contributions of Dan Martin, above all, perhaps, his *Tibetan Histories*. A *Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works*. That survey, first published in 1997, is a unique goldmine of information. It was put online in a revised and expanded edition in 2020, providing information concerning date, authorship, contents, editions, and studies of 1 261 Tibetan historical texts<sup>1</sup>. Among these texts is an anonymous historiographic text dated to 1261 (Text 88)<sup>2</sup>, generally referred to by its Tibetan short title, *Khepa Deyu* (mKhas-pa lDe'u).
- 2 The present work, a study and annotated



translation of the *Khepa Deyu*, is on the same vast scale as *Tibetan Histories*. While short passages have already been translated by various scholars, this is the first translation of the entire text<sup>3</sup>. The *Khepa Deyu* must, however, be seen in connection with two other texts which likewise contain the name Deyu. These texts, referred to as “the Deyu histories”, are clearly related; this problem is discussed at length by Martin (pp. 10-18), but need not detain us here. Martin’s translation of the *Khepa Deyu* extends to 720 pages; there is also an Introduction (pp. 1-52) in which he discusses the *Khepa Deyu* and its contents, its historical context, and the principles underlying the style and objectives of the translation; there is a vast Bibliography (pp. 779-885), and an Index of entries in English, Tibetan, and Sanskrit, combining personal names, places, titles of texts, and general concepts (pp. 887-952).

- 3 The *Khepa Deyu* was first published in 1987, in Lhasa, twenty years after its existence had been (briefly) noted by western scholars for the first time, namely by Géza Uray (p. 24), to whom accordingly the honour goes of being the first to realise its importance for the study of Tibetan history<sup>4</sup>. Although by no means the earliest among Tibetan post-Imperial Period historical writings, the anonymous (p. 14) *Khepa Deyu* was probably the most ambitious text in terms of length and scope within the Tibetan historiographical genre at the time of its composition. It has two parts, the first dealing with the origins of the Buddha’s Dharma in India, with particular attention paid to the origin of the Buddhist scriptures, and the second shifting the focus to Tibet where the Buddha’s Dharma, according to a tradition already well established in the thirteenth century, was destined to be preserved after its demise in India. This second part may in turn be divided into two sections: first, the history of the Tibetan royal dynasty which, the text explains, was of Indian origin; and second, the narrative of the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet and the translation of Buddhist texts into Tibetan, culminating in the founding of the first Buddhist monastery at the temple of Samyé (bSam-yas) under the Emperor Trisong Detsen (Khri-srong lDe-brtsan, 742-c. 800 C.E.). The text then outlines the subsequent decline of Buddhism following the fragmentation of the

Tibetan Empire and, finally, its resurgence with the renewal of monastic ordinations in what is generally known, in the Tibetan context, as “the Later Spread [of the Dharma]”.

- 4 While the text as a whole is of great importance as an early example of an extensive Tibetan narrative of the origin of Buddhist texts in India and of the introduction and ultimate supremacy of the Buddha’s Dharma in Tibet, the most original and, in terms of historical narrative, most interesting part of *Khepa Deyu* is arguably the second part of the text that sets forth the mythic origins of the Tibetan royal dynasty and its history up to Emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong-btsan sGam-po) in the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E., by which time (if not a couple of generations earlier) we find ourselves, broadly speaking, on relatively safe historical ground.
- 5 Among the interesting features of *mKhas-pa lDe'u* is the incorporation of passages from a group of texts known as the *Can lnga*. Other scholars, notably Samten G. Karmay<sup>5</sup>, have already pointed out the existence of these texts and assigned them to the Imperial Period. Martin adduces additional arguments for dating them to the late Imperial Period; he also provides solid and convincing arguments for identifying each text and suggesting translations of their titles (pp. 32-38).
- 6 Since the date of the text is 1261, it is a relatively late text in terms of the so-called “Later Spread of the Dharma”, which began in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. It is therefore surprising that the section on the royal dynasty clearly contains substantial material dating back to the Imperial Period. This indicates that there was no absolute break in continuity between the Tibetan Empire and the beginning of the Later Spread of the Dharma some 150 years later.
- 7 Martin states that he does not propose to discuss “the eleventh-century emergence of a Bön historical tradition” (p. 5). This is perfectly understandable, given the already formidable length of the present volume. Nevertheless, the tradition of historical narratives that appeared within the Bön religion between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries can probably best be understood as an integral part of the Later Spread of the Dharma, of which the *Khepa Deyu* was a part. To set forth arguments in favour of this connection would require a separate article; however, it should be mentioned that a 12<sup>th</sup> century historical Bön text has recently been studied, translated, and edited in a volume of which Dan Martin is one of the authors – I refer to Per Kværne and Dan Martin, *Drenpa’s Proclamation. The Rise and Decline of the Bön Religion in Tibet* (2023) – in the “Introduction” of which the background and intentions of the Bön text, in some respects, *mutatis mutandis*, not so unlike the concerns of the *Khepa Deyu*, are discussed.
- 8 In spite of “some negative characterizations of whatever it is that he intends by the label of ‘Bön’”, the author of the *Khepa Deyu* “shows himself to be perfectly capable of writing a universal and nonsectarian history of Tibet” (p. 19). He must, as Martin points out, “be regarded as belonging to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism”, as he “entirely accepted the Old Translation tantras [the tantric texts translated in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries]” (*ibid.*). Martin further points out that the author belonged to a Zhijé (*zhi byed*) lineage, or at least had a close connection with the Zhijé tradition (p. 20), and speculates that there might also be connections with certain lineages in the “Great Perfection” (*rdzogs-chen*) tradition (p. 2). Both these traditions intersect in various ways, and are in general characterised by eclecticism and a non-sectarian mindset. In this respect, comparison with *Drenpa’s Proclamation* referred to above is relevant, as that text is strongly influenced by the Great Perfection in its insistence that Bön and Buddhism are, ultimately, identical.

- 9 There are many topics worthy of notice in the narrative presented by the anonymous author of *Khepa Deyu*, but only one, by way of example, will be mentioned here, namely a passage (pp. 701-706), which Martin refers to as “The Revolts of the Civil Works Corps”. This refers to rebellions that took place after the demise of the Tibetan Empire and that was sustained by a social class called *kheng* in Tibetan, variously translated by other scholars as “civilians”, “peasants”, or “servants”. Martin suggests that it should be translated as “civil works corps”, i.e. “involuntary laborers that could be called up when required for sizable projects” (p. 39; see also p. 701, note 2762). Looking at one of the several revolts outlined in the text, he argues that it may perhaps not refer to a specific historical event at all, but rather be a “set piece useful for explaining all sorts of social disorders”, and he provides a series of references to other Tibetan sources that might strengthen this argument, suggesting that the *Khepa Deyu* may be the earliest Tibetan instance of the use of set narratives to refer to social uprisings.
- 10 Finally, a few words about what Martin refers to as “The Author’s Purpose” (pp. 20-22, the author being, of course, the anonymous author of the *Khepa Deyu*). The *Deyu* texts, he points out, do not seek to promote or legitimise specific lineages, but he suggests that “there is a strong possibility that some or all of these Deyu histories were written under commission from royalty, or the authors could have had other types of ties with royalty, including family ties” (p. 21). To answer the question “what use royalty could have had for these works”, he suggests that they might have had a function similar to “a Western Tibetan custom of giving speeches (*mol-ba* or *mol-ba*) that included lengthy historical accounts”<sup>6</sup>. He therefore advances the hypothesis that the Deyu histories “were written in support of the kingly practice of making speeches” (*ibid.*). This is a new and interesting approach, deserving further attention, to this literary genre.
- 11 A reader who might expect this immense volume to pose a challenge in terms of dry, pedantic, and long-winded academic prose will be in for a surprise. Martin’s style is personal, yet elegant and fluid, giving the reader – whether an academic or not – a feeling of participating in an informal yet fascinating seminar. Not many scholars have the gift of being able to communicate with readers in this way. It should be added that the 3 064 footnotes represent an immense treasure house of relevant and useful information which will delight scholars. Summing up, *Khepa Deyu*, the fruit of decades of study and research, is an erudite, eminently readable, and fascinating volume. The term is perhaps overused, but Martin’s book is and will remain a landmark in Tibetan studies.

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## NOTES

1. <https://www.bdrc.io/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/martin-Tibetan-Histories-A-Bibliography-revised-ed.-20201028.pdf>, accessed 24 June 2024.
2. The date, 1261, was established by Samten G. Karmay (1994, p. 414).
3. There is a Chinese translation, see Martin 1997 (Text 88), which he states he has not seen or made use of (p. 44).
4. In Uray 1967a and 1967b.
5. Karmay 1988, and, more importantly, his article published in 1994, referred to above (note 1).
6. This tradition has been maintained in parts of the Western Himalayas, see for example Jackson 1984.

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## AUTHORS

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