

## The ritual significance of *zan par*

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The purpose of this paper is to examine in some detail the Tibetan wooden moulds known as *zan par* (food mould) or *glud par shing* (wooden mould) for ritual ransom or substitute. The *zan par* is used to create effigies of dough as scapegoats, (*T. glud*) in order to propitiate evil spirits or as offerings to the deities.

The idea of transferring evil to another being or scapegoat is common in many cultures throughout the world. In Tibet, the concept of *glud* stems from the earlier pre-Buddhist faith, the indigenous folk tradition and the Bon religion, where sacrifice formed an essential part of ritual ceremonies. It was later adopted and used in the tantric rituals of the Tibetan tradition

Such rituals were of course, anathema to Buddhism, which held all forms of life sacred. And when Buddhism gained the upper hand and obtained state recognition, the Bonpos were forbidden to indulge further in such practises. The use of effigies as substitute scapegoat is believed to date from this time, as is the introduction of the *zan par*. Effigies come in a variety of sizes, from life-size representations down to the miniature impressions created by these wooden moulds.

The different types of *zan par* will be studied, as will the rich iconography and symbolism found on these moulds. The profusion of carved designs (animals, birds, mythological creatures, deities, demons, astrological signs, auspicious emblems etc) will be further examined in some detail.

For example, there are countless representations of deities (*lha*) and demons (*bdud*). These are usually divided into three categories – those that rule the sky (*lha*), those that reign over the land (*sa bdag*) and those that control the underworld (*klu*). The list of subdivisions is too expansive to detail, but included on *zan par* are representations of *dgra lha*, *dregs*, *btsan ma*, *the 'u brang* and *gnyan*.

Also depicted are specific groups of protective deities who repel hostile or inimical forces (*dgra lha*) for each different community. For example, the nomads worship a group of nine (*'brog mo*), whilst those that live in the mountains propitiate the gods of the rocks (*brag lha*). The dress and mounts of these deities indicate the pastoral and warlike nature of their corresponding social strata. The carved representations ride animals and wear armour often with the addition of shamanic equipment.

The use of *zan par* still appears to be widespread throughout the Tibetan cultural and spiritual domain. They are common amongst the Bonpo and in all the major Tibetan

Buddhist traditions. However the zan par is not exclusively used by religious practitioners. A selection of zan par is kept in the monasteries, but also carried from village to village by both lay and Buddhist practitioners, in order to cure sickness and deal with various misfortunes.

The method of making the votive images will be explored. The mould is lightly coated with butter, then a mixture of barley flour (*rtsampa*) and water (or sometimes milk and further butter) is pressed into the mould, in order to create a miniature impression. The *tsampa* flour is consecrated before use, auspicious ingredients often being added to please the deity being propitiated. It may also be coloured, depending on the particular ritual and the nature of the specific deity. .

The final section of the paper will deal with specific rituals in which images from the zan par are used and in what method they are utilised. For example, in conjunction with a threadcross (*nam mkha*). In a complex ritual, an altar is set up and on top of this a multi-tiered structure of coloured threads representing Mount Meru, often crowned by a further threadcross mansion which houses an effigy of the person or deity for whom the ritual is being performed.

Dough images of animals, birds, humans, weapons and a multitude of other *glud* offerings made with the zan par are carefully arranged on the tiers. The officiating lama then performs the ritual, invoking the various deities to enter into the images and the thread cross mountain. Finally, the whole structure is burnt or cast away, symbolically removing all traces of negativity and misfortune.

The profusion of zan par images are similar to the symbolism found on offering *tangkhas* (i.e. *rgyen tshogs*, *bskang rdzas*). Comparisons will be made, as will the distinction that in the paintings the offerings are visualised and created in the mind, whereas through the zan par three-dimensional representations are created, which not only serve as offerings, but also as ritual substitutes when rites of exorcism are employed.

In this introduction to the ritual significance of zan par, I will attempt to illustrate how the Tibetan people use the images made in these moulds, in order to cope with the various natural and supernatural forces at work in their environment.