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*Kar gling zhi khro: A Tantric Buddhist Concept..* By Henk Blezer. Leiden: CNWS Publications, Vol. 56, 1997, viii + 249 pages, with floppy disks, ISBN 90-73782-85-6.

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Jan Gonda has been one of the most significant figures in Dutch Indology this century. His *oeuvre* is remarkable for its vigor and energy, its encyclopedic volume, the use of indigenous research assistants, and a distinctive inventory-like style that focused on making straightforward records of items found in Sanskrit literature. In Henk Blezer's beautifully presented small work, we find a clear revival of the style, energy, and intellectual vision that informed Jan Gonda's work, albeit now transposed into Tibetan rather than Sanskrit texts, and with an added bonus: computer technology. Where Gonda could only accumulate items on card indices and reproduce them somewhat haphazardly in his published books, Henk Blezer has been able (with the help of his brother Frans) to format and sort these into beautifully compiled lists and tables in an impressive display of micro-computing skills. In his book, we thus find approximately 138 pages of spotlessly neat computer-generated tables, which take up a somewhat greater proportion of the book than the hundred or so pages given over to actual prose text. In addition, there are accompanying floppy disks that contain Tibetan texts, though only in the form of simple provisional collations rather than proper editions.

The prose text of the printed book itself is written in quite passable and only occasionally non-idiomatic English. The tables, however, appear to be the medium in which Blezer is most comfortable, and these vary from simple bibliographies compiled by computer searches and by interrogating indigenous informants and others (about sixty-six pages), to slightly more complex tables which do such work as comparing the names of *zhi khro* deities as rendered in a few different texts (about seventy-two pages). Thankfully for those who are not mathematically minded, none of the tables is very complex.

Blezer's stated purpose in writing this book was to analyze four topics, which he tabulates neatly on page one of his introduction: (1) developments in speculations concerning an intermediate state *antarābhava* (*bar ma do'i srid pa*) and *bar do* (pp. 6-38, including tables); (2) developments in the concept of peaceful and wrathful deities (*zhi khro*) (pp. 39-66, including tables); (3) the conflation of speculations regarding *bar do* and *zhi khro* in a new *bar do*, a *bon nyid/zhi khro bar do* (Bon) or *chos nyid bar do* (Buddhist) (pp. 67-93, including tables); and (4) current traditional interpretations of the *zhi khro*, which he attempts to translate, followed by a "further interpretation" and a conclusion (pp. 94-130, including tables).

The first twenty-four pages of section one on the *antarābhava* deal mainly with Pali and Sanskrit sources, including some pages of quotations, and bear the obvious (if unacknowledged, for reasons as given below) imprint of Tilmann Vetter, Blezer's main Ph.D. advisor. As far as I am aware,

the analysis is a reproduction of conventional opinions rather than a presentation of new research. Pages 26 to 38 deal with Tibetan materials, and consist mainly of a compilation of instances in which the term *bar do* occurs. Here (p. 31, note 134) Blezer *inter alia* criticizes Giacomella Orofino's very earliest (that is, immature or pre-academic) textual work for being uncritical, but I was struck at how Blezer's own citations (for example, from the *Mila mgur 'bum*) in this context themselves equally lack any explicit text-critical or even historical contextualization.

In section two on the *zhi khro*, sixteen of the twenty-seven pages consist entirely of tables. The remaining ten or so pages of actual prose refer to works such as those of the *rGyud gsang ba snying po* cycle, but to my mind are intellectually naive in that they fail to bring a sufficiently analytical historical perspective into play; for example, Blezer (p. 40) seeks to resolve centuries of traditional controversy and decades of modern scholarly perplexity on the historical origin of these texts simply by asserting that we should take the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* colophons at face value!

Blezer's work is an entirely unmodified presentation of his Leiden Ph.D., and I understand it was completed quite quickly by Leiden standards. Clearly identifying itself as a Leiden *Proefschrift* on the front page in the requisite Leiden ritual style, it bears the names of his *Promotiecommissie* and *Overige leden* inscribed on the other side. As a Leiden Ph.D. *Proefschrift*, it is, under Leiden conventions, not expected or even permitted to acknowledge the input of his Ph.D. advisors, Tilmann Vetter (an authority on Indian Buddhist doctrines), Samten Karmay (a renowned expert in Bon and *rdzogs chen*) and Peter Verhagen (a specialist in Sanskrit and Tibetan grammar), not to mention the indigenous informants with whom Blezer worked in India. Nevertheless, over and above such understandable limitations to his scope for giving citations and acknowledgements, there seems to be an unfortunate lack of reference to important works directly relevant to his thesis written by other Western scholars. Indeed, much of what Blezer is saying has arguably been said earlier and better in David Germano's well-known Ph.D. thesis. It is quite striking that the very names of such authors as David Germano, Dan Martin, Janet Gyatso, and Matthew Kapstein do not appear anywhere in Blezer's book. However, Blezer's bibliographies do include lengthy lists of volumes by such academically off-beat figures as W. Y. Evans-Wentz and Chogyam Trungpa. In the last two sections of his thesis the dearth of references to contemporary American academic scholarship on the *rNying-ma-pa* appears most pronounced and regrettable.

Blezer's emulation of the Gonda style, despite all the improvements in presentation that his computer has brought to bear, does raise some gen-

eral methodological questions. For Gonda, complex encumbrances such as theory of any kind, sustained attempts at contextualization, or even textual criticism, were usually deemed unnecessary to what he apparently saw as the more pressing basic task of making a basic inventory of found items. Blezer clearly follows in this tradition. But is this not perhaps a little archaic for contemporary scholarship? Should he not have at least tried some serious textual criticism? Could he not have looked (as do Janet Gyatso and David Germano) into the social and historical conditions that formed the contexts of the doctrinal developments he seeks to describe? And even if Blezer wished to limit himself strictly to textual and philological concerns, should he not have considered the highly relevant *Guhyasamāja* materials? Or the relevant *Dunhuang Mahāyoga* materials? Without applying such methods to get a purchase on his raw materials, it is hardly surprising that Blezer's findings remain by his own admission rather inconclusive (pp. 127-130).

Blezer does finally attempt some eight pages of theory towards the end of his book — he extremely briefly appends to the end of his study a series of ideas in résumé form in order, as follows:

- (a) sensory deprivation experiments done at McGill in the 1950s;
- (b) a volume by N.A. Stillings (1995) on cognitive science;
- (c) Francoise Pommaret's volume (1989) on the '*das-log* phenomenon';
- (d) Raymond Moody's work on near-death experiences (1975, 1988);
- (e) Joel Whitton's work on hypnotic regression (1986);
- (f) J.J. Poortman's work from the 1950s on the subtle body (Poortman is described as "Professor of metaphysics in the spirit of theosophy").

Yet these six tidbits of theory, packed into eight pages, are tagged onto the end of the book as an extraneous addendum to the tables and descriptive prose which form the real meat of this work. At no stage are they introduced as part of a coherent conceptual framework that sustains the rest of the work — hence, I suppose, their appearance at the end rather than the beginning of the book.

In short, this volume highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of Dutch philology in the Gonda mould: on the one hand we find a very considerable and admirable linguistic range in Asian and European languages alike combined with immense energy and enthusiasm, but on the other there is very little analysis — either text-critical or historical — and no attempt at a sustained theoretical framework.