

# The Bon Religion

## *A First Unifying Factor*



Bon followers worshipped lakes and mountains. Here the sacred Yarlha Sampho peaks



Tonpa Sherab Miwoche founder of the Bon Faith



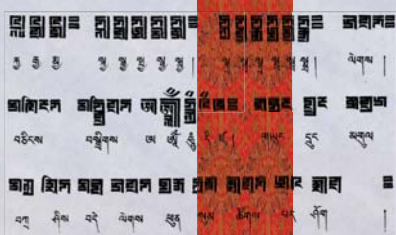
Bon monuments are often found near lakes

Bon is considered the native faith of Tibet which has survived till the present day. For some, Bon is only a body of folk beliefs such as divination, propitiations, offerings, curses; for others, Bon is seen as a more complex religious system with priests called Bonpo, who are believed to have supernatural powers. For still others, Bon is a belief system which matured in the 11th century; this 'organized Bon' has characteristics closely resembling Tibetan Buddhism.

Some scholars divide the history of Bon into three periods. First, the pre-Buddhist era where Bon was a folk religion; the second period was characterized by the emergence of an organized priesthood and a more sophisticated doctrine. It was during this period that the Bon establishment confronted, often violently, Buddhism. The third stage took place after Buddhism became the State religion. Adherents of Bon had to assimilate several Buddhist features to ensure their survival. In turn Buddhism was deeply influenced by Bon.



Sherab Gyaltsen, the founder of the Menri monastery in the 15th century



Maryig scripts used by the Bonpos

Early Bon was closely linked with the Kingdom of Zhangzhung and later with the Yarlung Dynasty. Future research on Zhangzhung may shed more light on the historical relationship with other Himalayan beliefs and civilizations.



Rock engraving

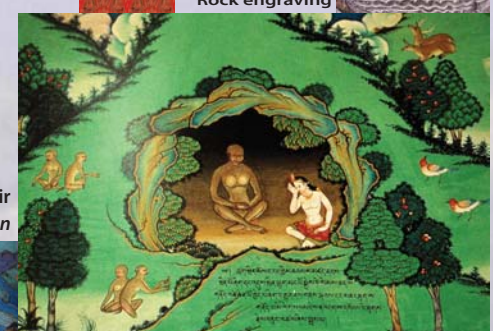


Bonpo priest



Nangshig Bon monastery in Northeastern Tibet

Bonpo yogis are known for their practice of the Great Perfection



The legend of the first Tibetans according to the Bonpos is similar to the Buddhist one. Which one inspired the other?