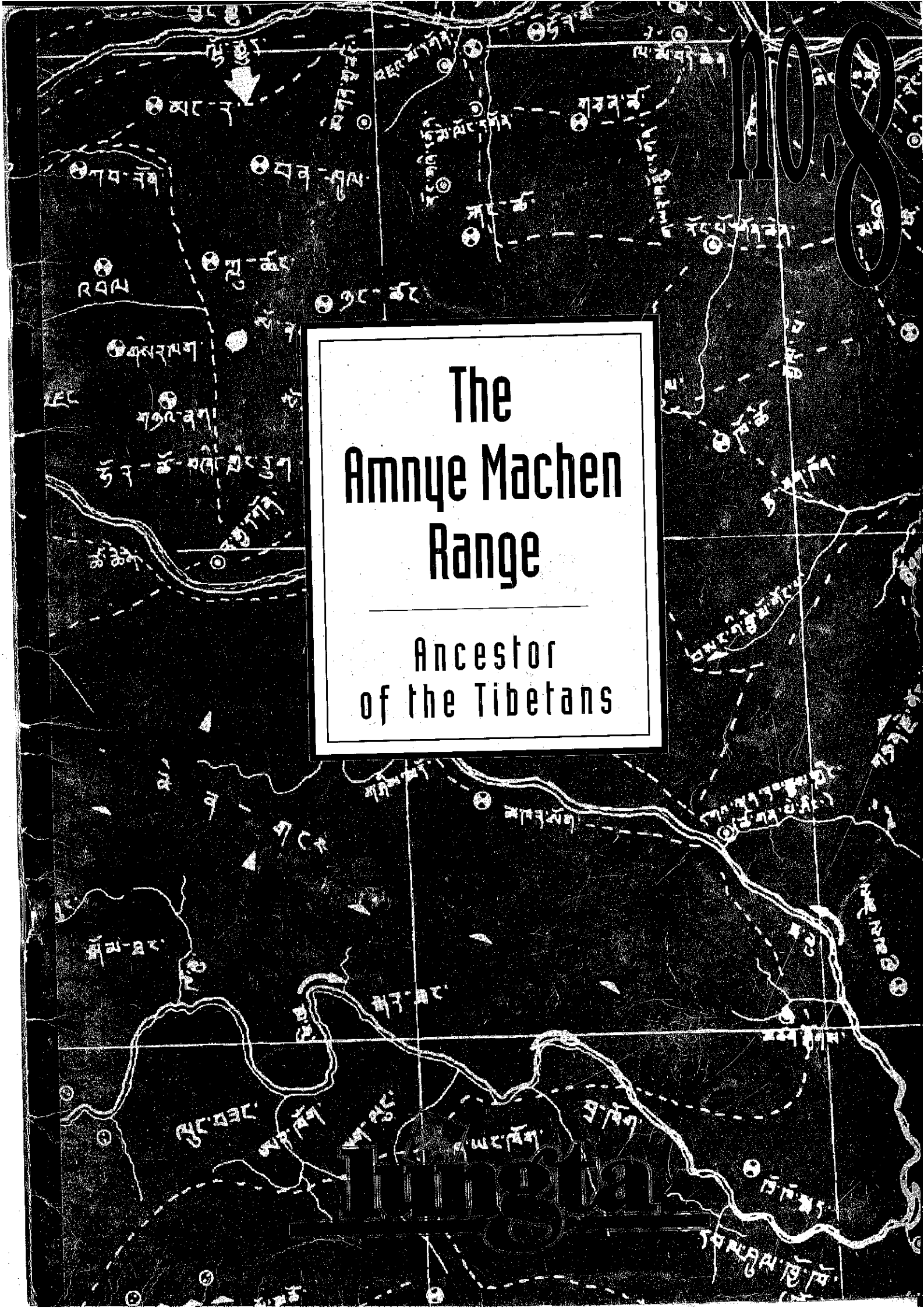


nos. 8

# The Amnye Machen Range

Ancestor  
of the Tibetans

Ungva



# *A Bonpo Pilgrimage Guide to Amnye Machen Mountain*



BY KATIA BUFFETRILLE

1922, while in Yunnan, the American botanist J.F. Rock met General G. Pereira who was on his way back after a long journey to China and Tibet. The latter's description of his travels through the grasslands around Kokonor, the sight he had had of a snowy mountain called Amnye Machen which he asserted was higher than Everest, and his tales about a Golok queen who led a tribe the name of which inspired terror, impressed Rock so much that he decided at once to mount an expedition to this mountain. He made two attempts: one in 1924, which stopped short because of fighting between Tibetans and Muslims, and a second one in 1926, which was no more successful. The Goloks prevented him from reaching even the foot of the mountain.

Amnye Machen also fascinated L. Clark, an OSS officer in China during the second World War. In 1949, he organized an expedition that could be called military that reached the north-west end of the chain without realizing that he could not see the highest peak from this point, and estimated the altitude of the mountain at 9,041 metres.

Other explorers mentioned this mountain but no one consecrated such a passion to it.

Situated in the bend of the Yellow River (Machu) Amnye Machen is in fact no higher than 6,282 metres – well short of Everest (8,848 metres). This is of little interest to the local inhabitants, most of whom are nomads who worship it as the chief of all the gods of the region of Amdo. A pilgrimage is dedicated to it and every twelve years, during the Horse year, a larger one is held. This happened in 1990 when, for the first time for many years, hundreds of pilgrims came to worship and perform the circumambulation. Buddhists usually go around an object of worship keeping it on their right, but the adepts of Bon, the religion which coexists with Buddhism in Tibet,

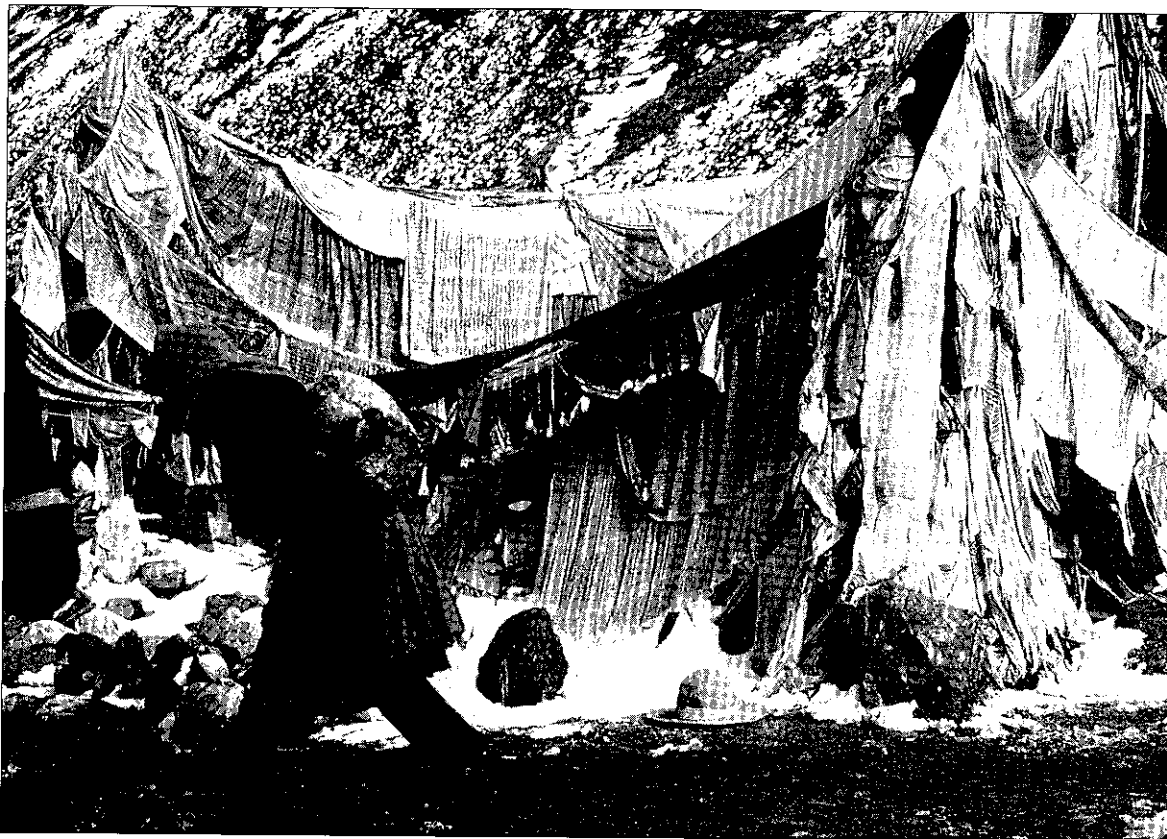
generally circumambulate anti-clockwise. While Buddhists and Bonpos alike go clockwise around Amnye Machen, during the pilgrimage around the Bonpo sacred mountain, Kongpo Bonri, south-east of Lhasa, all the pilgrims go around keeping the mountain on their left.

At the same time divinity and residence of the divinity, this mountain is known under several names, such as Machen Pomra or Magyel Pomra.

Traditionally in Tibet one or several pilgrimage guides or handbooks were dedicated to pilgrimage places: temples, monasteries, lakes, sacred mountains. The expression "pilgrimage guide" is slightly misleading because it is scarcely a "guide" in the sense that we understand it in the West. In Tibet, pilgrimage guides form a particular literary genre, with a style, schema and structure which is reproduced from one text to another. This is in order to put the *mandala* of a divinity into a landscape and to disseminate Buddhist ideology. The authors follow a model, a convention.

Reading a pilgrimage guide is not easy and can even be wearisome, because of the repetitious, dull style and the numerous stereotypes; but the number of pilgrimage guides in existence even after the Chinese occupation, and the fact that Tibetan authors still write new ones, show the importance for Tibetans of this kind of literature.

I am aware of only two pilgrimage guides to the Amnye Machen. One was written by an author belonging to the Jonangpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its adherents were condemned by the fifth Dalai Lama because they defended points of view qualified as heterodox, and some of them took refuge in the East of Tibet. The second, a translation of which is given below, is a Bonpo pilgrimage guide. According to tradition, Bon was brought to this world by Shenrab Miwo (gShen-rab mi-bo) who came to a



Göku Chenmo, Sacred site. — PHOTO BY KATIA BUFFETRILLE.

country called Olmo Lungring ('Ol-mo lung-ring), which is sometimes situated in the West of Tibet, in Shang Shung (Zhang-zhung), and sometimes in Iran, in a region called Tagzig (sTag-gzig).

The author of this guide is said to be Vairocana, a great seventh century translator acclaimed by both Buddhists and Bonpos. He is at the junction of the two traditions.

The text is difficult to date, but the personages cited, Padmasambhava, Vairocana and Dranpa Namkha (Dran-pa nam-mkha') suggest that this guide belongs to the syncretic school called "School of the New Bon" (Bon-gsar), which mixes Nyingmapa Buddhist beliefs and practices of the Bonpo tradition. It is a trend already discernable in the eleventh century and which came to life again in the eighteenth century.

#### A SHORT GUIDE TO MAGYEL POMRA

Extract [from the text *Prophecies of Vairocana, Mandala of the sun (Bairo'i-lung bstan-byed nyi-ma'i dkyil-'khor)*].

...Then, in the middle of the degenerate time, the army [of enemies will come from] the borderlands [and] will arrive in front of Pomra. Thanks to the compassionate benedictions of Pomra, the Protector of the Doctrine, this enemy army will disappear, its immaterial nature disintegrating like an evaporating mist. This particularly holy place bears the name Pomra. As soon as one sets eyes on it, the doors of bad destiny are closed. It is a site blessed by Kunzang Zangpo (Kun-tu bzang-po) and Shenlha Ökar (gShen-lha 'od-dkar)<sup>1</sup>. [It is the place where] the eighty Great Accomplished Masters meditated on the meaning of the cessation of the senses. Previously, the Past Buddha [left this place] as the mark of his coming on earth. It is the place where there came the Present Buddha Shenrab (gShen-rab). It is the place where will come the Future Buddha Medron (Me-sgron). At the top of the white snowy mountain that looks like a *stupa* there is [the image of] the forty peaceful divinities not erected [by the hand of man but] spontaneously manifested. There is a chain of rainbow lights [of the paradise called] Thugpo Köpa ('Thug-po bkod-pa)<sup>2</sup>. The middle part of the mountain is made up of irregular blue slates [and

includes] the eighty meditation caves of the eighty knowledge-holders. There are many different and extraordinary religious signs. At the base [of the mountain] that simulates springs and broad forests, there are five thousand five hundred *nagas*. There are four hundred [and four] small streams of medicinal water which cure four hundred [and four] sicknesses. At the head of each of these small streams, there are symbolic writings. There are eighty-five different kinds of [treasure-text] mines. There are the protectors of the treasures Tongdu Mar [and] Tongdu Nag (sTong-bdud dmar [and] sTong-bdud nag).

To the East, on a mountain that looks like a *svastika*, there is the *kha tam ga* and the *vajra* of the Master Padmasambhava. There is a spontaneously manifested [image] of the Buddha Nangwa Thaye (sNang-ba mtha'-yas). There is [the text called] *The sadhana of the blazing Protector (bsTan-srung 'Bar-ba'i sgrub-skor)* which subdues enemies. There is a spontaneously manifested [image] of Tara and one of Gonpo (mGon-po) [Mahakala, also] spontaneously manifested. There are one hundred and eight different Buddhist treasure-texts. There are the foot-prints of the eighty Indian Accomplished Masters. There are relics of the body of the Buddha Sakyamuni.

On the north side, on a mountain that is similar to a vessel, there are a hundred *stupa* of pure crystal. There is a spontaneously manifested [image] of the *dakini* Kyema Ötsho (Kye-ma 'od-mtsho). At the base of a rock that looks like a sword's sheath, there is a treasure. [the text] *The sadhana of all the united dakinis (mKha'-gro kun-'dus sgrub-skor.)* There is a spontaneously manifested [image] of the treasure-keeper, the *dakini* Simhamukha. At the right hand corner of a rock similar to a tortoise, there is a spontaneously manifested basin of medicinal water which cures leprosy. Trees are like umbrellas, fruits [like] hanging ornaments. There are many marks [revealing] the teachings of all the *dakinis*. There is a spontaneously manifested image of [the *dakini*] Yumchen Thugje Kundröl (Yum-chen thugs-rje kun-sgröl). There is the spontaneously manifested [text] *The sadhana of the fearful and victorious raksa with hundred-thousand heads (Khro-rgyal rak-sha dbu-'bum sgrub-skor)* and the spontaneously manifested [images] of the eighteen "arrogant ones"<sup>3</sup>, and of Tongdu Mar [and] Tongdu Nag. There is the foot-print of Gyabon Zingpa Thuchen (rGya-bon zing-pa mthu-chen)<sup>4</sup>. There is a spontaneously manifested [image] of the fearful Tsochog Khaging (gTso-mchog mkha'-gying). The wind spontaneously emits the sound [of the *mantra*] *Salé 'od*. There is a spontaneously created meditation cave of the knowledge-holder Tonggyung

Thuchen (sTong-rgyung mthu-chen)<sup>5</sup>. In the lake, there is a spontaneously manifested [image] of Ludrub Nyingpo (Klu-grub snying-po)<sup>6</sup>. Fortunate beings can see in it their past and future rebirths. In the plain there is a spot where one can go through the ten stages of *svastika* [which leads to the state of Buddha]. On a stone [is written the] spontaneously manifested [*mantra*] *gSal ba dgu 'dzab* and also the spontaneously manifested [images] of Kuntu Zangpo and Shenlha Ökar with their attendants.

To the west, on a mountain that looks like a proudly rising bull, there is [the text called] *The sadhana of Balbon Taglha Mebar (dBal-bon sTag-lha me-'bar sgrub-skor)* and a spontaneously manifested [image] of the *Tenma (bstan-ma)* Dragdong (Khrag-gdong) and Tagdong (sTag-gdong). There is a mine of texts about violent magic. The urine of Thugje Jamma (Thugs-rje byams-ma) pours by itself. As treasure there is the bow with which Dasagriva [Ravana] was killed and [also] the fire-place of the forty divinities of the fire. At the base of a rock similar to a poisonous snake, there is as treasure the leopard-coat of Sangwa Dupa<sup>7</sup> (gSang-ba 'dus-pa) and a golden stick with nine points. It is the residence of the treasure-keeper divinity [Macig] Kasang Lhamo ([Ma-gcig] bKa'-gsang lha-mo). On a rock that looks like a fearful bounding red tiger springing up, there is a mine of texts on [the ritual] of an explosive weapon (*Dzo*) [like] *The sadhana of the explosive weapon (Dzo-yi sgrub-skor)*. As treasure, there is [the text called] *gSergyi rna-ru dbal-chu*. There is the treasure-keeper, Gyelchen Nyipang Sewer (rGyal-chen nyi-pang sad-wer). There are in reality the spontaneously manifested three kinds of Protectors. There are the imprints of the *The'u rang*<sup>8</sup> bound by oath. In the lake there is red boiling water which whirls around by itself and a source where the *gyelsen (rgyal-bsen)*<sup>9</sup> were reduced to bondage. On a stone there is a spontaneously manifested sharp magical dagger and a foot-print of Tagna (sTag-sna), king of Shang Shung. There are an important number of precious gold mines. It is the ever-lasting abode of the treasure-master Chuwang Gyelpo (Chu-dbang rgyal-po). On a white rock that looks like a tall lion, there is a treasure [full of] swords [which is able] to push back the [enemy] armies [coming from] the borderlands.

To the South, on a mountain similar to a blazing fire mountain, there is a spontaneously manifested [image] of Sigyel (Srid-rgyal)<sup>10</sup> with one hundred heads and one thousand hands. There are texts on the methods of realization of a great number of Bon Protectors. There dwells the ever-lasting treasure-keeper Kasang Lhamo. At the base of a blue rock

similar to a garuda's wing there are spontaneously manifested images of the [three] Protectors of Bon, the *ma* (Sipa Gyelmo: Srid-pa rgyal-mo), the *dü* (*bdud*) (Jampa Drago: 'Byams-pa Khrag-'go) and the *tsen* (*btsan*) (Abse Gyelwa: A-bse rGyal-ba). There is a mine of texts on rituals that project the thunderbolt with violence. The Protector of the treasures, Namlha Karmo (gNam-lha dkar-mo) guards them. At the base of a red rock that looks like a deer, as treasure there is a letter [which is the life-essence] of the red *tsen* (*btsan*). There is a hand-print of Pebön Thogdrul (sPe-bon thog-sprul)<sup>11</sup>. On a rock whose summit looks like tongues of fire, there is a spontaneously manifested [image] of Rigdzin Drenpa (Rig-'dzin Dran-pa), father and sons<sup>12</sup>. There is a mine of texts on the methods of realization of "The garuda overwhelming the three worlds" (*Srid-gsum zil-gnon khyung*) protected by the treasure-master Tsudrul Menzhi (rDzu-'phrul sman-bzhi), "The four miraculous deities". Also in a rock similar to an assembled army, there are the spontaneously manifested [images] of the [twenty-seven deities] *Welmo* (*dBal-mo*), [the nine] *gze* [*ma*], [the nine] *gye* (*gyad*) [*mo*], [the nine] *spar* [*ma*]. There are the syllable life[-essence]s of the eight categories of *lha* and *'dre*. The treasure-keeper Khyungmen Gyelmo (Khyung-sman rgyal-mo) protects them. In the middle of a lake similar to a flower, there is a

spontaneously manifested [image] of the *naga*-king Tsugna Rinchen (gTsug-na rin-chen). There are Bonpo texts on the *nagas* which reconcile the disagreements in the three worlds with the protector of the treasure Luyel Jogpo (Klu-rgyal 'jog-po) [who resides there]. Also in a mountain that looks like a half-moon, there is a great number of vermilion mines and groves where one can see the center[?]; there is also the treasure keeper Thugdrul Madu (Thugs-sprul ma-bdud)<sup>13</sup>.

In a rock that looks like a turquoise dragon moving in the sky, there is a spontaneously manifested [image] of the six emanations [called] Dulwa Shendrug ('Dul-ba gshen-drug). In the four directions there are spontaneously manifested [images] of the four queens of the four seasons. In the four intermediate spaces there are spontaneously manifested [images] of the four categories of *dakinis*.

If one does three circumambulations of this mountain, one will be reborn in the rank of the Yungdrung Sempa (gYung-drung sems-dpa') [who have reached] the tenth stage. Again, at the end of the epoch of the five kinds of degeneration, Manyen Pomra (rMa gnyan-Pomra), compassionate and great distributor of the blessings [will] gather in this place all the men from the borderlands.

If one makes propitiations to this mountain, one

*The Amnye Machen Range. — PHOTO BY KATIA BUFFETRILLE.*





Pilgrims in Amnye Machen. — PHOTO BY KATIA BUFFETRILLE.

will meet in reality the spontaneously manifested gods [practising] the four activities<sup>14</sup>.

If one makes an offering of the five kinds [of ingredients], one will achieve the accumulation [of merits] and that [of wisdom] and one will realize one's own good and that of others. At the time when longevity will not go beyond fifty years, when there will occur the disturbances of war, if all sentient beings make admonishment offerings to Pomra, one will be able to kill the enemies of the doctrine and drive off the armies [coming from] the borderlands. If one worships Pomra for luck and for the essence of fortune inexhaustible wealth will grow, as broad as the earth. If one worships to obtain longevity when life is drawing to a close, life will be extended and beauty and brightness will increase. If one worships Pomra for clairvoyance, he will give perfect clairvoyance without darkness of the three times. At the end of time, all benedictions will increase.

*itha rgya rgya ngbha nba bha rba rda rgya.*

I, Vairocana the translator, wrote [this text] for the good of sentient beings in the future.

1. Shenlha Ökar was the Master of Shenrab.
2. The full name of this paradise is Ogmin thugpo köpa ('Ogmin 'thug-po bkod-pa). It is similar to the Buddhist Akanistha. (Karmay: 1972: 6).

3. The "arrogant ones" are the attendants of Tagla Mebar.
4. He was a Chinese priest who possessed supernatural powers (Karmay 1972: 41).
5. According to the tradition, he is a knowledge-holder from the eighth century.
6. His story is as follows: "he was born to Dzedden (mDzes ldan) and Nyencham Jima (gNyan lcam brjid ma) in Tagzig. First they have no children and go for help to a 'serpent-priest' who tells them that they should make offerings to serpents, and then gives them his spittle which they eat. Later the wife gives birth to a son whom they accordingly call Ludrub, 'obtained from the serpents'". Karmay 1972: XXII.
7. He is the son of one of the kings of Tagzig.
8. Category half-divine, half-demoniac of pre-Buddhist times.
9. The *gyelsen* (*rgyal-bsen*) are malevolent spirits.
10. Sigyel (Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo) is the queen of the phenomenal world and was subdued by Tagla Mebar.
11. He is a priest with supernatural powers (Karmay 1972: 41).
12. "We know little about the historical existence of Drenpanamkha (Dran-pa nam-mkha)". Some sources states that he had twin sons, Tsewang Rigdzin (Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin), a Bonpo teacher (eighth century) and Padmasambhava (Pad-ma byung-gnas). (Karmay 1972: XXXII).
13. Thuldrug Madu (Thugs-sprul ma-bdud) is one of the attendants of Sipe Gyelmo.
14. These are: Pacification (*zhi-ba*), development (*rgyas-pa*), overpowering (*dbang*), violent subjugation (*drug-po*).