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Einladung zum Vortrag

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The Metaphysics of Light in the Tibetan Books of the Dead Some Considerations on their Origins

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In this lecture I will consider the doctrines concerning death that were developed in Tibet after the eleventh century. These doctrines constitute a vast and very much stratified literary corpus whose most famous book is the so-called *Bar do thos sgrol chen mo* that belongs to the collection of works that form the *Khar gling zhi khro* cycle. Translated into English in 1919 by Kazi Dawa Samdup and Walter Yeling Evans-Wentz and published under the name “The Tibetan Book of the Dead”, it is probably the most well-known work of Tibetan literature in the western world.

The lecture will focus on some particular conceptual aspects that emerge from this ritual treatise and from other esoteric treatises about death that were produced between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, a period of religious renaissance in Tibet defined by Tibetan historians as the “Era of Light” (*sgron ma'i bskal pa*). It is a period in which Tibetans produced a great amount of new esoteric tantric literature, related in some way or other to the last phase of Buddhism in India.

Although among the old Tibetan documents from Dun huang there are several treatises dealing with death and the afterlife, in my opinion the *antarābhava* or *bar do* doctrine arose in Tibet as a distinctive tantric idea that developed after the eleventh century. I think that in tantric treatises such as the *Guhyasamājatantra* and the *Kālacakrat Tantra* which acquired great importance in the Tibetan *gsar ma* traditions, and the *Guhyagarbhatantra*, one of the most authoritative sources of the *rnying ma* tradition, we can detect the theories that supply the background of the various later Tibetan teachings on the *antarābhava* and the Tibetan books of the dead.