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Political and Economic Geographies across the Eastern Himalayas: The Cost of Cross-Border Transportation in the 1940s-50s Kalimpong

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uman mind is wired for categorisations, so much so that our perception of the outside world cannot but reflect the innate structure of our brain. This is evident in the way we process our surroundings through spatial and temporal differentiations – this is *here*, that is *there*, this is *now*, that was *then*. Such mental distinctions are further applied to social relations, as we position *ourselves* against the *other*. Yet, no human entity exists in isolation. Regardless of the essential indivisibility of specific places, cultures, and people, each of them is in turn connected to another, to the extent that "the character of a particular region, or the 'regionality' of a place … stands … at the intersection of an interlocking whole of locational-physical, political-economic, and socio-cultural universes."[1]

From this perspective, it is easy to grasp the fascination exerted by borderland regions, located as they are "in-between," neither *here* nor *there*, but suspended in an everlasting *now*, seemingly immune to past and future. However, at a closer examination the same concepts of "centre" and "periphery" around which such a discourse on borderlands revolves prove inconsistent, as the frame of references changes with the perspective adopted: who is peripheral to whom when no centre is mutually recognised? In talking about the eastern Tibetan area of Khams – one of such borderland regions – Stéphane Gros (2019) proposes the notion of "frontier dynamics," thus embracing the idea expressed by the anthropologists Lars Rodseth and Bradley Parker of "frontiers (as) the quintessential matrices of change."[2] Far from being immutable places, borderland regions are constantly *in fieri*, their motion paced by the rhythm of fluxes – of people, commodities, and ideas. These dynamics of exchange and interaction are present in a lesser or greater degree in all those locales

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[1]   Spengen (2000: 52).
[2]   Rodseth and Parker (2005), as quoted in Gros (2019: 44).

that are, geographically or culturally, amidst other, often more centralised units. In the present article, I will examine some of the socio-economic developments that occurred in one of such places, namely the area of Kalimpong, West Bengal, between the outbreak of WWII in Asia in 1937 and the Sino-Indian Trade Agreement of 1954. The choice of the timeframe is not casual, as it encompasses what can only be described, for lack of better words, as the region's swansong: from the economic boom of the 1940s with the wool slump in the early 1950s and the brief growth spell that followed the Sino-Indian Trade Agreement in 1954 to the closure of the borders in the aftermath of Sino-Indian War of 1962. By the early 1960s, the financial and social decline of Kalimpong, once the major trade hub of the Indo-Tibetan route, was completed. After setting the geo-historical backdrop against which my discourse will be carried out, I will introduce the social actors through whose eyes such border regions will be seen – the ones, in other words, whose perspective will be adopted in observing the borderlands, in a fascinating alternation of *foreign* and *familiar*, *peripheral* and *central*. These will be the point of view of muleteers and porters, Tibetan settlers and transients, as well as of British and Indian officials, who in different ways navigated through the transculturality of that "contact zone" that was mid-twentieth century Kalimpong.[3] Particular attention will be paid to the economics of cross-border transport and the sensitivity of the latter to market fluctuation and volatility. To do so, I will avail myself of local newspapers, traders' memoirs, and archival documents, in an effort to shed some light on the financial weight and logistical power of a category so far understudied.

1. The gateway to India: the emergence of Kalimpong as trade hub

Evocative of bustling bazaars and multi-ethnic crowds, the Kalimpong of common imagery is a multifaceted, nebulous entity, set somewhere between a far-gone past of colonial splendour and a brief, post-Independence spell brimming with a too early thwarted economic potential. A borderland, in other words, stuck into chronological immobility, a vague *then* that does not care to acknowledge the dynamics that created the place. That image, shrouded in a nostalgic halo, was in fact the outcome of a process that, in less than a century, transformed a backwater Lepcha hamlet, no more than a gathering of huts, into a hill station renowned for its boarding schools, medical centres, and shops.[4] The driving force behind such progresses was

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[3]   Viehbeck (2017).
[4]   Rennie (1866: 21), Majumdar (1993: 574).

Rev. William Macfarlane (1840-87), a missionary of the Church of Scotland, who, almost single-handedly, altered the social and cultural geography of the area in a permanent way. Originally situated in Bhutanese territory, Kalimpong was part of those territories annexed to British India in 1865; included in the Darjeeling district in 1866, the Lepcha inhabitants of the hamlet soon attracted the attention of the few foreign missionaries stationed in the area. Macfarlane in particular had noticed their "child-like simplicity in receiving the teaching of Christ,"[5] and, eager to expedite the diffusion of the Gospel among them, he settled in Kalimpong in 1873, opening a small school and kickstarting a process that gradually transformed the centre into a beacon of Western education and modernity.[6] In a few years' time, the construction of new establishments – churches, boarding schools, hospitals – modified the outlook of Kalimpong, setting the foundations for its municipal development. As extra building areas were identified to accommodate newcomers, mostly Anglo-Indians, Bengalis, Europeans, but also wealthy Tibetans eager to rent housing and business spaces, the original inhabitants – Lepchas, Bhotias, and Nepalese – were progressively resettled outside of the main urban agglomerate. By the 1920s, the process of urbanisation was completed, and Kalimpong, recognised as town in 1931, became a municipality fourteen years later, in 1945.[7]

The opening of Tibet in the aftermath of the Younghusband Expedition (1903-04) quickly transformed the hill station into a place of encounters, where identities were continuously challenged and negotiated. Trade became a centripetal force that made of Kalimpong a local centre of gravity: due to its strategical location, close to both the Jelep La and Nathu La passes, the town became a natural node in the land route connecting the ports and markets of West Bengal to the urban areas of Tibet, and, from there, to China and Central Asia. With goods and money came traders and workers: new housing and storing facilities were built, and heterogenous communities found themselves at close quarters, all ensnared in the same network of socio-cultural and economic entanglements, power dynamics, and contact. [8] Kalimpong became the gateway to India for all those Tibetans who, in growing numbers, travelled south of the Himalayas for both business and pleasure;[9] although most were transients, a few settled down, either temporary or permanently, and opened retail shops and

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5   Gilmour (1914), as quoted in McKay (2007: 70).
6   McKay (2007: 69-70).
7   Viehbeck (2017: 5). For an in-depth analysis of the urban development of Kalimpong as a hill station, see, among others, Majumdar (1993; 2006).
8   Viehbeck (2017: 7-13).
9   Huber (2008), Galli (2020).

guesthouses, or hired their services as contractors. In the wake of Chinese military engagement with Japan in 1937, trade along the Indo-Tibetan route grew exponentially, as the Nationalist government struggled to cope with the inner demand for basic supplies. The escalation of the conflict at a global level in 1939 generated a ripple effect that reverberated through all the markets: the borderland regions, by their nature sensitive to supranational changes, reacted accordingly, with a rapid decrease in commodity transit across the border. In the first phase of the war – roughly from 1939 to late 1941-early 1942 – military factors tipped the scale between the contenders, with the power of the Axis essentially dwarfing the Allies in terms of strategy and fighting power. In the second phase, which began in 1942, the nitty-gritty of economic fundamentals reasserted themselves. When the war turned into a stalemate, sheer population size trumped military superiority: the Anglo-French alliance alone counted, with the respective colonial empires, nearly 700 million people, and China boasted thrice the population of Japan and its colonies in the Far East. By adopting a proactive policy of resource mobilisation, the Allies tapped into the reserves of their colonies, thus moving the GDP balance in their favour. Such economic mobilisation came at a hefty price though: the disruptions of trade, both internally and externally, heavily affected those economies that much relied on agriculture, with China and the U.S.S.R. being the first to show the weakness of a low-income states.[10] India did not fare much better: despite an impressive increase in the output of certain industries, mostly connected with the war efforts, the overall expansion of the industrial sector was trivial, with production growth mainly obtained through fuller employment of manpower. As previously mentioned, the expansion and escalation of the conflict affected the volume, value, composition, and direction of India's foreign trade. Both imports and exports declined, due to an acute shortage of shipping, which in turn raised the incidence of freight and war-risk insurance. While the purchasing power of the rupee increased, it did so by limiting the quantity of goods available to the civilian population. The composition of foreign trade itself changed, with exports of manufactured articles, especially cotton piece-goods, rising from 30 percent in 1938-39 to 46 percent in 1945-46, and imports of raw materials increasing from 21.7 percent to 48.4 percent over the same period.[11] The halt imposed on shipping boosted trade with neighbouring states, including Tibet: between the late 1930s up to 1950, commodity transit via Kalimpong rose exponentially.

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[10]   Harrison (1998: 1-9).
[11]   *International Reference Service* (1946: 3).

2. The southbound route: the wool trade

Among Tibetan exports, raw wool figured prominently, the latter a trend started as early as the first decade of the 1900s: over the 1914-15–1915-16 period, the value of wool imports registered a 10 percent annual increment, growing from Rs. 1,177,183 to Rs. 1,284,693.[12] The profits generated by the wool trade led to rapid and radical economic transformations in Central Tibet, with the affirmation of new social sectors whose financial power tipped the scales of political balance and offered a chance, however limited, of mobility in an otherwise crystallised society. Consisting mainly of professional groups, these wealthy and educated "elite commoners"[13] were situated between the upper and lower classes, that is to say between aristocrats and high clergy on one end and farmers and nomads on the other – they occupied, in other words, intermediate social niches that clustered at the margins of traditional hierarchical divisions. The influence wielded by these new classes, in their majority formed by Eastern Tibetan trading firms and their associates, has been examined elsewhere and need not to be reiterated here.[14] Suffice to say that, in the wake of the Younghusband Expedition (1904), the proactive opening policy fostered by British India translated into an increase of transit along the land route connecting Lhasa to Calcutta via Kalimpong. Regulated by several informal institutions, the trans-frontier trade thus generated involved local entities at all levels, which in turn stimulated various forms of inter- and intra-group collaboration and competition. The preference accorded to the Jelep La pass, and therefore to Kalimpong, by the British India government may be traced back to the Lhasa Convention (1904) and had in Captain William Frederick O'Connor its most stalwart supporter. Contrary to the views of the Deputy Commissioner John Claude White, who argued for an improvement of the already existing Nathu La pass, O'Connor pushed for a realignment of the traditional route through Jelep La, hence prioritising Kalimpong – at the time still a poorly connected hamlet near Darjeeling – over Gangtok. In 1906, the proposal advanced by the Captain was ratified and traffic began to be re-oriented along the new route, an event that became a leading factor in the gradual decline of transit that was later registered along the traditional passages in the eastern (Tibet-Bhutan-Bengal) and western (Tibet-Nepal) Himalayas.[15] The sharp increase in commodity flows,

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[12] Sherpa (2019: 400).
[13] Travers (2013: 144).
[14] See, among others, Goldstein (1989a), McGranahan (2002), Harris (2013), Travers (2013; 2018).
[15] Sherpa (2019: 396-97).

until then managed by Dromowas or Monpas, attracted the attention of other groups, such as the Marwaris and Tibetans, who fiercely competed over the monopoly of transport through Dromo (Chumbi Valley) and the Jelep La pass.[16] The disruptions caused by the war heavily affected the budding wool trade, which had in the United States its largest market. The temporary halt in overseas exports caused a substantial drop in the commodity prices in Kalimpong, with a 63 percent loss over an eleven-month period (July 1937 to June 1938).[17] When British India entered the conflict in September 1939, wool prices settled at an average of Rs. 28-30 per maund,[18] a figure that slowly increased with the progression of the war and the affirmation of the Allies over the power of the Axis.[19] By December 1945, two months after the official surrender of Japan (September 2, 1945), raw wool was priced at Rs. 54 per maund in the Kalimpong market.[20] On the wave of the post-war economic expansion, the value of the commodity grew at a steady pace, rising from Rs. 60 per maund (September 1947) to Rs. 70-75 per maund (July 1949).[21] This positive trend, set at a respectable 25 percent increase, underwent a dramatic growth spurt starting from October 1949, when the price of a maund of wool soared from Rs. 95 to Rs. 140-150 (August 1950).[22] This growth spell continued at an even faster pace over following months, with the price curve reaching its spike at the end of 1950. By the early 1951, this positive trend stalled and inverted its course, with wool quotations dropping from Rs. 260 per maund (December 1950-January 1951) to Rs. 130-140 (July 1951) – a harrowing 46-50 percent loss.[23]

Such a fall in prices was the local response to global events: the issuing of the Foreign Assets Control Regulations by the U.S. Treasury

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[16] Spengen (2000: 117).

[17] According to the figures reported in the *Tibet Mirror* (1937: 4; 1938: 2), the price of a maund of raw wool dropped from Rs. 54 (July 1937) to Rs. 20 (June 1938).

[18] Unit of weight used in India and other parts of Asia. Its value varied greatly according to locality; in India, a maund went from 25 to 82.286 pounds (11 to 37.4 kg), the latter being the standard *mondo* (*mon do*) adopted by the Tibetans.

[19] The onset of WWII flared up the global demand for wool to be used in military apparel, and by 1940, the U.S. had emerged as a main buyer and strong competitor of British India. In the attempt to oust the latter from the market, the American government purposely doubled the market offer, causing the wool price to jump from Rs. 20-40 to Rs. 30-60 per maund (Sherpa 2019: 401) and triggering an increase in wool exports (+43 percent in a year) (Travers 2018: 172). As the conflict progressed though, the disruption of supply routes cut off overseas markets, thus causing a slump of Tibetan wool exports, to such an extent that the commodity still stored in Kalimpong began to rot (Grunfeld 1996: 88; Spengen 2000: 86; Travers 2018: 176).

[20] *Tibet Mirror* (1945: 8).

[21] *Tibet Mirror* (1947b: 8; 1949a: 8).

[22] *Tibet Mirror* (1949b: 4; 1950: 6).

[23] *Tibet Mirror* (1950-51: 24; 1951a: 6).

Department on December 17, 1950 came as a blow, as it prohibited the unlicensed importation into the United States of goods of Chinese origin.[24] The CCP's encroachment on Tibet in October 1949 and the consequent relocation of the Tibetan government in Yatung had created much uncertainty among the traders – anxieties that were scarcely put to rest by the Dalai Lama's return to Lhasa in late July 1951 and his ratification of the controversial Seventeen-Point Agreement on October 24 of the same year, an act that sanctioned Tibet's annexation to the People's Republic of China and its de facto inclusion into the Communist bloc. The Dalai Lama's endorsement of the Sino-Tibetan treaty followed by a few months the U.S. government's enforcement of sections 5 and 11 of the Trade Agreement Extension Act, 1951, which stipulated the withdrawal of the benefits of trade-agreement concessions "to imports from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and to imports from any nation or area dominated or controlled by the foreign government or foreign organization controlling the world Communist movement." [25] As communicated by Harry S. Truman himself in a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Treasury John W. Snyder,

> the suspension provided for therein (i.e., sections 5 and 11 of the Trade Agreement Extension Act, 1951) shall be applicable with respect to imports from the following nations and areas which are entered, or withdrawn from warehouse, for consumption after the close of business August 31, 1951: … *Any part of China which may be under Communist domination or control*.[26]

The implementation of sections 5 and 11 represented the muscular reaction of America to the Chinese by-passing of 1950 Regulations: despite the prohibition of entry the United States, goods originating in the PRC found avenues of evasion through other countries, where they were exported for processing prior to their shipment overseas. This maneuver technically changed the country of origin of the goods, thus granting China an indirect profit; yet, according to the Trade Agreement Extension Act,

> processing in other countries of goods originating in China does not change the "country of origin" for the purpose of the Foreign Assets Control Regulations and, accordingly, these goods, even though processed outside of China, will not be admitted by Customs.[27]

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[24] "U.S. Treasury Department Report" (1952: 460).
[25] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1951a: 21).
[26] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1951: 21, my italics).
[27] "U.S. Treasury Department Report" (1952: 460).

The measures taken by the U.S. government clearly affected Tibetan products as well, including wool: regardless of any processing that the commodity underwent in Kalimpong, its country of origin remained, for all intents and purposes, Tibet – "a part of China under Communist control," as the Americans saw it.

The ban essentially meant the loss of Tibet's main foreign buyer, a fact that burst the wool price bubble: when the U.S. declared their availability to accept shipment until February 29, 1952 at the latest, sellers released great quantities of raw wool in the attempt to save some of their assets. The decline in demand, coupled with the rapid saturation of the market, removed any price cap the traders had managed to preserve in the previous months – over a seven-month period, the value of the commodity fell by 44-54 percent, depending on the quality taken into consideration.[28] By April 1952, no more wool was traded in Kalimpong, with all transactions forcibly suspended until further notice. The situation was dire, as almost 2,000 tons (ca. 53,585 maunds) of wool were left to rot in the godowns of the Himalayan trade hub. [29] Already in March 1952, some of the representatives of the largest Tibetan trading firms had approached the PRC's leadership, requesting a strong intervention on their part. As reported in the *Tibet Mirror*, a Tibetan-language newspaper published in Kalimpong, issue dated April 1952,

> Tibetan wool is the primary choice for Americans, who see it as a vital commodity, yet among the many clauses contained in a bulletin issued by the Foreign Department at Washington on January 31, 1952 was the decision that hereafter no goods whatsoever coming from Communist countries should be bought. Due to China's incorporation of Tibet, this meant a great loss for Tibetan traders, who were forced to reduce the price of the wool to the Indian factories as much as they could, to the point of being unable to make up for the costs. In December of last year, the head of the (Tibetan) Traders' Association, the Governor of Dromo and fourth rank (in the Tibetan aristocratic system) Pangdatsang (sPang mda' tshang),[30] together with the various representatives (of the Association), asked the representative of the People's Republic of

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[28] Tibetan raw wool was divided in two varieties, according to the place from which the loads were despatched, namely Lhasa (higher, more expensive quality, known as "white" wool) and Tsang (lower, cheaper quality, known as "black" wool). On the Kalimpong market, the difference in price between the two was around 15-20 percent.

[29] Harris (2013: 39).

[30] Pangdatsang Lobsang Yampel (sPang mda' tshang Blo bzang yar 'phel (1900?-72/73) was granted the fourth rank in the Tibetan government (*rim bzhi*), an appointment that included the post of Tibetan Trade Agent in Yatung as well as the title of Governor of Dromo (*gro mo spyi khyab*).

China in Calcutta Mr. Xiling [31] to inquire about his government's interest in purchasing the wool already in Kalimpong. Taking such responsibility upon himself, Mr. Xiling, together with the China Bank, entered into negotiations with the Russian government. When a special trade deputy from Moscow – TRADE AGENT OF U.S.S.R, IN INDIA – arrived at the Russian trade bureau in Calcutta, Reting (Rwa sgreng), Pangdatsang, and Sadutsang (Sa 'du tshang) arranged (a group of) about seven delegates, plus the deputy secretary of the Association Mr. Tsenam (Tshe rnam); on March 21, they met in Calcutta with the Chinese representative Mr. Xiling, the Russian agent, and the manager of China Bank. At the meeting, they discussed in detail the factors contributing to the current situation. A decision was taken concerning the way in which to buy and sell wool, and the manner of payment – "TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF BUSINESS." As for the price, the Russians requested to first examine the quality of the Tibetan wool, since they have never traded in this commodity before. The agent from Moscow has already left with the samples and the promise to send a telegram with a buying offer, eagerly awaited by the Tibetan traders. Such news will certainly help Tibetan trade in general, even though it has not been decided yet how much wool should be separated into black and white and made into bundles in Kalimpong.[32]

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[31]   Physicist, playwright, and Vice-Minister for Culture, Ding Xiling (丁西林, 1893-1974) led the first Chinese cultural delegation to India in the late 1951 in his role of President of the China-India Friendship Association (CIFA) (Ghosh 2017: 705).

[32]   *bod kyi bal rnams a mi ri kar mgo gnad [*dgos gnas] che ba'i bal phal che ba a mi ri ka bas nyo mus kyang 'das lo 1952 zla ba dang po ta rig 31 nyin a mi ri ka wa shing kron* Treasury Department, Foreign Assets Control, Washington, 25, D.C. *nas btang ba'i rtsa tshig* (ANNOUNCED) *'drem [*'grem] spel byas gsal bod rgya gmar [*dmar] khongs su song gshis da cha dmar po'i yul nas thon pa'i dngos zog gang yang nyo rgyu min pa thag chod pa sogs don tshan mang tsam 'khod par btan [*brten] rgya gar khul gyi bzo 'phrul khag sogs nas kyang bal gong gcog gang thub kyis bod kyi tshong pa rnams la gyong gun ci che 'i 'gro sdod dang | sprod len kyang mi thub pa'i gnas su gyur bzhin pa'i skabs su bod tshong e so se shan gyi dbu bzhugs mi rje gro spyi rim bzhi spom mda' ba mchog dang 'thus mi khag bcas snga lo zla ba 12 pa'i nang ka tar rgya nag mi dmangs srid gzhung rgyal khab kyi sku tshab kling si brgyud bod kyi bal ka phag [*ka sbug] khul 'byor zin pa rnams srid bzhung rang nas spus gzigs mdzad rogs zhes snyan 'bul zhus 'dug par kling si mchog dang | ci na sbeng* (China Bank) *bcas nas thugs 'khur che bzhes kyis u ru su'i rgyal khab tu bka' mol gnang ste ka ta u ru su' tshong don las khungs* TRADE AGENT OF U.S.S.R., IN INDIA, *yod mus khar nye char ma se ko* (MASCOW) *nas dmigs gsal tshong don sku tshab zhig ka tar ched 'byor zin pa'i brda lan byung 'phral rwa spom sa gsum gyi [*gyis] gcos [*bcos] e so se shan gyi sku tshab seg re kre ri sku zhabs tshe rnam lhan rgyas bcas 'thus mi bdun tsam spyi zla 3 tshes 21 nyin ka tar ched bcar kyis srid gzhung sku tshab kling si mchog dang | ru su'i sku tshab lhan rgyas ci na sbeng gi ma ni 'jer* (Manager of China Bank) *bcas ngo mjal thog gnas lugs yong rkyen bka' mol zhib phra zhus pa'i snying por | bal nyo tshong gtong phyogs rin dngul sprod len byed stang sogs kyi chod don* TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF BUSINESS, *zhes pa gtan 'bebs zin pa dang | bal gong thad u ru sus de snga bod kyi bal nyo tshong byed myong med stabs bal gyi spus tshad blta zhib nan gtan byas te ring min tar thog rin 'di tsam sprod thub zhes*

The vacuum left by the American market forced Tibetan traders to turn towards new potential buyers: in spite of Russians and Czechs' mild interest,[33] the Chinese government provided ample support, willingly collaborating with the Traders' Associations, who had in Pangdatsang Lobsang Yampel their spokesman. Throughout April 1952, negotiations continued at a fast pace and an agreement was reached in the second part of the month; once again, the *Tibet Mirror* functioned as a broadcasting platform. From the joint issue date May-June 1952,

> As was recorded in last month's newspaper (i.e., the April issue), following previous talks with the Chinese representative in Calcutta, the head of the Tibetan Traders' Association together with the honourable Governor of Dromo and fourth rank (of the Tibetan nobility) Pangdatsang and a few other delegates met with an agent of the U.S.S.R.. The wool was examined for quality, and a quick response with an offer was anticipated via telegram. The lack of an answer by the deadline left the Tibetan petty traders in a state of uncertainty. A few sold at a loss; it is said that, after selling at around Rs. 56 (per maund), they went bankrupt … Recently, on April 22, 1952, a telegram was sent to the Tibet Traders' Association in Kalimpong from Lhasa. It was received on the twenty-sixth of the same month at 6pm; this is a true reproduction in English script … *TRUE COPY OF TELEGRAM RECEIVED FROM TIBET TRADERS ASSOCIATION LHASA. LHASA.22.4.52 KALIMPONG.26.4.52. At 6P.M. Tibetan Traders Association, Kalimpong. "For the improvement of Tibetan trade Chinese Govt. helped us in settling to sell all Tibetan wools to the factory of China; they also offered good price so don't intend to sell whatever wool reached there. AAA Inform all Tibetan traders accordingly. AAA Detailed letter posted continued. Tibetan Traders."* … Although it is said that a maund of white wool will fetch Rs. 185, at the moment no one is buying or selling.[34]

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pa'i (Offer) *o phar gtong rgyu bcas gnyis mos kyis ma se ko nas phebs pa'i sku tshab de bzhin bal gyi spus tshad dang bcas phyir phebs zin 'dug par bod tshong rnams ring min* (Offer) *o phar 'byor rgyu'i re ba ci che'i ngang du bzhugs 'dug pa'i gnas tshul go thos byung | ka sbug tu bal dkar nag dbyer 'byed dang sgam khri rgyag rgyu sogs ji byed da lta gtan 'khel mi 'dug kyang bod tshong spyir phan pa'i thabs shes gnang gi yod bsha' red || Tibet Mirror* (1952a: 7).

[33] Russia's delay to answer the plea of Tibetan wool traders was by some ascribed to the country's decision to await the evaluation of the Economic Conference, scheduled to be held in Moscow in 1952; see *Himalayan Times* (1952: 6, 8).

[34] *snga zla'i gsar shog tu bkod gsal bod tshong e so se shan gyi dbu bzhugs mi rje gro spyi sku ngo spom mda' mchog dang 'thus mi khag nas ka tar rgya gzhung sku tshab dang bka' mol gnang rjes u ru su'i sku tshab dang bka' mol thog bal gyi spus tshad blta zhib kyis ring min tar thog rin 'di tsam sprod thub ces pa'i lan gsal byed rgyu bcas 'dug rung | lan gsal dus thog 'byor min bod kyi tshong chung rnams 'gro 'dod [*sdod] ma shes tsam du lus te kha shas nas 'pham tshong brgyab ste sgor lnga bcu drug cu tsam la btsongs nas log skad | da lam gnas tshul 'byor gsal | nye sngon spyi zla bzhi pa'i tshes nyer gnyis nyin Lhasa*

The quotation reported above proved to be correct, as 80,000 maunds (ca. 3,000 tons) of unsold wool, still stored at the Calcutta docks, were purchased by the PRC at the fixed price of Rs. 184 per maund.[35] By directly liaising with the Tibetan Traders' Association in Kalimpong, the Chinese government re-oriented the flow of wool from India to mainland China. By April 1953, the commodity was once again quoted in Kalimpong at Rs. 140 per maund. The lack of competitors flattened the market, with fluctuations in the order of Rs. 5 per maund – over a seventeen-month period (April 1953-September 1954), the price registered a 7 percent increment on an average, with the highest quotation recorded in January 1954 at Rs. 160 per maund (Lhasa variety).[36] The signing of the Sino-Indian treaty on April 29, 1954 definitely closed the door to any hope for bilateral trade agreements with India that might have been still harboured by Tibetan traders. Cut off from the global market and unable to halt the progressive encroachment on its territory by Chinese construction workers and settlers, Tibet saw its exports increasingly deviate from the Himalayas to mainland China. In the following months, the wool flow across the Jelep La pass came to a virtual end, and in 1955 the reduced volume of trade prompted the Indian Railway Board to terminate the working arrangements on the Kalimpong Gielle Khola Ropeway: the slump of cross-border transit and the lack of modernisation made it impossible for the line to cope with the competition of road traffic.[37] The Sino-Indian war in 1962 and the subsequent closure of the border brought the trade flows to a complete halt.

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nas ka sbug bod tshong e so se shan la lcags 'phrin btang ba 'dir tshes nyer drug gong [*dgong] thag tshod drug par 'byor ba'i dbyin yig 'dra shus [*bshus] ngo ma [...] *TRUE COPY OF TELEGRAM RECEIVED FROM TIBET TRADERS ASSOCIATION LHASA. LHASA. 22.04.52 KALIMPONG. 26.04.52 At 6 P.M. TIBETAN TRADERS ASSOCIATION, KALIMPONG. "For the improvement of Tibetan trade Chinese Govt. helped us in settling to sell all Tibetan wools to the factory of China they also offered good price so don't intend to sell whatever wool reached there AAA Inform all Tibetan traders accordingly AAA Detailed letter posted continued. Tibetan Traders."* [...] *bal dkar rkyang mon dor sgor 185 tsam re sprod kyi yod skad kyang da lta nyo tshong byed mkhan ni mi 'dug* || *Tibet Mirror* (1952b: 7).

[35] Figures as reported in *Tibet Mirror* (1952b: 7).
[36] Figures as reported in the *Tibet Mirror*, issues dated from April 1953 to September 1954. See *Tibet Mirror* (1953a: 6; 1953b: 4; 1953c: 8; 1953d: 4; 1953e: 8; 1953f: 6; 1953g: 6; 1953h: 6; 1954a: 6; 1954b: 6; 1954c: 6; 1954d: 8; 1954e: 4; 1954f: 16).
[37] Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company Limited and DHR Extensions Co. Ltd. were nationalised on October 20, 1948; the operation cost the Indian Government only Rs. 15 lakhs (1.5 million) (Sherpa 2019: 402). For an in-depth study of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and its socio-economic impact on Darjeeling, see Rai (2014).

3. Talking business: freightage fares along the route

The few figures presented above attest to the importance that the wool trade had on the Tibetan economy – at both general and individual levels. Numerous studies have been dedicated to the rapid rise of Khampa trading families in the socio-political fabric of twentieth-century Lhasa and the modernising influence that cross-border encounters had on many sectors (e.g., economics, education, military organisation, urban architecture, transport) in Tibet.[38] Wool trade undoubtedly played a major role in these events as hundreds of thousands of maunds in wool loads transited along the Indo-Tibet land route – a several millions of rupees worth flow that cascaded from retailers to wholesalers, porters, middlemen, and nomads, diminishing the closer each stage was to the origin of the commodity chain. It was the network process itself that fostered inequality as the different stages of the commodity chain unrolled according to a pyramid scheme well-known in the contemporary financial world. At the base (first stage / origin) were the producers (i.e., the nomads), who sold their basic product (i.e., sheared wool) at low-profit rate to either independent contractors or private buyers (second stage). Given the unsophisticated nature of pre-modern Tibetan economy, at this stage transactions were generally conducted on a barter level, as wool was exchanged for grains, cotton cloth or other basic supplies not available in the pasture lands. Contractors were keen to keep the price low, as to cushion any fluctuations in quality that may adversely affect their own profit at the time of delivering the product. The sheared wool, roughly packed in bundles by the nomads, was then shipped on mules to the urban areas of Central Tibet, the most part of it being distributed to agents of middle and large trading firms (third stage), with only a fraction reserved to retailers. Temporarily stored in Lhasa or Gyantse, the bundles were then delivered, via yaks, mules or porters (fourth stage), to Phari in Dromo, and, from there, to Kalimpong through the Jelep-La pass. In the trade hub, the loads were shifted to the storing facilities of individual traders (fifth stage), where they were unpacked, cleaned, and re-bundled, ready to be sold to the best bidder. At each stage of the chain, the commodity changed hands, passing from an

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[38]   In addition to the references provided in note 14, see also FitzHerbert and Travers (2020) for an introduction to the foreign influences on the Tibetan military apparatus, Travers on the military identity of early twentieth-century Tibetan aristocracy (2011) and on the private schooling in pre-1951 Tibet (2016), Stoddard (1985) and McGranahan (2005) on the socio-political role of progressive Tibetan intellectuals, van Spengen (2000) on the changes brought to local economy by long-distance trade, and Alexander (2013) for a study of twentieth-century urban changes in Lhasa.

intermediary to the other, in a constant inflation of its nominal value: among those who gained the most from this process were, ironically, the ones who did not possess the commodity, but simply arranged for its transport, whereas those whose survival most relied on wool ended up gaining the least from the business.

In a recent study of the Tibetan "bourgeoisie," Alice Travers (2018) presents a much-needed quantitative analysis of wool trade exports from 1907 to 1947 that supports a more concrete evaluation of the commodity impact on local economies, especially on the induced sectors (e.g., transport). Although only the first ten years of the period under examination in the present paper (1937-54) are covered by the data set compiled by Travers, the figures extrapolated from the exports over the years 1942-47 may be used to plot the corresponding trend in the transport fees along the southbound route and hence calculate, by approximation, the income generated by the wool trade in the ancillary activities of muleteers and porters. The adoption of such a restricted time frame is made necessary by the paucity of information on the local transport sector prior to September 1942, when freightage fares began to be regularly published in the pages of the *Tibet Mirror*.[39] Aside from providing the reader with practical figures, the quotes reported in the newspaper depict the mental maps – the "geographical imaginings" [40] – that flanked, and often replaced, the "official" cartographic representations of the itinerary that unravelled through the eastern passages of the Himalayas. As customary among its users, the land route was in fact divided into several segments, priced differently in consideration of the direction of the flow – southbound (Lhasa-Kalimpong) or northbound (Kalimpong-Lhasa) – and length of the leg taken into consideration (Kalimpong-Phari / Phari-Kalimpong, Kalimpong-Lhasa). Freight shipment rates fluctuated according to the market trends: in adherence to basic tenets of economics, an increase in demand determined a correspondent rise in transport fees along the commodity flow direction. In September 1942, for instance, the price for the dispatch of a backload (equal to a maund) was Rs. 4-5 on the southbound route (Phari-Kalimpong) and Rs. 13 on the northbound route (Kalimpong-Phari).[41] Such a staggering difference (about +200 percent) was largely due to global economic conditions: the slump of the wool market following the disruption of overseas shipments had caused a drop in Tibetan exports and a consequent growth in imports,

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[39] Transport fees were also reported in the issues dated October 1933 (Phari-Kalimpong: Rs. 5-6; Kalimpong-Phari: Rs. 8), January 1934 (Kalimpong-Phari: Rs. 5-6) and February-March 1934 (Phari-Kalimpong: Rs. 10-12; Kalimpong-Phari: Rs. 4-5). See *Tibet Mirror* (1933: 2; 1934a: 8; 1934b: 8).

[40] Harris (2013: 2).

[41] *Tibet Mirror* (1942: 2).

as basic supplies were funnelled to China, at the time engaged against Japan on the Far Eastern front.[42] The price fluctuations in transport rates reflect the general trends of local economy, in turn affected by supranational events; the interweaving of geo-political and financial dynamics during WWII and in the post-war immediacy is a well-known consequence of conflicts fought at a global level. The tens, often hundreds, of thousands of mauds in commodity loads transiting annually along the Indo-Tibetan route generated a corresponding income, worth millions of rupees, in freightage. In the following pages, I will attempt a more detailed analysis of the actual value, in transport rates, generated by two commodities, namely wool and cotton-pieces, which represented the most quantitative relevant items respectively exported from and imported to Tibet via Kalimpong between the early 1940s and the mid-1950s. For the sake of convenience, I have divided my analysis into two sections: the first, presented hereafter, will deal with the export of wool along the southbound route over the period 1942-54, while the second section will examine the northbound transit of cotton-pieces between 1942 and 1954, with a brief diversion on transport fares that the Tibetan government accorded at a special rate to Indian officials.

3.1 The price of going south: wool loads and transport fees

Before delving any deeper into the nitty-gritty of freightage fares, a *caveat* is necessary: the figures produced below are projections extrapolated from incomplete data sets and must therefore be understood as indicative and approximate. This is particularly true for the years 1942-46, as only a few issues of the *Tibet Mirror* are currently available for the period;[43] even the export data compiled by Travers, and here used as source of reference, present inherent lacunae and "artificial" adjustments, a fact remarked by the author herself.[44] It is worth recalling at this point that, despite their titles, British Trade Agencies were not, to all intents and purposes, *trade* posts, rather they functioned as intelligence stations, collecting precious information on the socio-political developments in Lhasa, and their interest in

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[42] The shortage of overseas shipping, and the consequent halt of exports to the United States, forced the traders to cut themselves a niche in the local market: in 1942, the Indian mills turned their purchases to Tibetan raw wool, thus providing a release for the accumulated stocks in Kalimpong. See the *Himalayan Times* (1952: 6).

[43] The following is a list of issues per volume printed in the 1942-1946 period and currently available for consultation: v. 11, no. 1-3, 7 (August to October 1942, February 1943); v. 12, no. 10 (May 1944); v. 13, no. 1, 9 (August-September 1944, May-June 1945); v. 14, no. 3, 5-7 (December 1945, March to April-May 1946). No issues are available for the months between May 1946 and July 1947.

[44] Travers (2018: 168 fn. 19).

economic matters was therefore marginal.[45] In the light of that, the transport fees presented below (Table 1) represent the yearly average, calculated on the basis of the quotations recorded in the issues of the *Tibet Mirror* available to me at the time of writing. These figures, referring to the cost of a loaded mule (ca. 1 maund per pack animal), will be multiplied for the corresponding annual exports as presented in Travers to provide a gross estimate of the income generated by wool trade in the transport sector. [46] The leg examined is the Phari-Kalimpong, the most relevant in the present discussion as the export data refer to the transit through Dromo (Chumbi Valley).[47]

	Wool transit (Volume in maunds)	Transport fees (Rs. per maund)	Total annual freightage income (Rs.)
1942-43	56,994	~ 16	~ 896,000
1943-44	33,022	~ 28	~ 896,000
1944-45	57,150	~ 28	~1,568,000
1945-46	62,345	~ 24	~ 1,488,000
1946-47	116,307	~ 28	~ 2,976,540

Table 1 — Total annual freightage fares for the period March 1942- March 1947

Starting from the year 1946-47, the reliability of data in terms of transport fees positively increases, as more issues of the *Tibet Mirror* become available. Regrettably, the same cannot be said for the volume of wool transiting across the border: statistics relative to the post-Independence period were in fact collected at selected Railway Stations, hence they are just indicative of the inner movement of the commodity from the ports of entry (e.g., Kalimpong) to those of exit (e.g., Calcutta), a trend mostly dependent on external demand. These figures, referring to the fiscal period 1946-49, are contained in a statement presented to the Parliament by the Minister of the

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[45]   McKay (1992).
[46]   Travers (2018: 169). The British reports were generally dispatched in March, yet there were instances where only ten or eleven months were accounted for; in consideration of that, Travers adjusts the figures, corroborating them with the statistics collected at Calcutta concerning the transit of wool through Bengal. Similarly, the transport fees have been, wherever possible, calculated over a March-to-March period. The lack of quotations available for certain months made necessary the adoption of an artificial mean value; the order of approximation is indicated in the tables by the following symbols: ~ (zeroth order of approximation), ≈ (first order of approximation), ≅ (second order of approximation). The higher the order, the more reliable the figure is.
[47]   The data set in Travers contains statistics mostly compiled by the British Trade Agency in Yatung (2018: 168).

Commerce Kshitish Chandra Neogy on February 27, 1950. [48] The statistics, reported below (Table 2) and to be treated as approximate only, appear to be rather conservative in their estimates, the latter a fact largely ascribable to the reasons given above. A point in question is represented by the fiscal year 1946-47: the volume in maunds provided by Travers in her data set (i.e., 116,307) appears slightly higher than the figures (i.e., 106,615) advanced by Harris [49] for the period April 1, 1946 to March 31, 1947, both of which amply overhaul the statistics compiled by the Ministry of Commerce for the year in question. [50]

	1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949 (April to October)
Wool transit (volume in maunds)	71,187	70,008	85,387	33,169

Table 2 — Total annual freightage fares for the period April 1946 to October 1949

The accuracy of wool transit figures for the financial years 1947-48 and 1948-49 finds corroboration in the statistics reported in the *Foreign Commerce Weekly*, a publication edited by the Office of International Trade, U.S. Department of Commerce. From the issue dated May 15, 1948,

> Kalimpong stocks were estimated at about 8,000 to 9,000 bales[51] at the end of February. Total supplies of Tibetan wool will be about 8,000,000 pounds (ca. 90,000 maunds) this season as compared with 5,000,000 pounds (ca. 57,000 maunds) last season.[52]

The difference in value between the statistics provided by K. C. Neogy and those distributed by the U.S. Office of International Trade for the financial year 1947-48 may be once again ascribable to the system used by the Indian Ministry of Commerce to gauge the volume of the

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[48] "Provisional Parliamentary Debates (First Session)" (1950: 504).
[49] Harris (2008: 207).
[50] The statistics are given in tons. For sake of consistency, the figures shown in Table 2 have been converted to maunds; the original volumes communicated by the Minister of Commerce are as follows: 2,657 tons (F.Y.: 1946-47), 2,613 tons (F.Y.: 1947-48), 3,187 tons (F.Y.: 1948-49), and 1,238 (for the 7-month period: April to October 1949). See Provisional Parliament Debate (1950: 504).
[51] Unit of weight equal to 218 kg (ca. 5.8 maunds).
[52] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1948: 32)

commodity transiting from Tibet to India. The drop in sales at the end of 1946 determined a surplus of stocks in Kalimpong, which in turn may account for the lower volume of maunds registered by the Indian Minister of Commerce compared to the statistics compiled by the British Trade Agency in Yatung. Triggered by post-war demand, the beginning of the season (October-November 1946) saw a surge in the quantity of wool transiting across the border, as Tibetan traders were eager to sell fresh clips to the best bidder. With the revival of overseas communications however, already existing Empire stocks were suddenly released:[53] the temporary saturation of the global market led to a drop in Tibetan wool exports, as reflected in the statistics collected at the Railway Stations by the Ministry of Commerce. Likewise, the discrepancy between the figures reported for the financial year 1947-48 in Table 2 and the ones broadcasted by the U.S. Office of International Trade is due to the different sources used to compile the statistics: the first one records the movement of wool maunds from stocking places (e.g., Kalimpong) to ports of exit (e.g., Calcutta), while the other registers the actual commodity transit across the border. Between February 1947 and February 1948, the number of bales shipped from Calcutta to the United States alone jumped from 125 to 2,446 bales, a mind-boggling 1,956.8 percent increment. Since the depots in Kalimpong were well-stocked, it is likely that most of these bales were remains from the previous season: in an effort to clear out old stocks, the import of fresh clips was therefore reduced, passing from the 8,000,000 pounds (ca. 106,000 maunds) of 1946-47 to 5,000,000 pounds (ca. 60,750 maunds) of 1947-48.[54] In the following years (1948-49 and 1949-50), the volume of wool crossing the border grew again, settling at an average of 7,000,000 pounds per financial year, as confirmed by the Deputy Minister of Commerce Dattatraya

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[53] "… on reasonably optimistic assumption, the period required to dispose of existing Empire stocks alongside new clips would be on average 13 years from June 30th, 1945" (*Report and Recommendation of the London Wool Conference*, as quoted in Blau 1946, 180). To avoid a disorganisation of the market, the governments of four Commonwealth countries – the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa – established a "Joint Disposal Organisation" (J.O.) in 1945, the aim of which was to buy, hold, and sell the surplus wool accumulated by its members. Despite the estimates advanced at the London Wool Conference, J.O. stocks had almost disappeared by the 1949-50, and at the opening of the 1950-51 season the world wool stocks had reached their minimum levels ("World Wool Situation" 1952: 2-3).

[54] In the years prior to Partition, about 5,000,000 pounds of Tibetan wool were annually re-exported from Calcutta docks. These figures, reported in the *Foreign Commerce Weekly*, issue dated July 25, 1949, are in line with the statistics in Table 1. See *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1949: 6).

Parasuram Karmakar at the Parliamentary session on November 23, 1950.[55]

As the statistics provided in Table 2 do not extend beyond October 1949, I will supplement those data with figures on exports of Tibetan raw wool as recorded in other official sources. Regrettably, at the time of writing I could access only a restricted portion of the trade statistics compiled by the Indian Trade Agency in Yatung in the years 1940-54, a fact that forced me to rely on the information provided by the Office of International Trade of the United States; due to the lack of detailed, month-by-month registers, the numbers presented below are therefore to be understood as indicative only (Table 3). The statistics provided by the Indian Ministry of Commerce accounts for the first seven months of the financial year 1949-50 (April-October 1949). In the effort to reconstruct the whole annual trend, those numbers have been integrated with the figures on exports of Tibetan wool as recorded in *Foreign Commerce Weekly*, issue dated July 10, 1950: according to the latter, approximately 75 percent of the season's wool supply[57] in Tibet had been baled and shipped by the end of April 1950.[58] Between January and April 1950, exports of Tibetan wool to the United States alone amounted to 1,543,961 pounds, to which should be added those shipped to other foreign countries during February-April 1950, for a total of 1,856,529 pounds.[59] If we consider the figures registered by the British Trade Agency, Yatung for the period April-October 1949 (Table 2) and add them to the exports registered in *Foreign Commerce Weekly*, the volume of wool loads that transited across the border between April 1949 and April 1950 should have been in the order of 4,585,866 pounds. As the latter represented 75 percent of the total supply available in Tibet, the exports of wool in the financial year 1949-50 may be rounded up at a lump-sum of 6,200,000 pounds (ca. 75,347 maunds). These estimates are confirmed by the statistics provided in *Foreign Commerce Weekly*, issue dated January 8, 1951; therein, the total supply of Tibetan wool for the year 1949-50 is given at 20,000 bales (ca.

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[55] "Provisional Parliamentary Debates (Third Session)" (1950b: 295). In mid-summer 1949, the U.S. Ministry of Commerce actually estimated that the Tibetan wool production in the year 1949-50 would not exceed 5,250,000 pounds (ca. 63,800 maunds) (*Foreign Commerce Weekly* 1949: 6), a projection that did not take into account the reduction of surplus stocks and the consequent price spike ("World Wool Situation" 1952: 3), that led to an increase in the volume of cross-border transit.

[57] The wool trading season begins at the end of the wet monsoon in October or November, when the first caravans cross the Himalayan passes towards India (Metcalf 1954: 7).

[58] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1950: 35).

[59] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1950: 35).

6,000,000 pounds / 72,917 maunds). [60] Although more on the conservative side, such figures appear in line with the statistics presented by D. P. Karmarkar and will therefore be used as acceptable estimates to calculate the approximate income from freightage fares in the financial year 1949-50.

Despite estimates prospecting a 10 percent increase in Tibet's wool production for the year 1950-51 (ca. 6,820,000 pounds), the Chinese encroachment effectively halted shipments of raw wool from Calcutta. At the end of October 1950, no more than 1,000 bales (ca. 300,000 pounds) of the new clips had been received in Kalimpong, and by November the bulk of Tibet's trade in wool had been diverted to southwest China.[61] Wool trade resumed eagerly in the first months of 1951, and by February 12, 1951 no less than 20,000 bales (ca. 6,000,000 pounds / 72,917 maunds) were expected to be available for export from Calcutta.[62] The global demand for wool inflated the price: it was only a matter of time before the bubble burst. The commodity, flowing in millions of pounds across the border, began to accumulate in the godowns and storing facilities of Kalimpong and Calcutta, where it remained largely unsold due to the enforcement of the ban by the U.S. government. In mid-1951, the American embargo depressed the local market, with the commodity depreciating by more than 50 percent.[63] It is to be noted that the values given for the financial year 1951-52 are indicative of the drop of volume consequent to the U.S. embargo, the effects of which dragged on into the following year. With most of the stocks accumulated between December 17, 1951 and February 29, 1952 (ca. 80,000 maunds / 6,600,000 pounds) bought at a fixed rate by the Chinese government, shipment across the border resumed, as the balance of 1951 clips and the unsold 1952 production were re-directed towards China via Calcutta. While in Kalimpong stock quotations were suspended for months, and the volume of wool transiting through the Chumbi Valley was considerably downsized, [64] the transport fees showed minimal variation, as the flow remained consistent for the most part of the year.[65] Starting from April 1953,

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[60] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1951a: 21).
[61] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1951a: 21).
[62] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1951b: 24).
[63] Metcalf (1954: 7)
[64] According to Metcalf (1954: 7), arrivals of Tibetan wool in Kalimpong during the 1952-53 trading season totalled approximatively 5,000,000 pounds (ca. 60,764 maunds).
[65] The annual report compiled by the Indian Trade Agency, Yatung for the year 1952 (January-December) accounts for 62,229 maunds (ca. 5,696,562 pounds). The trend shows a marked slump in volume transiting across the Jelep La and Nathu La passes in mid-summer (July-September), with a virtual halt (only 33 maunds) in September. The trade resumed in earnest in November, reaching a peak (12,836

wool was once again priced, yet fluctuations throughout the financial
year 1953-54 were limited and mostly regulated by China's demand,
which was by then the main buyer;[66] such a trend remained virtually
unaltered up to the closure of the border in the aftermath of the Sino-
Indian War of 1962.

	Wool transit (Volume in maunds)	Transport fees (Rs. per maund)	Total annual freightage income (Rs.)
1946-47	106,000	~ 28	2,968,000
1947-48	60,750	~ 22	1,336,500
1948-49	85,387	≈ 22	1,878,514
1949-50	75,347	≈ 39	2,938,533
1950-51	72,917	≈ 50	3,645,850
1951-52	80,000	≈ 26	2,080,000
1952-53	~ 60,764	~ 20	1,215,280
1953-54	~ 48,611	≈ 30	1,458,330

Table 3 — Total annual freightage fares for the period April 1946 to April 1954

maunds) in December (National Archives of India, External Affairs, North Eastern
Frontier, File No. N/52/2411/1201, "Trade Statistics Between India and Tibet").
The latter tendency would justify the larger volume registered for 1952-53 in Table
3, as the Indian financial year run from April 1, 1952 to March 31, 1953.

[66] The Chinese policy of purchasing large quantities of Tibetan raw wool in India at
a premium price had stabilised the market, de facto hindering any speculative
fluctuations (Metcalf 1954: 7). No detailed statistics concerning the quantity of raw
wool transit through Kalimpong is available to me for the financial year 1953-54,
yet according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 1955 a decline in re-exports
Tibetan wool clips from Calcutta was registered, a fact ascribed to the increase in
purchases by China and other Communist countries. In 1955, the re-exports
amounted to 3,400,000 pounds; in consideration of the trend registered in 1952-53,
it seems likely to place the total volume of wool for the financial year 1953-54 in
the order of 4,000,000 pounds (ca. 48,611 maunds) ("Foreign Agricultural Circular
FW 4-56" 1956: 2), especially since imports of wool from Tibet were reported to
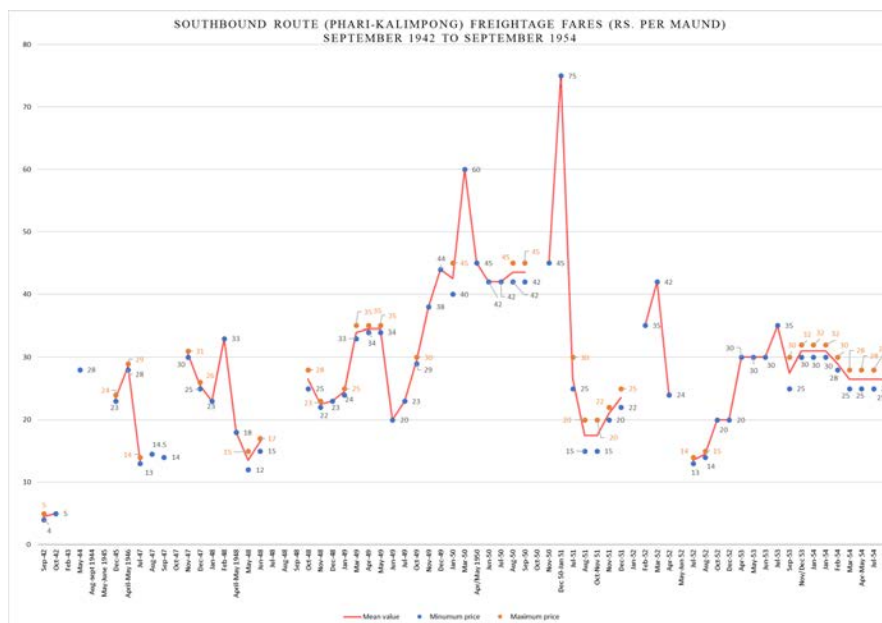still be very low in late June 1954 (see *Himalayan Times* 1954: 4).

Table 4 — Freightage fares on the southbound route (Phari-Kalimpong) from September 1942 to September 1954. Maximum and minimum prices in Rs. per maund

3.2 Hiking the passes, hiking the fares: cotton-pieces and the northbound route

The data presented so far illustrate the impact that the wool trade had on a quantitative level on the induced transport sector: although different commodities found their way south on the backs of mules, raw wool admittedly trumped in sheer volume any other item, its market value virtually ruling the freightage fares on the southbound route. A similar situation, yet opposite in both direction flux and peak-times, occurred on the northbound route (Kalimpong-Phari): here the trade was dominated by cotton piece-goods and yarn – millions of pounds in bundles funnelled from Kalimpong to Tibet via the Nathu La and Jelep La passes. Contrary to wool, the circulation and distribution of which remained largely free and unhindered,[67] cotton, be it raw or in manufactured or semi-manufactured forms, remained a contested ground for most of the 1940s and 1950s. When WWII broke out in Europe in 1939, the Government of Britain introduced control on almost all the essential commodities. The adverse impact that the

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[67] Regardless of the devasting impact that the 1950 U.S. ban had on the local trade, Tibetan wool was never a controlled commodity, and its price and transiting volume were regulated by basic demand and supply principles.

imposition of quotas and price ceilings had on the general populace was mitigated by a well-functioning distribution network and administrative structure, which ensured constant availability of essential supplies. In British India the adoption of similar measures occurred rather late, in 1941, and mostly at the urging of Provincial Governors, the first to feel the pressure that inflation and limited provisions had on consumers. The reluctancy showed by British administrators in enforcing restrictions in the colonies reflected the imperialistic stance of His Majesty's Government, as national demand collided with war needs. If controls were introduced, the commodities which were required for war purposes would have been mostly consumed by the people of India. Restrictions were eventually adopted in 1942, but their implementation was half-hearted and mainly relied on price ceilings, the supervision of which was entrusted to largely understaffed and unprepared District Collectors.[68] Now considered an essential supply, cotton was restricted under the Cotton Control Act, 1942, and quota and licensing systems were introduced to ensure domestic needs. The relaxation of restrictions in early 1943, when inner stocks were still below demand, led to an inflationary spiral, quickly curbed through the reintroduction of control measures and the tightening of distribution and exports in the first part of the year.[69] By 1944, Tibetan traders who wished to export cotton piece-goods were required to obtain a permit, the latter a condition which some found more difficult than others to oblige. From the pages of the *Tibet Mirror*, joint-issue dated August-September 1944,

> Starting from July, all loads of cotton cloth exported to Tibet without a permit have been blocked by the Pedong Police Office regardless of their owner. If one goes there right away and asks to have the goods back, they will be returned, but sending them to Tibet will not be permitted. Unclaimed items will be taken and then sold in the public market if not retrieved promptly.[70]

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[68]   "The Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates" (1947: 1289).

[69]   By the end of March 1944, the Government of India imposed restrictions on the cotton market in order to avoid speculative fluctuations; for such reason, the price was to be maintained between a floor of 400 rupees and a ceiling of 550 rupees per candy (784 pounds). In the event of cotton reaching the ceiling price, the Government had the right to requisite such cotton as required by the Indian mills, at a price either equal or 5 percent below the price ceiling ("*Foreign Commerce Weekly*" 1944: 21).

[70]   *bod tshong rnams la phan pa'i gtam* → *da lam dbyin 7 zla pa'i tshe shar nas lag khyer med par bod phyogs btang ba'i ras cha do po mang tsam spos sdong pu li si'i las khungs nas bkag sdom byas yod 'dug pa'i do bdag su su yin rung lam sang phebs nas do po rtsis len zhu na bod phyogs gtong ma thub rung phyir log thob nges | gal srid mgyogs po rtsis len ma gnang tshe gzhung bzhes thog khroms dmangs kyi sar tshong rgyu yin 'dug pa'i gnas tshul ||* *Tibet Mirror* (1944: 4).

The situation did not ease in the following years. In the aftermath of WWII, while the world hungered for basic supplies, the Government of India tightened control over essential commodities in an attempt to rectify the national balance. As outlined in the pages of the *Indian Information*,[71] issue dated February 1, 1947,

> 1946 saw a progressive relaxation of wartime controls on many commodities. … Similarly, the Anti-Hoarding and Profiteering Prevention Ordinance, in operation since 1943, and the Consumer Goods (Control or Distribution) Order, 1944 also ceased. … A few essential commodities which are in short supply, like foodstuffs and textiles, coal and iron, however, continued to be controlled, not by wartime measures but by an Act of the Central Legislature passed in November 1946. This Act, called the "Essential Supplies (Temporary Powers) Act of 1946", was passed under the provision of a Parliamentary legislation enabling the Central Government for a period of one to five years after the cessation of the war to control production, supply and distribution of and trade and commerce in eight essential commodities.[72] The case for continuance of controls even after the war emergency is over rests on the fact that inflation is still unabated and there is an acute shortage of goods in the country. … India is not in a fortunate position to increase the supply of goods all at once … (n)or India is able to increase supplies by imports as there are not enough surpluses abroad.[73]

The general post-war dearth of supplies, especially cotton cloth, saw Tibetan traders became increasingly dependent on the quota system introduced by their southern neighbour. From the *Tibet Mirror*, joint-issue April-May 1946,

> "On Textile" – The World War is over, yet nowadays there is a scarcity of global foodstuffs, textiles, and the like. Furthermore, there are concerning rumours that the workers of the mill factories had to suspend their work and that the materials are scarce. Due to that, and in consideration of the low quantity of textile exported, the Government of India has no choice but to produce less than 10 percent of all of the existing quota of textile and to block the export of textile from India for three months starting from the first days of June.

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[71] Magazine edited by A. S. Iyengar, Principal Information Officer, with the aim to provide a condensed record of the main activities of the Government of India.

[72] "'Essential commodity' means any of the following classes of commodities: (i) foodstuffs, (ii) cotton and woollen textiles, (iii) paper, (iv) petroleum and petroleum products, (v) spare parts of mechanically propelled vehicles, (vi) coal, (vii) iron and steel, (viii) mica" (Essential Supplies (Temporary Powers), Act XXI 1946).

[73] *Indian Information* (1947: 102).

Discussions are allegedly ongoing between India and neighbouring countries regarding trading textiles for grains. The news suggests that despite being a neighbouring country, Tibet won't receive textiles unless grains are sent from Tibetan estates to India. Even so, there are dialogues underway with the Indian authorities, facilitated by the Political Officer in Sikkim, who has been a vital advocate for Tibet and persists in offering assistance. It seems like he has a plan for Tibet to secure the same textile quota as before, rather than a reduced one.[74]

Starting from January 1947, monthly lists of authorised cloth exporters began to be reproduced in the pages of the *Tibet Mirror*, thus freeing any interested party from presenting themselves to the Textile Office in Kalimpong to consult them. The newspaper provided local officials with an invaluable broadcasting platform through which to reach highly mobile individuals: as most certified traders were either contractors or transient agents, it was not unusual for quota calls to go unattended. These lists, known in Tibetan as *mingto* (*ming tho*), represent a precious source of historical and socio-economic information for scholars, as they contain not only the name of the various traders but also their place of origin (*pha yul*), their Kalimpong address, and the amount (in maund) of cotton cloth they had been allocated. In the light of the present impossibility of accessing the statistics compiled by the Indian Trade Agency, Yatung, these lists will therefore be used as main source from which to extrapolate the financial spillovers in the transport sector on the southbound route during the years 1948 and 1951. These data will be supplemented with the export figures of cotton piece-goods from India to Tibet over the years (July-June) 1944-45, 1945-46, 1946-47 (Table 5).[75]

Months/Years	1944-45 (maunds)	1945-46 (maunds)	1946-47 (maunds)
July	3,744	199	3,419

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[74] *ras chas skor* ➔ *'dzam gling dmag thag chod tsam byung rung | da dung 'dzam gling yongs su lto gos ras cha sogs shin tu dkon ba'i khar 'thag 'phrul khang las byed rnams nas las ka bshol rgyu'i 'jigs gtam dang rgyu chas dkon stabs sogs kyis ras cha'i 'thon 'bor je zhan byung rkyen rgya gar gzhung nas dbyin zla 6 tshes shar nas bzhung ras cha'i thob thang ji yod kyi brgya nas bcu tham pa nyung bar mi byed ka med ma zad zla yun gsum ring rgya gar nas phyi la ras cha gtong rgyur bkag bsdom byed dgos kyang | rgya gar gyi phyi yul su sus rgya gar du 'bru rigs gtong bar khas len byas pa'i yul ljongs khag la ras cha sprod gtong chog pa'i bka' mol gnang ba'i gnas tshul thos | gong gsal gnas tshul la bltas na bod kyang rgya gar gyi phyi yul yin gshis bod nas rgya gar du 'bru rigs ma btang na ras cha mi thob pa ltar mthong rung dpal ldan 'bras spyi blon chen mchog nas bod la gzhan dang mi 'dra ba'i phan thog chen po gnang dang gnang mus su mchis na da dung yang rgya gar gzhung dang bka' mol gnang nas lngar rgyun ras cha'i thob thang ji yod kyi grags 'bor las ma nyung ba'i thabs shes gnang yong snyam ||* Tibet Mirror (1946: 7).

[75] Stats published in the *Tibet Mirror* (1947c: 4-5).

August	4,017	198	3,229
September	1,699	117	2,861
October	1,569	424	2,266
November	716	210	1,398
December	1,066	1,573	1,848
January	531	3,300	1,044
February	631	3,061	2,516
March	2,865	2,294	1,828
April	1,403	1,722	1,118
May	2,027	5,125	1,266
June	549	3,450	1,838
TOTAL	20,817	21,583	24,631

Table 5 — Statistics of cotton cloth exported from India to Tibet in the years 1944-45, 1945-46, 1946-47

Prior statistics covering the period from June 1944 to June 1947 confirm a negative trend in quantity of cloth allotted to Tibet each month, following the re-enforcement of control policies.[76] The monthly quota of 4,200 maund, registered up to December 1944, decreased drastically in 1945, settling on an average of 866 maund per month (January-December 1945), a situation mainly due to the block imposed on imports by the Tibetan government. In 1946, the curve of the exports picked up, totalling an average of 2,576 maunds per month (January-December 1946). Starting from June 1947, the system was changed, and a fixed quota of 280 tons (ca. 7,502 maunds) was allocated on a six-month basis to avoid marked fluctuations. Such a measure did not last long however, and, as early as September 1947, the share was recalibrated to 265 tons (ca. 7,100 maunds) due to domestic shortage,[77] for a monthly average of 1,183 maunds, confirmed in the year 1948. At the time, the whole quota allotted to Tibet was entrusted to eighteen Indian wholesalers, the only ones authorised to sell it at retail level. When control – and therefore price ceilings – was removed on December 31, 1947, the quantity of unsold stocks accounted for 836 *gentri* (*'gan khri*) (3,344 maunds), a surplus that was carried over into 1948 and added to the monthly quota of 270 *gentri* (1,080 maunds).[78]

Discontent over the imposition of a filtered access to the quotas allotted to Tibet increased throughout the year,[79] fomented by rumours of a price cartel and consequent inflationary spiral caused by the wholesalers.[80] In early March 1949, following a series of intense

[76]   Stats published in the *Tibet Mirror* (1947a: 3).
[77]   *Tibet Mirror* (1947d: 5).
[78]   *Tibet Mirror* (1948a: 7).
[79]   *Tibet Mirror* (1948b: 10).
[80]   *Tibet Mirror* (1948c: 6).

negotiations with representatives of the Tibet Traders' Association, the Government of India relented, and the management and distribution of the whole textile quota were delegated to the Tibet Cotton Cloth and Yarn Syndicate based in Kalimpong. The issue was far from being solved however, as the syndicate was run by Indian merchants on the orders of the Government of India and under the supervision of a specially appointed official, the Tibet Liaison Officer.[81] In an interview released to the *Himalayan Times* on August 28, 1950 and printed in the issue dated September 3, the leader of the Tibetan delegation Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa (*rtsis dpon* dBang phuyg bde ldan zhwa sgab pa, 1907-89) conveyed the frustration of a category who felt to have been robbed of freedom of purchase and choice, and blamed the syndicate of purposely keeping low stocks in order to force the sale of the least sought-after textile varieties at a high price.[82]

By November 1949, economic frictions within the Kalimpong mercantile sector were temporarily set aside as more concerning news reached the trade hub from the other side of the Himalayas: rumours of Chinese encroachment on Tibetan territory led to a significant, although transitory reduction in transborder transit. While wool trade picked up fairly quickly, a general dearth of textile characterised most of 1950, and quotas lay below the limit fixed in 1948. By 1951, the situation improved,[83] and in the financial year 1951-52 the number of bales (1 bale = 480 pounds / 5.8 maunds) exported to Tibet totalled 2,566 (ca. 14,910 maunds), a volume in line with pre-1950 standards.[84] The statistics compiled by the Indian Trade Agency, Yatung for the year 1952 (January-December) confirm a volume of cloth imports to Tibet of 12,570 maunds.[85] Prior to the decontrol of cloth distribution, export limitations were in terms of quantity, as no more than 600 tons (ca. 16,075 maunds) per year could be allotted to Tibet. The lifting of restrictions allowed to noticeably increase the quantity available to licenced traders, and by 1953 the whole quota administered by the Political Officer in Sikkim was in the order of 1,000 tons (ca. 26,792

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[81] "Parliamentary Debates" (1950: 658).

[82] *Himalayan Times* (1950: 7). The situation improved only at the end of July 1951, when the Political Officer in Sikkim agreed to the setting up of an advisory committee formed by various representatives of Tibetan trading community in Kalimpong with the aim of assisting the Tibet Liaison Officer in his functions (*Himalayan Times* 1951: 9; *Tibet Mirror* 1951b: 8).

[83] On July 30, 1951, the Political Officer in Sikkim yielded to the requests advanced by both members of the Tibet Traders' Association and representatives of petty merchants and allowed the establishment of an advisory board to assist the Tibet Liaison Officer in revising the old registers (*ming deb*) listing the authorised traders to ensure a fairer distribution of individual quotas (*Himalayan Times* 1951: 9).

[84] "Parliamentary Debates" (1951: 719).

[85] National Archives of India, External Affairs, North Eastern Frontier, File No. N/52/2411/1201, "Trade Statistics Between India and Tibet."

maunds) per year.[86] In 1954, the quota fell to 800 tons (ca. 21,434 maunds) a year.[87]

Due to limited access to precise export statistics, especially for the financial years 1952-53 and 1953-54, any estimate of annual income on northbound freightage fares presented hereafter (Table 6) must be considered as merely indicative of a trend the magnitude of which has been extrapolated from a series of incomplete data.

	Cloth transit (Volume in maunds)	Transport fees (Rs. per maund)	Total annual freightage income (Rs.)
1945-46	15,265	~ 52	~ 793,780
1946-47	30,706	~ 30	~ 921,180
1947-48	10,435	~ 39	~ 406,965
1948-49	12,960	26	336,960
1949-50	12,960	24	311,040
1950-51	< 12,960	18	< 233,280
1951-52	14,968	25	374,200
1952 (April-Dec)	10,269	50	513,450

Table 6 — Total annual freightage fares for the period April 1945 to December 1952

Regardless of such inevitable gross approximations, the order of the figures, both in maunds and rupees, is accurate enough to support quantitative comparisons with contemporary wages as raised on the southbound route (Table 7). Although the annual volume of cotton piece-goods transiting on the northbound route was on average five times less than the maunds of wool bundles headed south, the higher freightage fares exacted on the Kalimpong-Phari tract more than amortised the costs of inbound trips, especially between July 1952 and July 1953, when the rates rose steadily, reaching a spike over the period December 1952 and April 1953, with quotes at Rs.130 per maund (Table 7).

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[86] "Parliamentary Debates" (1953: 2882-83).
[87] "Parliamentary Debates" (1954: 978). It should be stressed that availability does not necessarily reflect actual export volumes, as the latter were regulated by the economics of demand.
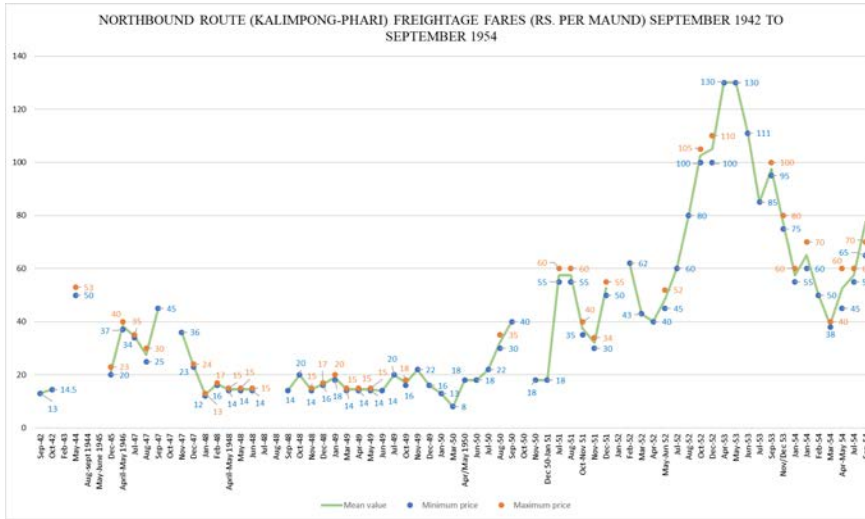
Table 7 — Freightage fares on the northbound route (Kalimpong-Phari) from September 1942 to September 1954. Maximum and minimum prices in Rs. per maund

As a matter of fact, exports to Tibet in the Indian fiscal year April 1, 1953-March 31, 1954 exceeded the value of imports, rising from 10 tons (268 maunds) of commodities a day to an average of 20 tons (536 maunds). Total value of exports in 1952-53 was Rs. 22,600,000 and in the ten-month period of 1953-54, or up to February 1, Rs. 18,580,000.[88] Whereas these statistics reflect a general trend and included all the sundry items exported and imported, they are significant in so far as they provide an explanation to the staggering increase in freightage fares registered over the years 1952-54.

4. Counting pockets: relative wealth and status display

The flow of wool and cotton-pieces loads translated, as the graph below shows (Table 8), into an economic spillover of impressive magnitude, ever more so if we consider that those millions of rupees

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[88] *Foreign Commerce Weekly* (1954: 13). A clearer picture of such a trend emerges when examining the value of total imports from and exports to Tibet between the Indian fiscal years 1950-51 to 1953-54 as provided in the statement given during the Lok Sabha Parliamentary debate dated August 23, 1954. The figures are as follows: 1950-51: Imports Rs. 33,000,000, Exports Rs. 21,200,000; 1951-52: Imports Rs. 8,100,000, Exports Rs. 9,500,000; 1952-53: Imports Rs. 7,100,000, Exports Rs. 22,700,000; 1953-54: Imports Rs. 10,000,000, Exports Rs. 20,100,000 ("Appendix 1, Annexure No. 11" 1954: 16). As we can see, between 1951-52 and 1952-53 the value of exports registered a 239 percent increase against an 88 percent decrease in imports.

that the financial reports spread over the breadth of a year were in fact injected in the local economy over a few months.
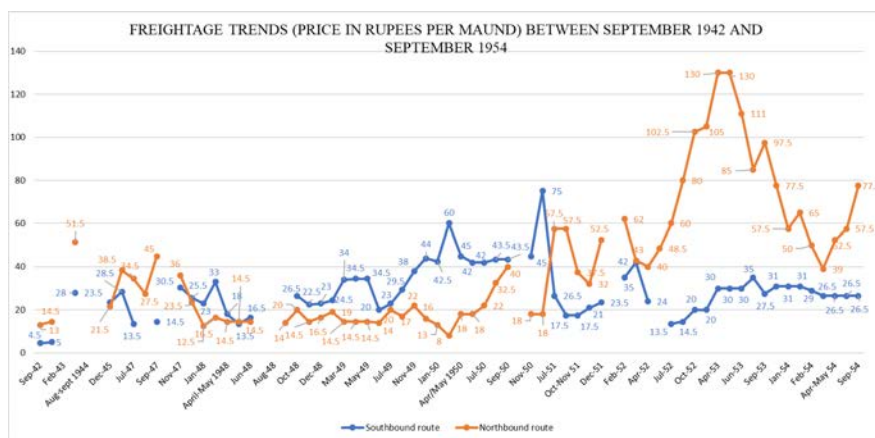

Table 8 — Freightage trends (prices in rupees) between September 1942 and September 1954

As the trade seasons came and went, a constant stream of commodities and money passed from one intermediary to the other – from one hand to another – in a series of channels that, stemming from a main source, branch out to nurture far away fields, their flow rapidly dwindling the more ramified they became. Money, like water, has the tendency to trickle away fast, and just as the farther branches of a river delta eventually become shallow and silted, so too the income generated from the trade did not reach all of those who engaged in it. The inequalities in force throughout the different stages of the commodity chains were present in the induced sectors as well, and the pyramid scheme thus created determined an uneven distribution of wealth among those involved in the transport business. Starting from the late 1930s and early 1940s, with the volume of items transiting on the southbound route increasing at a steady pace, the Himalayan passes became contested ground. Local communities, whose livelihood depended on seasonal transport of commodities across the border, were gradually but relentlessly forced out of the market – what had been until then a traditional right, born out of an ancestral acquaintance to the land, had morphed into a business, ruled by implacable economic principles. Prospective labour force flooded in numbers to the area of Kalimpong and Phari, and competition grew fierce. Trading families from Amdo and Kham moved their firms closer to the border, opening branches in the urban areas of Central Tibet and Kalimpong. Agents and muleteers were recruited and despatched locally: networks of trusted individuals were created to take charge of cargos and secure them against the dangers of both

wilderness and civilisation. Although the roads crossing the plateau (themselves barely tracks) menaced bandits, accidents, and inevitable delays, to cause Tibetan traders real concern were in fact the trappings of bureaucracy. Permits and licences, fees and taxes, random check-point controls – these were the unforeseeable events that could not be entrusted to strangers to solve. Based on a clan-like structure, Khampa trading firms relied on close-knit ties, similar in their essence to kinship bonds, that ensured members' commitment to the welfare of the whole group;[89] co-regional muleteers could therefore be implicitly trusted to hold the family's interest at heart, and their aggressive attitude made them prone to violence and threatening.[90] By the mid-1940s, Eastern Tibetan firms monopolised most of the transport market across the border, to the extent that some of their teamsters even worked as contractors, hiring their animals and expertise to the best bidder.

The social repercussions of the economic growth that the border trade brought about were far-reaching and went beyond the inclusion of a few Khampa families into the urban fabric of Lhasa or Shigatse. In an upending of the hierarchical ladder, many nobles found themselves increasingly enticed by the way of living of the mercantile sector and especially by the remunerative aspect of trade, to the extent of investing considerable sums of money into the purchase and equipment of trains of mules, some of which were occasionally hired out to privates. As the figures listed in the tables above show, renting whole caravans was an expensive affair, one not easily escaped by those who could not count on personal conveys. In recounting his family's business in the wool trade, Sharchen Tashi Tsering (Shar chen bKra shis tshe ring), a trade agent for the monastic establishment of Ganden Chökhorling (dGa' ldan chos 'khor gling) in Shangs, Shigatse district, carefully recalls that, in the latter part of the 1940s, the price charged by locals in Phari for the last leg of the southbound route was around 14-15 silver *sang* (*srang*) per donkey (meaning, per maund).[91] At the time (1946-48), the exchange rate was set at slightly above 2 silver *sang* per rupees, which would place the freightage fare paid by

[89] See Galli (2021).

[90] Already on August 26, 1943, in his demi-official letter to Secretary of the Central Board of Revenue Hugh Weightman, the Collector of the Excises and Salt of North-Eastern India R. B. S. Charan Das lamented the "readiness for violence" displayed by Tibetan muleteers when challenged at check-points about the destination of their cargos (National Archives of India, External Affairs, External Branch, File No. 104(2)-X/42, "Foreign Trade Control – Exports to China via Kalimpong. Prevention of without license", missive by the Collector of Central Excises and Salt, North-Eastern India to the Secretary of the Central Board of Revenue, dated August 26, 1943 (C.No. 11-Et/43/17745).

[91] Shar chen bkra shis tshe ring (1996).

the Sharchens in line with the quotations recorded in the *Tibet Mirror* for that period. When we consider the volume traded by Tashi Tsering's family – 3,000 to 4,000 maunds of wool per year – the annual income generated in the induced sector was in the order of 84,000 to 120,000 rupees. Those who could afford to establish and maintain their own trains of mules could increment their total revenue by both reducing costs to external agents and hiring out their surplus animal packs and teamsters during slump periods. Those Central Tibetan aristocrats who, following in the steps of the Khampa trading families, set up a personal system of caravans, thus engaging in seasonal import/export activities, largely drew from their own estates, recruiting *miser* (*mi ser*) as teamsters and loaders. The recourse to *ulak* (*'u lag*), or corvée labour, allowed the principal investor (the lord of the house) to minimise the costs, as he recruited workers who tolled basically for free, as some sort of labour was legally required of them in exchange for protection, shelter, and food. As is well-known, *miser* are a most controversial topic and still a matter of dispute among Tibetan historians and anthropologists alike, as demonstrated by the numerous studies dedicated to them.[92] I aim not to provide any further addenda, rather I here use the term in its most generic sense to indicate a low-class individual legally bonded to a landowner, by whom basic rights are granted in exchange for a set amount of labour, or *ulak*, the characteristics of which could vary from tilling and harvesting to transport and house chores. The essence of *ulak* ensured the master the maximum capitalisation of the resources, as the employment of personal teamsters cut off many of those intermediaries that formed the various steps of the commodity chain. Teamsters were provided with fodder and supplies for the journey, but the signing of legal agreements, known in Tibetan as *gendzin* (*gan 'dzin*) or *gengya* (*gan rgya*), made them responsible for any delay or mishaps occurring to the commodities en route. As a matter of fact, in a landscape difficult to navigate, mules represented an asset to be fully exploited, as the British and Indian officials came to understand at their own expenses: the increase in transit volume along the Lhasa-Kalimpong route, and the consequent paucity of pack-animals and porters, negatively impacted the movements of governmental personnel across Central Tibet. By the second half of the 1940s, annual lengthy negotiations were customarily carried out between representatives of the two governments to agree on fixed rates. The latter were strictly reserved to official travellers, as clearly stated in the express letter from the British Mission in Lhasa to Arthur John Hopkinson, then acting as

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[92] See, among many, Goldstein (1971a; 1971b; 1986; 1989b), Miller (1987; 1988), Bischoff (2013; 2017).

Political Officer in Sikkim, dated February 18, 1947.[93] Fine connoisseur of Tibetan policy towards foreigners, Hopkinson was not surprised by the reticence showed by the Lhasa government towards private adventurers, as he himself elucidated in a demi-official letter to Major Fry, dated April 28, 1947.[94] An excerpt from the missive is reported hereafter:

> After discussions of over fourteen months on the Gyantse Trade Route we have at last got an agreement in respect of transport rates for officials only – private people are left to the mercies of the "market." In Gartok the British Trade Agent has trouble every year over the same argument. The Tibetans do not want visitors, and are not going to arrange special transport facilities for them: and have already said so definitely in respect of the last application backed by the Government of India …

The enforcement of fixed rates for foreigner officials was facilitated by the *ulak* system, as the district governors (*rdzon dpon*) could rely on corvée transport provided by the *miser* residing in the governmental estates of which they were in charge. Whereas in an "open" market (although such a definition is here used in a rather loose sense), muleteers, donkey-drivers or porters could make their own prices, thus increasing their chances of profit, in the case of British and Indian personnel in an official mission, transport fares along pre-set legs of the route were firmly set, and no wiggle room was allowed. The analysis offered so far fails to go beyond the mere category of teamsters and porters to grasp the peculiar conditions of the single individual: as is often the case for the "silent voices" of history, theirs is a nameless remembrance, a cypher in a levelling round-up figure. Yet, the sheer numbers – of animals and men – that flatten the identity of caravanners to the point of historical anonymity are the same element that granted them prestige – a status that raised them above fellow farers. On that note, I will conclude with the words of A. D. Moddie, IAS and historian of the Himalayan region, who so describes the socio-economic value local populace still ascribed to large trains of mules as late as 1957,

> As there were only two ways, a trader's or a pilgrim's permit, I opted for the former. I wrote to our agent in Gangtok, Sikkim, to arrange a mule and a muleteer for me; I would walk. When I arrived in Gangtok and enquired about the mule arrangement, the Agent prevaricated. He shyly disclosed he had arranged twenty mules. He was taking advantage of a sahib-type, who also knew the Political Officer,

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[93]   National Archives of India, File No. 12(34)-NEF/47, Express Letter No. 9(3)-L/47).
[94]   National Archives of India, File No. 12(34)-NEF/47, D.O. No 10(17)-P/46).

Gangtok, to send his mules train in, for greater security, under my leadership. When I met Apa Pant, the P.O. for my permit in English, Hindi and Tibetan, I thought I would amuse him with the story of one mule becoming twenty. Apa Pant saw no humour in it. In serious official style, he advised me to take all twenty mules saying, "*One mule no status, twenty mules status.*"[95]

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[95] The following quote was part of a private conversation between A. D. Moddie and Rajen Upadhyay (Namchi Government College, South Sikkim), posted on the latter's blog on October 12, 2010 (my italics). See http://sikkim-historyhunter.blogspot.com/2010/10/trade-between-india-and-tibet-in.html

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The Bheda's Pony
Horse breeding, castration,
and trade in Spiti in the 18th–20th centuries

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A horse is judged by its saddle
A man is judged by his work

The Himalayan valley of Spiti (*spyi ti*, *spi ti*, *pi ti*) in the state of Himachal Pradesh is home to one of the six indigenous horse breeds of India: the Spiti horse.[1] Early travel and colonial literature from the 19th century is unanimous in praising the feats of this high-altitude mount. The authors of these accounts also observe that most Spiti horses were gelded and traded in the neighbouring regions of West Tibet, Ladakh, Kulu, and Kinnaur. The castration of stallions did not only make these horses better behaved and easier to control, but may also have been an attempt to secure the local breeders a monopoly in the region. In the 1980s, the state of Himachal Pradesh set up a horse breeding farm towards the conservation of Spiti horses. Since then, the economic value of this breed has increased year on year at domestic and international trading fairs. Nowadays, it is not unusual to read that the people of Spiti have been engaged in horse rearing "since ages" if not "since times immemorial" in specialised literature. But what is the historical basis for such a statement?

In this paper, I will therefore examine the breeding of horses, the castration of stallions, and the socio-economic importance of these animals for the people of Spiti during the last three centuries. In doing so, I draw on Tibetan legal documents from the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as European travelogues and colonial reports produced in the 19th and 20th centuries when the border valley of Spiti was under the power of British India. The picture that emerges from these sources is complemented by more recent ethnographic work and scientific

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[1] Although technically a pony, I will also refer to this equid as a horse in accordance with both lay and specialised publications; see CHAUHAN 2005: 36.

research where necessary.

The starting point of the present study are two legal documents (BmK11 and BmK25) issued a century apart, which granted a particular household, namely the Bheda of Dangkhar, the exclusive right to geld horses on behalf of the entire valley of Spiti. Who were these people and under what criteria were they better positioned to deal with geldings? Correspondingly, who were the legal authorities responsible for the issuance of these permits and where did their interest in Spiti horses came from? These are some of the questions that the present research seeks to address.
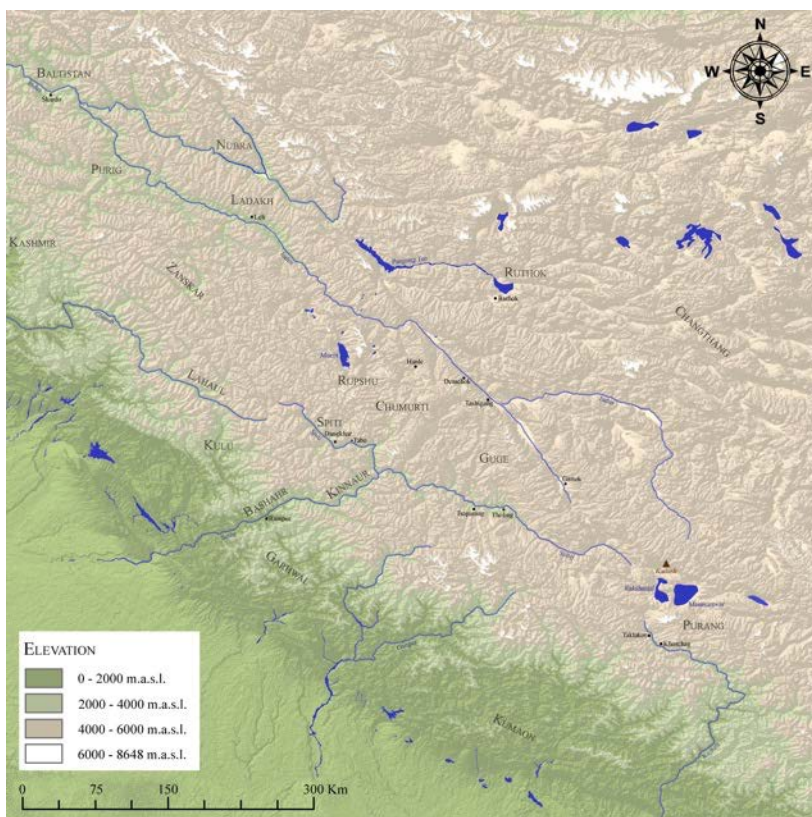

Figure 1 – The Western Himalayas in historical times and
the main places discussed in this article. Map: the author, 2019.

1. The Spiti pony or Chamurti horse

In his book *The Abode of Snow* Andrew Wilson (1831–1881), who travelled from Kinnaur to Kashmir in 1873, conveyed his appreciation and admiration for Spiti horses:

The small ponies are famous for their surefootedness, their sagacity, and their power of carrying their rider safely up and down the most terrible, dangerous, and fatiguing paths. (…) No one who had not seen the performance of a Spiti pony could have believed it possible for any animal of the kind to go over the ground at all, and much less with a rider upon it. (…) I speak in this way, however, only of the best ponies of Spiti and Zanskar, and not of those of Lahaul, or any of the lower Himalayan provinces, which are much inferior.[2]

Amongst the six indigenous horse breeds (*Equus caballus*) of India, the Zanskari and Spiti horses are well known for their adaptation to high altitude and mountainous terrain.[3] Their small sizes, however, should technically rank them among ponies rather than horses. The Zanskari ponies, like their Spiti cousins, seems to have been much in demand already in the late 19th–early 20th centuries.[4] Indeed, genetic diversity analysis shows that the two breeds are closely related, possibly due to the movements of these animals in the region and the geographical proximity of the two breeding areas (Fig.1).[5]

The Spiti pony also goes by the name Chamurti horse (alt. Chamurthi, Chhumurthi). It owes this intriguing epithet to the region of Chumurti (*chu mur ti*), on the other side of the border with Tibet.[6] Major William Hay (1805–1879), who was the first to hold the position of Assistant Commissioner of Kulu,[7] reported on the presence of two different types of Ghoonts, a term for Himalayan horses,[8] during his

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[2] WILSON 1875: 244–245, 261–264.

[3] The four other horse breeds of India are the Kathiawari horse from Gujarat, the Marwari horse from Rajasthan, the Manipuri pony from Assam, and the Bhutia pony from Darjeeling in Sikkim.

[4] On the Trans-Himalayan trade of Zanskari horses in the first half of the 20th century, see RIZVI 1999.

[5] On the genetic characterisation of Indian horses and genetic closeness of Zanskari and Spiti ponies, see CHAUHAN et al. 2004; BEHL et al. 2006; GUPTA et al. 2012; GUPTA et al. 2014.

[6] The area of Chumurti takes its name from the river (*ti*) Chumur. This river valley is situated in the Zanda County (*rtsa mda' rdzong*) of the Ngari Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region about 60km east of Spiti as the crow flies.

[7] The annexation of the Spiti Valley by the East India Company took place in 1846. From that time onwards, the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu administered the three contiguous valleys of Kulu, Lahaul, and Spiti. This official took up his position at Nagar in the greener and milder hills of Kulu and would visit the Spiti Valley only intermittently.

[8] From Urdu *ghūṇṭ* or *gūṇṭh*; a Himalayan horse or hill pony. The use of this word is already attested during the Mughal period. In his official history of Akbar's reign titled *Ain I Akbari*, court historian Abū Al-Faẕl Ibn Mubārak (1551–1602) writes: "In

inspection of the Spiti Valley in 1849:

> The Ghoont, although a useful animal, seldom carries any burden but a man; the total number in Spiti is 365, but bred chiefly for sale. They have two breeds, one small Ghoont, never above 12 hands high,[9] peculiar to the country. The other a large breed of Ghoonts, from 13 to 13½ hands high, is bought from the Chinese,[10] and usually comes from 'Chúmúrti'. For a Chinese Ghoont two years old, they give a four-year-old Spiti Ghoont. All are equally hardy, and are kept out the whole winter,–all except the yearlings, which are housed. During winter, the Ghoonts live entirely upon the roots of stunted bushes, and are very expert at scraping the snow from off them with their fore feet.[11]

The body of the Spiti pony or Chamurti horse is generally well developed and muscular (Fig.2). Typical coat colours are dune, brown, dark grey, and piebald. The head is heavy, with sharp erected ears, leading down to a short, bulky neck with a long mane. The back is short with strong hindquarters, and a slightly sloped rump whilst the tail is full and long. The legs of these ponies are short and sturdy; often covered with long, coarse hair. The hooves are rounded and well-shaped, with extremely tough horn suitable for covering mountainous terrain; for that reason, the Spiti ponies were usually unshod in the past.[12]

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the northern mountainous district of Hindustan, a kind of small but strong horse is bred, which are called *gūṭ*"; see ABŪ AL-FAZL 1927: 140.

[9] Horses are traditionally measured in hands, particularly ponies. According to Hay's observation, the small breed described in the passage above was generally inferior to 121,9cm (12 hh) while Chamurti horses would measure between 132-137cm (13-13,5 hh). Recent research gives the Spiti horse an average body height of 129cm; see PUNDIR 2004.

[10] Early Western travellers who toured the Indo-Tibetan border regions of the Western Himalayas often wrongly described local Tibetans as 'Chinese Tartars'.

[11] HAY 1850: 441.

[12] WILSON 1875: 262–263; MURRAY-AYNSLEY 1882: 68.

Figure 2 – A group of Spiti horses roaming freely on the high-altitude tracks of Spiti.
Photo: the author, 2016.

There is a general consensus that the Spiti breed is well adapted to its environment. It thrives in cold climate and survives well on scarce forage resources during winters. It is highly valued for its stamina (*shugs*) and sure-footedness (*rkang gnyis legs par 'jug*), displaying an intelligent (*blo ldan*) and alert attitude (*rang bzhin rno*) in all circumstances. Imbued with these qualities, the Spiti horse is able to undertake long journeys in the most extreme terrain condition of high-altitude deserts. In a typical display of British wit, military officer Philip Henry Egerton (1824–1893) sketches a deceptively negative portrait of his steed during a tour of the valley in 1863:

> We started on our return up the Spiti valley. I had hitherto preferred walking the marches, though I hired a pony, at sixpence per diem which was led after me, more for the look of the thing than anything else; but now I was a cripple and was constrained to trust myself on a pony – 'a mare of the desert' indeed 'a gallant grey' with a vengeance! the most unmitigated brute I ever bestrode.[13] She was a stout, good-looking beast, and took my eye at first; but – for stopping every ten yards up-hill to blow, – for lifting both fore legs together and letting them down

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[13] It is generally admitted that mares can be temperamental and show behavioural changes particularly when they come into heat.

with a plump when descending a rocky path, – for always shying at the dogs in a dangerous place (and nowhere else!), – for going closer to the edge of a precipice than any other brute, and letting her hind legs slip over the path when crossing a particularly steep bed of shingle (sending your heart into your mouth with a jerk !), – for squeezing close up to the inside of the path if there happened to be a projecting rock to catch your knee, – for always choosing the wrong path if there were a choice, and when there was apparently no option, coolly bolting up or down a precipitous bank for a particular bit of vegetation which took her fancy, keeping the smallest possible speck of both reverted eyes on you all the time, in a way that became at last quite insupportable – in short, for aggravating a man in every conceivable and in every inconceivable way, I would back her against any female in creation.[14]

The socio-economic aspects of horse rearing in Spiti have aroused great interest in the last twenty years.[15] Traditionally, Spiti horses have been used as a means of transport, a source of power for agricultural work (i.e. ploughing), occasionally as pack animals, but above all as status symbols and articles of trade. Practices involving horses in Spiti generally follow cultural trends shared by other nomadic and agropastoral groups of Tibet and Inner Asia.[16] These include horse racing (*rta rgyug*) as well as the participation of horses in wedding ceremonies (*bag ston*) and in the propitiation ritual of territorial deities (*lha gsol*) performed at hill summits.[17] Horsemanship activities therefore involve social engagement, which helps in shaping the identity of communities.

Colonial literature generally contends that horse owners were found mostly among the tax-paying landholders (*khang chen pa*) of Spiti. These farmers, who owned most of the agricultural land of the valley, numbered 300 households and were grouped into five administrative units.[18] The principal landowners of Spiti, argues social anthropologist Christian Jahoda, were indeed more likely to keep horses as they would have been able to produce "sufficient supplies of fodder or the capital to finance the use of pasture owned by another

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[14] EGERTON 1864: 48.

[15] DIXIT 1997; CHAUHAN 2005; CHAUHAN 2008; PAL et al. 2011.

[16] DIEMBERGER AND DIEMBERGER 2019.

[17] TASHI TSERING 2014: 191.

[18] The five administrative units (*tshug so*; *koṭhī*) comprised the lower valley (*sham*), the middle valley (*bar*; *bar cig*), the upper valley (*stod*), the side valley of Pin (*sprin*, *pin*), and the communal ecclesiastical estate (*mchod gzhis*) of Spiti. The study of Tibetan taxation records from Spiti by Dieter Schuh shows an increase of tax-paying households from 250 to 300 households in the 19th century; see SCHUH 2016: 91–92.

individual".[19] This view seems to be corroborated by field data. According to settlement reports, there were 365 horses in Spiti in 1849,[20] 335 in 1871,[21] 512 in 1891,[22] and 629 in 1913,[23] giving an average of 1.5 horse per household for the period under review.[24] British official James Broadwood Lyall (1839–1916), who produced one of the most detailed settlement reports on Spiti in 1874, summarizes some of the key points discussed previously:

> Most of the Spiti landholders own one or two ponies; they sell some in Basáhir and a few in Kulu,[25] but the great traffic is with the neighbouring Tibetan province of Chamarthi. The Spiti pony is a handsomely shaped animal, but very small; he is very sure-footed, and will carry you a long distance over bad roads in a short time at the pace he is taught, which is a kind of amble or running walk. In India, or on the southern side of the Himalayas, he is apt to get sluggish. A number of the ponies seen in Spiti are from Charmarthi, where the breed is of a larger size. The Spiti-men exchange one broken in four-year old pony for two Chamarthi colts; when the two are full grown, they sell one for cash and goods, and again exchange the other for two more colts; this is the great way in which they raise money to pay the revenue and buy tobacco, tea, &c. The price of a good pony in Spiti ranges from fifty to a hundred rupees. In the lower part of the valley they are out at grass most of the winter, while in the upper part they have to be stall-fed. Nearly all are gelded.[26]

As the preceding passage outlines, the main farming households of Spiti would have had one or perhaps two animals. It was the trade of Spiti horses, however, that gave this robust and sure-footed equid its economic value, making the so-called Chamurti horse a highly prized commodity in the early 20th century.

To this day, the rearing of horses has been essentially the affair of

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[19] JAHODA 2015: 203, n.351.
[20] HAY 1850: 441.
[21] DIACK 1899: 106.
[22] DIACK 1899: 106; COLDSTREAM 1913: 9.
[23] COLDSREAM 1913: 9.
[24] In 1913, however, British Settlement Officer John Coldstream (1877–1954) remarked "The Spitial's one source of gain is the breeding and selling of ponies, and only about half the landowners have ponies, the number of which has increase from 512 to 629 since 1891"; see COLDSTREAM 1913: 9. The decline of horse owners accompanied by an increase of animals observed by Coldstream seems to be indicative of the growing importance of horse breeding and trade at the turn of the 20th century.
[25] The princely states Bashahr-Kinnaur and Kulu in today's state of Himachal Pradesh, India.
[26] LYALL 1874: 196.

the side valley of Pin, an area of Spiti with a horse breeding culture of its own. Fifteen villages of the Pin Valley have been reportedly engaged in the rearing and breeding of these animals.[27] The horse owners from Pin are primarily farmers; horse breeding remaining secondary to agricultural work. Spiti horses are usually reared under a stationary and migratory system. The animals are stall-fed during the winter months from December to May. The foaling usually takes place in April and May. It is followed by the rebreeding of brood mares. In June, all horses from a single village are moved to high mountain pastures for the summer months except for the young foals and pregnant mares. A horse breeder (*rta rdzi*) is assisted by a groom (*rta g.yog*) to look after the herd. Two other individuals replace them after about two weeks. The herd is taken back to the village with the first snowfalls usually in late October early November.

Once a year, a local committee composed of elders and local breeders reviews eligible stallions for servicing the mares from two or three villages. The owners of brood mares are required to pay a fee in cash or in kind towards the upkeep of the nominated stallion.[28] This practice is attested already at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1912, Settlement Officer John Coldstream remarked that 64 bushels of grains were required per village for participation in the 'horse fair' of the Pin Valley.[29] To this day, the rebreeding is performed by natural mating around the month of April, when the selected stallion and the mares are set loose to roam freely. A stallion is used for covering mares during a single mating season, after which it is gelded. Since the 1990s, the castration of surplus males (i.e. geldings) has been conducted annually by the Department of Animal Husbandry of Himachal Pradesh.

Horse castration is an important aspect of horse breeding. Gelding is mostly performed to make equids calmer and easier to handle. This procedure can also remove a horse from the gene pool; notably if the animal is of lower quality or in order to help horse owners maintain a continuing demand. Information about the local system of castration in Spiti, prior to veterinary interventions, is hard to come by. This operation has usually been performed under the religious guidance of village priests (*jo ba*) and traditional physicians (*am chi*) who would conduct rituals on behalf of the animals. It involves the recitation of

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[27] PAL 2011; BODH (n.d.).
[28] BODH (n.d.).
[29] "In Kothi Pin certain hamlets contributed 64 *khals* as a subscription to the Pin horse fair". The term *khal* designates a Tibetan unit of measure for grains (e.g. barley seeds); see COLDSTREAM 1913: 8.

Buddhist *dhāraṇī* or 'ritual spells for horses' (*rta gzungs*).[30] It is believed that the reading of these formulae out loud will help protect the new geldings from postoperative complications, illnesses, and suffering. I was not able, however, to gather details about the castration procedure *per se* in former times, which was characterised as "risky and unscientific" by Veterinary Officer Vinod Kumar Bodh.[31]

The earliest text describing horse castration in a Tibetan context was found amongst the Dunhuang manuscripts and dates to before the 11th century. This text belongs to a set of documents concerned mostly with veterinary knowledge, known as hippiatry, which have been studied by Tibetologist Anne-Marie Blondeau. [32] In Pelliot Tibétan 1064, gelding is advised as a corrective treatment against what may be seen as horse lymphangitis. The passage reads:

> If this is not enough, bring the penis out of the sheath and incise [the skin of] the testicles just a little. Lying flat on the back, one then moves the horse down [on the side] in order to draw about one and a half *lto gu* of blood.[33] At this moment, pressing down the testicular vein with a *lbang bu*,[34] cut off the testicles and discard them. Apply butter to stop the vein bleeding and cauterise [the wound] with a stone or [a piece of] steel. When the bleeding has stopped, break the *lbang bu* too and release [the

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[30] The collection of *Horse Dhāraṇī* (*rta gsungs*) used in Spiti during the castration of horses includes texts such as the *'Phags pa re manta zhes bya ba'i gzungs* (Skt. *Ārya-tathāgataremanta*), *'Phags pa re manta zhes bya ba'i gzungs* (Skt. *Āryaremantanāma-dhāraṇī*), *'Phags pa mgon po nag po rta'i gzungs* (Skt. *Āryaśrīmahākāladhāraṇī*), *dPal nag po chen po khams gsum la dbang bsgyur ba* (Skt. *Śrīmahāyoginī*), *rGyal po rnam thos sras kyis dpal phyag na rdo rje ri rab kyi zo ma na bzhugs pa* (Skt. *Vaiśravaṇavajra**), and the *'Phags pa rta nad thams cad rab tu zhi bar byed pa'i gzungs* (Skt. *Āryaghoṭadhāraṇī*) to name the most popular ones; I wish to thank Patrick Sutherland and Dechen Lhundrup from Tabo for identifying these texts and Ulrike Roesler for her comments.

[31] BODH (n.d.).

[32] The Old Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang were written between the 9th century and 11th century. Among these documents, Pelliot Tibétain no.1061-1065, together with the manuscripts no.760-763 from the India Office Library, deal specifically with horses and veterinary science; see BLONDEAU 1972.

[33] Blondeau suggests that the term *lto gu*, literally 'little belly', must refer to a unit of capacity which she cannot identify. If not Tibetan, this term could perhaps be related to the Chinese word for 'bucket', 'Chinese peck' or 'a dry measure for grain' (個斗; *ge dou*). I am grateful to David Neil Schmid and Nathan W. Hill for their comments about this term.

[34] Blondeau translates the word *lbang bu* as 'string'; i.e. 'ficelle' in French. While the syllable *bu* may be understood as a diminutive, the word *lbang* is unknown to me. Alternatively, this term may perhaps be the translation of the Chinese word for a 'wooden stick' or 'cudgel' (木棒; *mu bang*). I wish to thank David Neil Schmid for his suggestion.

horse].[35]

In her fascinating account *Horses Like Lightning*, anthropologist Sienna Craig offers a glimpse into what traditional gelding must have looked like in Mustang, and perhaps other regions of the Himalayas, until recently.[36] The removal of the testicles was done with a sharp, heated knife. Following the operation, the wound was not stitched to avoid altering the horse's gait and instead, the incision would be washed and treated with a poultice. According to Craig's informants, after a recovery period, the new gelding was ridden lightly to prevent a constriction of the hindquarters. Not unlike in Spiti, she notes tensions between the proponents of traditional gelding practices and the government veterinarians of Nepal.

Finally, a first-hand account on gelding horses comes from contemporary Tibet. In his study on ecological knowledge and pastoralism in the Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of North-eastern Tibet (Qinghai), Chos-bstan-rgyal provides the following description:

> One stallion is shared by several encampments or between relatives. Since the number of mature stallions is kept to a minimum, gelding horses is done with great care. When a horse reaches the age of three, a family member finds someone who can geld horses. In 2013, only two people in Smug po knew how to geld horses (…)
> Several men gather, tie the horse's front and hind legs together, and then slowly lay it on the ground on its side. A knife is sharpened and purified with *bsang* smoke. They then put a stick between the horse's teeth to prevent it from biting its tongue during castration. The man who will geld the horse first washes the horse's scrotum with water and then with liquor, before using a very sharp knife to make an incision in the scrotum, through which he removes the testicles with his hands; the testicles are then discarded. When he finishes, he uses a hot iron to cauterize the wound, and then ties the scrotum very tightly with a string. Bleeding then stops and the scrotum drops off within the next two months.
> The men untie the horse's legs and, then, because the horse is weak and in pain, they help it to stand up, and cover it with robes

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[35] *des ma thub na rlig pa phyags bu'I nang nas phyung la | 'bras bu bag ste | de nas gan rkyal las | phyir bsnyal te | khrag gzags la | lto gu phye[d] dang do tsam phyung la | de nas gzod | rlIg pa'I rtsa | lbang bus mnan te | rlIg 'bras bcad de | bor la rtsa khrag zad pa'I mar gyis bskus la | rdo 'am lcags kyIs bsregs la khrag zad pa dang | lbang bu yang bshig ste btang ngo |*; for a different translation of this passage in French, see Pelliot Tibétain 1064–B3, line 3-5 in BLONDEAU 1972: 248–249.

[36] CRAIG 2008: 87–88.

> (…) because [it] cannot lie down for at least one month, so they
> ensure that the horse remains standing. After around ten days,
> they start riding the horse to strengthen it, but they sit in the
> horse's rump rather than its back. The horse becomes
> accustomed to whatever it is taught during this period.[37]

Several details of this account are reminiscent of the chirurgical
procedure described in the Dunhuang document or as reported in
highland Nepal. We also note that the upkeep of a single stallion for
breeding purposes and the castration of the remaining studs are in
accordance with observations made in Spiti.

Overall, ethnographic and veterinary studies are generally
consistent with colonial literature and show that Spiti horses have been
bred mostly for trade, at least from the 19th century onwards.
Traditionally, the horse owners from the Pin Valley would rear both
foals and fillies until the age of three years. The surplus of geldings
and mares would be sold at trade fairs across the Western Himalayas;
a subject to which I will return further down.

In this regard, the Buchens (*bu chen*) played an important role in
taking Spiti horses to Ladakh in recent years. The Buchens from the
Pin Valley are a class of religious performers and wandering
minstrels. [38] Social anthropologist Pascal Dollfus notes that at the
beginning of each summer some Buchens would cross the Parung Pass
(*pha rang la*), which separates the Spiti Valley from the Rupshu area (*ru
shod*, *rub shog*), and proceed towards Ladakh.[39] On route, they would
stop at villages and nomad camps to stage religious performances.
During these halts, the travelling group would also take the
opportunity to hold trading negotiations. They would sell Spiti horses
and purchase yaks, furs, blankets, wool, and some pashm in return. In
the year 2000, for instance, a party from the Pin Valley composed of
two Buchens, two monks, and a trader went to Ladakh with nineteen
horses. They returned two months later with a caravan of fifteen yaks
and numerous bags of wool, blankets, and rugs. [40] According to
Dollfus, the Pin Buchens would also trade Spiti horses at an annual fair
held in Rampur in Shimla District in the past.

It is generally believed that the Lavi Fair at Rampur Busharh was
established under the reign of Raja Kehri Singh (1639–1696) in the
aftermath of the Tibet-Bashahr Treaty of 1679.[41] To this day, the Lavi

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37   CHOS BSTAN RGYAL 2014: 146.
38   DOLLFUS 2004; SUTHERLAND 2011; DOLLFUS 2017.
39   DOLLFUS 2004: 9.
40   DOLLFUS 2004: 11.
41   HALKIAS 2009a; HALKIAS 2009b. British Lieutenant Thomas Hutton (1806–1875)
     gives a vivid description of the commercial activities taken place during the Lavi
     Fair in the 1830s. There is curiously no mention of horses: "This place is therefore

Fair is still the largest trading event in the Western Himalayas. The trade of Spiti horses, in particular, has experienced an incredible economic boom over the last two decades. Popularly rebranded as the 'ship of the cold desert' or 'snow horse', Spiti horses now attract the attention of horse aficionados and domestic buyers, including the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) forces of India,[42] during a 'Spiti Horse Show' organised by the Animal Husbandry Department. Every year, 250 to 350 horses from Spiti are taken to Rampur for the fair, commanding a price ten times higher today than they did twenty years ago.[43]

In spite of its popularity and rising value, the Spiti horse is viewed as an endangered breed. Indeed, the traditional breeding practices of the Pin Valley, which dictate that only a limited number of stallions be

strictly speaking a manufacturing town, where those of its inhabitants who are not engaged in travelling with grain into Ludak [i.e. Ladakh] and Chinese Tartary [i.e. Tibet], are employed in the manufacturing of pushmeena chuddurs [i.e. pashmina shawls] (…) It is here that in the beginning of November the great fair is held, which draws together the people from the upper hills to barter the products of those elevated tracks for that of the lower hills and plains. Here may be seen commingled in one grotesque assemblage the Tartars of Hungrung, of Spiti, of Ludak and Chinese Tartary, with the inhabitants of Kunawur [i.e. Kinnaur], of the lower hills and plains, and sometimes also with those of Europe. Among these tribes little or perhaps no money is exchanged, but the dealers in tobacco or grain offer to the seller of wool or woollen cloths an equivalent quantity of merchandise for that which he requires, and thus in a very short time the produce of either country has changed masters (…) At this season the articles brought into the market from the upper hills, are blankets and sooklats from Lubrung, Khanum, Soongnum, and other places in upper Kunawar;–raisins, neozas, cummin seed, sheep, goats, and ghee from the lower parts ; –chowrees, birmore, pushm wool, byangee wool, silver and gold dust in small quantities, borax and salt, numdahs, &c., from Ludak and different parts of Tartary. These are exchanged for opium, celestial barley and wheat, tobacco, iron, butter, ghee, treacle or ghoor, linen cloths, brass pots, &c. all of which meet with a ready and profitable sale in the upper parts of the country. Within the last three or four years, the traders from Ludak have purchased opium, which they did not take previously. Ghee is not purchased for Ludak or Tartary, but butter is taken instead, and forms a great ingredient in the mess, which they make of tea and flour, and which forms their food"; see HUTTON 1839: 904–905.

[42]   CHAUHAN 2008.
[43]   Data retrieved from various sources suggest that the price of Spiti horses–depending upon age, sex, and physical characteristics–went up from about Rs 6,400 in 1999 to Rs 50,500 in 2018; with some animals being sold up to Rs 80,000 in 2016; see CHAUHAN 2005: 36 and the following webpages:
https://www.oneindia.com/2008/11/06/chamurthi-steeds-steal-show-rampur-horse-fair-himachal-1225991100.html (last retrieved February 2024)
https://www.thestatesman.com/features/chamurti-horses-exotic-as-ever-1478952904.html (last retrieved January 2020)
https://www.news18.com/news/lifestyle/himachals-centuries-old-lavi-fair-to-begin-on-november-11-1933099.html (last retrieved February 2024).

kept, could contribute to the extinction of these equids.[44] To address these concerns, the State of Himachal Pradesh established a State Horse Breeding Farm towards the preservation of the Spiti breed at Kamand in Mandi District in 1986. The farm was subsequently relocated to the village of Lari in Spiti in 2002. Despite the threat to Spiti horses, the reputation of this Himalayan steed is well established outside the boundaries of India. In 2000, the State Horse Breeding Farm of Himachal Pradesh exported seven Spiti horses to the Royal Government of Bhutan.[45]

In view of the above discussion, it is found that anthropological and veterinary observations are generally in agreement with information recorded in early travel and colonial literature vis-à-vis Spiti horses. With few exceptions, members of the dominant economic class of the Spiti Valley would have owned one or two horses as marks of prestige and status symbols. However, the rearing of horses was mostly the affair of the villagers of the Pin Valley in Spiti. While historical data are still few and far between, the Pin breeders seem to have practiced very little controlled or selective breeding beyond the castration of stallions. Geldings were largely preferred to stallions and mares due to the absence of hormonal fluctuations, the castration process transforming them into biddable mounts: easier to work with and better-suited to the high-altitude and treacherous tracks criss-crossing the Western Himalayas. With a reputation for being a sure-footed and hardy mount, the Spiti pony was traded outside of the Spiti Valley. Yet this short overview describes equine practices and cultural trends that cannot be considered to represent conditions prior to the 19th century. How far back in history can we effectively trace the rearing of horses in Spiti and neighbouring regions is the question which needs to be addressed now.

2. Horses in West Tibet and Spiti

To recall the importance of horses in early human societies may seem trite and obvious, but given the removal of horses from our modern existence, the point deserves to be reiterated. The introduction of domestic horses changed the way many nomadic groups and agropastoral communities subsisted, communicated, waged wars, or considered life after death. The central place of these animals in Tibetan and Himalayan societies is no exception. Rather than presenting a comprehensive overview about horse domestication on the Tibetan plateau, I would like to look more closely at the specific

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[44] CHAUHAN 2005: 36; BEHL et al 2006.
[45] CHAUHAN 2005: 36; CHAUHAN 2008.

history of the Western Himalayas. Archaeological evidence and literary sources draw attention to the crucial role equids have played in West Tibet and Spiti from an early age. Most noticeably, a traditional Tibetan narrative situates the origin of horses at the foothills of Mount Kailash in West Tibet.

The mythic origins of the horse is given in the first chapters of the *Treatise on Horses titled The Silver-White Mirror* (*rta gzhung dngul dkar me long*).[46] This work is commonly attributed to a Turkic (*gru gu*) scholar (*mkhas pa*) and physician (*sman pa*) named Seng-mdo chen-mo (alt. Seng-mdo 'od-chen), who is believed to have composed hippiatric manuals at the behest of the Tibetan Emperor Khri Srong-lde-btsan in the 8th century.[47] The legend about the origin of horses reported in this work not only displays strong indigenous elements but may also have served to convey basic hippologic concepts and hippiatric principles.[48]

Once upon a time, says *The Silver-White Mirror*, a lascivious female monkey (*ma sprel*) was attracted to a magnificent white vulture (*bya rgod*). After mating with the bird, the mother monkey laid five eggs which she then looked after over eleven months or so; an amount of time corresponding to the gestation period for horses.[49] Having placed the eggs inside the horn of a wild yak (*'brong*), she moved her progeny to a different location every three months as the seasons changed. In the three winter months, for example, the eggs were sheltered inside the cavity of a cliff, while they grew up in the wild during the rest of the year. This particular aspect of the narrative would thus seem to set out the twofold system of stationary and migratory breeding according to which horses are kept indoor in winter and left to fend for themselves on the high mountain pastures during the rest of the year. At the end of this period, the eggs eventually hatched giving birth to five types of horses.[50] After what amount to a short foaling period, the five horses were ready to clamber to their feet and fend for themselves. Galloping freely in the wild, their encounter with a forest ascetic precipitated their domestication. Infuriated by a cavalcade of unbridled behaviour, the sage cursed the horses sentencing the

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[46] The Tibetan original of this narrative is given in appendix along with an English translation. I would like to thank Kalsang Norbu Gurung for his comments and suggestions regarding this text.

[47] YE SHES STOBS RGYAL 1990: 1; JAMGÖN KONGTRUL LODRÖ TAYE 2012: 312, 805 n.725; DIEMBERGER AND DIEMBERGER 2019: 241–242.

[48] The structure of this myth is somewhat reminiscent of other traditional narratives pertaining to Tibetan agropastoral life like, for instance, the gift of agriculture to the primaeval tribes of Tibet; see LAURENT 2015.

[49] According to biological veterinary knowledge, the gestation period for horses is 320 to 370 days counting from the first day of mating, with an average gestation period of 340 days or eleven months.

[50] On the traditional typology of Tibetan horses, see MAURER 2019: 220.

animals to a life of servitude as mounts and beasts of burden. Although several passages of this narrative are difficult to interpret, it is worth noting the setting of the story. From the time of conception until their domestication, the first Tibetan horses portrayed in this narrative evolved in the wild, nurturing area surrounding Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar in West Tibet.

Additionally, the archaeological findings from West Tibet highlight the significance of horses for local communities as early as 500 BCE. Mark Aldenderfer observes that the skeletal remains of horses found in mortuary sites are indicative of a "growing social and political complexity across the plateau", as well as the development of new forms of religious beliefs and practices that predated the introduction of Buddhism.[51] The ritual sacrifice of horses, among other animals, along with the display of funerary objects in tombs attest to some degree to the status and prestige of the deceased.

The discovery of disarticulated equids and horse heads in Western Tibetan burials appears to be strongly reminiscent of human funeral rituals described in Old Tibetan manuscripts dating to the 9th-11th centuries. In his magisterial essay *Du récit au rituel*, Tibetologist Rolf Alfred Stein pointed out the sacred alliance (*tha chigs*; *mna'*) between men and horses in life or in death.[52] The favourite and closest animals (*spo ma nye du*) to the deceased were therefore sacrificed and buried with the dead. Honouring its pledge, the horse as psychopomp would escort the departed to the afterlife. According to the *Testament of Ba* (*sba bzhed*, *dba' bzhed*), animal sacrifices persisted until the 8th century when the Tibetan Emperor Khri Srong-lde-btsan eventually prohibited the killing of horses and cattle at funerals, attesting to the growing hold of Buddhist ideas.[53]

With the advent of Buddhism on the plateau, Guge and Spiti became pivotal regions for the dissemination of religious ideas and vernacular knowledge from the Indian sub-continent. Around the turn of the first millennium, the Tibetan rulers of a newly established kingdom spreading from North-western Nepal to Ladakh engineered a vast movement of religious patronage and translation activities. This cultural revival would soon be referred to as 'the later dissemination of Buddhism' (*bstan pa phyi dar*) by Tibet's own historians. During this time, the most famous treatise on Indian hippology, the *Aśvāyurveda* ascribed to Śālihotra, was translated into Tibetan by the renowned translator Rin-chen bzang-po (958–1055) with the assistance of the

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[51]   ALDENDERFER 2013.
[52]   STEIN 1971.
[53]   PASANG WANGDU AND DIEMBERGER 2000: 62.

Indian Ācārya Dharmaśribhadra and Buddhaśrīśānti.[54] Importantly, the colophon of the Tibetan editions specifies that the translation of this work had been explicitly and personally requested by the ruler of West Tibet bKra-shis lha-lde btsan, better known as King lHa-lde (996–1024).

Likewise, the western Tibetan royalty was keen on establishing Buddhist temples across the realm. In 996, for instance, King Ye-shes-'od (947–1019/24) founded a monastic centre at Tabo in the Spiti Valley. The location of these monasteries, argues art historian Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, must have been chosen in accordance with a network of trading routes connecting the Western Himalayas to North-western India and Central Asia.[55] As such, the settlement of Tabo with its monastic facilities may well have served as a relay station and local trade emporium on the route followed by merchants, Buddhist monks, and artisans travelling between Kashmir and West Tibet. As a waypoint, Tabo would have provided water, food, and fodder to these travellers and their mounts.

In this context, some researchers have seen in the toponym Tabo (*rta pho, ta pho, ta po*) a possible reference to 'male horses' or 'stallions' (*rta pho*). This possibility has been put forward, on the one hand, due to the discovery of early inscriptions near Tabo mentioning horses (*rta cog*) and horse owners (*rta cog pa*), according to Laxam S. Thakur.[56] The etymological reading of the place name Tabo as 'male horse' is also endorsed by Lahauli scholar Tobdan, based on his reading of a Buddhist legend. According to local lore, the horse of dPal-gyi rdo-rje from Lhalung, the famous Buddhist monk who assassinated the Tibetan King Langdarma in 842, refused to leave the lowland surrounding the Tabo settlement.[57]

Finally, and as far as the local tradition of Spiti is concerned, Tibetologist Namgyal Henry reports another legend according to which the earliest king of Spiti had a passion for Chamurti horses. For that reason, this Hindu Raja was named Aśvapati or the Lord of horses

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[54] On the Tibetan translation of Śālihotra's *Aśvāyurveda* (*rta yi tshe'i rigs byed*) by the great editor and translator (*zhu chen gyi lo tsā ba*) Rin-chen bzang-po, see BLONDEAU 1972: 12–110.

[55] KLIMBURG-SALTER 1982; KLIMBURG-SALTER 1997.

[56] THAKUR 2000.

[57] This story is encapsulated in the following Tibetan verse: *lha lung dpal gi rdo rje ri la phyin kyang / rta pho'i zhabs yang dang yang thang la bzhag*; "Although dPal-gyi rdo-rje from Lhalung went uphill, his stallion's hooves did not want to leave the plain". There is little historical basis for this narrative which conflates dPal-gyi rdo-rje's clan name (*lha lung*) from Central Tibet with the place name Lhalung in Spiti. This narrative, remarks Tobdan, is an attempt by the people of Spiti to explain why the Lhalung settlement is topographically situated uphill while Tabo (i.e. the horse) is located on the plain; see TOBDAN 2015.

(*rta'i bdag po*).[58]

While it is essential to approach the interpretation of these narratives with caution, it is worth highlighting that horses occupied an important place in the collective imagination of the inhabitants of the Western Himalayas. Archaeological evidence indicates a longstanding relationship between these people and horses dating back to the first millennium BCE. Used for transportation and herding, horses became an integral part of agropastoral communities' daily life; a role also reflected in the ritual killing of these animals at human funerals. With the development of more complex forms of social and political organisation, horses grew in importance as valuable means of communication, trade, and warfare. It is difficult to imagine what the Buddhist kingdom established in West Tibet in the mid-10th century would have been without these animals. Reflecting on that period, a 15th-century chronicle titled the *Royal Succession of Ngari* (*mnga' ris rgyal rabs*) reports several instances where horses were bestowed upon clerics in return for Buddhist teachings or obtained as tribute. In addition to their economic value, the royalty of West Tibet also elevated horsemanship to a patriotic aptitude in the service of one's country and religion:

> All lay people and clerics have to protect the stability of the Buddhist doctrine. Henceforth, one must show deference to the teachings and commentaries recently acquired as well as [respect] all ordained clerics and people of great knowledge. In case medicine, weapons and the like are not available here, they must be brought from elsewhere. All monks and lay persons ought to protect West Tibet against depredation caused by border tribes. All laymen must learn how to shoot arrows, run, jump, exercise, swim, ride a horse, write, read, count; all things athletic men [should do]. Moreover, one must all learn how to be strong and courageous.[59]

In addition to the development of Buddhist ideas, the above passage underlines that vernacular knowledge was imported from foreign lands when deemed necessary. Given the central importance of horses, it is understandable that King lHa-lde sought to acquire more

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[58]   HENRY 2016: 28.

[59]   *skya ser thams cad kyis chos skor brtan por bsrung ba dang / phyin chad bka' dang bstan chos gsar du song ba dang / mang du thos pa dang / sdom brtson thams cad kyis bkur ba dang / sman dang go cha la sogs pa 'dir med na / gzhan nas 'tshol ba dang / mnga' ris mtha' mi god par ban skya thams cad kyis bsrung ba dang / skye bo rnams kyis mda' dang / bang dang / mchongs dang/ spyad kyi stangs dang / skyal dang / rta skya dang / 'bris dang / klog dang / rtsis te pho gyad sna dgu dang / gzhan yang dpa' rtsal thams cad slob pa dang /*; for a different translation of this passage, see VITALI 1996: 55, 110–111.

knowledge on the subject of hippology and hippiatry, thereby requesting the translation of the *Aśvāyurveda* into Tibetan.

In this particular context, the name of some localities seems to have preserved the memory of places tied to horse rearing. While the origin of the place name Tabo (*rta pho*; 'horse male') in Spiti may remain beyond reach, social anthropologists Yancen and Hildegard Diemberger report other toponyms relating to horses such as Taling (*rta gling*; 'horse country') near Lake Manasarovar and Talung (*rta lung*; 'horse valley') located further south.[60] Stressing the contribution of members of the royal house of West Tibet to horse knowledge in the 9th-10th centuries, the two anthropologists are led to conclude, "the vast nomadic pasture lands in the Kailash area at the heart of the Zhang Zhung kingdom may have offered an ideal ground to develop horsemanship and the building of horse breeding skills (…) any polity that stretched over the vast territory loosely indicated as Zhang Zhung would have been strongly dependent on horses".[61]

3. The Dangkhar settlement: stable master, horse rearing, and stallions

Diplomatic correspondence exchanged between the chancery of the rNam-rgyal dynasty of Ladakh and the local government of Spiti is informative insofar as horse breeding in the Western Himalayas is concerned. From 1630 to 1846, the rNam-rgyal dynasty ruled over Spiti except for twenty-four years during which the border valley was controlled from afar by the Tibetan government (1684–1708). Throughout this period, the settlement of Dangkhar (*brag mkhar*, *brag dkar*, *brang mkhar*) assumed the function of political centre or capital (*rgyal sa*) of Spiti.[62] Established on top of vertiginous cliffs, a district fort (*mkhar rdzong*) housed the local government and administrative headquarters of the valley (Fig.3). A fort prefect (*mkhar dpon*) appointed by the royal house of Ladakh, or one of its offshoots, travelled to Spiti only periodically. During the rest of the year, a bevy of local officials and functionaries supervised current affairs.

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[60]   DIEMBERGER AND DIEMBERGER 2019: 247.
[61]   *Ibid.*
[62]   LAURENT 2023.

Figure 3 – Dangkhar: the former capital of Spiti. 1) The district fortress 2) The Geluk monastery of Lagope (now Dangkhar Tashi Chöling) 3) The Upper Temple 4) The Bheda's house. Drawing: Carmen Auer and the author, 2018 (based on Samuel Bournes'1866 photograph).

Information about equestrian activities and structures at Dangkhar is rarely forthcoming. There is, however, ample evidence that an area bordering the Dangkhar Lake served as a race track in the 19th century (Fig.4). Horse races were widely popular among the landed gentry of Spiti and were often commented upon by foreign observers. [63] Egerton's *Journal of a Tour through Spiti to the Frontier of Chinese Thibet* provides a colourful description of one of these events:

> July 29th. The Nono invited us to some horse-races, and provided a number of ponies for us and our servants. The race-course was the dry bed of a small lake about 800 yards in circumference. We were preceded on our way there by a cavalry band, making the most discordant noise. The first thing our Spiti friends did was to seat themselves in a comfortable place, protected from the wind by a low wall, and commenced drinking chāng. The Nono and his immediate guests and retainers were served from a private vessel, resembling a huge brass teapot; whilst liquor for the *hoi polloi* was kept in a small mussuck (cured goat-skin). Having gone on drinking till we exhibited symptoms of impatience, some of the 'swells,' including the Nono's eldest son and a few of the more

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[63] GERARD 1841: 149–150; MOORCROFT AND TREBECK 1841: 2: 76; EGERTON 1864: 22–23; LYALL 1874: 203; WILSON 1875: 244–245.

distinguished villagers, performed a dance to the sound of a flageolet and kettle-drums. This dancing was the most ludicrous thing I ever saw, not excepting the races that succeeded (…) After this the racing (!) began – everybody starting where he liked, pushing his wretched pony to a gallop and coming in anywhere. The rider leans quite over the pony's head (so that if declared to win by a nose, it must be the rider's and not the pony's nose), and keeps himself in that position by holding the bridle with both hands close to the bit. As the Nono's son was riding a course, the bridle broke, and down he came on the ground, and the same thing occurred to another. Their dignity was a good deal hurt, as they pique themselves on their riding (and really do stick on well), and elaborate explanations were entered into to show me that if the bridle had not broken, it could not have occurred. The saddles and bridles are neater and better put together than I could have expected in that wild region. The iron-work in particular is good, and they use the buckle and tongue, which has not yet made its way into Hindoostan. After the paces of the ponies had been exhibited, a newspaper was stuck up as a mark on a little heap of earth, and then they all tried to hit this paper, riding past best pace, one with a matchlock loaded with shots, another with bow and arrow, and a third with a sword. One had a pistol which declined to go off. Some of the ponies thought the newspaper dangerous, and objected to go near it, bolting mid-course. All this was gone through time after time in the most solemn way, the actors evidently believing that they were making a very imposing martial display, whilst the utter inefficiency of the weapons, the diminutiveness of the ponies, and the pace they went (about half as fast as a man could run), with great bellies full of grass, combined to render it a most ridiculous exhibition. I tried in vain to photograph them.[64]

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[64] EGERTON 1864: 22–23.

Figure 4 – A group of Spiti horses with foals on the shore of the Dangkhar Lake in Spiti.
Photo: the author, 2011.

To date, the earliest historical source pertaining to Spiti horses and Dangkhar comes from the Sakya monastery of Tengyu (*steng rgyud*). This document, first published by Tibetologists Jörg Heimbel and Dieter Schuh, has been identified as a copy of a royal charter (*phyag rgya*) issued by the King of Ladakh Nyi-ma rnam-rgyal (r.*c.*1694–1729) in 1720. The purpose of this copy was to confirm the legal dispositions of a lost charter, which had been initially granted by the King of Zanskar bDe-mchog rnam-rgyal between 1647 and 1684.[65] To this end, Nyi-ma rnam-rgyal's document is addressed *pro forma* to the 'fort prefect of the province of Spiti' (*spyi ti khul gyi mkhar dpon*) and to the other members of the local government. Among these officials is a 'head groom' or 'stable master' (*chibs dpon*). The prerogatives of this functionary of lower rank are not known with precision. It is very likely that the stable master was in charge of looking after horses used by governmental officials, envoys and messengers who, upon presentation of a travel permit (*lam yig*), would have been able to obtain fodder or even a fresh mount.[66] In 1822, George Trebeck reported a "yard close to the fort" that may have served as a horse

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[65] See document sTeng-rgyud 1f in SCHUH 2019: 51–55.
[66] On horse transportation and postal services in Tibet from the 13th to the 20th century, see MAURER 2019–20.

enclosure according to my local informants.[67] The position of stable master was maintained at least until the first half of the 19th century, as demonstrated by its appearance in a royal order (*bka'*) issued to the government of Spiti by the King of Ladakh Tshe-dpal don-grub rnam-rgyal (r.*c*.1802–1840) in 1818.[68] This position was probably made redundant after British India took control of the valley, and thereupon reduced the local government of Spiti to only two offices: that of the valley headman (*rgya pa*), known as the Nono, and that of his assistant and registrar (*ta go che*, *do ga che*), retitled as *paṭwārī* by the British administration.

The 1720 charter also draws attention to horse rearing (*chibs gsos*), albeit in a legal context. Primarily concerned with the monastic properties and obligations of Tengyu Monastery, the document validated the removal of tax burden (*khral thebs*) from the monastery. Accordingly, Tengyu, the Sakya institution of the Spiti Valley, had been exempted from "obligations such as horse rearing, goats and sheep rearing, and the guarding of the fort".[69] These dispositions seem to suggest that previously, particular duties had been owed towards the local government of Spiti. In effect, the tenants of monastic estates attached to Tengyu Monastery were thus relieved from having to defend the seat of the government or to provide labour and agricultural products towards state husbandry.

The intervention of the state in matters of horse breeding may be established on the basis of a document dated 1748. Following the death of Nyi-ma rnam-rgyal, the Kingdom of Ladakh was divided between his two sons: bDe-skyong rnam-rgyal (r.*c*.1729–1739) kept Ladakh while his half-brother bKra-shis rnam-rgyal (r.*c*.1734–1758) inherited Purig and Spiti. According to a royal decree studied by Schuh, King bKra-shis rnam rgyal attempted to regulate the export of Spiti horses.[70]

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[67] MOORCROFT AND TREBECK 1841: 2: 76. As for non-governmental horses, a written agreement drawn up at an unknown date by the local monastery specifies that water and fodder could also be obtained from the monastic estate (*bla brang*) as there was no provisions for unloading and storing the freight of packhorses; see BmK26 in LAURENT 2023: 2: 180–81.

[68] The notification (*promulagatio*) of this document reads as follows: *pyi ti mkhar dpon / grong dpon / gnyer pa / do kha che / rgad po / bcu dpon / chibs dpon / mdor na / rgan mgo yod dmangs bcas la springs pa* /; "This is addressed to the prefect of the fort of Spiti, the village headman, the steward, the Do-kha-che, the elders, the leader of ten, the stable master, in short to all those holding public offices"; see document BmK02 in LAURENT 2023: 2: 139–41.

[69] *chibs gsos / ra lug gi gsos / mkhar srung sogs khral thebs rigs*; see document sTeng-rgyud 1f in SCHUH 2019: 51–55.

[70] The king of Purig was not the only Asian ruler to regulate the sale of horses. The Mughal emperor Akbar the Great (1542–1605) also restricted the export of horses from his country unless a royal permit was obtained from the royal court; see POUR 2013: 130.

Indeed, the document stipulates that the sale of any stallions was contingent upon approval by the district resident of the fort (*rdzong sdod*).[71] In spite of its brevity and the specific reference to horses, the 1748 charter was mostly concerned with rising tension between Spiti and the princely state of Bashahr-Kinnaur; with good reason as the latter launched an attack on Spiti the following year. It is possible therefore that bKra-shis rnam-rgyal's intention was to protect the country's herd by imposing trade restrictions with neighbouring states. Overall, the Spiti Valley had little economic value to the rNam-rgyal dynasty. Beyond taxes, horses represented wealth and authority. The interest in horses on the part of Asian rulers, as we will see, was far from insignificant. In any event, the King of Purig had a complicated relationship with these animals which fuelled tensions with Ladakh.[72] Following his death in 1758, the Spiti Valley was returned to the Kingdom of Ladakh. As a result, observed Joseph Gergan (1878–1946), "the entire wealth of King bKra-shis rnam-rgyal, the many *dkar rgya* from Spiti, and the stallions of this country, were all taken away without exception".[73] Prior to that, however, the King of Purig would rule about Spiti horses once more, this time to control the castration of said stallions.

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[71]   *de lhag pho rta tshong rgyu byed na yang/ rdzong sdod las bris ba byes nas ma rtogs tshong rgyu yang man cing*; "Moreover, if stallions are for sale, they cannot be sold unless a request was made to the district resident of the fort". The district resident may have been the fort prefect himself or a local official acting on his behalf; see document No-no 14 in SCHUH 2016: 174–176.

[72]   A bitter rivalry between bKra-shis rnam-rgyal and his nephew Phun-tshogs rnam-rgyal (r.1739–1753) concerning Spiti's political status led to the Treaty of Hanle (*wam le*) signed in 1753. As a result of these negotiations, the King of Purig was also forced to return more than two thirds of his herds of horses to the King of Ladakh; see SCHIEWGER 1997; SCHWIEGER 1999.

[73]   *rgyal po bkra shis rnam rgyal rgyi nor rdzas thabs cad dang spyi ti'i dkar rgya rnams dang yul de'i pho rta gcig kyang ma bor bar gtsang dag 'khor*; GERGAN 1976: 478. It is not clear what sources did Gergan use here. Moreover, the phrase *dkar rgya rnams* is not easily understandable. The use of the plural particle *rnams* is highly indicative of a great number of countable units. As a colour, the term *dkar rgya* could perhaps refer to the pale pink coat of horses. It is of interest that the word *rgya* is also used for a three-year-old horse in Eastern Tibet. Unfortunately, none of my informants could confirm a similar usage in their respective region. I wish to thank Dieter Schuh, Lochen Tulku Rinpoche, Kachen Lobsang Duskor, and Tsetan Nymgyal for their comments and suggestions.

Figure 5 – A confirmation letter of privileges issued by the King of Purig in 1753. Local archives (BmK25) of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling in Spiti. Photo: the author, 2016.

4. The Bheda's pony: horse castration in Spiti

As discussed earlier, the practice of castration can be explained by the requirements of horse husbandry. It facilitated the management of herds and perhaps also secured the economic interests of breeders. Geldings were generally preferred to stallions and mares as they were easier to work with and more suited to Himalayan style of life. Although the traditional chirurgical procedure is not precisely known, archival records draw attention to the social dimension connected to horse castration in Spiti. As we will see below, the terminology used is often imprecise and the meaning of these documents is revealed by a comparison with other available sources.

The first document of interest belongs to the monastic archives of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling (Fig.5). Taking the form of an oblong folio, a three line-long confirmation letter of privileges (*gyab gnon*) is authenticated by the impression of a large seal belonging once again to the King of Purig bKra-shis rnam-rgyal. Although partly illegible, the document reads as follows:

> *Narratio*
> [1] Since he is the horse maker of the fort, this is addressed to the people of Dangkhar of the land (…) to make horse (…) [2] in particular when it must be made urgently (…)
> *Dispositio*
> Apart from him, no one else is permitted to carry out [this work].
> [3] Let it be done!
> *Eschatocol*
> Issued on the (…) of the 4th month in the Water-Bird Year [1753]. (seal)[74]

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[74] [1] *mkhar gyi chibs bzo mkhan yin stabs la chan brag dkar bar dang springs bcas kyi yul* (…) *rta bzo rgyu* (…) *bzo ga* [2] (…) *sgos su ma 'gyang par 'phral 'phral du bzo phyin kho rang gi ma gtogs gzhan gyi bzo mi chog pa yin pa'i* (…) [3] *de ltar yong ba gyis // chu bya zla 4 tshes* (…) (seal) *bris /*. For a critical edition of this text, see document BmK25 in LAURENT 2023: 2: 178–79.

Dated 1753, this work permit effectively recognised the right of an unnamed individual to 'make horses' (*rta bzo rgyu*). However vague the phrase is, the use of the Tibetan verb *bzo* is clearly indicative of physical labour and manual work. Furthermore, the present document underscores two essential facts. Firstly, this particular line of work was explicitly connected to the district fort of the valley and, as such, it may have been understood as a governmental position. Secondly, and as a consequence of the previous point, this legal document prevented anyone else from carrying the task granted to 'the horse maker of the fort' (*mkhar gyi chibs bzo mkhan*).

Following the annexation of the Spiti Valley by the British in the 19th century, a similar matter was once again brought to the attention of local authorities, now the Raj. To this end, a new work permit was granted in 1851 (Fig.6). Also preserved in the Dangkhar archives, this bilingual Farsi-Tibetan document was authenticated by apposition of the seal of the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu. [75] A tentative translation of the first half of this text reads:[76]

> (…) the district town of Dange,[77]
> [As for] the works which ought to be completed (…) Nono
> *kārdār*.[78]
> You are hereby granted a licence to carry out these works which will be done by all of you as in the past.
> You shall uphold this order and ensure all [appropriate actions] for this area.
> [As of] 1851.[79]

Written in Tibetan, the second half of this document does not appear to be an exact translation from one language to another. It does bring some clarity about the nature of this work permit and more importantly about the recipient's identity. It reads as follows:

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[75]   The seal is written in Farsi in the centre and in Devanagari script, with due phonetic changes, circling around the rim. It reads: "Muhr Kachahari Asistant Kamishanar Saheb Bahadur Kulu Iswi 1849"; "Seal of the Office of Assistant Commissioner [of] Kulu [dated] 1849". I wish to thank Shailendra Bhandare from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for his assistance in the study of this seal; see document BmK11 in LAURENT 2023: 2: 155–56.

[76]   I am very grateful to Najam-ur-Rashid from the University of the Punjab, Pakistan, for helping with the translation of this document; see document BmK11 in LAURENT 2023: 2: 155–56.

[77]   In other words, the settlement (*nāgar*) of Dangkhar.

[78]   A Persian noun used for the office of an alderman or a bailiff. The term *kārdār* is here equivalent to the Tibetan title 'headman' (*rgya pa*) who, under British rule, was simply called 'Nono' (*no no*).

[79]   The date is given in Arabic numerals (i.e. ١٨٥١)

Narratio

[1] The present Bheda 'Byor-rgyas of Dangkhar was in charge of horses (*rta grid*) [2] for the five *kothīs* already in former times. Accordingly, [the monastery of] Lago[pe] granted favours [3] through the intermediary of the *hisāb*.[80]

Dispositio et sanctio

[4] Whosoever was to ignore this statement, [be it a member of] the laity or the clergy, [5] let it be understood that they will be prosecuted. Nobody, from Lari upward to Losar downward, [6] shall claim the right of the Bheda of Dangkhar for [the duration of] an aeon.[81]
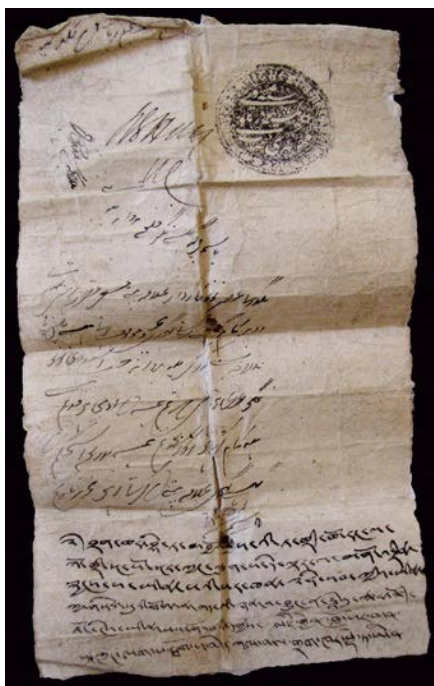

Figure 6 – Work permit issued by the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, William Edmund Hay, in 1851. Local archives (BmK11) of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling, Spiti. Photo: the author, 2011.

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[80] The Geluk monastery of Lagope (*la go spel*, *legs sgo spe*, *lags spel* etc.) now known as Dangkhar Tashi Chöling. If understood correctly, the Hindustani word *hisāb* (*he sab*), meaning account, is used here to designate the treasurer (*phyag mdzod*) of the monastery.

[81] [1] *brag khar bhe ta 'byor rgyas 'di rta grid kho rang la* [2] *ko gri lnga po sngar kyang 'dug pa de ltar la mgo drin* [3] *bskyang pas yin pa'i bar mkhan he sab kyis yin* [4] *skya ser sus thog na skad 'di nyan ma byung na rjes su rtsad gcod* [5] *'ong nges yin pas go bar bgyis / la ri gyen blo sar man* [6] *sus kyang lag pa thog sa med bskal ba la grag khar bhe ta yin /*; for a critical edition of this text, see document BmK11 in LAURENT 2023: 2: 155–56.

Issued by the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu in 1851, this work permit was delivered to Spiti through the intermediary of the valley headman Nono bsKal-bzang, who was in effect a spokesperson for the British—if not their stooge—in the mid-19th century.[82] The recipient of this document was a man from Dangkhar named 'Byor-rgyas. Preceding his name, the patronymic Bheda (*bhe ta*) designated a social class, rather than a paternal filiation as we shall see below. Given the lack of spelling exactness that often characterizes archival records, the reading of the Tibetan term describing his line of work (*rta grid**) is more problematic. Did the scribe mean to write 'horses and mules' (*rta drel*), 'to lead or bring horses' (*rta 'khral*), or instead a compounded noun such as 'horse and knife' (*rta gri*) to designate castration procedure? What is certain is that 'Byor-rgyas was the only individual officially allowed to exercise this activity, whatever it was, within the five administrative units of the Spiti Valley (*tshug so*, *koṭhī*).[83] To make that point absolutely clear, the document also stresses that nobody inhabiting the territory comprised between Lari and Losar, two settlements which formed the southern and northern boundaries of the valley, shall claim the right of the Bheda 'Byor-rgyas from Dangkhar.

The work relation between this man and horses can be clarified through colonial sources. In 1851, the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu was none other than the Major Hay who was cited above vis-à-vis Spiti horses. Further in the same piece, Hay observes:

> But little attention, except in a few cases, is paid to the breeding of these Ghoonts; a certain number of entire Ghoonts are turned loose amongst the mares, and the sire of a foal is seldom known. Such as are not required for breeding, are castrated when between two and three years of age. The right of castration has usually been the right of one person given under a seal from Ladak.[84]

Published 1850, Hay's *Report on the Valley of Spiti* suggests that the Scottish officer was approached by the Dangkhar Bheda as early as 1847 when he was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Kulu. The reference to the seal from Ladakh is sufficiently specific to assume that Hay had been presented with a document very similar to bKra-shis

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[82]   EGERTON 1864: 57–58; LAURENT 2023.

[83]   In the mid-19th century, British officials used the word *koṭhī*, a Hindustani term that originally designated a granary or a warehouse, to refer to an administrative unit (*tshug so*) from which taxes were levied.

[84]   HAY 1850: 441.

rnam-rgyal's 1753 work permit, if not the very same one. In fact, it was quite common for the British to be asked to confirm the rights and privileges previously bestowed upon Spiti individuals by the rNam-rgyal dynasty through sealed documents. [85] In any event, Hay's observation sheds significant light on the two work permits issued in 1753 and 1851. It confirms that the Bheda household of the Dangkhar settlement was indeed granted the exclusive right to castrate stallions and produce geldings—literally 'to make horses' (*rta bzo*)—for the whole Spiti Valley.

This fact was also later reported, albeit obliquely, by Gergan in his *Description of Spiti* (*spyi ti sgo gsum gyi skor gleng ba*) written in the 1920s.[86] Describing patrilineages and clan names, the Ladakhi-Tibetan scholar remarked:

> The Bhedas are the 'grooms' (*rta bco mkhan*) of the people of Spiti. It is said that the blacksmiths of Dangkhar are from the family lineage wearing a conch shell earring. Accordingly, there are more than thirty-six kinds of 'bone lineages' in Spiti.[87]

Here again, the Tibetan term *rta bco mkhan* used to describe the Bhedas' occupational activity lacks precision and does not correspond exactly to 'groom' (*rta rdzi*, *rta g.yog*). It may derive from the noun for a two-year-old colt (*bco pa*); an appropriate age for an animal to be gelded, as observed by Hay. Alternatively, the term could come from the verb 'to make', 'to perform', or 'to treat illness' (*bco*), in which case it would have more or less the same meaning as the 'maker of horses' (*chibs bzo mkhan*). Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the Bhedas from Dangkhar were working with horses on behalf of the Spiti people.

The Tibetan sources discussed above draw attention to a hitherto unknown aspect of the social history of the Western Himalayas. Socio-anthropological works have generally insisted upon the fact that Bhedas were traditional musicians and entertainers.[88] It is generally

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85 EGERTON 1864: 28–29, LYALL 1874: 186.

86 Gergan's *Treasure of Immortality: The Royal Succession of Ladakh* (*la dwags rgyal rabs 'chi med gter*) contains a chapter on Spiti with information gathered during his visits to the valley; see GERGAN 1976: 320–329. Elena de Rossi Filibeck has looked into Gergan's description of Spiti and gives a partial translation of this text in English; see DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2002.

87 /*spyi ti pa rta bco mkhan be dā yin no/ dung gi sna lo can* [36] *gyi brgyud las brang mkhar gyi mgar ba de yin zer ro/ de ltar spyi ti na rus sna so drug las lhag par yod shag/*; GEGAN 1976: 325. The numbering used by Gergan, given above in brackets, indicates that the Bheda families were not counted by the author as a formal patrilineage of Spiti; see LAURENT 2023: 1: 88.

88 On the origin, function, and discrimination of Bheda communities in Ladakh and Spiti; see TREWIN 1995: 166–167, 180–181; RATHER 1997; TASHI TSERING 2014: 58–64; ZIMMERMANN 2014.

assumed that they made their first appearance in the Western Himalayas in the 17th century as court musicians (*mkhar mon*). To this day, Bhedas are known for playing musical instruments, whose forms and corresponding names are highly indicative of cultural influences from the Islamic-Iranian world.[89] Likewise, the noun Bheda itself may also attest to the foreign origin and low social status of this group.[90]

As a social category, Bhedas are found in Spiti, Lahaul, and in Ladakh. Traditionally considered as outsiders (*phyi pa*), the Bhedas have constituted a partially outcast and endogamous group. Until recently, the members of this community were referred to as 'vile and disreputable' (*ma rabs*) by their neighbours. Colonial sources report that there were forty-six Bhedas in Spiti in the 1860s.[91] This figure suggests that the Bheda community comprised no more than eight households, of which there was one in the valley capital of Dangkhar. British official Lyall also recorded the local saying "Bheda no land, the dog no load", thus underscoring that these households did not own agricultural land and had therefore no social obligations (i.e. payment of tax, corvée labour) and therefore very few rights at the village level.[92] Since the members of the Bheda community did not cultivate fields, they made a living by playing music at weddings, festivals, and ceremonies.

In this particular context, it begs the question as to how the Bheda household from Dangkhar managed to secure an alternative source of income. A heated dispute involving Bheda women provides possible answers while simultaneously drawing attention to the importance of horses for their household. In the summer of 1863, the Deputy Commissioner of Kangra Philip Egerton reported an altercation caused by an act of defilement relating to the use of a smoking pipe by

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[89]   These musical instruments comprise two types of percussion known as 'dawu' and 'daman' in Spiti. The first one is a tambourine that resembles the Iranian frame drum (*daf*). The second instrument likely derived its name from the Persian bowl-shaped drum (*damameh*). Finally, a type of oboe known as 'surna' must be related to the Persian word *sorna*, a woodwind instrument with a double reed played across the Indian subcontinent.

[90]   The term Bheda could come from the Sanskrit word for 'difference', 'rupture', or 'violation' (*bheda*), but more likely, given the Persian origins of the names of their musical instruments, is a derivation from the Persian word for 'low born', 'ill mannered', or 'something new or strange' (*beda-at*). Whatever the donor language, the multiple spelling variants recorded in Tibetan, the most common forms being *be da*, *be dha*, and *bhe da* to name just a few, underscore the non-Tibetan origin of this word.

[91]   LYALL 1874: 198.

[92]   LYALL 1874: 199. Tashi Tsering gives a slightly different version of this axiom: "Dogs have no load, Bhedas have no tax" (*khyi la 'gel med / be da la khral med*); see TASHI TSERING 2014: 171, 216.

two Bheda women from Dangkhar:

> The complainants were musicians, who stated their case thus:
> – At an evening party two of them asked some blacksmiths to let
> them have a smoke at their pipes. The blacksmiths refused,
> saying that the musicians were *low caste*. The musicians snatched
> a pipe and smoked it. There was a slight scuffle, and the
> blacksmiths caught it rather severely from the *tongues* of the
> female musicians. A few days after, the blacksmiths (…) held a
> conclave, and resolved to vindicate their outraged dignity.
> Accordingly they assembled to the number of about eighty,
> attacked the musicians' house, plundered everything in their
> possession, and took two of them, the original aggressors,
> captive, and held them hostages for good behaviour. Defendants
> allowed the correctness, of this statement, even to the detail of
> plundered property, which (including as it did *one item of seven
> horses*),[93] I had thought exaggerated. They asserted that the
> musicians were *low caste*, and that they could not smoke pipes
> with them (…) I convicted the whole lot, comprising forty
> blacksmiths and two musicians, and sentenced them to one
> month's imprisonment and two rupees fine each, awarding
> compensation to the plundered parties out of the fine (…) A
> petition was put in afterwards by the blacksmiths, coolly
> requesting me to declare that the musicians are of low caste, and
> are never again to smoke a blacksmith's pipe! Of course I
> snubbed them, for I should be sorry if the curse of caste should
> become firmly rooted here. (…) There is, however, no doubt that
> the musicians of Spiti are a different race from most of the
> Zemindars or landowners, as the annexed photograph will
> show.[94]

The claims put forward against these women and the violent reprisal
conducted against their household are highly indicative of Spiti's
social stratification. In effect, both blacksmiths and Bhedas were
considered partially outcast groups. They belonged to what is
commonly termed as an 'inferior class' (*smad rigs*) in traditional
Tibetan and Himalayan societies, and as such were perceived as
forming an 'unclean or polluted social stratum' (*rigs btsog pa*). Between
the two groups, however, the Bhedas ranked lower and essentially
occupied the bottom of the social scale in Spiti. Social interactions
between members of different groups required the observance of
taboos to avoid the risk of ritual pollution, including the avoidance of
sexual relations with a member an unclean household, adherence to
seating protocols, and the avoidance of the 'mixing of mouth' (*kha yum*

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[93] The emphasis is mine.
[94] EGERTON 1864: 27–28.

zas, *kha bsres pa*). [95] In accordance with the last socio-cultural proscription, Bhedas were strictly prohibited from using dishware and utensils belonging to people outside their community. Having wilfully violated this custom, the use of the blacksmiths' pipe by the two Bheda women was thus perceived as a severe act of contamination (*grib*). The ritual pollution associated with inferior classes, in addition to being hereditary, was directly related to particular social groups whose menial work was considered problematic, if not improper, according to Buddhist beliefs. These works included occupational activities such as the butchering of animals, funeral labour (i.e. corpse cutting), metal working, and petty animal trade. In light of the above, it is therefore easy to understand that the castration of horses would have been restricted to a member of an unclean and polluted class. The physical procedure not only required the mutilation and suffering of the animal, but could also cause the spilling of blood and potentially even the death of the gelding should postoperative complications arise.

With regard to this incident, it should also be noted that the aggrieved party is said to have taken seven horses from the Bheda family. This detail of the case is particularly relevant for the present investigation. As noted earlier, data retrieved from colonial sources clearly indicate that the principal landowners of Spiti did not have more than one or two horses per household in the 19th century. It is therefore highly improbable that the Dangkhar Bhedas would have possessed seven animals solely for their personal pleasure. These animals were not their property but must have been entrusted to this household to be gelded. Without this work, they would have had no source of income other than music. [96] Observations made in Eastern Tibet, as we have seen, highlights that new geldings must remain standing for a month following castration, with training resuming ten days after their operation. In this way, the Dangkhar Bhedas would have had several animals under their care, despite Egerton's disbelief.

The perceived pollution resulting from the castration of horses was

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[95] Blacksmiths and Bhedas were compelled to occupy seating positions (*gral rim*) reflective of their inferior status at formal group gatherings; often on the floor itself and at the end of the row (*gral mjug*) usually by the door. On social stratification, casteism, and pollution in Tibet, see UGEN GOMBO 1983; FJELD 2003.

[96] A possible reference to the dual professional activity of the Dangkhar Bheda can perhaps be inferred from a short article about Spiti by diplomatic historian Alastair Lamb. The identification of the 'entertainers and animal doctors' as Bhedas rests, as it should, on the proper use of the Oxford comma, or the lack thereof: "The majority of the villagers are landless. Some are junior members of landholding families who work in the fields for their keep. Others are labourers paid in kind. In each village there are specialists, such as the blacksmiths, millers, entertainers and animal doctors, who are kept by the community in return for their services"; see LAMB 1956: 249–250.

directly experienced by veterinary sergeant William Moorcroft (1767–1825) on his way to Ladakh. In the 1820s, Moorcroft travelled from Sultanpur in India to Bukhara in Central Asia in search of horse breeding stock. Having left the Himalayan foothills, his party reached the valley of Lahaul when the following event took place:

> 12th [August 1820] We were obliged to stop here all day as some of our loads did not come up till very late–two of the pittoos belonging to our party had been very troublesome and were castrated.[97]
>
> 13th [August] It had rained hard all night and till midday and this was imputed by the natives to our having violated the sanctity of the place by the operation just mentioned–However one of our accusers was observed slyly to carry off the offending parts which had been left on the ground and passing across the rivulet in which it was pictured that he was about to throw them without having so done and having taken his prize to his house it was presumed that he meant to expiate the offence by a broil.[98]

Lahaul is the adjacent valley to Spiti, and today the two form the Indian district of Lahaul-Spiti. As might be expected, the two share many socio-cultural features and thus Moorcroft's account can be considered indicative of the seriousness with which the pollution imputed by castration was taken in the region.[99] Notions of pollution and defilement were widely prevalent in traditional Tibetan and Himalayan societies. Risks of pollution linked to particular activities were therefore real for individuals and communities alike, bearing various consequences ranging from human diseases to natural disasters—including the torrential rain imputed to Moorcroft's decision to castrate his packhorses. In her insightful research on horses in Mustang, anthropologist Sienna Craig remarks on how a traditional physician named Malaya was believed to carry a lot of defilement

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[97] The term 'pittoos', from the Nepalese word for a person's or animal's back (*piṭhyū*), was used by extension for 'a porter' or 'a packhorse'.

[98] Moorcroft, William. *7th Fasciculus of Journal from July 28th to August 16th*. Mss.Eur.D242. British Library: London. 105r.23–105v.11. I wish to thank David G.K. Taylor for his kind help in unscrambling Moorcroft's journal entries.

[99] Regarding the subject of horses, British officer Lyall observed that "horse-racing and shooting with the long bow are amusements common to both Láhoul and Spiti, and are practiced at meetings held at particular seasons. Prizes are given at the races, and the rider of the last horse is subject to a good deal of ridicule and practical joking. The target at an archery meeting consists generally of a pillar of snow with a leaf for a bull's eye. The archers excite themselves by treating the pillar as an effigy of some traditional tyrant, and cry out 'let the Rana of Ghúsa [i.e. the queen of Lahaul (*gar zha*)] have it in the goitre,' or 'give the Kárdang naplang one in the eye.' Stake of cash or grain are shot for"; see LYALL 1874: 203.

(*grib*) on account of all the animals he treated. Interestingly enough, one of Craig's informants also reports the rumour that Malaya knew how to perform horse castration.[100] Hence the removal of a stallion's genitalia must have been broadly equated to a polluting act not unlike butchering work in many places across the Himalayas. As such the castration of horses fell within the purview of inferior and unclean members of the society. In Spiti, this function was assumed by a family of Bheda musicians who lived in Dangkhar, the capital of the valley. Unlike the other members of their community, the Dangkhar Bhedas secured a second source of income when their household was granted the exclusive right to geld studs in 1753. A century later, following the formal takeover of the region by British India in 1846, the same family approached the new authorities and saw their prerogatives reconfirmed by means of a new work permit delivered in 1851.

Moorcroft's investigation into the breeding of horses in India also draws attention to an interesting parallel social arrangement. [101] Following a decline in the breeding industry of Rohilkhand in what is today Uttar Pradesh, the members of a caste of Hindu troubadours and musicians called Bhāṭ were mandated by the local Indo-Afghan ruler Ḥāfiẓ Rahmat Khān (1749–1774) to oversee the distribution of stallions to local landholders. This caste, explains historian Jos Gommans, took studs to the *zamīndār*'s stables where they let the stallions cover the mares against remuneration.[102] There is no indication, however, that the Bhāṭs of Rohilkhand would also perform castration.

The production of geldings by the Dangkhar Bhedas constitutes only one piece of a broader puzzle. Horse castration therefore harks back to the availability of stallions in Spiti, and to the circulation of Spiti horses outside the valley, both regulated post 1748.

5. Horse tribute and war booty

If the development of horse trade in the Western Himalayas is difficult to trace, it is my contention that it must reflect to some degree the establishment of powerful empires (e.g. Mughal, Qing, Sikh, and British India) with their ever-increasing need for horses.[103] Military conflicts, in particular, created a substantial demand for these animals. Priding themselves on their royal stables, rulers often encouraged domestic breeding but still remained dependent on the supply of Central Eurasian warhorses. Discussed in the previous sections, extant

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[100] CRAIG 2008: 83, 88.
[101] MOORCROFT 1862: 46–48; GOMMANS 1994: 242–243.
[102] GOMMANS 1994: 242–243.
[103] GOMMANS 2007; CHOUDHARY 2019.

sources and legal documents show that Western Tibetan monarchs were no exception, keeping horse matters under close scrutiny, whether by promoting horsemanship and hippiatric knowledge in the 11th century or through reliance upon horse services, royal herds, and regulations in the 18th-19th centuries. The rise to power of the rNam-rgyal dynasty of Ladakh and the political history of Spiti provide further evidence concerning breeding and trade in the Western Himalayas.

Wedged between Tibet on one side and the Indian subcontinent on the other, the Spiti Valley often bore the brunt of the expanding territorial ambitions and vested economic interests of its immediate neighbours. After its incorporation into the Kingdom of Ladakh in 1630, the people of Spiti were compelled to pay governmental taxes to the subsequent monarchs of rNam-rgyal dynasty. From 1708 onward, however, Spiti also contributed ecclesiastical dues in kind to the Geluk monasteries of West Tibet, in accordance with the separation of jurisdictional powers negotiated between Tibet and Ladakh. Meanwhile, the neighbouring hill states of Kulu and Bashahr-Kinnaur also coveted the border valley and rarely missed an opportunity to enter Spiti, desecrating buildings and plundering the valley for its horses and cattle. [104] According to French botanist Victor Vincelas Jacquemont (1801–1832), who toured the Spiti Valley in 1830, Spiti was thus bound to the payment of small tributes to manage its neighbours' propensity for military interventions:

> Spiti has no Raja of its own but it pays a small tribute to all bordering states. Thus, every three years, it sends to the Raja of Bashahr four horses, twenty blankets etc.; in the same way to the Chinese resident in Garou;[105] to the Raja of Kulu, and probably more to the Raja of Ladakh. A decade ago, it was looted by two viziers from Kulu (…) the first vizier of Bashahr also invaded this district some fifty years ago, and even occupied the Fort for two years (…) These wars were not conducted for any purpose other than that of looting, mainly the capture of cattle, and generally ended without bloodshed.[106]

Whilst Tibetan sources are generally silent about the payment of tributes to Kulu and Bashahr, colonial reports on the other hand

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[104] Troops from Kulu entered Spiti in 1686 and again around 1821. Bashahr-Kinnaur launched a first offensive against Spiti in 1749/50 and is reported to have occupied the capital Dangkhar for two years in the 1760s or 70s during which the monastery of the capital was heavily damaged; see LAURENT 2023: 1: 131, 160.

[105] The 'Chinese resident of Garou' was in fact the Tibetan governor of Gartok in West Tibet.

[106] The translation is mine. For the original in French, see JACQUEMONT 1841: 2: 353.

suggest that it was a common practice in the first half of the 19th century. The ceremonial offering of horses, in particular, appeared to have been a required gesture on the part of a vassal polity. Hay's report on Spiti is here again informative in this respect:

> In the years 1844-45 and 46, the annual revenue paid to the Thánádár at Ladak was 1,031 rupees. Besides this, 100 'Múndís' or iron crow-bars; likewise two Goonts, and a nazaráná of 15 rupees annually to the Thánádár, and 60 sheep in jugat.[107]
>
> During these three years the Seiks are said to have further plundered the country of 4,000 rupees, also 60 Ghoonts, and much other property.
>
> From 1839 to 1843, both inclusive, an annual revenue of 2,000 rupees was paid to Rájá Goláb Singh.[108] Besides this, 100 sheep within the five years; and, in 1839, three Ghoonts were presented as nazzars, and one Ghoont annually for the four succeeding years.
>
> Before 1839 the revenues from time within memory, was always pad to the Rájá of ladak, as follows; 396 rupees in cash, 200 lacs of grain, 100 múndís, 34 pieces of cloth (Barmúr), and 132 shúgús of paper, equal to 660 Hindustáni táktehs.[109]

To bestow horses upon ruling monarchs was a long-established practice in the Western Himalayas. In the second half of the 16th century, the Kingdom of Guge in West Tibet is reported to have sent a horse annually to the king of Ladakh Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal as tribute.[110] Likewise, the wall-paintings of a small temple in Dangkhar

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[107] The Urdu terms 'nazaráná' (*nazrā'nah*) and 'nazzar' (*naz'ar*) derive from the Persian word for a 'solemn vow or promise' (*nazr*). It designates an offering or a fee made to the state or to its representative.

[108] The Dogra ruler Gulab Singh (1792–1857) annexed Kulu and Spiti, more or less in the name of his Sikh overlord Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), in 1841. Under the leadership of his general Zorawar Singh (1786–1841), the Dogra forces had invaded Ladakh in 1834, Baltistan in 1839, and West Tibet in 1841. These military campaigns eventually led to the waning of the rNam-rgyal dynasty of Ladakh and the annexation of Spiti by British India.

[109] HAY 1850: 438.

[110] *de nas sprul pa'i rgyal po tshe dbang rnam rgyal de rgyal srid la mnga' gsol nas/ sku na gzhon dus dmag mdzad pas/ shar ngam ring man chad/ blo bo dang/ pu hrangs/ gu ge la sogs pa mnga' 'od tu bsdus/ lho phyogs ''dzum lang/ nyung ti gnyis/ nub phyogs she dkar dang/ kha dkar tshun chod mnga' 'od tu bsdus/ byang hor la dmag rgyab gsung ba la/ nub ra sa rnams kyis zhu ba phul nas/ ma mdzad/ gzhan de rnams kyi jo kun dang/ ngan med pa'i bka' byas gte pa la khyongs/ mkhar rnams la sku tshab bzhag nas/ mar yul thams cad dar zhing rgyas pa yin no/ gu ge nas khral dang dpyad 'bul ba la/ lo re la gser zho gsum brgya/ dngul dang/ tsher mo brgya dang/ chibs gcig/*; "Thereafter, the divine King Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal ascended the throne of the kingdom and waged war while he was in his youth. In the East, he brought [the district of] Ngam ring along with Mustang, Purang, Guge and so on under his control. In the South, he annexed

demonstrate the tributary relationship that Spiti held to the royal court of Ladakh. I have argued elsewhere that this edifice was commissioned by the King of Ladakh Nyi-ma rnam-rgyal in the first half of the 18th century.[111] A socio-historical analysis of a donor tableau sheds significant light on the subordinate status assumed by the Spiti Valley at the time. The panel displays a royal banquet and consecration scene led by the Ladakhi monarch and his Drukpa court chaplain (Fig.7). This formal ceremonial gathering includes other members of the nobility, servants, musicians, and dancers. The right side of this panel, however, departs from the conventional mode of depiction of similar donor tableaux and consecration scenes. Instead, the panel shows the arrival of a convoy, announced by two musicians (Fig.8). The party is composed of four mules carrying heavy bags and bales of fabric. These animals are being escorted by foot soldiers with swords and standard-like spears. The main figure of this convoy is riding a white horse. Behind him, and closing the scene, is another infantry soldier leading a horse.

Bearing little relation to traditional donor tableaux, this last scene may be read as a political statement on the part of the rNam-rgyal dynasty. It was a visual reminder of Spiti's status within the Kingdom of Ladakh. As such, the people of this vassal province were subject to the payment of revenues collected annually by the fort prefect. These governmental taxes were mostly levied in kind in the form of grains and would typically have corresponded to the content of the bags carried by the mules. But colonial sources also mention other items such as cloth and blankets, just as the painting depicts.

'Dzum lang and Kulu. In the West, he conquered She dkar and Kha dkar. He expressed [the intention] to wage war against the Mongols in the north (i.e. Eastern Chagatai Khanate), but as the people of Nubra petitioned him, he desisted. Thanks to words devoid of malice, all the rulers (*jo*) of the other [lands] were brought to swear allegiance. Emissaries were stationed in their forts and the whole [Ladakh] Maryul flourished. Taxes and tributes were received from Guge [amounting to] three hundred golden coins, silver, one hundred young sheep, and a horse per year"; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 48–49.

[111] LAURENT 2014; LAURENT 2023: 1: 134–40.

Figure 7 – The consecration scene and royal banquet of the Upper Temple in Dangkhar, Spiti.
Photo: the author, 2011.

Most noticeable, however, is the gift of a horse to the king, the patron of this temple (Fig.9). Compared to the white mount ridden by the central figure of the convoy, the horse being pulled by a soldier appears to be a colt. Smaller in size, its head seems to resist and its gait looks jumpy, as the soldier's arms are stretched out to hold it. The colt's red coat may have been a deliberate choice on the parts of the painters, if not the patron himself. In her work on horses and social status, Tibetologist Petra Maurer recalls that the best horse for a king is the one suitable for warfare. According to the *Aśvāyurveda* and its 11th-century Tibetan translation, a red horse, as a symbol of kingship, would befit a monarch to rule the world.[112]

Figure 8 – Convoy with armed escorts bringing Spiti's tribute to the King of Ladakh.
Upper Temple of Dangkhar, Spiti. Photo: the author, 2011.

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[112] MAURER 2019: 214,

Figure 9 – The offering of a Spiti colt to the royal court of Ladakh.
Upper Temple of Dangkhar, Spiti. Photo: the author, 2016.

Spiti horses, as both Jacquemont's and Hay's accounts attest, were not only presented as a sign of fealty, but were also forcibly taken as war booty. These two aspects, namely horse tribute and horse looting, may well have been the underlying principles for the circulation of these animals in the Western Himalayas. Ladakhi rulers, for instance, were eager to acquire horses and expanded their royal herds at any costs. According to the *Royal Succession of Ladakh* (*la dwags rgyal rabs*), one of the early monarchs of the rNam-rgyal dynasty named bKras-shis rnam-rgyal (r.*c*.1555–1575) is said to have brought back large numbers of horses following his conquests:

> At the time reigned King bKra-shis rnam-rgyal. This king, having brought under his dominions all the regions from upper Purig down to Droshö [in Tibet], returned with herds of horses in inconceivable numbers. He established the fortress of Namgyel Tsemo in Leh and the urban suburb of Chubi.[113]

Similarly, the Ladakhi chronicle reports on King Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal's (r.*c*.1753–1782) distinctive obsession with foreign horses:

> His actions and doings were astonishing and unprecedented. Each of his five hundred *tibicag* horses had a head groom, a

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[113] *de'i dus su / rgyal po bkra shis rnam rgyal gyis rgyal srid mdzad do / rgyal po des pu rig gyen chad / gro shod man chad mnga' 'og tu bsdus nas / rta khyu bsam gyis mi khyab pa khyongs / sku mkhar slel rnam rgyal rtse mo dang / chu bhi 'i grong khyer btab /*; see LA DWAGS RGYAL RABS 1987: 47.

chamber silver bowl and so on to stretch out their gait. The legs of the *tibicag*, the secret parts,[114] and the like were paid much attention to.[115]

The name of this horse breed, given as *tibicag* in the text, originates from a breed called *tōbčāq* in Turkic languages.[116] Turkologist and Altaist Gerhard Doerfer observed that the noun *tōbčāq* is a diminutive deriving from the word 'bullet' (*top*).[117] It characterises a fine breed of fat horses, with large and round flanks. Already familiar to Ilkhanate Mongols in the 14th century, these animals seem to have originated from Central Asia.[118] During the Mughal period (16th-19th centuries), these horses became practically synonymous with the conception of a highly trained military mount. Azad Choudhury remarks that the term *tipuchag* was used to describe equestrian training techniques and military drills received by warhorses in the imperial stables.[119] According to Mughal sources, horses trained in *tipuchag* were highly prized war booty and deemed particularly appropriate for gift-exchanges (*nazr*) between rulers and subjects. These notions likely translated to Tibet around the same period.

By the time of the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal War (1679–1684), the trained bullet-like *tibicag* mounts had acquired a reputation as chargers. Like in Mughal India, *tibicag* warhorses were used

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[114] Modern commentators have been at odds over the meaning of the word 'secret' or 'hidden' (*gsang*) in this passage. Francke proposed to translate it as 'genitals' which, he believed, might have been used for divination; see FRANCKE 1926: 122. Petech, however, understood the term *gsang* as referring to 'food' provided a spelling emendation (*bsang*), presumably on account of a rather uncommon Tibetan noun for 'food' or 'fare' (*bsang bu*). It is my opinion that the term 'secret' may indeed refer, albeit euphemistically, to the horses' genitalia in accordance with many Tibetan compounded nouns such as 'secret bag' or 'scrotum' (*gsang sgro*) and 'secret water' or 'urine' (*gsang chab*) to name just a couple. This passage would therefore highlight that in Ladakh, as was customary in other parts of Asia, that Central Eurasian horses were used as warhorses as well as for crossbreeding. This would explain why stable masters were required to pay much attention to the legs, genitalia, and other body parts in order to select the most promising individuals. On warhorses and trade in Asia; see GOMMANS 1994; GOMMANS 2007.

[115] *phyag las sogs sngar med pa'i ya mtshan dang / chibs pa ti bi chag lnga brgya re la chibs dpon dang / gzims ting sogs 'gros che ba / ti bi chag gi zhabs thams cad dang / gsang sogs la rtsi ba shag che ba byung nas /*; see LA DWAGS RGYAL RABS 1987: 69.

[116] PETECH 1977: 115.

[117] DOERFER 1965: 601–603.

[118] In her study of the *Compendium of Chronicles* (*Jāmiʿ al-Tawārīkh*) by historian Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb (1247–1318), D. G. Maitland Muller notes that the word *tōbčāq* was used for 'horses of the west' (*aspān-i tobčag*; *tobiča'ut*); see MAITLAND MULLER 1957: 39, 211, 250; DOERFER 1965: 601–603.

[119] CHOUDHARY 2019: 74.

specifically for battle by the kings of Ladakh. Tibetan sources recall, for example, that when the Tibetan troops defeated the Ladakhi armies at Basgo in 1683, "even the *tibicag* horses, which are renown as powerful (*stobs po che*) and supreme steeds (*rta mchog*), were taken as a reward of bravery" by the victors.[120] It is not clear, however, who rode these warhorses. The Ladakhi cavalry (*rta'i dpung*) was, in theory at least, formed by the members of a conscripted militia who owned their own, presumably indigenous, mounts.[121]

In any event, it is generally believed that Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal's unmitigated passion for *tibicag* horses accompanied his conversion to Islam, which led ultimately to his abdication under public and politic pressure. In his *Treasure of Immortality: The Royal Succession of Ladakh*, Gergan provides the following account:

> It all started when Mirza Malik presented a *tibicag*. As one or two *tibicag* [horses] were brought every year without interruption, [the king] became infatuated with *tibicag*. With his behaviour being influenced by Mirza Malik, he converted to the sole views of Islam but maintained the appearance of a Buddhist devotee.[122]

> Since King Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal adhered to Shia Islam, he even took the name Mohamed Akbar Khan. During three years, there were no offerings of butter lamps to the major and secondary [chapels] of the palace, but presents were made to the *tibicag* [horses] instead.[123]

> (…) all [parties] came to the palace of Leh and rose against the king. King Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal received Sarbu and many lands from Matho for the *tibicag*. As a final ruling was pronounced, the king abdicated and the realm was entrusted to the prince. It is said that King Tshe-dbang rnam-rgyal had five hundred *tibicag* [horses].[124]

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[120] *ti pi cag tu grags pa'i rta mchog stobs po che dag kyang dpa' mtshan du blangs*; see MDO MKHAR BA TSHE RING DBANG RGYAL 1981: 1: 40; PETECH 1947: 33.

[121] PETECH 1977:160.

[122] *mir za ma lig gis ti bi cag gcig phul ba las 'go zugs te / lo re bzhin ti bi cag gcig gnyis re 'khyong rgyun ma chag pa dang / ti bi cag la thugs steng che ba mdzad de mir za ma lig gi spyod pa'i rjes su 'brangs nas / nang pa sangs rgyas kyi chos phyi tshul du byed pa ma gtogs don du mu sul chos lugs 'dzin pa'i lta spyod kho na'i dbang du gyur bas/*; see GERGAN 1976: 476.

[123] *rgyal po tshe dbang rnam rgyal mu sul mān shi'a chos lugs la brten nas mtshan du'ang mha mad aka bad khan btags nas lo gsum mkhar gyi lhag chung sogs kyi mchod me med par byas nas ti bi chag la de'i tshab phul*; GERGAN 1976: 480.

[124] *(…) thams cad gle mkhar du lhags nas rgyal por ngo log nas/ rgyal po tshe dbang rnam rgyal la ti bi chag bcas 'bos 'gros ba'i sa zhing mang sprod nas mang ba dang sa bu bcas nas 'phul te bcad khra btsan po bcas nas rgyal po khri las phab ste de'i sras la rgyal srid gtad // rgyal po tshe dbang la ti bi chag lnga brgya yod skad /*; GERGAN 1976: 481.

In spite of the king's whims, the prestige of the foreign *tobčaq* breed never waned and it has remained associated with Ladakh royalty, particularly in the context of ceremonial music. Until recently, processional music (*rgyal po'i 'phebs rnga*) performed by court musicians (*mkhar mon*) included melodies called *tibicag* to accompany the king's horse procession.[125]

It would thus appear that the kings of Ladakh maintained a strong interest in the rearing of specific horse breeds, a commitment that persisted until the kingdom's downfall in the mid-19th century. Documents issued by the royal house of Ladakh over the decade from 1834 to 1844 shed light on a specific husbandry experiment. According to Schuh's study of these archives, an experienced man from Purig named Ali Hussain (*'a li hu sen*) was put in charge of rearing a group of five horses.[126] These animals were to be trained, evaluated, and removed from the farm if necessary. What captures our attention is the origin of these horses: one from Purig, another from Zanskar, two horses from Baltistan, and what is believed to be a Mughal stud (*mu 'gul pa*).[127] The absence of the Spiti horse is particularly notable.

6. The trade in Spiti horses in the Western Himalayas

Few rulers of the rNam-rgyal dynasty seem to have taken an interest in Spiti horses, based on current available sources. By all accounts, the King of Purig bKra-shis rnam-rgyal (r.*c.*1734–1758) was the only member of this dynasty to leave concrete written evidence of his involvement with the horse breeding culture of Spiti. We have seen, however, that during the reign of King Nyi-ma rnam-rgyal (r.*c.*1694–1729), bKra-shis rnam rgyal's father, the provision of horses for government officials and their upkeep was one of the duties expected of Spiti. These steeds were kept at the district fort of the capital and put under the responsibility of a stable master. While still in Dangkhar, the painting program of the upper temple offers visual evidence that Spiti horses were also given as gifts to the court of Ladakh. King bKra-shis rnam-rgyal, on the other hand, actively engaged with the regulation of horse breeding in Spiti. Placing the sale of stallions under the purview of the local government in 1748, he then limited the production of geldings to the prerogatives of a single household of the

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[125] As ethnomusicologist Trewin notes: "The first of the three *ti-bi-cag* signals indicating the king's movements would then be played as the king dismounted, the second as he passed through the gate, and the third as he arrived in the inner hall where the festivities were to be held"; see TREWIN 1995: 262, 322, 402.

[126] SCHUH 2018: 159–168.

[127] *Ibid.*

capital in 1753. On account of the nature of these two documents, these measures must have applied to all horse owners of Spiti and likely aimed to regulate the export of this breed beyond the king's jurisdiction. Like Mughal India, there is ground to believe that Ladakhi rulers sought to import Central Eurasian horses to supplement their royal stables and cavalry, perhaps through crossbreeding efforts.

Notwithstanding these facts, nothing is known about the trade in Spiti horses until the 19th century. It was the newly appointed Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, Hay, who once again drew attention to the sale of these animals in the Himalayan territories annexed by British India. Yet the detail of this trade looks far from impressive:

> The Spiti people are not essentially traders, their country affords but little pasturage, and they seldom have more sheep than to supply their own wants. The exports are confined to grain and a few Ghoonts, together with a few manufacture blankets, and pieces of Barmúr cloth (…) [the Tibetans] are their own carriers: they come to Spiti in November, and take about 1,000 lacs of grain, and a few Ghoonts (…) [The Spiti people] export to Busáhir 250 lacs of grain (…) a few Ghoonts are also sold.[128]

Judging from the above, the trade in Spiti horses was still in its infancy in the mid-19th century, with a few animals being exported to the hill state of Bashahr-Kinnaur under British control and a few more sold to Western Tibetan traders. These Himalayan ponies, observed Major Hay, "were chiefly bred for sale" by the Spiti people; a trade that he estimated to be worth about 400 rupees in 1849. This sum represented less than a dozen animals based on colonial knowledge that the price of a good Spiti horse ranged from fifty to hundred rupees at the time.[129] This source of income obviously did not comprise the bartering of horses in exchange of goods between the Spiti people and their neighbours. At the exact same time, the Bhedas of the capital were confirmed in their official position as gelding agents thanks to Hay's work permit, attesting perhaps to the vitality of horse breeding at a domestic level. In spite of his mixed assessment, the Assistant Commissioner seems to have seen an opportunity to supply proper mounts to his government, concluding that "the breed of Ghoonts with a little care might be considerably improved".[130]

The British obsession with horse breeding in India began at the end of the 18th century when the East India Company found herself at a

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[128] HAY 1850: 439.
[129] See *supra* note 26.
[130] HAY 1850: 441.

significant military disadvantage. The constant demand and high prices commanded by Central Asian warhorses stimulated the breeding economy of the Indian sub-continent. Drastic measures were taken in order to increase the size of the Bengal cavalry, which grew twelvefold in less than two decades.[131] In 1793, the East India Company established a stud breeding farm at Pusa in Bihar. The 'Pusa Experiment' as it came to be known had two objectives: to produce large and suitable mounts for the British cavalry on the one hand, and to improve local horse breeds on the other.[132] Despite some improvement, "the total British cavalry force", notes Gommans, "was still inferior to the massive cavalry contingents of the native states".[133] Unable to provide sufficient cavalry remounts, the farm managed to supply good animals to British officials nonetheless by tapping into regional markets. Amid growing criticism against the stud operations, veterinary surgeon William Moorcroft was called in in 1808.[134] In spite of his expertise, breeding efforts continued to fail to supply a sufficient number of warhorses. To redress the situation, Moorcroft proposed a horse-buying mission to Central Asia in order to acquire bigger, bonier horses to improve quality of the stud. As mentioned earlier, his expedition took him to Ladakh, where he sojourned from 1820 to 1822, before proceeding towards Bukhara. If his journey is generally considered a commercial failure, it is nevertheless hard to overestimate the importance of British breeding activities for the development of horse trade in Asia in the first half of the 19th century.

This period also coincided with the expansion of British influence and the systematic exploration of the Western Himalayas by the military officers of the East India Company. In 1816, the hill territories of Kumaon, Garwhal, and Bashahr-Kinnaur were ceded to the Company giving Britain a direct border with Tibet for the first time. In 1846, the three contiguous valleys of Kulu, Lahaul, Spiti were formally annexed, opening up the Indo-Tibetan border regions of the Western Himalayas to intense foreign scrutiny. Observations made about Himalayan ponies in Spiti were echoed in other parts of these borderlands. The Assistant Commissioner of Kumaon George William Traill (1792–1847), for instance, underlined the reliability of these horses while reporting on an increase in the selling price of these animals due to a growing demand:

> The horses in use here, are small stout ponies of Tartar breed, called "Gúnts:" these animals are remarkably sure-footed, and

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[131] GOMMANS 1994: 236.
[132] ALDER 1979.
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] On the life of William Moorcroft, see ALDER 1985.

> consequently, well adapted for the rocky and precipitous roads of the hills; they have the further merit of not requiring shoes, and are invariably ridden unshod. The price has, of late years, been much enhanced by the demand of European gentlemen; a poney of good qualifications not being procurable for less than from sixty to one hundred rupees, near treble the former rates.[135]

Traill's report published in 1832 shows that a want for high-altitude mounts may well have impacted the local economy, resulting in a sharp rise of prices. In effect, military officers, officials, missionaries, natural scientists, idle travellers, and hunting parties started to pour down the Himalayan trails, often relying on large numbers of attendants, porters, and ponies during their tours of British Himalayan territories. In the early 1860s, Egerton remarked that the Spiti people exported "a good number of ponies" with Lyall highlighting that "they sell some in Basáhir and a few in Kulu, but the great traffic is with the neighbouring Tibetan province of Chamarthi".[136] In addition to the territories under British rule, West Tibet was perhaps the most important trading destination for the sale of Himalayan ponies. Travelling alongside the region of Chumurti, the Deputy Commissioner of Almora Charles Atmore Sherring noted during his 1905 journey in West Tibet:

> The distance from Gartok to Rudok is only a matter of some eight to ten days: there is a large population there, barley is cultivated and there is an abundance of salt, while the surrounding country is famous for its horses, which always acquit themselves well at the annual horse-races at Gartok, and invariably fetch a high price in the market.[137]

The district settlement of Gartok was thus renowned for its horse races and annual fair.[138] Apart from this, a regular military force of two

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[135] TRAILL 1832: 14.
[136] EGERTON 1964: 51; LYALL 1874: 196.
[137] SHERRING 1906: 157.
[138] According to interviews conducted among Ladakhi traders by historian Janet Rizvi in the 1980s, Gartok had been the biggest of all the markets in western Tibet: "Gartok was the rendez-vous of traders from a wide area – Lahul, Spiti, Kulu and Manali, as well as Ladakh, from where there were Baltis, Shamma and Arghon bringing not only provisions to sell to the Chang-pa, but also a variety of goods from Yarkand. Others came from as far as Lhasa itself (…) There were hillmen from the southern flank of the Himalaya, from Nainital and Almora, bringing cloth from India, and many kinds of livestock – horses, sheep, goats, yak, *dzo*; the Chang-pa also brought sheep and goat, yak and *dimo*. The gathering lasted two or three months, and Tonyot Shah estimates that every year 10,000 to 12,000 men must have assembled there, so that the whole plain was covered with their tents"; see RIZVI 1999: 80.

hundred horses is said to have been stationed at Gartok on behalf of the Tibetan government.[139] To explore the demand for horses in West Tibet would take this study too far. Suffice to note that the trade in Spiti horses on a transregional level, as reflected in colonial sources, must have been essentially a 19th-century development.

Conclusion

Contrary to expectations, the Spiti pony or Chamurti horse is perhaps more famous and commands a higher price now than it ever did in the past, courtesy of tourism and the oddities of the modern horse trade and its particular interest in provenance (Fig.10). As this article has demonstrated, the pre-modern trade in Spiti horses was mostly local, and it can be hypothesized to have been primarily a barter trade. The market took off with the arrival of the British and other European interests in the early 19th century, for whom the use of these 'ships of cold desert' was both practical and connected to their strategic concerns in the Himalayas. Although the trade in Spiti horses was probably largely unrecorded in previous periods, the breeding of horses was nonetheless an important aspect of the socio-economic life of this border valley. If these animals may not have had much following outside Spiti itself, the gelding of stallions and the position of the Dangkhar Bhedas only make sense if the circulation of Spiti horses pre-existed the 19th century. Indeed, regulatory dispositions vis-à-vis the sale of stallions and the production of geldings had first been established by the King of Purig in the mid-18th century.

Figure 10 – A group of Spiti ponies or Chamurti horses grazing in the hills above Dangkhar, Spiti. Photo: the author 2011.

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[139] TRAILLS 1832: 46.

A review of Tibetan sources pertaining to the rNam-rgyal dynasty is informative in this regard. It underscores the centrality of horses of all breeds for the royal houses of Ladakh and Purig in the 18th–19th centuries. These monarchs, like other Asian rulers, were partial to supply steeds to their royal stables through trade, war booty, gifts, and possibly crossbreeding. They too seem to have favoured Central Eurasian mounts at a time where military conflicts and the demand for warhorses prompted long-distance trade and stimulated horse breeding across the Indian subcontinent and beyond.[140] Through the figure of the Bheda's pony, we were thus able to explore hitherto little known social structures, trading activities, and political relations particular to Spiti, which in many ways connected this remote Himalayan valley to some of the most important empires of Asia in the 18th–20th centuries.

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[140] GOMMANS 1994; GOMMANS 2007; POUR 2013; CHOUDHARY 2017; CHOUDHARY 2019.

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Appendix

Treatise on Horses titled The Silver-White Mirror

Chapter One
Introducing the father vulture

First, regarding the origin of horses: In [the region of] Mount Kailash, monkeys were frolicking hither and thither on the shores of Lake Manasarovar. From the edge of a lofty cliff, a monkey in heat was looking at the surroundings. A resplendent white bird, with its head held up high and wings spread wide, was gently hovering in the sky.[141] Having noticed [the bird], her desire grew even stronger. She quickly ran towards him, climbed onto the top of a rocky outcrop, and waited. The former, a beautiful bird, and the latter, the repugnant and defiled creature who had appeared, mated.

This is the first chapter introducing the father vulture.

Chapter Two
The tale about the father vulture and the mother monkey who spawned the horse breed

The next day at dusk, the monkey was looking from the rocky outcrop wondering whether yesterday's vulture would come again, but did not see the bird. She laid five eggs and placed them inside the horn of a wild yak.[142] They were left in the midst of grass during the three

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[141] From this short literary description, it may well be that the father bird is a bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), also known as Lammergeier, rather than the more conventional Himalayan vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*). Usually seen floating along mountainside, this eagle-like vulture frequently measures over 1 meter from beak to tail, with a wingspan of nearly 3 meters. Unlike its cousin, the bearded vulture does not have a bald head. The body plumage is a mingled rusty and white, with a creamy-coloured forehead.

[142] It is difficult to assess the symbolic meaning and significance of the wild yak's horn in this story. As a possible line of approach, some legendary narratives reported in funerary rituals from the Old Tibetan manuscripts found at Dunhuang have a few points of similarity. In his analysis of the ritual function of the horse based on the Dunhuang documents, Rolf Alfred Stein examined a primordial feud between the horse and the wild yak (*'brong g.yag*) which resulted in the death of the former. Having been assigned different realms (*bskos*), the horse ventures into the wild yak's northern territory in search for grassland and water. For his transgression, the horse is gored by the wild yak and dies. The horse's youngest brother decides to avenge his death and forges a sacred alliance with man to do so. Henceforth, man will ride the horse in life or in death (i.e. the horse as psychopomp). Building on these reciprocal obligations, the youngest horse and man depart to the northern land where they hunt the wild yak down and kill him; see STEIN 1971: 485–491. By goring the (eldest) horse to death, the wild yak conversely causes the

autumn months. Despite the grass rocking them back and forth the eggs did not break. For that reason, [horses] must be guarded against [the dangers of] grass during the three autumn months. During the three winter months, she left them in a nesting crevice within a cliff. The eggs once again did not break. For that reason, a roof must be put over [horses] during the three winter months. During the three spring months, she left them on the shore of Lake Manasarovar. Here again, the eggs did not break. For that reason, [horses] must be kept away from water during the three spring months. Thereafter, she left them on the side of Mt Kailash during the three summer months. She left them for two months near a brook of glacier water running from the summit where various flowers and medicinal herbs grew. Yet again, the eggs did not break.

Having given up, the [mother monkey] departed for a forest in search for food. She encountered an ascetic who asked her where she was going. She recounted her story. He told her to stay for a few days and to eat the offering cakes he had discarded. She stayed there seven days. Then she went back to have a look. The horn had become bigger. She looked inside and saw that the eggs got bigger. The horn was almost filled. As she could not lift them, she left.

She waited for discarded dough cakes during seven days. Then she went to check again. The horn was swollen with cracks all over it. She looked inside and saw that the eggs filled [the horn] completely. She left once again as she could not lift them.

The next day she came to see at sunrise. The horn had cracked even more. Inside, the eggs were also cracked. One of them had produced manure. As she could neither lift them, nor was she able to move them, she left them on site. When she looked on the surface, a piece of the horn broke with a dry sound and fell off. The eggs hatched. Inside, five animals with different coats were screaming. At the sound and sight of these [creatures], the mother was struck with terror and fainted. Afterwards, she regained consciousness and looked around. She saw bodies with wobbly weak limbs swimming back and forth here and there. As they crossed the water many times, they strengthened. It is the poison of the horn that makes their legs weak and unsteady.[143]

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domestication of the (youngest) horse by man. Could it be that the horn in our narrative stands as a symbolic representation of the yak's killing? With its transformation from instrument of death to symbolic matrix, does the horn of the wild yak thus allow horses to grow in the wild in all safety until their final encounter with the ascetic and subsequent domestication by man?

[143] The compound noun 'horn poison' (*rwa dug*) may in fact be referring to a poisonous plant called *ra dug* in Tibetan. This plant is listed as one of the three poisons for horses in Pelliot Tibétain 1062; see BLONDEAU 1972: 212, n.62. There is no general consensus regarding the taxonomic status of this herbaceous plant. According to the *Great Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary*, this dark blue poisonous flower

Hence, horses and yaks are inclined to be hostile. It turns out that swimming (bathing?) is needed.

This is the second chapter about how the father vulture and the mother monkey spawned the horse breed.

Chapter Three
The Five Types of Horses

Because the monkey was the mother of horses, she wanted to look after them. Because the father was a vulture, it turned out that a small hammer was required.

One [of the horses] was untainted with a white coat. The tail, mane, and four joints were bluish and faultless. The voice was strong and pleasant. It had a long and loud snorting. [The voice] had many tunes. This haughty [creature] is the heavenly white horse Gyiling.

Another one had a yellow coat. The melodious sound of its snorting was pleasant. This is the Dowa [breed].

Another one had a red coat. It had fine muscles. The tail and the mane were slightly inferior. It had a rough temperament. The neighing had a weak sound. This is the Rungu [breed].

Another one had a light blue coat tinged with yellow. The neighing had a short sound. This is the Möndro [breed].

This is the third chapter about the origin of the five types of horses.[144]

Chapter Four
How the sage cursed the horses

Thereafter, the mother monkey and the five horse siblings lived together. Having grown up, they galloped in the vicinity of the ascetic bringing havoc by bucking around. A hammer was produced to rein the horses in. The sage, infuriated, cursed them. May a cold iron bit be inserted in your mouth in order to steer the body! May you be equipped with a saddle on the back! May humans and gods ride you! May you be a pack animal for people! Having cursed them, horses were forced to carry human loads.

This is the truth of the fourth chapter about how [horses] were cursed.

(*ra dug pa*) is said to possess the same properties (*nus pa*) as the 'black aconite' (*bong nga nag po*). Aconites (*Aconitum spp.*) are highly toxic flowering plants with hood-shaped dark blue or purple flowers. They are ubiquitous to the mountainous regions of the northern hemisphere including Tibet and the Himalayas.

[144] The description of the fifth and last breed is curiously missing.

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ཏུ་གཞུང་དངུལ་དཀར་མེ་ལོང་བཞུགས་སོ།། [145]

ཞེལུ་དང་པོ། ཁ་བྱ་ཆོད་ཡིན་པའི་སྒྲེང་གཞི།

དེ་ཡང་དང་པོ་རྟ་ཡི་འབྱུང་ཁུངས་ནི། གནས་ཏེ་མེ་དང་མཚོ་མ་རྫོས་པའི་འགྲམ་ན་སྤྱེལུ་རྣམས་ཆེ་ཞིང་བར་འགྲོ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཡོད་པ་ལ། སྤྱེལུ་གཅིག་ཆགས་པ་ལངས་ནས་བྲག་བྱུང་མཐོན་པོ་ཞིག་ནས་ལྔ་བཞིན་ཡོད་པ་ལ། ནས་མཁན་ནས་བྱུ་གསྲུགས་དཀར་ལ་མརྫོས་པ་མརྒོ་མརྫོ་པ། གཤོག་རྒྱངས་རིང་བ་གཅིག་ཡིང་ཡིང་བྱེད་འདུག་པ་དེ་ལ་ཡིན་སོང་ནས་འདོད་པ་ལྷག་ཏུ་སྐྱེས་ཏེ། དེ་ཕྱོགས་སུ་སྨྱུར་བར་རྒྱགས་ནས་བྲག་མཐོན་པོ་ཞིག་གི་ཁར་ཕྱིན་ནས་བསྱུད་པས། སྱར་གྱི་བྱུ་ལེགས་པོ་དེ་དང་མི་འདུ་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་དྲེ་མ་ཅན་ཞིག་འོངས་ནས་འདོད་པ་སྱུད་དོ། དེ་ནི་ཁ་བྱུ་ཆོད་ཡིན་པའི་སྒྲེང་གཞིའི་ཞེལུ་སྟེ་དང་པོའོ།། །།

ཞེལུ་གཉིས་པ། ཁ་བྱུ་ཆོད་དང་མ་སྱེལ་མར་ཏུ་རིགས་བྱུང་ཚུལ།

དེའི་སང་པོར་གྱི་དུས་སུ་ [146] སྤྱེལུ་མོས་ཁ་ལ་སང་གི་བྱུ་ལོང་ལམ་བསམ་ནས་བྲག་པོད་མཐོན་པོ་ནས་བསྐུར་པས་བྱུ་དེ་མ་མཐོ། སྱོང་ལྷ་སྱེས་བྱུང་བས། དེ་འགྲོང་གི་ར་ཚོ་ཞིག་ཏུ་བཅུག་ནས་སྱོང་ [147] ལྷ་གསུམ་ཆུའི་གསེན་ཏུ་བཞག་པས་རྒྱས་འཆུང་ནས་སྱོང་ལ་བརྫོ། སྱོང་ལྷ་གསུམ་ཆུ་བརྫང་དགོས་པ་དེ་ནས་བྱུང་། དགུན་ལྷ་གསུམ་བྲག་གསེན་གྱི་བྱུ་སྐྱེངས་སུ་བཞག་པས། དེར་ཡང་སྱོང་ས་བརྫོ། དགུན་ལྷ་གསུམ་ཁབས་ས་འབེགས་དགོས་པ་དེ་ནས་བྱུང་། དཔྱིད་ལྷ་གསུམ་མཚོ་མ་རྫོས་པའི་འགྲམ་ཏུ་བཞག་པས་དེར་ཡང་སྱོང་ས་བརྫོ། དཔྱིད་ལྷ་གསུམ་ཆུ་བསྱུང་དགོས་པ་དེ་ནས་བྱུང་། དེ་ནས་དབྱར་ལྷ་གསུམ་གངས་ཏེ་སེའི་འགྲམ་ཏུ་བཞག་ཕུ་ནས་གངས་ཆུ་རྒྱག་པ་དང་མེ་ཏོག་དང་། སྤྱིན་སྲ་ཚོགས་སྱེས་པའི་རྒྱ་འགྲམ་དེར་ལྷ་བ་གཉིས་བཞག་དེར་ཡང་སྱོང་ས་བརྫོ། དེར་པོར་ནས་ནགས་ཀྱི་ཁྱོད་ཟས་འཚོལ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པས་དང་སྱོག་གཅིག་དང་མཐལ་བས། ཁོ་ན་རེ། ཁྱོད་གང་ལ་འགྲོ་གསུངས། སྱར་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱལ་རྣམས་བཤད། ཞག་འགགས་འདབའི་གཏོར་རིལ་ཟ་ཡིན་སྱོད་གསུངས། དེར་ཞག་བདུན་བསྱད། དེར་ཡང་སྱར་ཕྱིན་ནས་ན། དུ་ཙོ་དེ་ཆེ་དུ་སོང་འདུག་པའི་ནང་བསྱས་པས། སྱོང་ཆེ་དུ་སོང་ནས། དུ་ཚོ་ཁིངས་ལ་ཁད་འདུག་བཏེགས་པས་མ་ཐིག་པར་ལོག་ཕྱིན་ནས། ཞག་བདུན་གཏོར་ཟན་ལ་སྱག ཡང་ལྷ་དུ་ཕྱིན་པས་དུ་ཅེ་དེ་སྱོས། སེར་ཁ་ཞིག་ཡིག་ཆགས་འདུག ནང་དུ་བསྱས་ནས་སྱོངས་ཐག་ཁེས་འདུག བཏེགས་པས་མ་ཐིག་ཡང་ལོག་ཕྱིན། སང་ཉི་ཤར་ལ་ལྷ་དུ་ཕྱིན། དུ་ཚོ་ཡང་ཞིག་ཞིག་ལ་གས་སོང་འདུག ནང་གི་སྱོང་རྣམས་ཀྱང་གས་

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[145]   YE SHES STOBS RGYAL 1990.
[146]   Sic, for *srod kyi dus su*; 'in the evening' or 'at dusk'?
[147]   Sic, for *ston*; 'autumn'.

ནས་ཞིག་ལ་ཁད་ལྷུད་དེ་བཏེགས་པས་ས་ཐེག་སྤུལ་བར་ཡང་མ་ནུས་པར་རང་སར་བཞག་ནས། ལོགས་ཤིག་ཏུ་བསྐྱེས་ཚ་ན། རྟ་ཚོ་དེའི་དུམ་ཞིག་ནས་ཆག་སྟ་དང་བཅས་ཏེ་སིང་སིང་དུ་སྟོད། སྦྲོང་རྣམས་བཙོལ་བའི་ནང་ནས་སེམས་ཅན་སྣ་སྣ་མདོག་མི་འདྲ་བ་སྐྱད་ཆེ་བ་ཞིག་འདུག་པ་ལྷ་རོང་དེ་ཕོན་བྱུང་བས་འཛིགས་ཏེ་དུམ་གཅིག་བརྒྱལ། དེ་ནས་དྲན་པ་གསོས་པ་དང་བསྐུལ་བས། གཟུགས་གཡས་གཡོན་ཀུན་ལག་ཀུལ་ཀྱིལ་མོད་པ་རྣམས་རྒྱ་ལ་བར་རྒྱལ་ཆུང་རྒྱལ་བརྒྱབ་པ་མཐོང་། རྒྱ་མང་དུ་བཀལ་བས་ནད་དག་ཀྱང་འདུག ཀུང་ལག་ཀྱུལ་ཀྱིལ་སོང་བ་དེ་ར་དུག་ཡིན། རྟ་དང་གཡག་ལས་ཀྱི་དུག་དུ་འགྲོ་བ་དང་རྒྱ་བ་ཤན་བྱེད་དགོས་པ་དེ་ནས་བྱུང་། པ་བྱུ་ཀྲོད་དང་ས་སྤྱི་ཨ་ར་ཏ་རིགས་བྱུང་བའི་ལེའུ་སྟེ་གཉིས་པའོ། །།

ལེའུ་གསུམ་པ། ཏ་རིགས་སྤྱར་དབྱེ་བ།

སྤྱི་ཏུ་ཏ་ཡི་མ་ཡིན་པས་སྦྱང་བ་དགོས་པ་དང་། པ་བྱུ་ཀྲོད་ཡིན་པས་སྤྱི་དགོས་པ་དེ་ནས་བྱུང་། གཅིག་ནི་ས་སྦུ་མདོག་དཀར་ལ་དུས་པ། ཏ་རྫོག་དང་ཚིགས་བཞི་སྦྱལ་དུས་པ། སྐྱད་ཆེ་ལ་སྤུན་པ། ཁྱིལ་རྒྱུངས་ཆེ་བ་ལ། འཁྱུར་ཁྱག་མང་བ། མགོ་འཕང་མཐོ་བ་དེ་ནི་ཀྱི་ཡིན་གནས་ཏ་དཀར་པོ་ཡིན། གཅིག་ནི་མདོག་སེར་ལ། སྐྱད་དབུངས་ཁྱིལ་ལ་སྤུན་པ། དེ་ནི་འདོ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། གཅིག་ནི་མདོག་དམར་བ། ཤ་བཟང་བ། ཏ་རྫོག་ཆུང་ནང་པ། སྤྱོད་པ་ཆུབ་པ། སྐྱད་ལྷ་ལ་འཆེར་བ་ཞིག་འདུག་པ་དེ་ནི་ད་ཏ་ཡིན་ནོ། གཅིག་མདོག་སྦོ་སྐྱུ་ར་སེར་པོའི་མདངས་ཆགས་པ་ཞིག་འདུག་པ། སྐྱད་སྦུལ་ལ་འཆེར་བ་དེ་ནི་མོལ་གྲོ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཏ་འི་རིགས་ལྷ་དུ་བྱུང་བའི་སྟེ་གསུམ་པའོ། །།

ལེའུ་བཞི་པ། དང་སྦོང་གིས་ཏ་ལ་མདམོད་པ་བོར་བ།

དེ་ནས་ཏ་སྤོན་ལྷ་དང་མ་སྤྱི་བཙས་པ་དེར་ཡོད་པ་ལ། ཆེར་སོང་ནས་དང་སྦོང་གི་ཅུར་རྒྱགས་ཏེ། ཏ་པོངས་[148]གཏོར། ཏ་ལྷག་དང་ཆུལ་པོ་རྒྱལ་བྱས་པས། དང་སྦོང་ཁྲོས་ཏེ་དམོད་པ་བོར་ནས། ལུས་པོ་རྟིངས་པའི་དགོས་པ་དུ་ཁ་དུ་ལྷགས་སྲང་འདྲུག་པར་ཤོག རྒྱལ་ཏུ་སྦོ་སྟུན་སྟོད་པར་ཤོག མི་དང་ལྷ་ཡིས་བཞིན་པར་ཤོག མིའི་འཁུར་པོ་བྱེད་པར་ཤོག ཅས་དམོད་པ་བོར་བས། ཏ་ཡིས་མི་འཁུར་དགོས་པ་དེ་ནས་བྱུང་། ཞེས་བདེན་ཚིག་གྲུབ་པ་དམོད་པ་བོར་བའི་ལེའུ་སྟེ་བཞིན་པའོ། །།

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[148] Sic, for *'phongs*; hind part of a horse back.

Newly discovered rock paintings from Berinag (Uttarakhand, India) as mythograms[*]

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1. Introduction

Berinag, a small settlement, is situated in District Pithoragarh, a border district in the state of Uttarakhand, India. It borders Tibet in the north and Nepal in the east. Uttarakhand Himalaya is yet to be subjected to adequate prehistoric investigations despite the fact that sporadic discoveries of prehistoric remains have been reported from this region from the nineteenth century CE onwards. Thus, Henwood's report (Henwood 1856) on the discovery of "Rock-Basons at Deo (Devi) Dhoora" in Kumaon Himalaya (Uttarakhand) in 1856 is taken as the earliest published study of the palaeo-"art" in the world (Pradhan 2001: 3). Twenty years later, Rivett-Carnac (1877) wrote that the motifs such as found in the petroglyphs of Kumaon are widely distributed the world over. Therefore, he hypothesized that the petroglyphs represented the "ancient form of 'writing'" (Rivett-Carnac 1903: 518). Interestingly, cup-marks/cupules (Henwood's basons) are found all over the world and Bednarik's study compelling shows that at least in the Auditorium Cave, Bhimbetka (MadhyaPradesh, India), cupules were executed during the Lower Palaeolithic. Together with the evidence of Daraki-Chattan, another important petroglyph site in Madhya Pradesh, Bednarik (2007; 2009: 3) believes that in India cupules may date back to "several hundred millennia". Cupules are ubiquitous in Central Himalaya and some of them that are situated in the rocky forested tracts may be among the earliest human creativity in Central Himalaya cannot be ruled out, especially in the context of their functional significance as containers filled with sedative and saline liquid to

attract game (Joshi 1987; Joshi *et al*. 2017). There is no doubt that all the palaeo drawings exhibit, what the noted archaeologist and palaeo drawing specialist Leroi-Gourhan (1993: 107) says: "a progressively growing faculty for symbolization". Therefore, one should be wary of using the term "art" in describing palaeo drawings.

The present paper purports to report the first ever discovery of an interesting rock painting site. The paintings are done on now inaccessible surfaces of a cliff facing north-east. The cliff is situated at Jhaluvā Dhuṅgā in Berinag (District Pithoragarh, Kumaon Himalaya) (Pl. I). The site is notorious as "Suicide-ridge" because in the past the steep incline of the cliff was used to commit suicide by some persons.[1]
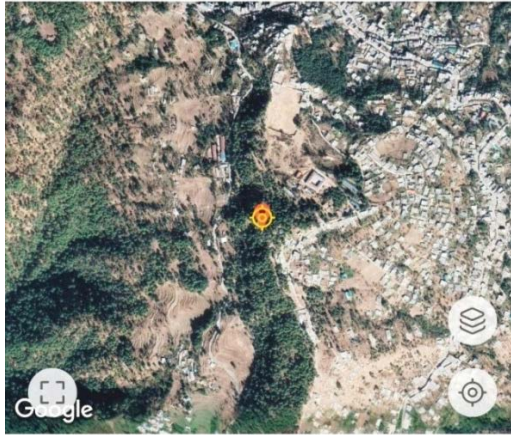
GPS Coordinates

Latitude
29.774786

Longitude
80.048877

Location

Line 1

Q2FX+QF4 बडा झलवा ढुग, PG College Rd, Berinag, Uttarakhand 262531, India

Plate I

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[1] The site is located close to the Government Post Graduate College, Berinag, District Pithoragarh.

The cliff consists of successive overhanging rocks (Pl. II). The awful vertical incline of the cliff cannot be negotiated without mountaineering skills. So far, some ten locations showing paintings in the cliff have been sighted. There is every possibility that a thorough search in the cliff would yield many more painted spots. The paintings are found at such awkward points that they cannot be photographed from adequate angles.
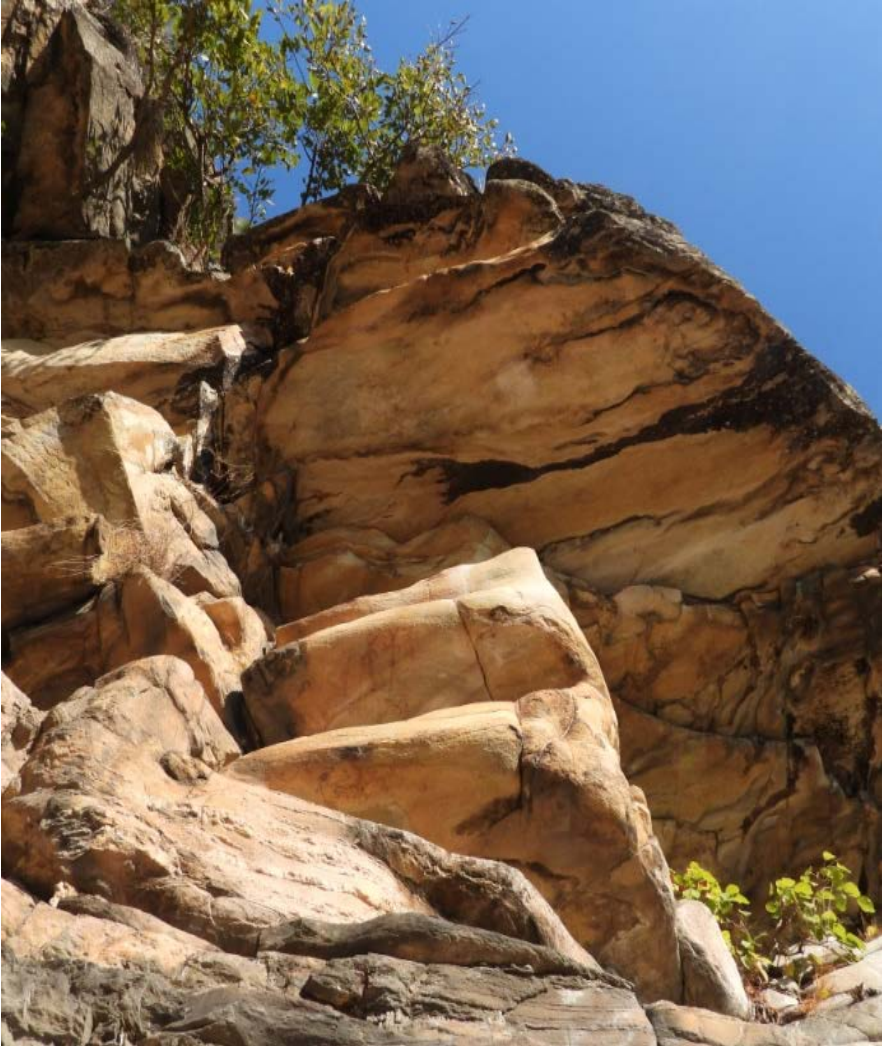

Plate II

2. The paintings

Rappelling from the "Suicide-ridge" point some 7.5 metres downwards there is a big overhang and immediately below it lies a receding step-like overhanging rock which houses the most interesting paintings of the site. The three naturally smooth surfaces of the overhanging rock have been used in executing the paintings. It is worthy of note that presently this overhanging rock cannot be accessed for close examination (Pl. III).[2]
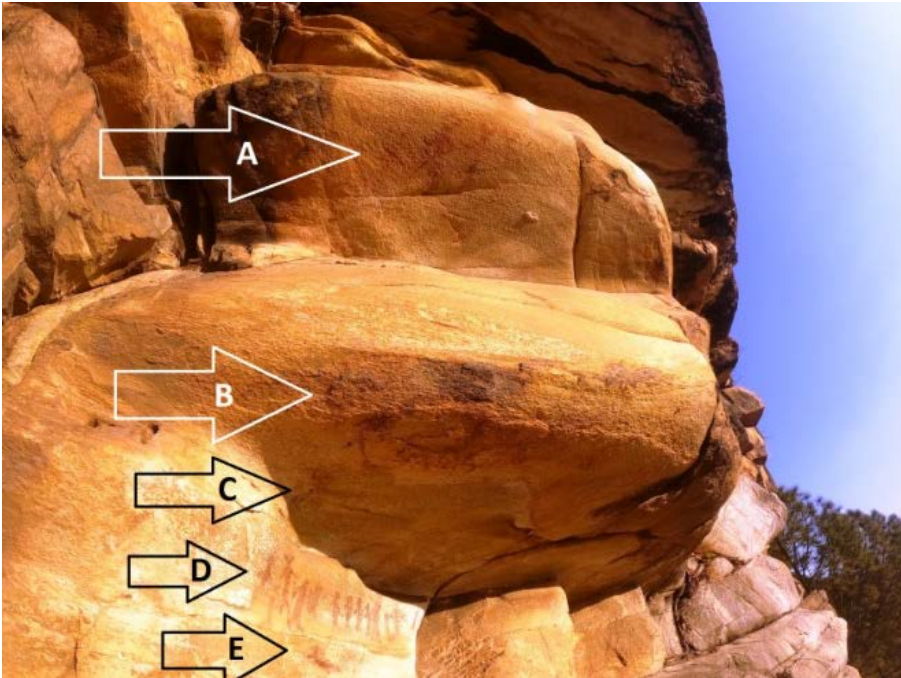
P**late III**

The ceiling of the upper overhang shows four stylized anthropomorphic figures juxtaposed slightly obliquely as if in descending order (or vice versa?). All of them are adorned with a "horned" headdress and their elbows turned outward, nearly akimbo. The two figures shown in the middle are taller and flanking them the remaining two are shorter. Below them is a shaft like pattern terminating on the

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[2]   The nearest point to reach the main paintings that can be negotiated on foot by climbing is about three metres away.

left into a "U"-like curve in outline and filled with geometrical pattern, on its right a quadruped (?), and further right an indistinct motif. On the extreme left of these motifs is a wavy line which looks like a flying bird or a snake, and on the extreme right a quadruped or else a prostrate anthropomorphic (?) figure. There are few oblique lines across the surface of the ceiling. We do not know whether they are natural or manually drawn to suggest terrestrial or extraterrestrial planes/pathways in relation to the anthropomorphic figures (Pl. IV).

Plate IV

The outer side of the lower ceiling depicts some five figures. The one on the extreme left is a bird like grotesque figure with round body and a headgear (?) resembling a bird's spread wings. On its right is an anthropomorphic figure to right as if chasing an animal flock. The left side of the inner part of the ceiling shows a long python like thick wavy line, and on the right side there is a medley of diverse enigmatic geometric and floral motifs (Pl. V).

Plate V

Immediately below on the left wall of the ceiling there are altogether thirteen representations done in solid (Pl. VI). The one on extreme left may represent either a prostrate quadruped having a thick tail or else a human figure (Pl. VII. 1).[3] On the right, there are nine anthropomorphic figures wearing diverse headgears (Pl. VII. 2-10). Further, the motif on the extreme right appears to be a pointed stick (Pl. VII. 13). There are at least two more representations on the left of the pointed stick. The one on the immediate left of the pointed stick seems to be a tall human figure with slightly bowed head towards right. The tall figure appears to carry a tiny figure (a baby?) with rabbit like ears (headgear?) shown horizontally at the chest level of the tall figure (Pl. VII. 12).[4] The adjoining figure on the left of the tall figure looks like a short anthropomorphic figure whose right hand seems to hold/touch the tiny figure's feet (? Pl. VII. 11). There appears to be a galloping deer (? Pl. VII. 14) below the two anthropomorphic figures (Pl. VII. 5-6) shown nearly in the middle of the composition. On the right of the deer there is an indistinct motif. There is no doubt that this composition portrays an elaborate narrative scene as evidenced in distinction in representation of the anthropomorphic figures in a circle. We will return to it in section 5 of this paper.

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[3]   If this figure (Pl. VII. 1) represents a male, the tail like projection may represent the male genital organ, or else menstrual signal in case of a female (Power 2009; cf. Joshi 2014: in press, Pl. 19).

[4]   As in case of the figure on the extreme left (Pl. VII. 1), figure numbered VII. 12 may represent either a quadruped with a long tail, or else a male or female anthropomorphic figure somewhat similar to numbered VII. 1.

Plate VI
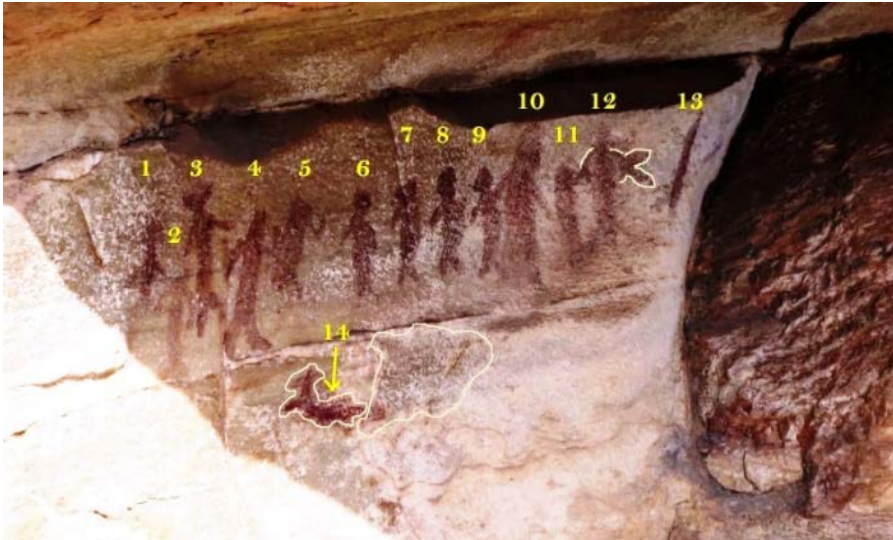
Plate VII

Below this composition towards right there are few geometrical patterns painted on a rough surface of the rock (Pl. VIII). On extreme left there are at least two stylized anthropomorphic figures. On their right there appears to be a pair of concentric circles with few stick-like projections radiating from the circle (?). On the right of this motif

there are few more stick like patterns which may represent stylized anthropomorphic figures (?).

Plate VIII

About two metres downwards the above-mentioned overhanging painted rock, there is a slight outcrop of rock. It has been dressed like a circular platform with a cup-mark dug into the left half (Pl. IX). Some seven metres away from this cup-mark towards right there is a tree like motif with large branches hanging down on left and right, somewhat like a willow plant, painted in red, and on the left an indistinct quadruped in grey colour (Pl. X).

Plate IX

Plate X

Further downwards, some eight metres from the cup-mark there are stalks of two tubular plants painted in dark grey on a smooth surface of a rock (Pl. XI).

Plate XI

3. Painting techniques

The Berinag rock paintings show both solid and transparent techniques in drawing. Thus, the anthropomorphic figures are invariably done in solid, others either in solid or in transparent technique. Interestingly, the animal figures and some other motifs done in transparent technique are filled with geometric patterns, which clearly display the painter's expertise in handling micrographic objects.

As noted above, the most interesting paintings of the site cannot be approached for close examination, therefore measurements of the painted motifs are rough. However, it is clear that the anthropomorphic figures in the Berinag paintings are done in two sizes, the larger ones measure approximately ± 20 cms, and the smaller ones between approximately ± 7 and ± 10 cms. The larger ones are found only on the upper ceiling of the overhanging rock. Animal figures

and some of the floral motifs are micrographic. The largest representation is that of the tubular plant like motif which measures above 30 cms.

With the exception of the quadruped and the tubular plant like motif, which are done in dark grey, the rest of the motifs are painted in different hues of red. It may be noted here that some of the rocks in the cliff are naturally red due to iron contents (?). Since pigments obtained from iron oxides and hydroxides are "metastable" and change colours (Bednarik 2002), nothing can be said about the original colours.

Interestingly, despite plenty of space one can notice superimposition of figures in the Berinag rock paintings. It is clear that this superimposition is synchronically imposed as it is linked with animation, to wit, the animal flock, or the tall anthropomorphic figure superimposed on the "baby" depicted horizontally as if the former is carrying the baby.

Paintings on the two ceilings of the overhanging rock described above are undoubtedly representative examples of prehistoric painters' mastery of awareness of framing, perspective, and animation to painting narrative scenes naturalistically. Thus, of the four anthropomorphic figures adorned with horned headgear on the upper ceiling the middle two are larger and flanking them on right and left are smaller. They are configured slightly obliquely, as if descending from a far-off quarter into the horizon. However, the eye-catching composition is found on the left wall of the lower ceiling of the overhanging rock showing thirteen objects (Pl. VI). Ten of these are clearly anthropomorphic figures arranged in a circle demonstrating their dancing gestures towards right (Pl. VII. 2, 4-6, 10-11) as well as left (Pl. VII. 3, 7-9). The composition exhibits superb perspective and animation as evidenced in the naturalistic gaits of the circularly configured larger and smaller figures.

4. Dating

When even scientific methods are not accepted as reliable, and considering diverse methods employed in dating prehistoric paintings, it would be an academic misadventure to date Berinag rock paintings. However, Joshi says that the earliest Central Himalayan pictographs do not depict any advanced tool technology, and anthropomorphic figures are barehanded. They show simple iconicity and small variety of aniconic motifs. On these grounds they compare well with the earliest rock paintings of Bhimbetka (Joshi 2019a: 113). Since the earliest Bhimbetka rock paintings are assigned to 40000-15000BP (Wakankar 1984: 51; cf. Allchin 1987: 145; Neumayer 1993: 32-4; Sonawane 1987;

Tewari 1990: 43), rock paintings of the Central Himalaya may be placed in the same time frame. This observation also seems to hold good in case of some of the Berinag paintings albeit anthropomorphic figures in them show marked distinction. In addition, it is also worthy of note that animal figures are painted in transparent technique and filled with geometric patterns. It draws our attention to the "engraved Mesolithic core from Chandravati, Rajasthan" (Sonawane 1987). It bears geometrical patterns resembling with some of the painted "designs" found in the rock paintings at "Bhimbetka-IIF-20, III C-13, C-21, Chiklod-I-9, Modi-6, Kathotia Karad, Jaura, Kota, Badami and other sites" (Sonawane 1987: 55). Likewise, Tewari (1990: 43) informs about similarity between certain motifs depicted in the rock paintings and ostrich egg-shell engravings, the latter dateable to about "25000 BC". Furthermore, in some places surfaces of the painted rocks are patinated, which indicate that some of the Berinag paintings were done during those times when the surfaces under reference were easily accessible for painting, and in all probability before patination. It is to be noted here that despite severe criticism, dating the palaeo drawings on stylistic considerations coupled with circumstantial evidence still holds, for new laboratory tests on rock drawings are not only expensive but "equally inconsistent" (see Clottes 1997; Watchman 1997).

5. Interpreting Berinag rock paintings

Of all the rock paintings found in Uttarakhand Himalaya, the Berinag paintings form a class by themselves. They feature naturalistic representation of the anthropomorphic figures in perspective as evidenced in sharp distinction, particularly in their height and hairdo, and pattern and direction of their gaits, all remarkable examples of animation (Pls. VI-VII). This issue draws our attention to "The Birth of Graphism" (Leroi-Gourhan 1993: Ch. I. 6) and the process of externalization of memory (*ibid*: II. 7 and II. 9). They exhibit humankind's symbolic behaviour, which being the defining characteristic of human species (see for details, *ibid*: *in passim*; Renfrew 2001; Renfrew 2008: Ch. 6, and *in passim*). Admittedly, human interest in aesthetics has deep antiquity as noticed in the production of "artifactual symmetry" in the Acheulean artefacts which is taken as "the first episode of development" in cognition (Wynn 2002: 398-400). Aesthetics has "different levels – *physiological*, *technical*, *social*, *and figurative*... within which human sensations are ordered" (Leroi-Gourhan 1993: 272; see, Joshi 2919: in press, for further references). Thus, to style aesthetics as an "art" object would be misleading. Likewise, describing prehistoric rock drawings as examples of "art" amounts to assigning the modern

concept of "art" to a society which was always in the move to gather food. Thus, interpreting prehistoric rock drawings (pictographs and petroglyphs) as "art" is a risky proposition, for the word "art" does not exist in the vocabulary of many societies known for "splendid rock paintings" (Mithen 1998: 175). Contextually, we believe that the Berinag paintings should be read "as symbols and mythograms representing visual version of a now lost oral context" (see for details and further references, Joshi 2019: in press). Since the scope of this aspect is wide, we will confine our interpretation to the anthropomorphic figures described above.

It may be noted here that Berinag is situated in Eastern Kumaon. This area along with adjoining Far West Nepal is noted for being the habitat of the foraging tribe "Raute, Raji or Banraji" (Fortier 2009; Rastogi 2017). Origin of their language named "Raji or Raute" remains disputed (Krishnan cited in Zoller 2016: 3). However, it is included in the "Himalayish group of Tibeto-Burman" (Pokharel 2020: x). Further towards east in Nepal is the habitat of another foraging tribe who call themselves "mihaq Ban Raja" and speak "Kusunda", a language isolate (Watters 2006: 14). It is also to be noted that Burushaski is another language isolate which is spoken in the central Hunza Valley of the northern Pakistani Himalaya (Turin and Zeisler 2011: 1). Joshi postulates that it is likely that the forebears of Kusunda and Burushaski speakers represented the authors of the prehistoric material culture of the Himalaya for archaeologists have discovered prehistoric remains in the vicinity of the present habitats of those peoples (Joshi 2019a; 2019b).

In support of his postulations Joshi adds that Burushaski is considered to be one of the branches of Basque, and Basque is "related to the language spoken by Cro-Magnons, the first modern humans in Europe" (Cavalli-Sforza 2001: 112, 121, 141-2, 149, 158). Likewise, can the narrative scenes of the Berinag rock paintings be explained in the light of religious beliefs and practices of the Raji, Raute or Banraji? Thus, the Raji refer to the world as the "children of god". For them both animate and inanimate entities are supernaturally living "non-human persons". Their belief system recognises "supernatural manifestation" of divinities that include supernatural animals. "Shamans" play central role in their religion, and they are capable of making "direct communication" with deities "during dance and ritual shamanic performances" (Fortier 2009: Ch. 8).

Keeping in mind the Raji religious belief system we begin with the assumption that the paintings on the upper and the lower ceilings of the overhanging rock are contemporaneous and interconnected. Accordingly, in the light of religious beliefs and practices of the Raji, depiction of the four anthropomorphic figures adorned with identical

horned headgear and bodily posture on the upper ceiling of the overhanging rock suggests their extraterrestrial association. Since these figures are juxtaposed slightly obliquely, therefore it is likely that the same figure is repeated in different sizes as an example of animation and framing to communicate that the extraterrestrial being (a solar deity?) is descending from a higher plane (sky?) to the lower one towards the earth. It draws our attention to the Raji solar deity "Damu" who first created foods, waters, forests, birds, insects, monkeys, tigers, snakes, trees, and even the stars (Fortier 2009: 147). Alternatively if the figure is ascending from the earth towards the sky, it may represent a deceased person for the Raji believe that "humans don't just deteriorate—they go into the sky" (Fortier 2009: 150).

Next, the lower ceiling of the overhanging rock shows at least five figures which include a bird like figure, a human figure and a flock of animals on the outer side, and serpentine, floral and geometrical motifs on the inner side. The human figure does not hold anything and therefore cannot be identified as a hunter. The overall presentation of this medley of motifs may have been intended to portray floral and faunal surroundings in relation to human species as creation of the extraterrestrial agency, the above-mentioned solar deity of the Raji (?).

The most interesting example of the Berinag rock paintings that clearly represents a mythogram is found on the side wall of the lower ceiling. As mentioned above, it shows thirteen motifs of which ten are clearly anthropomorphic figures configured in a circle. Their gaits are naturalistic and vividly illustrate not only their movements towards right as well as left but also their oral gestures (Pl. VII. 6-7). Admittedly, this visual version of an oral communication cannot be retrieved, but it clearly demonstrates that the group represents a ceremonial congregation.

In a discussion on the symbolic cognition of the rock paintings of Central Himalaya, Joshi suggested that some of them may be associated with spirit possession and trance journeys, and some with ancestor worship, which may have stemmed from the then existing religious beliefs and practices (see for details and further references, Joshi 2014: in press; Joshi 2019: in press; Joshi 2022). Paintings interpreted as representing spirit possession scenes fall in the domain of "shamanistic" interpretation. Be that as it may, in case of the thirteen figures in circular configuration, there is no doubt that they depict assemblage of at least three types of anthropomorphic figures differentiated according to their respective headdresses (Pl. VI). Thus, from left to right, figure numbered VII. 3 is adorned with a headgear resembling a rabbit's long ears, figures numbered VII. 2, 4, 5, and 6 are shown with horned headdresses, and hairdos of figures numbered

VII. 7 to VI. 10, and probably numbered VII. 11 as well, seem to have been arranged in top knot. As noted above, portrayal of the larger and the smaller figures in perspective and naturalistic dancing gestures exemplifies superb animation. According to Leroi-Gourhan (1982: 36), assemblage of figures denotes space, and animation for time, "for measuring spatio-temporal symbolism". He also suggests that painted caves may be considered as "a 'temple', that is, as a cult place accessible to all or at least a relatively large proportion of the community" (Leroi-Gourhan 1982: 75).

Applying this information to the rock paintings of the Central Himalaya in particular, it was observed that spirit possession and trance journeys called *jāgara*, *ghaḍyāli*, *ghayālu*, *ghayālo*, etc., may be traced to the prehistoric times (Joshi 2014: in press). They are comparable to those of the San shamans of Africa who "induce an altered state of consciousness by intense concentration, audio-driving, prolonged rhythmic movement, and hyperventilation (swift, shallow breathing)" (Lewis-Williams 2012 [2002]: 141). The Central Himalayan trance journeys are not induced by means of hallucinogenic plants. They are "ritual trance" (cf. Helvenston and Bahn 2005: 25) officiated by a priest called *jagari* who induces participants to go into trance journeys by means of audio-driving. The priest conducts the possessed persons as if controlling the spirits. Interestingly, while in trance the possessed persons called *daṅgari*, *autari*, etc., move in a circle and make such gestures as if transformed into some or other "form" narrated by the *jagari* (see Bernède 2001). When the *jāgara* ritual is in progress, depending on its theme, irrespective of caste and gender, any number of mediums can go into trance and enact accordingly. For example, in the *Jiyārānī/Maulā jāgara* as many as twenty mediums go into trance, and each one is possessed by a discrete spirit (see Joshi 2014).

To return to the thirteen figures depicted on the left wall of the lower ceiling of the overhanging rock, one can clearly discern distinction in representation of anthropomorphic figures as noticed in their respective headgears, bodily gestures, sizes and movements. Applying shamanistic interpretation to this representation, we may take the anthropomorphic figures as persons in trance journey. We do not know whether depiction of figures with rabbit like ears (Pl. VII. 3) or with "horns" (Pl. VII. 4, 5, 6) is intended to show "shamans" in action assuming the forms of extraterrestrial entities (divinities?), it is clear that a figure whose hair is done in top knot is engaged in face to face oral communication with a "horned" figure (Pl. VII. 6-7). Dialogue between the priest and the possessed person is an indispensable part of the spirit possession séance in Uttarakhand Himalaya. Be that as it may, we strongly believe that this composition is a visual representa-

tion of the externalised memory of the authors of the Berinag paintings.

As stated above, we assume that all the paintings on the ceilings of the overhanging rock described above are interconnected. If so, it may be suggested that the painter conceived the four anthropomorphic figures on the upper ceiling of the overhanging rock as divine beings descending from the extra terrestrial plane into the earth. The earth is symbolically represented by the floral and faunal motifs depicted on the lower ceiling of the overhanging rock as creation of the divinity. Below them, on the left wall of the lower ceiling of the overhanging rock there are 13 motifs, ten of which depict anthropomorphic figures undoubtedly arranged in a circle. Following shamanistic interpretation of the rock paintings, it may be suggested that they represent "shamans"/human mediums in trance journey assuming the form of those beings that are conceived as spirits from the sky descending from the extraterrestrial plane, as depicted on the upper ceiling of the overhanging rock. The above interpretation conforms to the Raji belief system which recognises existence of animals spirits. We are told that when Raji "drum leaders (*gurau*) become possessed, they sometimes transmogrify into the form of a tiger" (Fortier 2009: 152-5). Likewise, in antiquity the "shamans"may have been transmogrifying into the form of a rabbit-like being or a horned animal as depicted in the Berinag rock paintings described above. Thus, the Raji religious belief system accords with our assumption that these three painted rock surfaces might be interconnected.

In this connection it is worthy of note that on the basis of the San folklore and religious beliefs and practices, Lewis-Williams and Clottes (1998), Lewis-Williams (2012 [2002]: Ch. 5, and *in passim*; 2013), and Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2004) have given compelling shamanistic explanation of certain motifs occurring in the palaeo drawings of Africa. Likewise, we strongly feel that the Berinag rock paintings are representative examples of shamanistic interpretation to explaining the semiotics of the Central Himalayan prehistoric narrative drawings.

6. Concluding remarks

While discussing material culture as proxy for language, Joshi draws our attention to the fact that in Central Himalaya there is no tradition of painting in the trance journey. However, Joshi suggests that like the San in Africa (Lewis-Williams 2012 [2002]: 125, 135, and *in passim*), the authors of figurative paintings on the rocks expressed their perception of extraterrestrial/divine agency due to deficiency in spoken language. The Berinag paintings are the representative exam-

ples of externalization of memory exhibiting the symbols in action. They are mythograms, visual version of a now lost oral context. They help us reconstruct the prehistory of the Himalayan languages (see for details, Joshi 2014: in press; Joshi 2019a; 2019b; Joshi 2019: in press). We conclude with Leroi-Gourhan's following observation on the Prehistoric rock paintings of Europe:

> They are really "mythograms," closer to ideograms than to picto-grams and closer to pictograms than to descriptive art (Leroi-Gourhan 1993: 191).

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Is there Beer in Tuṣita? Dialogue with the Fourth Karma pa, Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340–1383), about his Intermediate State (*bar do*)

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1. Introduction[1]

In this study, an annotated translation from two different sources of a dialogue (embedded in *rnam thar*) between the eight-year-old Fourth Karma pa, Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340–1383), and a previous disciple, together with an analysis of its content and meaning against the backdrop of Vajrayāna, its symbolism, and the historical context, is presented. The dialogue deals with questions about the passing of the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), and his subsequent sojourn in Tuṣita, trying to dispel doubts among an audience of disciples. The sources used are the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* ("Feast of the Wise") by dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1564/1566) and the *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng* ("Golden Garland of the Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud") by Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774) and his student.

Life stories (*rnam thar*) of Tibetan Buddhist masters exhibit different levels of content, which classically are divided into outer, inner, and secret life stories.[2] The genre of *rnam thar* is meant to show the "complete liberation" of the protagonist, as its Tibetan name suggests. In this respect, the secret life stories (*gsang ba'i rnam thar*) might be most defining for this genre, since they contain mystic events experienced by the protagonist, such as miraculous dreams, visions, and supernatural phenomena—all of which represent realization of the nature of mind. One sub-category of the secret life story is accounts of experiences during the intermediate state between death and rebirth

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[2] This classification is ascribed to sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) (Vostrikov 1994, 186–87).

(*bar do*).[3] These accounts are usually called *bar do'i rnam thar* and are especially associated with the Karma pas, the hierarchs of the Karma bka' brgyud lineage, the first lineage of successive incarnation in Tibet.[4] There are English translations of such accounts for the Third, Fourth, and Seventh Karma pas, which are in first-person or third-person narration.[5]

In contrast, in this paper, I want to draw the reader's attention to an account of the *bar do* state that comes in a different form—namely, that of a dialogue. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba, one of the main students of the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349), and a contemporary of the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), asks his eight-year-old reincarnation, the Fourth Karma pa, Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340–1383), questions about his passing in his third incarnation and his sojourn in Tuṣita afterward, in front of an audience.[6]

The dialogue at hand has the form of (written down) oral questions and answers. This reminds one of the Tibetan genre of *dris lan*, which usually stands separately but is sometimes found embedded into *rnam thar*s.[7] Rheingans defines the genre as follows: "Tibetan texts entitled *dri lan* or *dris lan* ('questions and answers' or 'answers to questions') predominantly consist of written answers to one or more questions, mainly containing short treatments of queries about the Buddha's teaching that are suited to specific individuals."[8] Notwithstanding the fluidity of Tibetan genres, the passage at hand being a written record of an oral dialogue rather disqualifies it as a *dris lan*, though it might

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[3]   On the meaning of *bar do*, see Cuevas 2003, 39–68.
[4]   Sometimes they are also called *rnam thar bar do ma*, especially with respect to the Third Karma pa. See for example Manson 2009, 44, and Berounský 2010, 7.
[5]   For the translations see Gamble 2020, 121–27; Dell 2024, 86–89; and Dell 2020, 48–51. For a more extensive overview of representatives of this sub-genre, see Dell 2020, 41–47 and Dell 2024, 84–86.
[6]   Rheingans mentions the existence of another dialogue where the Eighth Karma pa, Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554), is asked about his stay in Tuṣita by his attendant A khu A khra (Rheingans 2014, 86). Its translation and analysis, together with a comparison, might be an interesting future research paper.
[7]   Rheingans 2014, 75.
[8]   Announcement text for a lecture by Jim Rheingans on May 13, 2024, with the title "Discussing the Dharma: Answers to Questions (dris lan) by the 15th Century Kagyupa Masters as Sources for the Study of Tibetan Religious History." Accessed March 15, 2024. https://www.oeaw.ac.at/fileadmin/Institute/IKGA/PDF/events/Poster_Rheingans_Discussing_the_Dharma.pdf. The genre of *dris lan* is not much researched (Rheingans 2015, 3), but there are a few contributions. For instance, for a translation of *dris lan* letters replied by Sa skya Paṇḍita, see Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltshen and Rhoton 2002, Part III; for a case study on a *dris lan* about Mahāmudrā answered by the Eighth Karma pa, see Rheingans 2011.

share some features with this genre.[9] One main difference is that a dialogue consists of two-way communication.[10] In general, dialogues can be considered a typical element of narrative texts.[11] The genre of *rnam thar* can be classified as a narrative text (in most cases) and its main narrative is often interspersed with what can be called embedded texts.[12] In the case at hand, the embedded text is a dialogue and its translation and analysis will be the focus of this paper.[13]

The analysis presented in this paper will be with respect to the content of the text, which is interpreted on the background of Vajrayāna and its symbolism, as well as from the historical background. As the text does not stand alone, its function within the main narrative will also receive some attention in the analysis.

The paper is based on two different sources, in which the dialogue appears in different lengths. The first one is a historiographical work of the genre "Religious History" (Tib. *chos 'byung*) called "Feast of the Wise" (Tib. *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*), composed by the historian dPa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1564/1566), which will be henceforth referred to as CKG.[14] The second source is also a historiographical work, but of the genre "Golden Garland" (Tib. *gser 'phreng*), often referred to as the "Golden Garland of the Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud" (Tib. *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng*) or by its ornamental title "Moonstone Water-Crystal Mālā" (Tib. *Nor bu zla ba chu shel gyi phreng ba*, often shortened to *Zla ba chu shel*), which will be henceforth referred to as KSP. It was written by the polymath Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1699/1700–1774), also known as Si tu Paṇ chen, and his student 'Be lo Tshe dbang kun khyab (b. 18th cent.).[15]

The KSP has become the standard work for scholars in the Karma bKa' brgyud tradition who deal with the lives of their lineage's masters. Its language is considered easier to understand and its organization is more chronological than the earlier CKG, which is another standard historical Karma bka' brgyud work.[16] In the case at

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[9]   On the fluidity of Tibetan genres, see Jackson 2015.
[10] Rheingans similarly analyzes dialogues embedded into *rnam thar* and delimits them toward *dris lan* (Rheingans 2014, 75–76).
[11] Ibid., 76 with reference to Neumann and Nünning 2011, 110.
[12] Rheingans 2014, 69–70.
[13] Rheingans refers to a *mKhan po* he consulted, according to whom such recordings of oral dialogues are very rare in Tibetan literature, but Rheingans also points out that this claim is still to be verified by a detailed survey (Ibid., 76, footnote 24).
[14] For an overview of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, see Dell 2021. For the life of its author, see Bjerregaard and Dell 2022.
[15] For an overview of the *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng* and references about the lives of its authors, see Dell 2023.
[16] Rheingans 2017, 69.

hand, in both sources, the dialogue follows the same story line and content, but the text is generally more extended in the KSP.

As for the outline of this paper, in section 2, annotated translations of both texts are to be presented, followed by an analysis of their content in section 3, and a conclusion in section 4. An appendix contains the Tibetan text of both passages (section 5).

2. Translation

In this section, annotated translations of the Fourth Karma pa's dialogue with rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba about his sojourn in Tuṣita during his intermediate state are presented, based on the CKG and the KSP.

2.1. Translation from the CKG

rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba met [with the Fourth Karma pa].[17] Since a fire was lit in the assembly rows, it became hot. [The Karma pa] used a fan and said: "[It] is like the heat of the summer [in] China. Even if [one] uses a fan, [it] will only gather the heat."

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] asked: "[In your third incarnation, you] asserted that [you] would live to be eighty-four years old. Why did [you] not live beyond the age of fifty-six?"[18] [The Karma pa] replied: "[I] was disenchanted, because many engaged in negative actions."

[He went on] asking: "Togs ldan Grags seng ba saw [you] departing to Tuṣita, and many people saw [your shape] on the moon [disc]. Is this true?"[19] [The Karma pa] replied: "Yes, that was me. At that time, the Mongols were acting like this." [While saying this, he] knelt down and made a gesture of showing the moon. [The Karma pa] went on: "In general, Tuṣita is not far away. The one who was on the moon, the one who was on the lion or the elephant, and so forth, all of these were me."

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] went on asking in a joking way: "Is there beer in Tuṣita?"[20] [The Karma pa] replied: "There is no such

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17   rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba is mentioned in the *Blue Annals* as one of the four main disciples of the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349; Roerich 1995, 532). Further details on his life are not provided there. Possibly, he can be identified with Brag nag pa mGon rgyal ba (b. 14th century; BDRC, P5090).

18   In Western counting, his age would be fifty-five. The Third Karma pa lived from 1284 to 1339.

19   Togs ldan Grags seng ba can be identified with the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349; BDRC, P70), who was a disciple of the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339).

20   In the following text, the Tibetan does not mention the agent who asks the questions explicitly. Hence, it could also just be some random people from the

intoxicating [drink, but] there is divine *amṛta*." [He] asked: "It is said that the black *amṛta* is good. Is that true?" [The Karma pa] replied: "[I] have not seen black *amṛta*, [but] the white [*amṛta*] similar to milk is endowed with a hundred flavors."

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] said: "There is nothing like the silk parasols of Tshal gung thang [in Tuṣita].[21] [The Karma pa] replied: "O lama, all desirables of the human realm appear small [compared to Tuṣita]. There are single flowers in Tuṣita that do not even fit into [the great mountain hermitage of] lKog 'phreng."[22]

[He] asked: "Is there no great river like the Yar gtsang?[23] Is there not even a castle like that of rTam nyog?"[24] [The Karma pa] replied: "In Tuṣita, all water is *amṛta*. All castles [are] only [made of] jewels, there are no ordinary soils or stones."

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] asked: "Is there anything like the horses with brass-colored [manes] of rTam nyog?" [The Karma pa] replied: "If [you] have no time for the Dharma, [you] are an old monk who has gone astray. Act according to just that! [Practice the Dharma!]"

2.2. Translation from the KSP

In the earth-mouse year (1348), when [the Fourth Karma pa] was nine years old,[25] the people of Tshal[26] offered [him] tea and other [gifts]. [He] was invited to tea by all the important people of Amdo (Tib. *mdo*)

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assembly. That is also what Roerich assumed in this translation of the corresponding passage from "The Blue Annals" ("they asked"; Roerich 1995, 495–97). Unlike Roerich, since no new agent is mentioned, I assume that the conversation just continues between rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba and the Karma pa through to the end. This is also supported by the fact that the Karma pa repeatedly (once in CKG and three times in KSP) addresses his conversation partner as "lama" (Tib. *bla ma pa*) which certainly applies to him but not to a random person from the audience.

21   Tib. *tshal gung thang (dgon)*. "Monastery of the Tshal pa bka' brgyud tradition and the seat of the Tshal pa myriarchy," which was founded in 1187 and destroyed by fire in 1546. It is located close to Lhasa (BDRC: G30).

22   Tib. *lkog 'phreng*. This is the name of a great mountain hermitage (*ri khrod chen po*) which had already been visited by the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje, who composed a commentary there (Roerich 1995, 492; Van der Kuijp 2004, 47, footnote 141; Ducher 2017, 120, footnote 357; Brunnhölzl 2007, 158). It is also the place where this very scene takes place, as seen from the equivalent passage in KSP.

23   Tib. *yar gtsang*, short for *yar lung gtsang po*, the largest river in Tibet, which turns into the Brahmaputra when descending to India.

24   Tib. *rtam nyog*. I could not find any reference to this as a place name or a name of a castle or another building.

25   In Western counting, this would be eight years.

26   Tib. *tshal pa*. It might refer to the Tshal pa bka' brgyud branch, with their seat in 'Tshal gung thang, located in central Tibet (Davidson 2005, 328–29).

and central Tibet (Tib. *dbus*) and received offerings [from those who] arrived.

Many [people] from mTshur phu [monastery], [27] Karma [monastery], [28] Nags phu [monastery], [29] Ba yo [monastery], [30] lKog 'phreng[31] and other places invited [him, but they could] not come to an agreement. Therefore, the dharma master said: "This time, I am going to lKog 'phreng." Thus, [he] came to lKog 'phreng, [where he] received offerings [and] was treated with utmost respect. Since [he] recognized the belongings of [his] predecessor such as conch shells, texts, and statues, [they] offered [them] all [to him].

While [the Karma pa] was staying at sTag khrom, in the mountain hermitage of lKog 'phreng, one night, in the rows of the feast offering, [he] said: "Light a big fire!"[32] [The fire] was lit and [he] said: "It is hot! Bring [me] a fan!" Since a fan was offered [to him], [he] fanned [himself] and said: "[It] is like the heat of the summer [in] China." rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba asked: "How is that?"[33] [The Karma pa] replied: "When it is very hot in China, even if [one] uses a fan, [it] will only gather the heat, and [one] will never have a feeling of coolness. In the same way, here, it makes it hotter and hotter."

Then, rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba asked: "Previously, [you] prophesied that [you] would live to be eighty-four years old [in your third incarnation]. Why did [you] not live beyond the age of fifty-

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[27] Tib. *mtshur phu (dgon)*. This is a Karma bka' brgyud monastery and one of the main seats of the lineage, located north-east of Lhasa, founded by the First Karma pa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), in 1189 (BDRC, G33).

[28] Tib. *karma (dgon)*. This is a Karma bka' brgyud monastery and one of the main seats of the lineage located in Chab mdo, eastern Tibet, founded by the First Karma pa, Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), in 1184 (BDRC, G35).

[29] Tib. *nags phu (dgon)*. This is a Karma bka' brgyud monastery in Kong po, south-east of Lhasa, founded by the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339; Roerich 1995, 529).

[30] Tib. *ba yo (dgon)*. A monastery in the Kong po region (Roerich 1995, 542–43).

[31] Tib. *lkog 'phreng*. Name of a place in the Kong po region where a great mountain hermitage (*ri khrod chen po*) is located, which had already been visited by the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje, who composed a commentary there (Roerich 1995, 492; Van der Kuijp 2004, 47, footnote 141; Ducher 2017, 120, footnote 357; Brunnhölzl 2007, 158).

[32] I could not find a reference to lKog 'phreng (Tib. *stag khrom*) as a place name. It is probably not the name of the mountain hermitage, as literally it means "tiger market" and a hermitage would not be called "market." It could be the name of a village nearby or of the district, while the mountain hermitage itself is called lKog 'phreng.

[33] rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba is mentioned in the *Blue Annals* as one of the four main disciples of the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349; Roerich 1995, 532). Further details on his life are not provided there. Possibly, he can be identified with Brag nag pa mGon rgyal ba (b. 14th century; BDRC, P5090).

six?"[34] [The Karma pa] replied: "O lama, [I] was indeed disenchanted, because there were few who practiced virtue and many who engaged in negative actions."

Further, [he] was asked: "Previously, at the time when [you] had passed to bliss, many saw [your] face on the moon. [35] Did [you] previously show [your] face [on the moon]?" [The Karma pa] replied: "Based on my immeasurable compassion and their faith, many had this vision. It seems, at that time, the Mongols were acting like this." [While saying this, he] knelt down holding [his] hat in [his] left hand. With [his] right index finger, [he] pointed to the moon, drawing the shape of [his] body. Then he sat down on his seat and said, "I am the one who was on the moon, the one who was sitting on the lion, and the one who was sitting on the elephant."

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba][36] related: "When you passed to bliss at dawn on the fourteenth day, rTogs ldan Grags seng ba[37] had a vision in which he saw you [in your previous form] holding a [piece of] agarwood[38] [colored like] white cotton and dwelling in the sky amidst rainbow light, and he asked [you] during [this vision]: 'Looking with compassion upon us disciples, how were you [able to] pass to bliss and not stay [with us]?' You replied: "I had good intentions, but in this degenerate age, the merit of sentient beings is not accomplished. [I] am disenchanted because there are many who engage in negative actions. I am going to Tuṣita.' These words arose [to rTogs ldan Grags seng ba] in his pure vision."

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba now] asked [the Fourth Karma pa]: "Did you say these words [to him]?" [The Karma pa] replied: "This is indeed

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[34] In Western counting, his age would be fifty-five. The Third Karma pa lived from 1284 to 1339.

[35] Tib. *bde bar gshegs pa*, lit. "gone to bliss" is usually an epithet of the Buddha. Here, it is a euphemism for the Karma pa's passing away. Alternatively, *bde ba* might be short for *bde ba can* (Skt. *sukhāvatī*), the pure land of Buddha Amitābha, and thus also a euphemism for his passing away.

[36] In the following text, the Tibetan does not mention the agent who asks the questions explicitly. Hence, it could also just be some random people from the assembly. That is also what Roerich assumed in this translation of the corresponding passage from "The Blue Annals" ("they asked"; Roerich 1959, 495–97). Unlike Roerich, since no new agent is mentioned, I assume that the conversation just continues between rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba and the Karma pa through to the end. This is also supported by the fact that the Karma pa repeatedly (once in CKG and three times in KSP) addresses his conversation partner as "lama" (Tib. *bla ma pa*) which certainly applies to him but not to a random person from the audience.

[37] He can be identified with the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349; BDRC, P70), who was a disciple of the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339).

[38] Tib. *a ga ra* is not lexicalized. However, *a ga ru* and *a ka ru* can be found in dictionaries as "agarwood," a very precious substance.

true, but I had left feeling sad. Furthermore, [I] had pretended to have gone to Tuṣita through illusory emanations such as a thoroughbred horse and an eagle, the king of birds, and through emanations of the body of the pure deities, even though Tuṣita is not far away."

In that [situation], [rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] offered [him] a select portion [of beer] and asked: "Please, drink [it]. Is there [such a] select portion [of beer] in Tuṣita?" [The Karma pa] replied: "No, there is no such intoxicating beer. There is [only] the so-called divine *amṛta*."

Then, in order to dispel the doubts [of] others, [rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] asked a few questions in a joking way: "The divine *amṛta* of black color is said to be good. Is that true?" [The Karma pa] replied: "I have not seen that black *amṛta*. [But I] tasted the various supreme flavors of the white [*amṛta*, which] is like milk."

[He] related: "Furthermore, it is said that the goods which are [usually] offered in our human realm, such as the silk parasols that are [used as] offerings in Tshal gung thang, do not exist in Tuṣita."[39] [The Karma pa] said: "O lama, all desirables of the human realm appear small [compared to Tuṣita]. Each flower in Tuṣita is as large as lKog 'phreng, and there are [more] inconceivable desirables such as these."[40]

[rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba] related: "It is said that [in Tuṣita], there are no rivers like the Yar chab gtsang po,[41] [and] there are no castles like the ones of Kong po gsang[42] and rTa mchog.[43] The reason for this is that it seems there are no good stones like the long stones of our human realm." [The Karma pa] replied: "O lama, all the water in Tuṣita is *amṛta*. It is not like the Yar chab gtsang po in the human realm. There are no such soils and stones in Tuṣita. All the soils and stones are made of jewels. The celestial palace of the Bhagavān

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[39] Tib. *tshal gung thang (dgon)*. "Monastery of the Tshal pa bka' brgyud tradition and the seat of the Tshal pa myriarchy" which was founded in 1187 and destroyed by fire in 1546. It is located close to Lhasa (BDRC: G30).

[40] Tib. *lkog 'phreng*. This is the name of the place where this dialogue takes place (see beginning of the paragraph).

[41] Tib. *yar chab gtsang po* (also known as *yar lung gtsang po*). The largest river on the Tibetan plateau, which eventually descends through India and Bengal to the Indian Ocean, where it is known as Brahmaputra (Phuntshog 1998, 49).

[42] Tib. *kong po gsang*. Literally, it means „secret Kong po," where Kong po is a region in southeastern Tibet (BDRC, G640). However, I could not find any reference to this as a name of a castle or another building.

[43] Tib. *rta mchog*. Literally, it means "supreme horse;" it can also refer to the horse of a *cakravartin* or to Hayagrīva (Tib. *rta mgrin*), the "horse-headed" (Duff 2009, *rta mchog*). However, I could not find any reference to this as a name of a castle or any place. CKG mentions *rtam nyog* as a place instead, which I could not identify either, but the two are very similar and one of them might be a misspelling.

Maitreyanātha, [44] the palace of the Bodhisattva Ratnāmati, [45] the mansion of Complete Victory in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three,[46] and so forth, the celestial palaces of the god realms are made of various jewels. The castles of the human realms appear small [compared to them]."

[He] asked further: "In Tuṣita, are there any good horses like the horses with brass-colored [manes], which [are] supreme horses?" [The Karma pa] replied: "If [you] have no time for the Dharma, [you] are an old monk who has gone astray. Act according to that! [Practice the Dharma!]"

3. Analysis

3.1. Context

To provide the context for the passage to be analyzed in this paper, I will very briefly summarize what happens before based on the KSP (the CKG has the same story line but is shorter and certain scenes are omitted). The life story starts with a short description of the intermediate state (*bar do*) of the Karma pa between his third and fourth incarnation.[47] Then the circumstances of his birth are mentioned such as parents, place, and date. The first few years of his life are covered on about three folios. The text relates various miracles, visions, and prophecies taking pace with his parents and some other people. It also reports several scenes from the Karma pa's travel activities where he meets previous disciples, cures ill people through his blessing, receives offerings, and has some small teaching dialogues. Many of his activities try to evoke trust in his previous disciples. At the age of eight, he finally finds himself in the questions and answers situation to be analyzed below.

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[44] Tib. *bcom ldan 'das byams pa mgon po*. The first part, *bcom ldan 'das*, corresponds to the Sanskrit Bhagavān, which literally means "endowed with fortune," and is one of the standard epithets of a buddha (Buswell and Lopez 2014, 108, *bhagavat*). The second part means Maitreyanātha in Sanskrit or Protector Maitreya in English and is an epithet of the future Buddha Maitreya who is said to dwell in Tuṣita until he takes birth as the fifth Buddha of our eon (ibid., 550–51, *Maitreya, Maitreyanātha*).

[45] Tib. *blo gros rin chen*. Ratnāmati is the name of a bodhisattva who appears in various Mahāyāna *sūtra*s (ibid., 703, Ratnāmati).

[46] Tib. *sum cu rtsa gsum*. Skt. *trāyastriṃśa*. The Heaven of the Thirty-Three is the second-lowest of the six heavens of the desire realm (Skt. Kāmadhātu). It is the realm of Śakra, the king of the gods (ibid., 921–22, *trāyastriṃśa*).

[47] An analysis of this passage is provided in Dell 2024 based on the KSP and CKG.

3.2. *Outline of the Translated Section*

In order to embark on an analysis of the questions and answers session with the Fourth Karma pa about his intermediate state in Tuṣita, first, an outline of the scene, which includes both versions, is provided:

- Invitation to many places and decision to go to lKog ʼphreng (KSP only);
- rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba meets with the Fourth Karma pa in an assembly in lKog ʼphreng; reference to the heat in China;
- Question why the Third Karma pa did not live as long as prophesied;
- Question whether the Karma pa had shown his shape on the moon disc after his passing;
- Question about Togs ldan Grags seng baʼs vision (KSP only);
- Question whether there is beer in Tuṣita;
- Question about the goods for offering in Tuṣita;
- Question about rivers and castles in Tuṣita;
- Question about the horses in Tuṣita.

3.3. *Invitation to lKog ʼphreng*

This first passage is only described in the KSP and is lacking in the CKG. The Fourth Karma pa is described as nine years old, or in Western counting, eight years old.[48] Having received invitations to go to many different Karma bkaʼ brgyud places, he decides to accept the invitation to go to lKog ʼphreng, a great mountain hermitage in Kong po, where his predecessor, Rang byung rdo rje, had spent some time. Hence, the eight-year-old boy is already so highly respected that he decides on his own where he travels next. It is also mentioned that he recognized some belongings of his predecessor, and that they were offered to him. This generates faith in his disciples that he is really the reincarnation of the Third Karma pa. Also, in other places before, it is reported that he identified certain objects. Likewise, what follows

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[48] The CKG does not mention the age in the paragraph dealt with in this paper. However, just after this paragraph, it is mentioned that the Karma pa was seven years old, which is inconsistent with the KSP. However, in this case, one should rather trust the KSP, as it is known, in general, for its chronological organization (Rheingans 2017, 69), while the CKG sometimes deviates from the chronological order in favor of a thematic organization (ibid., 67).

during the dialogue and before can all be seen in the light of dispelling doubts and generating trust that he is really the Karma pa.

3.4. Meeting in lKog 'phreng, Reference to China

While staying at the mountain hermitage of lKog 'phreng, one night there was an assembly with a feast offering. In this situation, the Karma pa is asking a fire to be lit and a fan to be brought. He is fanning himself and equating the experience of heat to the summer in China. This is clearly a reference to his previous incarnation as the Third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje, in which he spent many years at the Mongol court in China, and in particular, he was there during his passing.[49] Thus, again, just like in the previous scene, he implies access to the memories of his predecessor and exhibits the continuation of the Third Karma pa in him with the potential aim of building trust toward him in the audience.

In this scene, also rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba is introduced as the character who asks the questions in the following dialogue. He is mentioned in the *Blue Annals* as one of the four main disciples of the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349).[50] Further details on his life are not provided there. Since in the given situation he is speaking continuously in front of the audience, he is likely to have some official function representing the place of lKog 'phreng. His first question is about what exactly the Karma pa means by his comparison. The Karma pa explains that when it is very hot in China, even if one uses a fan, one will only feel hotter but not cooler. The statement does make sense literally, but it could also be an allusion to the situation he faced at the Mongol court. There, he felt like he was in a gilded cage, and desperately wanted to return to Tibet, but the emperor did not let him.[51] At the risk of overinterpretation, with respect to the image, the "heat" could be equated with the situation being unbearable for him and the "fanning" could symbolize his repeated requests to leave the court that might have made his situation even worse for him.

3.5. Unfulfilled Prophecy about Age of Passing

In the next question, rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba confronts the eight-year-old Karma pa with the fact that in his third incarnation, he only lived until age fifty-six instead of eighty-four as had been prophesied.

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[49]   Gamble 2018, 251–55; Gamble 2020, 104–14. Generally, for the Third Karma pa, see also Seegers 2009 and forthcoming 2024.
[50]   Roerich 1995, 532.
[51]   Gamble 2018, 251.

I was not able to find any record of this prophecy in Gamble's books about the Third Karma pa or elsewhere.[52] Nevertheless, eighty-four is well known as an auspicious number. Most prominently, it appears as the number of *mahāsiddha*s according to the Indian author Abhayadattaśrī,[53] and it is certainly derived from the 84,000 teachings the Buddha is said to have given, representing antidotes to the 84,000 afflictions.[54] The Karma pa's reply to the reproach is that he was disenchanted, because of the few virtuous people and the many who engaged in negative actions. At first, it sounds like general lamentation about our degenerate age, but again, here, it must be seen against the backdrop of his passing. It thus relates to much more specific circumstances. As pointed out in the previous paragraph, he was discontent with his situation at the Mongol court and wanted to leave for Tibet, which the emperor denied. According to Gamble, his biographers report that already some years before his death, he made a prophecy to his students that he would soon die and even gave hints concerning his future place of birth.[55] It is even said that this was a chance for the emperor to understand how important it was for Rang byung rdo rje to leave, but even after repeated requests following the prophecy, he did not let him go. Consequently, he soon fell ill and left his body at the age of fifty-six, as an opportunity to leave the unwholesome circumstances and be more beneficial elsewhere in his next life.[56] Thus, his excuse for not having lived longer due to too many non-virtuous actions around him specifically referred to the circumstances at the Mongol court.

3.6. *The Karma pa's Shape on the Moon Disc*

The next question follows along these lines and again alludes to events after his passing at the Mongol court. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba asks the Karma pa about a vision that many people reportedly had: seeing the Karma pa's body on the moon disc after his passing. He wanted to know if that was caused by the Karma pa. This vision is also described in Gamble's book: Fifteen days after his death, the palace guards waiting outside the gates of Xanadu saw the complete body and a *stūpa* on the moon disc. As the image persisted, they woke up the minister to have an authoritative witness of their vision.[57] Gamble also points out that the image of the moon was evoked repeatedly throughout his

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[52] Gamble 2018 and 2020.
[53] Buswell and Lopez 2014, 508.
[54] Ibid., 668.
[55] Gamble 2018, 254.
[56] Ibid., 255.
[57] Ibid.

life story.[58] For instance, at the description of his birth, Rang byung rdo je reports that right after his birth he saw the moon, which made him happy.[59]

The Karma pa confirms that many people had this vision due to his compassion and their faith. He also assumed the posture taken by the Mongols when they saw this vision (kneeling down, pointing to the moon and drawing the shape of his body with the index finger). The mention of the Mongols here is only comprehensible when one knows the circumstances of his death and the ensuing vision from other sources, as portrayed above. When only looking at the KSP (and even more so at the CKG, where the description is even shorter), it seems a bit out of context, but given the background, it is not.

As for the moon disc, according to Beer, especially when used in depictions with a meditational deity sitting on it, it represents relative or conventional *bodhicitta*, which "refers to the altruistic resolve to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings."[60] The Third Karma pa leaves his body and the Mongol court with the resolve to be more beneficial for beings, and then at the end of his life story is seen on the moon disc which represents exactly this. And there is even an interesting continuity with the beginning of the Fourth Karma pa's life story, since there he is portrayed as sitting on a moon disc looking at the world from a pure or celestial realm.[61] Hence, it is just the same situation from another perspective. Furthermore, together with the Karma pa's shape, the Mongols witness the shape of a *stūpa*. It is not mentioned in the passage translated in this paper, but in Gamble's book cited above.[62] The *stūpa* symbolizes the Buddha's enlightened mind. This fits with the Karma pa's destination when he is seen on the moon. He is on his way to Tuṣita, the heavenly realm where the Buddhas-to-be dwell before their final rebirth. The Karma pa is designated the sixth buddha of our eon.[63] Hence, he can be seen as having the enlightened mind of a buddha.

The Karma pa adds that he was not only the one on the moon, but he was also the one riding the lion and the elephant. Gamble mentions that there were other reported visions after the Third Karma pa's death where yogis saw him flying through the sky, travelling to Tuṣita, and the like.[64] She does not go into any details, but possibly in some of

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58   Ibid. and Gamble 2020, 47.
59   Ibid., 45, 47.
60   Beer 1999, 38.
61   Dell 2024, 86, 87.
62   Gamble 2018, 255.
63   Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé 2010, 349: "The future sixth buddha, Lion's Roar, in the guise of a bodhisattva, appears as the Karmapas."
64   Gamble 2018, 256.

those visions the Karma pa was seen riding on a lion or an elephant. The lion is regarded the king of all animals and is a symbol of Buddha Śakyamuni, who is also known as Śakyasiṃha, "the lion of the Śakya clan."[65] In Tibet, the Indian lion turned into the mythological snow-lion, who carries a similar symbolism. [66] Beer holds that "iconographically [the snow-lion's] most important function is to serve as the vehicles or throne supports for enlightened beings."[67] As for the symbolism of the elephant, Beer states: "The elephant is one of the seven possessions of the *chakravartin*. It is both the most gentle and powerful of creatures, representing the endurance, self-control, patience, gentleness, and power of the Buddha."[68] According to him, it is a mount of many Vajrayana Buddhist deities, and especially associated with the blue Buddha Akṣobhya, "the immovable one," whose qualities are symbolized by those of the elephant.[69] Hence, both animals—lion and elephant—are related to different qualities of a Buddha and thus are appropriate mounts for the Karma pa on his way to Tuṣita, the residence of buddhas-to-be.

3.7. rTogs ldan Grags seng ba's Vision

rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba relates a vision of his main teacher,[70] Togs ldan Grags seng ba, who can be identified with the First Zhwa dmar pa, rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge (1283–1349), a disciple of the Third Karma pa.[71] In this vision, which happened right after the passing of the Third Karma pa, the First Zhwa dmar pa saw him in the sky surrounded by rainbow light and holding a piece of agarwood, and then he asked him how he was able to abandon his disciples.

The rainbow the Karma pa is surrounded by is an auspicious sign *par excellence*, even when related to the passing of a great master, which is often the case.[72] It is used in the life story of the Buddha to mark auspicious events. The agarwood that the Karma pa holds in his hand, also known as eaglewood or aloewood, is one of the most precious woods in the world, known to many cultures and often used for

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[65] Beer 1999, 78.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 80.
[68] Ibid., 82.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Roerich 1995, 532.
[71] For a summary of rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge's life, see Gardner 2009. The title of Zhwa dmar pa was only awarded to him posthumously, probably at the time of the Fifth Karma pa.
[72] Beer 1999, 31.

incense and the like due to its unique complex odor.[73] The agarwood is described in the KSP as having the color of white cotton. Indeed, Tibetan medicine recognizes three types of agarwood: black (*ar nag*), white (*ar skya*) and red (*ar mar*).[74] Hence, the text might refer to the white agarwood. Generally, agarwood is used to cure "fever and particularly heart fever" and other diseases caused by heat.[75] As for the symbolism, agarwood is a very precious substance and therefore an adequate accessory of the Karma pa. Apart from that—and at the risk of overinterpretation—it could also refer to the Karma pa's cremation[76] and in some sense be a cure for the heat of this event. However, given that the text previously describes the simile of the summer heat in China where fanning makes it worse, and assuming that this possibly stands for the unbearable situation at the Mongol court where the Karma pa could not move out of the gilded cage, the agarwood in his hand might also represent a cure for this kind of heat, which is now cured with his passing.[77]

Upon rTogs ldan Graps pa sengge's question about how he was able to abandon his disciples, the Third Karma pa replied in the vision that he had good intentions, but that he was not able to benefit beings due to this degenerate age and since many engage in negative actions, and that therefore he was going to Tuṣita. This is very much in accord with what the Fourth Karma pa said earlier in this dialogue when asked about his untimely death.

Confronted with this vision by rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba, the Fourth Karma pa confirms that he had indeed said these words, but

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[73] For the cultural history of agarwood in Asia, see Jung 2016; its use in Tibet is also mentioned by Beer 1999, 50.

[74] Dunkenberger 2019, 73.

[75] Rechung Rinpoche Jampal Kunzang 1976, 70, 174, 239.

[76] Gamble 2018, 255.

[77] There is evidence that the word from the original source in that place did not make much sense to the later Tibetans either. At least, the KSP and the Blue Annals have different readings here. The KSP reads *ras dkar po'i a ga ra zhig bsnams nas*, which I rendered as "holding a [piece of] agarwood [colored like] white cotton" (SX1, vol. 11, 165r, l. 4). In contrast, the "Blue Annals," where we find a parallel description of this passage, read *ras dkar po'i ang rag bsnams nas* ('Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal 1974, vol. *nya*, fol. 41r, l. 7 (p. 431)), which Roerich translated as "wearing a white loin-cloth" (Roerich 1995, 496). The presumably original life story of the Fourth Karma pa written by the Second Zhwa dmar pa has yet another reading: *ras dkar po'i am ga rag gcig mnabs nas* (mKha' spyod dbang po 2013, fol. 10r, l. 3), which is difficult to make sense of. I only have access to this text in the form of the modern type-set edition by dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, which can in itself contain typos and miscorrections compared to the text they copied it from. In the end, it is possible that no agarwood is involved at all, but that he is just wearing some kind of white cotton clothing. Nevertheless, since in this paper I am concerned with the KSP as a source text, I go with its reading and my interpretation of it.

stresses that he had left with a sad feeling. He adds that on his way to Tuṣita, he had shown himself in illusory forms such as a thoroughbred horse, an eagle, and the body of deities, even though Tuṣita was not far away. Hence, the Fourth Karma pa is pointing to further auspicious forms in which he has shown himself to his disciples on his way to Tuṣita, even though Tuṣita is not a place that can be reached by travelling a worldly distance, but rather through a state of mind attained in meditation. The forms he mentions he has shown himself in on his way to Tuṣita add to the forms he mentioned earlier as having shown himself riding on (lion, elephant) and represent certain qualities. The horse mainly stands for "inexhaustible speed" but is also related to the element of wind.[78] The eagle, who has the apposition of "the king of birds" in the text at hand, is an auspicious sign often related to cremations of realized masters, similarly to rainbows.[79] The forms of the deities represent the destination the Karma pa is heading for after his passing, i.e., the pure realms or the celestial realm of Tuṣita.

The entire passage about the vision is only contained in the KSP. In the CKG, it is distorted to the single sentence: "Tuṣita is not far away." This sentence is then moved to the section about the moon and appears a bit out of context.

3.8. Beer in Tuṣita

This passage appears both in the KSP and the CKG, though it is a bit shorter in the latter. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba offers beer to the Karma pa and asks if there is also something like that in Tuṣita. The Karma pa replies that there is no such intoxicant, but that there is the divine *amṛta*. Being asked about black *amṛta*, he has not seen it, but praises the white *amṛta*, which is like milk and has various supreme flavors.

The notion of *amṛta* (Sanskrit for "immortal"), the nectar of immortality, originates from the ancient Indian Vedic legend of the churning of the ocean, which later became absorbed into Buddhism.[80] To cut the story short: Both *deva*s and *asura*s desired the *amṛta* which was hidden in the ocean. They cooperated to churn the ocean, through which its water first turned into milk and then into *amṛta*. Both sides quarreled to obtain the *amṛta* exclusively and in the end the *deva*s won and kept the *amṛta*.[81] Tuṣita is one of the heavens of the Kāmadhātu, the Desire Realm, where *deva*s dwell. Since the *deva*s are in possession

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[78]   Beer 1999, 161, 110.
[79]   Ibid., 32.
[80]   Ibid., 109.
[81]   For a more extended version of the story, see ibid., 109–10.

of the *amṛta*, it is found there. The description in the KSP and CKG says that the question about the black *amṛta* was asked jokingly in order to dispel the doubts of others. Certainly, it was common knowledge among the audience that *amṛta* is white and not black. In that sense, rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba might have used the question to test the Karma pa. And indeed, his reply indicates that he has witnessed the white *amṛta* in Tuṣita and that he speaks out of experience. Consequently, the reply serves to generate trust in his devotees, though it is in no way a proof of him having been to Tuṣita. If the facts about the *amṛta* were common knowledge to the audience, they might also have been known to the eight-year-old Karma pa.

3.9. *Offering Goods in Tuṣita*

The following questions are asked in the same joking, not quite serious mood. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba wants to know if there is anything in Tuṣita like the silk parasols used for offerings in Tshal gung thang. The Karma pa replies that all desirables of the human realm appear small compared to Tuṣita and that, for instance, flowers in Tuṣita are as large as lKog 'phreng, i.e., the place where this dialogue takes place. There is no significant difference in content and length of this passage in the KSP and the CKG. The parasol "is a traditional Indian symbol of both protection and royalty. [The] coolness of its shade symbolizes protection from the heat of suffering, desire, obstacles, illnesses, and harmful forces."[82] However, here, the symbolism seems not overly important. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba just asks a somewhat stupid question to play with the Karma pa, who replies simply pointing to the overabundance found in Tuṣita.

3.10.   *Rivers and Castles in Tuṣita*

The series of joking questions continues. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba asks if there is anything like the Tibetan part of the river Brahmaputra and some presumably magnificent Tibetan castles in Tuṣita. The Karma pa replies that all water in Tuṣita is *amṛta* and that there are only jewels, of which the palaces are made instead of soils and stones. In the KSP, he additionally mentions some examples of celestial palaces such as those of Maitreya and Ratnāmati.

Again, it seems the specific symbolism of the objects asked about is not very important. The Karma pa just replies again pointing to the

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[82]   Ibid., 176.

overabundance and splendor found in Tuṣita compared to the human realm.

3.11. *Horses in Tuṣita*

This is the fourth "stupid" question to the eight-year-old Karma pa. rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba asks about good horses in Tuṣita. The Karma pa does not reply to the question, but instead he stops this game of irrelevant questions, telling him that he should not spend his precious time on meaningless considerations, but rather practice the Dharma. This situation reminds one of the parable of the poisoned arrow. Māluṅkyaputta asked the Buddha all kinds of metaphysical questions, whereupon the Buddha told him this parable. If a man was hit by a poisoned arrow and he refused to take out the arrow before he found out all sorts of details about the person who shot it and about the making of the arrow, etc., then he would die and still not have answers to his questions. It is more important to remove the poisoned arrow first. In the same way, Māluṅkyaputta's metaphysical questions do not make him progress on the way to liberation and enlightenment. The answers would be irrelevant for his progress.[83] In a similar way, the Karma pa—after kindly playing along for some time—stops the useless questions about Tuṣita. In this sense, his inclination to turn the focus of his disciples toward the Dharma might be a better proof of him being a high bodhisattva or a buddha, than his knowledge of details of Tuṣita. At least, acting in this way, he is completely in line with the Buddha's example.

The way the Karma pa stops the dialogue might seem a bit rough. Rheingans, who comes across a somewhat comparable example of "surprisingly strong" language in a dialogue between the Eighth Karma pa and his attendant, holds that "the use of straightforward language in communicating with a student can, the more so in traditions of guru-devotion, express the strong bond between guru and disciple."[84] Accordingly, the directness can be seen as an expression of humor, and the fact that the student is able to endure it shows his devotion and close relationship to the Karma pa.

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[83] For the full story, see *sutta* 63 in the Majjhima Nikāya section of the Pāli canon, e.g., in translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu n.d.

[84] Rheingans 2014, 84. He also points to other situations known from the early bKa' brgyud masters such as Mar pa and Mi la ras pa, where there are even more rough stories.

4. *Conclusion*

The core of the article is the annotated translation from the *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (CKG) and the *Kaṃ tshang bka' brgyud gser 'phreng* (KSP), together with the analysis of the dialogue between rTogs ldan mGon rgyal ba and the Fourth Karma pa about the passing of the Third Karma pa and his subsequent sojourn in Tuṣita. The analysis tried to decipher and explain the dialogue by putting it into context. To this end, the background of Vajrayāna and its symbolism was considered, as well as the historical context, particularly with respect to the Third Karma pa's stay at the Mongol court toward the end of his life, to which the dialogue had many allusions.

The first part of the dialogue was mainly concerned with clarifying doubts related to the Third Karma pa's untimely death, upon which his students had felt somewhat abandoned. This involved collective visions (his shape on the moon), as well as an indirectly reported personal vision by the First Zhwa dmar pa, which, interestingly, consisted of a short dialogue embedded in the main dialogue. The Fourth Karma pa tried to explain himself and thus re-establish the students' trust.

In the second part, the dialogue turns to a number of joking questions being asked about Tuṣita, supposedly (as the text states) to dispel doubts in the audience. The Karma pa plays along for some time and provides intelligent answers to these questions, which imply that he has witnessed these different aspects of Tuṣita himself. In this way, this could indeed be considered a proper means to dispel doubts and generate trust. It might have played a role here that the Karma pa was only eight years old. Asking the same questions to a grown-up Karma pa might have been more embarrassing, while here it seemed admissible. Nevertheless, at some point he abruptly stops the interrogation and asks the inquirer to rather use his time to practice the Dharma than to bother about such possibly irrelevant questions. This both aligns him with the Buddha (thinking of the parable of the poisoned arrow) and expresses the strong bond between student and teacher (by knowing the student is able to endure the somewhat harsh reaction).

Looking at the greater context of the story, the visit to lKog 'phreng, where this dialogue takes place, lines up with previous passages where the Karma pa also visited different places, met students of his previous incarnation, and re-established their trust though various situations such as curing diseases through blessing and the like. This again fits into the even greater picture of the function of *rnam thar*, which is to portray the qualities of a realized master, showing his

"complete liberation" and thus generate or foster devotion in the readers or disciples.

Research about accounts of the intermediate state (*bar do'i rnam thar*) of realized masters is still in its infancy.[85] Those accounts are usually recounted by a first-person or omniscient third-person narrator. The paper at hand adds another format—that of a dialogue. The shift of perspective and the interactive element is refreshing, and literally and figuratively brings such accounts more down to earth. Whether it is really a record of an oral dialogue that happened this way, or if it rather contains fictional elements employed to serve a didactic purpose, is certainly up for discussion. Likewise, the question of what role this dialogue plays in the further unfolding of the Fourth Karma pa's rnam thar might be answered by future research. I only came across one other mention of a dialogue about Tuṣita.[86] It might be worthwhile to undertake a survey of such texts and compare them. To this end, the application of a narrative analysis might be useful.[87]

As for the sources used for this paper, the fact that the description in the later KSP is more extensive than in the earlier CKG suggests that the KSP has not (or not only) drawn from the CKG, but that there must be an earlier source known to both authors. There is a *rnam thar* of the Fourth Karma pa consisting of sixty-one folios authored by his contemporary and student, the Second Zhwa dmar pa, mKha' spyod dbang po (1350–1405).[88] There are grounds to conjecture that both later sources drew from this text, but to confirm this remains a task for future research and goes beyond the scope of this paper.

5. Appendix: Edition

5.1. Edition of the Passage from the CKG

An extensive overview of the extant textual witnesses of the CKG was provided by me in an earlier publication, and I will use the same sigla in the paper at hand.[89] All witnesses are derived from just one set of printing blocks—the lHo brag printing blocks. There are several textual witnesses of the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, of which the most interesting and original one is a reproduction of prints from the lHo

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[85] First contributions are found in Gamble 2020, 121–27; Dell 2024; Dell 2020, 48–51; Verhufen 1992, 75–77.

[86] Rheingans 2014, 86.

[87] For an example of a study that applies narratology to a similar text, see Rheingans 2014.

[88] For the person, see BDRC, P1413; for the Tibetan text, see mKha' spyod dbang po 2013.

[89] Dell 2021, 126–41.

brag blocks from Rumtek Monastery in two volumes from 1980 (PX1). This reproduction is also available via BDRC, and I took this as the starting point for the edition provided here. There are several other prints or reproductions of prints from those printing blocks available. However, as they are all produced from the same printing blocks, I do not expect any added value from considering them, and therefore, I neglected them for the edition. All other textual witnesses are derived from these printing blocks' text more recently.

Apart from the mentioned block print reproduction, I used only one of the contemporary editions, i.e., rDor je rgyal po's modern edition in book format, which was published by Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, first in 1986 in two volumes (PB2). It is also available via BDRC. The added value of rDo rje rgyal po's edition is that in many places it corrects spelling mistakes or non-standard spellings from the original block print. If there are differences, they are indicated in the apparatus. Generally, there are no significant differences in the section I studied.

[PX1, vol. 2, p. 100, l. 7; PB2, p. 952, l. 8] *rtogs ldan mgon rgyal bas mjal* [PX1, vol. 2, p. 101] *te[90] tshogs gral du me bus pas tshad pa tsha nas gsil yab kyis g.yabs pas rgya yul gyi dbyar sos kyi tshad pa dang 'dra bar gsil yab g.yabs kyang tsha 'ub 'ub byed gsungs[91]*/

khong gis dgung lo brgyad bcu rtsa bzhir bzhugs par zhal bzhes yod pa la lnga bcu rtsa drug las mi bzhugs pa ci lags zhus pas/ sdig spyod grangs mang bas[92] skyo ba skyes pa yin gsungs[93]/

rtogs ldan grags seng bas dga' ldan du gshegs par gzigs 'dug pa dang zla ba'i steng na bzhugs par mang pos mthong 'dug pa de ltar lags sam zhus pas/ de yang yin/ de dus hor rnams 'di ltar byed kyi 'dug gsung pus btsugs zla ba ston pa'i rnam 'gyur mdzad/

lar dga' ldan thag ring po na med/ zla ba'i steng na 'dug pa dang seng ge dang glang po'i steng na 'dug pa sogs de thams cad nga yin gsungs[94]/

yang co 'dri zhus te/ dga' ldan na chang yod dam zhus pas/ myos byed 'di med/ lha'i bdud rtsi yod gsungs[95]/

bdud rtsi nag po bzang zer ba bden nam zhus pas/ bdud rtsi nag po ma mthong dkar po 'o ma 'dra ba la ro brgya dang ldan pa yin gsungs[96]/

tshal gung thang gi dar gdugs lta bu mang[97] mchi zhus pas/ bla ma pa mi yul gyi 'dod yon kun g.yas chung/

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dga' ldan gyi me tog re yang lkog⁹⁸ phreng du mi shong ba yod gsungs⁹⁹/
yar gtsang lta bu'i chu chen po med mchi [PB2, p. 953] *rtam nyog gi*
mkhar khang 'dra ba yang med dam¹⁰⁰ zhus pas/ dga' ldan na chu thams cad
bdud rtsi yin/ mkhar khang thams cad rin po che 'ba' zhig las sa rdo phal pa
med gsungs¹⁰¹/
rtam nyog gi rta rag pa 'dra ba mchis sam zhus pas /chos la dus tshod med
na ban rgan 'chal ba yin/ de tsam la mdzod gsungs¹⁰²/

5.2. Edition of the Passage from the KSP

An overview of the different textual witnesses of the KSP was
provided by me in an earlier publication, and I will use the same sigla
in the paper at hand.¹⁰³ There is only one set of printing blocks.
Consequently, one of their reprints is used below (SX1), which forms
volumes 11 and 12 of the collected works of Si tu Chos kyi 'byung gnas.
In addition, one of the modern editions is used for the reader's
convenience (SB3). In the paragraph at hand, there were no differences
in spelling, and I emended only one place name to the standard
spelling. In the edition below, the page numbers of both texts are
indicated in brackets, if a new page starts.

[SX1, vol. 11, 164v, l. 3; SB3, p. 387, l. 21] *dgung lo dgu bzhes pa'i sa byi*
lo 'dir tshal pas ja 'dren phul ba sogs mdo dbus kyi mi chen kun gyi ja zhus
dang 'bul nod 'byor/
mtshur phu/ karma/ nags phu/ ba yo lkog 'phreng ba sogs gdan 'dren pa
mang [SB3, p. 388] *po kha ma 'chams pas/ chos rje'i zhal nas da res lkog*
'phreng du 'gro gsungs nas lkog 'phreng du pheb 'bul nod bsnyen bkur dpag
med byas/ chos dung phyag dpe lha rten sogs gong ma'i dus kyi rnams ngos
'dzin mdzad pas thams cad phyag tu phul/
lkog 'phreng gi ri khrod stag khrom du bzhugs pa'i dus su/ nub cig tshogs
mchod kyi gral du me chen po bus gsungs nas bus pa la/ tshad pa tsha bsil yab
de khyer la shog gsungs nas/ bsil yab phul bas g.yab par mdzad cing / rgya
yul dbyar sos kyi tshad pa dang 'dra bar 'dug gsung ba la/ rtogs ldan mgon
rgyal bas de ji ltar lags zhus pas/ rgya yul gyi tshad pa tsha dus bsil yab kyis
g.yab kyang tsha 'ub 'ub byed pa las bsil ba'i snang ba ye med/ de bzhin du
'dir yang tsha 'ub 'ub byed gsungs/

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⁹⁸   *lkog* PX1] *lkob* PB2
⁹⁹   *gsungs* PB2] *gsung* PX1
¹⁰⁰ *dam* PB2] *tam* PX1
¹⁰¹ *gsungs* PB2] *gsung* PX1
¹⁰² *gsungs* PB2] *gsung* PX1
¹⁰³ Dell 2023, 21–29.

yang rtogs ldan mgon rgyal bas/ drung nas dgung lo brgyad cu rtsa bzhi bzhugs pa'i lung bstan yod [SX1, vol. 11, 165r] *pa la lnga bcu rtsa drug las mi bzhugs pa ci lags zhus pas/ bla ma pa/ dge ba spyod pa nyung zhing sdig pa spyod pa mang bas skyo ba skyes pa yin mod gsungs/*

yang drung nas bde bar gshegs pa'i dus su zla ba'i steng nas zhal mthong ba mang po byung 'dug pa drung nas zhal bstan pa lags sam zhus pas/ nged kyi tshad med pa'i snying rje dang khong rang rnams kyi dad pa la brten nas mthong ba mang po byung 'dug

/de'i tshe hor sog rnams 'di bzhin byed kyin gda' gsungs nas/ dbu zhwa phyag g.yon du bzung/ pus mo btsugs/ g.yas pa'i mdzub mos zla ba ston cing sku lus kyi rnam 'gyur yang mdzad do/

/de nas bzhugs gdan la bzhugs te/ zla ba'i steng na 'dug pa yang nga yin/ seng ge'i steng na 'dug pa yang nga yin/ glang po che'i steng na 'dug pa yang nga yin gsungs/

yang drung nas bde bar gshegs pa'i bcu bzhi'i tho rangs kha/ rtogs ldan [SB3, p. 389] *grags seng pa'i gzigs snang la/ drung nyid ras dkar po'i a ga ra zhig bsnams nas 'ja' 'od kyi nang na nam mkha' la bzhugs par mthong ba la khong gis zhus te/ drung nas nged bu slob rnams la thugs rjes gzigs nas mi bzhugs par/ bde bar gshegs pa ji ltar lags zhus pas/ drung gi zhal nas/ nga la bsam pa bzang po yod kyang/ snyigs dus sems can gyi bsod nams la mi 'grub par 'dug /sdig spyod grangs mang bas skyo ba skyes pa yin/*

da dga' ldan du 'gro gsungs pa zhig khong gi dag snang la byung 'dug pa/ drung nas de skad gsungs pa lags sam zhus pas/ de ltar yin mod/ nged skyo ba skyes nas song ba yin/ gzhan yang cang shes kyi rta dang / bya rgyal rgod po la sogs sgyu ma'i sprul bsgyur dang / dag pa lha sku'i sprul bsgyur la sogs pas/ dga' ldan du phyin pa'i tshul yang byas/ lar dga' ldan de thag ring po zhig na yod pa ma yin gsungs/

der phud cig [SX1, vol. 11, 165v] *drang ste/ mchod par zhu dga' ldan na phud yod lags sam zhus pas myos byed kyi chang 'di med/ lha'i bdud rtsi bya ba yod gsungs/*

de nas gzhan dag the tshom bsal ba'i phyir/ co 'dri'i zhu phod cung zhig zhus te/ lha'i bdud rtsi kha dog nag po de bzang zer bar 'dug pa de ltar lags sam zhus pas/ bdud rtsi nag po'an de ngas ma mthong / kha dog dkar po 'o ma lta bu la ro mchog sna tshogs bro ba yin gsungs/

yang dga' ldan na rang re mi yul gyi mchod pa'i yo byad tshal gung thang[104] *gi mchod pa'i dar gdugs la sogs pa de lta bu med mchi zhes zhus pas/ bla ma pa mi yul gyi 'dod yon kun g.yas chung / dga' ldan gyi me tog re re la yang lkog 'phreng tsam yod cing/ de la sogs pa'i 'dod yon bsam gyis mi khyab pa yod pa yin gsungs/*

yang rang re mi yul gyi yar chab gtsang po tsam gyi chu yang med/ kong po [SB3, p. 390] *gsang dang rta mchog gi mkhar khang 'dra ba yang med zer/*

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[104] *tshal gung thang* em.] *mtshal gung thang* SX1, SB3

de'i rgyu mtshan rang re mi yul gyi sgyed rdo ring mo can 'di 'dra ba'i rdo legs po yang med pa 'dra zhus pas/

bla ma pa/ dga' ldan gyi chu thams cad bdud rtsi yin/ mi yul gyi yar chab gtsang po 'dra ba ma yin/ dga' ldan na sa rdo 'di 'dra ba med/ sa rdo thams cad rin po che sna tshogs las grub pa yin/ bcom ldan 'das byams pa mgon po'i gzhal yas khang ngam/ byang chub sems dpa' blo gros rin chen gyi pho brang ngam/ sum cu rtsa gsum na rnam par rgyal ba'i khang bzang la sogs pa lha'i yul gyi gzhal med khang rnams rin po che sna tshogs las grub pa yin/ mi yul gyi mkhar khang 'dra ba g.yas chung gsungs/

yang dga' ldan na rta mchog gi rta rag pa 'dra ba'i rta bzang po yod dam zhus pas/ chos la dus tshod med na ban rgan 'chal pa yin/de la mdzod gsungs/

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❖

Unfrozen Dragon: National Ethos and Identity in Bhutan as Constructed in Musical Performances at National Ceremonies

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enerally, from outsiders' perspective, Bhutan's image is that of a land of Buddhist spirituality and happiness. In Bhutan's Dzong (རྫོང་)[1] and monasteries, I heard the traditional ritual music of Buddhism; on the roads, I saw some people wearing *gho* (བགོ་)[2] and *kira* (དཀྱིར་), the national Bhutanese dress; and in bookstores, I bought books written in Dzongkha (རྫོང་ཁ་), Bhutan's official language. However, I rode in the hotel's elevator in Paro, I heard piped-in music by Kenny G. That is *Dying Young*. In a pub, a Bhutanese singer sang *What's Up* with the Western tourists singing along. On television, I heard a song sung in Dzongkha, but the melody was the same as *Gangnam Style*, the Korean pop hit. While Buddhist tradition and spirituality are an important part of the ethos of Bhutan today, its people have also embraced elements from cultures around the world.

In the seventeenth century, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (ཞབས་དྲུང་ ངག་དབང་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ 1594-1651), who belonged to the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud (འབྲུག་ པ་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་) sect, came from Tibet and unified the area in the seventeenth century. In 1907, a constitutional monarchy was established to rule the country. It was unavoidable that Tibetan religious and secular culture should influence Bhutan's culture in historical and social contexts; interaction with neighboring countries, immigration, and globalization have also played a part.

However, Bhutan's rulers have always tried to distinguish Bhutan from Tibet and made efforts to construct a clear identity for the Bhutanese nation-state. One strategy has been to rely on cultural events that assert "Bhutanness" to build that identity in multiple dimensions.

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[1] A religious and administrative institute.
[2] In English literatures, the terms in Dzongkha might be transcribed according to their pronunciation or in Wylie transliteration. If the terms are used to being transcribed based on the pronunciation, the terms in this article are written in this way and followed by Dzongkha. If not, the terms are transcribed in Wylie transliteration or translated and followed by Dzongkha.

This article focuses on musical culture and performance during national ceremonies to present the multi-layered ethos of Bhutan. It also considers how the strategy of using performance to construct the national identity connects historical past and the anticipated future.

Historical context

The names of Bhutan represent the perspective of the originally Tibetan cultural center. Aside from generic descriptors the names, such as "land of medicine" (སྨན་ལྗོངས་) and "Land bestrewn with cypress" (ཤུག་དན་བཀོད་པའི་ལྗོངས་) based on local natural resources, "dark area" (མོན་ཡུལ་) refers to a region covering parts of modern Bhutan, but also parts of surrounding countries. It has been suggested that "Mon" (མོན་) is derived from "mun", which means darkness. The inhabitants of this region were uneducated and considered opposite to the people with Buddhist wisdom who lived in central Tibet. The region was also known as "Lho mon" (ལྷོ་མོན་), which means South darkness. Another name, "Lho mon kha bZhi" (ལྷོ་མོན་ཁ་བཞི་) references four entrances of the South Mon region (Karma Phuntsho 2013: 2-8). Although the exact locations of the four corners are not always agreed upon, this version of the name represents the concept of the geographical unity as understood at that time. Clearly, the term "south" indicated that Bhutan was the south of Tibet. These names all point to a view that held Tibet to be central.

Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal unified the area in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth century, Bhutan had gradually become known as "Land of dragon" (འབྲུག་ཡུལ་) (Karma Phuntsho 2013: 10-11). "Dragon" (འབྲུག) is the first character of 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud. Even today, this name is still used by Bhutanese themselves, and a dragon is the figure on Bhutan's national flag. This name represents Bhutanese identity via both religious lineage and the importance of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. It has been suggested that the first Europeans to Bhutan in the seventeenth century considered Tibet and Bhutan to be different, but Europeans generally called the whole region Tibet without distinguishing Bhutan. In the eighteenth century, George Bogle and a British mission visited Bhutan and Tibet, and Bogle made a distinction between the two, referring to Bhutan as "Boutan". Although there were several sayings on the origin of the name, the name "Bhutan" is mainly regarded as derived from "Bod" (བོད་, Tibet) (Karma Phuntsho 2013: 11-14). At this point in time, Bhutan was usually strongly associated with Tibet.

Due to the scarcity of local literature and historical records, information on Bhutan's early history is usually derived from Buddhist narratives. One of these claims that Jampa Lhakhang (བྱམས་པ་ལྷ་ཁང་) and

Kyerchu Lhakhang (སྐྱེར་ཆུ་ལྷ་ཁང་), two important monasteries, were built by Srong bTsan sGam Po (སྲོང་བཙན་སྒམ་པོ་ 618-650), a Tibetan king. Padmasambhava (པདྨ་འབྱུང་གནས།), Buddhist master of rNying ma (རྙིང་མ་) sect, once visited the region. His representative legend is flying on the Taktsang (སྟག་ཚང་) in Paro, an important local monument. Longchenpa (ཀློང་ཆེན་པ་ 1308-64), a Tibetan master, once travelled to Bhutan, and Pema Lingpa (པདྨ་གླིང་པ་ 1450-1521), a local treasure texts' revealer (གཏེར་སྟོན་) [3] claimed to be an incarnation of Longchenpa. Other sects were also apparently active in Bhutan. It is said that Mi la ras pa (མི་ལ་རས་པ་ 1040-1123), the master of bKa' brgyud sect, had been to Takstang and transmitted doctrines. A special figure, Thangtong Gyalpo (ཐང་སྟོང་རྒྱལ་པོ་ 1385-1464/85?), a Buddhist monk, architect, and artist, may have visited Bhutan on three different occasions. In addition to creating Tibetan drama, this monk is famed for building iron-chain bridges across the Himalayas. (Karma Phuntsho 2013: 30, 76, 91-92, 108, 136-137, 177-178). These accounts relate the many religious and cultural connections between Bhutan and Tibet. Nowadays, religious monuments, such as the Taktsang in Paro, are famous sites visited by practicing Buddhists and tourists alike. The paintings of Mi la ras pa on the walls inside Paro Dzong and an iron chain left by Thangtong Gyalpo, exhibited in the National Museum in Paro, also point to the strong relationship with Tibet. The ethos of Tibetan Buddhism has been deeply embedded in Bhutanese culture. In the historical and current narratives and exhibitions in local monuments, Bhutan's history is always traced back to these most ancient Buddhist masters.

In addition to the institutions of Tibetan Buddhism, secular power also had influenced in Bhutan even today. Powerful heads of local families (གདུང་) and clans functioning as landlords had governed regionally before unification (Karma Phuntsho 2013: 120-121). The religious power of 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud sect extended across western Bhutan, and its early patrons provided a powerful and supportive foundation for success of the country's eventual unification.

Because of the argument on the double incarnations of Pema Karpo (པདྨ་དཀར་པོ་ 1527-1592), a scholar, saint, and the head of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud sect, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal accepted an invitation from the monastic community in Bhutan and left Tibet. With support of both the religious and secular powers, he founded "Chos-Srid" (ཆོས་སྲིད་), a dual system that coordinated religious and secular authority. Je Khenpo (རྗེ་མཁན་པོ་) was responsible for religious affairs, and the Druk

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[3]   It is claimed that revealers discovered the treasure texts buried by Padmasambhava.

Desid (འབྲུག་སྡེ་སྲིད་) was charged with secular administration. However, Tibetan and Mongolian armies invaded Bhutan several times after unification, and once the great leader Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal had passed away, internal fighting over leadership lasted at least for 150 years (Lyonpo Om Pradhan 2017: 64-65, 75, 77). In 1907, Ugyen Wangchuk (ཨོ་རྒྱན་དབང་ཕྱུག་ 1862-1926), established the monarchy and became the first king. The position of king replaced the political leadership of the incarnation of Zhabdrung and the Desid. Je Khenpo remains responsible for religious affairs.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, to support the interests of the British East India Company, the British army launched wars against Bhutan. With the signing of documents and treaties after the fighting was over, Bhutan lost control over the economy of several areas, such as Assam, and was force to pay Britain. At the beginning of twentieth century, the British army invaded Tibet. Bhutan's king Ugyen Wangchuk negotiated between Britain and Tibet, strengthening his country's relationship with Britain. When the Indian government took over from Britain, Bhutan chose to ally itself with the Indian side over fears of invasion by China. From a cultural perspective, the clear difference between India and Bhutan made Bhutan feel safe. And because the Chinese government claimed ownership of Tibet, Bhutan did not wish to be regarded as part of Tibet and lose its independence (Lyonpo Om Pradhan 2017: 87-93, 102-105, 116-119). This meant Bhutan had to distinguish itself from Tibet.

Bhutan is home to various tribes speaking different dialects. The most distinct ethnic group is the Nepali community. Nepali craftsmen were said to have come to Bhutan to build stupas in the seventeenth century. From the end of nineteenth century into twentieth century, Nepalis migrating to Bhutan increased the manpower and tax base of the country. They mainly reside in the south and are known as Lhotshampa (ལྷོ་མཚམས་པ་, people of the southern district). Bhutan's policy of assimilation, such as encouraging wearing the national dress and learning the national language, was an attempt to integrate the Nepalis, who came from a completely different culture. At the end of 1980s, when a population census was conducted, the fears of being expelling from Bhutan brought the Nepali protests and conflict (Lyonpo Om Pradhan 2017: 191-193).

The religious and cultural lineage of Buddhism is always foundational to the ethos of Bhutan, but the Bhutanese have succeeded in disconnecting from Tibet politically. Bhutan is not regarded as south Tibet, but an independent country. In addition to its political and diplomatic policies, cultural programs have also been used to assimilate different ethnic groups and construct a distinct identity of nation-state.

Nationhood

Nowadays, Bhutan's image and ethos are based in historical events, cultural accumulation and contacts, and newly created traditions. In the historical context, Buddhist spirituality is not the only element to Bhutanness. As mentioned above, secular authorities also played a part in the country's founding. Wars were important historical events and created another kind of national and cultural ethos. The third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (འཇིགས་མེད་རྡོ་རྗེ་དབང་ཕྱུག་མཆོག 1928-1972), devoted himself to promoting modernity, which remains the nation's goal. Thus, the nationhood and ethos of Bhutan are rooted in the narrative and performance of Buddhist and secular traditions, the bravery of its warriors, and its striving toward modernity.

Driglam namzha (སྒྲིག་ལམ་རྣམ་གཞག, the code of discipline) is claimed to be traced back to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who composed the *Tsa Yig Chen mo* (རྩ་ཡིག་ཆེན་མོ) to regular the moral and polite behavior of monks in the state monasteries. A Supreme Law Code (བཅའ་ཡིག་ཆེན་མོ) promulgated by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. *Driglam namzha* not only included the regulation of behavior but also the formal ceremonies of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud lineage (Whitecross 2017: 117-118). Therefore, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal constructed Bhutan's culture based mainly on the Tibetan Buddhist tradition though he is accredited with creating a nation distinct from Tibet.

Attempt on distinguish Bhutan from Tibet are still underway. A regulation on wearing Bhutanese dress on formal occasions was passed by the National Assembly in 1963. That can be regarded as the formal starting point for the imposition of *Driglam namzha* in the modern period. In 1989, *Driglam namzha* included assuming national dress (*gho* for men and *kira* for women) and speaking Dzongkha, the national language, and was proclaimed to promote a clearly Bhutanese identity (Whitecross 2017: 120-121). People in different districts speak their own dialects, but Dzongkha is the language spoken in administrative institutes and monasteries mainly in western Bhutan (Karma Phuntsho 2013: 52). The formal regulation of language and dress is part of the process of Bhutanization. The slogan, "one people, one nation," supported the dominant 'Brug pa tradition and was meant to encourage the various ethnic groups to assimilate to this culture (Mathou 2000: 245). However, the effort has raised protests from Lhotshampa, Bhuta's Nepali immigrants from a different culture.

Bhutan has not only accepted modernization but also actively innovates on its systems and processes. Jigme Dorje Wangchuck, the third king, regarded as a pioneer for his contribution to Bhutanese modernization, understood that the goal of development is the people's

prosperity and happiness, and this has been approach. The policy followed by his successors. In contrast to GDP, which measures purely economic development, Gross National Happiness (GNH) firstly introduced in 1979, as the fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck (འཇིགས་མེད་ སེང་གེ་དབང་ཕྱུག 1955-) responded to the questions from Indian journalists. In 1980, the *New York Times* had picked up on the concept of GNH and discussed it in the articles. Promoting GNH has ever since been part of Bhutan's development plans (Verma 2019:12-14).

On the National Day in 2023, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (འཇིགས་མེད་གེ་སར་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་དབང་ཕྱུག 1980-), the fifth King, announced the creation a new city, Gelephu, to help advance Bhutan's economic development. He also mentioned the idea of GNH, traditional culture, national identity, and the nation historically established by Zhabdrung Ngawan Namgyel in that speech ("Translation of the National Day Address").

In sum, Bhutan's rulers have been intentionally in their promotion of Bhutanness. While the country's Buddhism and culture were transmitted from Tibet, the historical conflicts, and wars, and the fear of China, have fueled Bhutan's attempts to disconnect from Tibet. Victory in wars that gave rise to the independent nation gave Bhutan the choice whether or not to identify with Tibet. Bhutan's rulers have also chosen to assimilate its various ethnic groups through national regulation. Modernity and happiness remain the national goals and have helped to construct nationhood and ethnos of Bhutan.

National Ceremonies

The performance during national ceremonies of Bhutan embodies the images and ethos of the nation-state. They not only include rituals and folk traditions but also newly invented performance forms. The ceremonies discussed here are the Dochula Druk Wangyel Festival (རྫོ་སྦློང་ལ་ འབྲུག་དབང་རྒྱལ་ཚེས་བཅུ་) (2023.12.13) and the 116th National Day Celebration (2023.12.17). The religious expressions of Tibetan Buddhism are basic and important elements in these ceremonies. Some parts of the stage performances narrate the story of Tibetan Buddhist masters, or recreate historical events as religious performance. Folk songs and new music performed during these ceremonies were meant to celebrate the national identity.

1. Dochula Druk Wangyel Festival

The Dochula Druk Wangyel Festival was organized by Karma Ura at the request of Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (རྫེ་དབང་མོ་དབང་ཕྱུག), the queen of the fourth king. It was revised according to the instructions

from the seventieth Je Khenpo, Trulku Jigme Choedra (སྤྲུལ་སྐུ་འཇིགས་མེད་ཆོས་གྲགས་ 1955-). This festival commemorates the war against the United Liberation Front of Assam, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, and the Kamtapur Liberation Organization in 2003, and was first held in 2011(Karma Ura 2011, 7-8). The performers were from the Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA), the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) Musical Band, and the Central Monastic Body (CMB). These organizations represent secular performers, modern warriors, and traditional monks.

The arrangement of performance is on a mound as the stage. From the angle of camera set up in the field, the performers showed up from the lower part to the higher center, and the crowds were seated around at the base of the mound as Figure 1.

Figure 1 A performance in the Dochula Druk Wangyel Festival

The mask dances include traditional Bhutanese movements, as well as the steps from Cameroonian and other African dances to portray rock demons, and the elements from Chinese opera. The texts of prayers in the dance "Vision of the Boddhisattvas" was written by the fifth king himself. The melody for that dance was inspired by He Xun Tian, a Chinese musician, and composed by Karm Ura (Karma Ura 2011, 13-16). All these elements demonstrate the event's hybridity, using multiple references to global artforms.

"Mask dances of the Protectors" is categorized as *sKu 'cham* (སྐུ་འཆམ་) and performed by the Central Monastic Body. "The dancers of the principal deities like…will be monks of the Central Monastic Body because these roles are traditionally carried out by monks" (Karma Ura 2011, 72-73). Although "Mask dances of Glimpse of the Boddhisattva" was performed by the Royal Academy of Performing Arts, it is also categorized as *sKu 'cham*. This performance included four main historical figures: Guru Rinpoche, Kuenkhen Gyalwa Longchen Rabjam Drimed Ozer, Terton Pema Lingpa, and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel surround by *dakas* and *dakinis*. The four figures walked accompanied by cymbals, the lyrics written by the fifth king, and a

melody similar to folk based music composed by Karma Ura. *sKu* is an honorific term meaning "body"; it also means "image" and "statue". Therefore, although the performance combined with different elements, the images of the four key figures in Bhutanese history from the Buddhist narratives represent high sacredness.

"Mask dances of Gatpo Ganmo," "Jetsun Melarapa and the Five Goddesses of Long Life," and "Dance of Heroes" are categorized as Gar 'cham (གར་འཆམ་) and were performed by the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) Musical Band. "Mask dance of Gatpo Ganmo" is performed to bring prosperity, longevity, and happiness (Karma Ura 2011, 19). "Dance of Jetsun Melarapa and the Five Goddesses of Long Life" is a narrative performance depicting how demons tried to distract Mi la ras pa from devotion, but in the end became protective deities.

"Dance of Heroes" is a narrative of historical events in Bhutan. The first part was "Going to war", in which the performers as warriors wear *gho* with shields and swords as what Pazaps (དཔའ་རྩལ་པ་)[4] wore strapped to on the performers' back and waist. In the middle part, the regular seven-beat rhythm of drum and cymbals accompanies warriors' movements marching off to battle. The second part of performance was "Dance of Heroes' War." The performers are dressed as medieval warriors. They brandish shields and swords and yelled in imitation of the circumstances of war. At the end, they seemed to leave in sequence and disappear behind the mound. But they returned to the stage accompanied by rapid rhythm for dramatic effect. Then, they left the stage again. The third part was "Heroes' Victory". The performers still have shields on their backs and hold *phur pa* (ཕུར་པ་), a three-edged knife, which they brandish as they move. This symbolizes destroying obstacles. Then, the warriors dance holding their shields. Finally, they dance without the shields and leave the stage.

In addition to these mask dances, the Royal Academy of Performing Arts performed traditional and new songs between each mask dance performance. The last song is "Tashi Laybay" (བཀྲ་ཤིས་ལེགས་པས།) which is *zhungdra* (གཞུང་སྒྲ་), a traditional genre of Bhutan. The lyrics describe the sky as an the eight-spoked wheel and the land as a lotus-shape with eight auspicious signs that can vanish devils. The goddesses are invited to bring the land prosperity and happiness.[5]

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[4]   Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal's warriors in the seventeenth century
[5]   Mandala. ""Tashi Labay": A Song for Auspicious Ending." Accessed March 4, 2024. https://av.mandala.library.virginia.edu/video/tashi-labay-song-auspicious-ending.

2. National Day Celebration

On National Day, as the ceremony is about to start, members of the Bhutanese audience all take off their coats to display their national dress. This ceremony also consists of traditional and modern elements. The modern armed forces holding guns parade to martial music. Then, monks walk onto the field to with the traditional Tibetan Buddhist music. A *dramney* (སྒྲ་སྙན་), the representative instrument of Bhutanese folk music, is played to accompany the singing of a long-life prayer for the king of Bhutan (མི་དབང་འཇིགས་མེད་གེ་སར་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་དབང་ཕྱུག་མཆོག་གི་ཞབས་བརྟན།).

Seven cultural programs are performed. "Black hat Cham" (ཞྭ་ནག་གི་ཧ་འཆམ), a traditional Tibetan Buddhist dance, was performed by the Central Monastic Body. A classical dance "gZhas sNa Tshags"(གཞས་སྣ་ཚོགས) usually performed by men was presented by the Royal Academy of Performing Arts, the Bhutan Royal Army, and the Royal Police. This dance is dedicated to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and represents the harmonic life of the country and the universe, as well as Bhutan as a united nation. The song, "Prosper Land of dGe legs phu" (དགེ་ལེགས་ཕུག་ལུ་གཡང་ཡོད།), was composed by the seventieth Je Khenpo and performed by the Royal Academy of Performing Arts. It celebrates the *chos-sri* system, the combination of sacred and secular cultures, that makes the country prosperous.

Rigsar songs (རིག་གསར་) and patriotic songs are also performed by secular performers to demonstrate young people's energy and enthusiasm, the construction of country, celebration, strength, and to create a symphony of joy. A performance "Tashi Laybay" closes the festival, with the king, government officials, guests, and so on, all participating in a dance circle.

In addition to the ceremony, *Zhungdra & Boedra* (བོད་སྒྲ་), traditional genres, musical concert was held to perform traditional music. Moreover, in *Rigsar* musical concert and the National-Day concert, foreign and Bhutanese singers performed *Rigsar* and pop music for celebrating the National Day.

In these two celebrations and relevant concerts, various kinds of music and dance were performed. Buddhist spirituality is a central theme. However, the forms of performance may be newly created, such as the narrative performance of Mi le ras pa's story and "Dances of Heros". *Zhungdra*, the Bhutanese folk music tradition, is always emphasized in such ceremonies, as in the closing performance of "Tashi Laybay". *Zhungdra*, *boedra*, and *rigsar* are all celebrated in the concerts. The ethnos of bravery is embodied in the movements and music of both the medieval warriors and modern soldiers. Current performance is always connected with Bhutan's historical events and the honorable

period constructing Bhutan's unity and identity in the seventeenth century. Although global and pop musical culture have had some influence on traditional music, they are instrumental in demonstrating Bhutan's modernity and happiness.

Traditional Music

Early albums of Bhutanese music released by Western music companies were recorded by John Levy (Levy 1973a, 1973b, 1973c, 1973d) and compiled by J.S Szuszkiewicz (1978). Levy received an invitation from the royal family to record music in late 1971 (Levy 1973a). In the explanatory notes on the albums, Levy quoted from *A Cultural History of Tibet* by David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson (2003 (1968)): "Of the whole enormous area which was once the spirited domain of Tibetan culture and religion…now only Bhutan seems to survive as the one resolute and self-contained representative of a fast disappearing civilization" (Levy 1973a; Snellgrove & Richardson (2003 (1968): 271). Scholars worried that Tibetan culture would disappear after Tibetans fled, and their culture was destroyed by the Chinese. They sought a pure and isolated land where Tibetan culture was well preserved. At that time, Bhutan was regarded as that place, a Shangri-la.

John Levy recorded music released in the albums "*Tibetan Buddhist Rites from the Monasteries of Bhutan*" and "*Tibetan and Bhutanese Instrumental and Folk Music*". These albums were produced with the notion that Tibetan and Bhutanese culture were closely connected. However, the musical culture of Bhutan contains not only Tibetan music. The album, "*Music of Bhutan*", collects traditional religious and folk music, especially, the Nepali music of the south (Szuszkiewicz 1978). Furthermore, the musical genres of Bhutan are not all identical to those of Tibet.

Various genres of traditional and religious music are distributed over different districts. Religious songs include *tshoglu* and *gurma*. Traditional songs that can be accompanied by dance are *zhungdra*, *boedra*, *yuedra*, *zhey*, and *zheym* genre. Traditional songs not performed with dance are *tsangmo*, *alo*, *khorey*, and *ausa*. Although religion and spirituality are important themes, love and emotion are also popular subjects of these songs (Sonam Kinga 2001: 134).

Generally, of these genres, *zhungdra* and *boedra* are usually stated as the most representative of Bhutan's traditional music. *Zhungdra* is claimed to be attributed to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and originated in Bhutan; *boedra* is influenced by Tibetan music. The Music of

Bhutan Research Centre (MRBC)[6] has categorized *zhungdra* as a sub-category of *dangrem* with elements of spirituality; *boedra* was from Tibet, but music in this Tibetan style composed by Bhutanese is categorized as *drukdra* (འབྲུག་སྒྲ་) (Herman and Kheng Sonam Dorji 2013: 8, 10-11). As mentioned above, "druk" (འབྲུག་, dragon) is the national icon of Bhutan. Although the term "*drukdra*" has not been said in common, it represents that the Bhutanese musician attempts to stress that this is now a localized musical genre belonging to Bhutan.

1. *Zhungdra* (གཞུང་སྒྲ་)

"*Dra*" (སྒྲ་) means sound. "*zhung*" (གཞུང་) means "central" so this term has been translated as "means the "music of the central" in several academic literatures and album notes. In addition, "*zhung*" also means "government", and it is said that when Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal constructed Fortress of Great Bliss (སྤུངས་ཐང་བདེ་ཆེན་རྫོང་།) in the seventeenth century, deities and people gathered there, and *zhungdra* was sung. Therefore, this musical form might have originated around the government activities. In addition, it is sung as an offering with singers standing in a line to symbolize offerings presented to the lamas and dignitaries. *Zhungdra* pieces, such as "Authentic Collection of Offering Songs" (མཆོན་ཕྱེན་ཚོགས་པའི་ཚོགས་སྒྲ།) are sung during important festivals, such as Tshechu (ཚེས་བཅུ་)[7] (Kunzang Phrinlas 2004: 163-166). Hence, it is not only a folk genre but also has religious functions.

The melody of the national anthem of Bhutan[8] is from the *zhungdra* piece "The Unchanging Lotus Throne" (ཁྲི་ཉམས་པ་མེད་པ་པད་མའི་ཁྲི།). The first version of lyrics to the national anthem written by Gyaldon Thinley. Later, it was shortened and revised by Shingkhar Lam, secretary to the king, and Sangay Dorji, an assistant. The first lines of the two versions are as below (Dorji Penjore and Sonam Kinga 2002: 14-18):

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6   MBRC was founded by Sonam Dorji, a performer of Bhutan's traditional music, in 2008. This center conducts research and collects traditional music. It established small archive and published recordings and books collected from fieldwork ("About Music of Bhutan Research Centre". Accessed March 23, 2024. https://www.musicofbhutan.org/history).

7   The annual festivals held in the different districts of Bhutan. Religious and traditional arts are performed (Tshewang Dendup 2006: 39).

8   In 1953, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the third king, announced his intention to sponsor the composition of a national anthem. Aku Tongmi, who had studied in India and was the first bandmaster in Bhutan, composed the melody of national anthem for the visit of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharla Nehru in 1958. The lyrics were written by Gyaldon Thinley, the guest master of the State. The melody was revised twice by Bajan Singh and H. Joseph, both officers and bandmasters of the Indian Army (Dorji Penjore & Sonam Kinga 2002: 14-15).

The first version:

ཙོ་ཚན་དན་བཀོད་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ནང་༎

In the southern kingdom adorned with cypress trees

The second version:

འབྲུག་ཚན་དན་བཀོད་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ནང་༎

In the Kingdom of Bhutan adorned with cypress trees

The opening word "southern" (ཙོ) is replaced by "dragon" (འབྲུག). This removes geographical description of Bhutan from the Tibetan perspective and asserts nationhood with national symbol. The melody is not a *boedra* tune but *zhungdra*, which is recognized as clearly Bhutanese music and asserts differ from Tibet.

Sara Nuttall as the outsider of Bhutanese musical culture did fieldwork in Bhutan and analyzed the general and specific musical characteristics of Bhutanese music based on commercial recordings and pieces she collected while in the field. *Zhungdra* is sung with long melismatic phrases and ornamentation. *Boedra* is known for its short phrases and regular beats. Nuttall analyzed musicians' personal interpretations on *zhungdra*. She looked at how different musicians produce continuous flow or a floating effect according to the points when they breath, the arrangement of the rhythm, and how they make *nyenku* (sweet sounds, mellifluous sounds) (Nuttall 1993: I: 19-20; II:4, 17).

As to instrumental music, the lute, "སྒྲ་སྙན", is the representative instrument of both Bhutanese and Tibetan musical culture, and it usually accompanies *zhungdra* singing. The heads of Bhutanese lutes are carved in *chu sing* (ཆུ་སྲིན) forms, which are said to be sea monsters or crocodiles. The sound of the lute is said to attract spirits and animals. According to advice from the Goddess of Music, carving the head of a sea monster on a lute can keep devils away (Nuttall 1993: I: 15, 27-28). Ter Ellingson, an ethnomusicologist working on Tibetan musical culture, concluded that the shapes of Tibetan lutes' heads could be a horse head, sea-monster (dragon), horned eagle (khyung), or unicorn (a kind of deer), according to the visual record in paintings and other scholars' research. These shapes were associated with the heaven of shamanism or Tibetan prayer flags (Ellingson 1974: 20-21). The shape of Bhutanese lutes' head is mainly *chu sing*, and the shape of most Tibetan lutes' heads is usually a horse' head shaped if not simple and flat.

While Tibetan lutes have the three pairs of strings, there are six and a half strings on Bhutanese lutes. Aup Dawpey, a traditional musician of Bhutan, has claimed that the sound from the seven strings symbolizes the voices of seven *dakinis* (Herman & Kheng Sonam Dorji 2013: 17). Bhutanese lute commonly features several spiritual or symbolic painted figure, such as dByangs can ma (དབྱངས་ཅན་མ), the female deity of

music. One Bhutanese musician explained that dByangs can ma is the personal deity of the people who play music, so he prays to her for good voice, peace, harmony, and the happiness of sentient beings (Interviewee 2023). In Bhutan's folk belief, Bhutanese lute should be played with musicians' smile and is connected to the Upper world (Jigme Drukpa 2006: 374-375). Thus, music has a spiritual function in the religious and folk belief.

Theoretically, the three pairs of strings on the Tibetan lute are tuned to A-d-G. The six and a half strings on Bhutanese lute are tuned as aA-d'dd-gg. Two and a half strings are in the middle part of Bhutanese lute. When the fingers do not press on the middle pair of long strings, the half string can be plucked with middle long strings to produce higher tone. Although it is said that these strings are tuned as aA-d'd d-gg, the tones could be tuned as lower pitch. For example, in Nuttall's research, the strings of lute were tuned to gG c'cc ff. (Nuttall 1993: I:16). Because the lute has no fret, microtones can be produced. If the strings are tuned to aA-d'dd-gg, a note higher than f, near f#, might be played in *Zhungdra*.

Zhungdra is a free-rhythm music. A Bhutanese musician explained that *zhungdra* is based on the lyrics, not the rhythm or melody (Interviewee 2023). One passage of "Tashi Laybay", the *zhungdra* song performed at the end of Dochula Druk Wangyel Festival, as transcribed below by Praat software, is presented in Figure 2. It shows the melismatic melody with no regular beat.
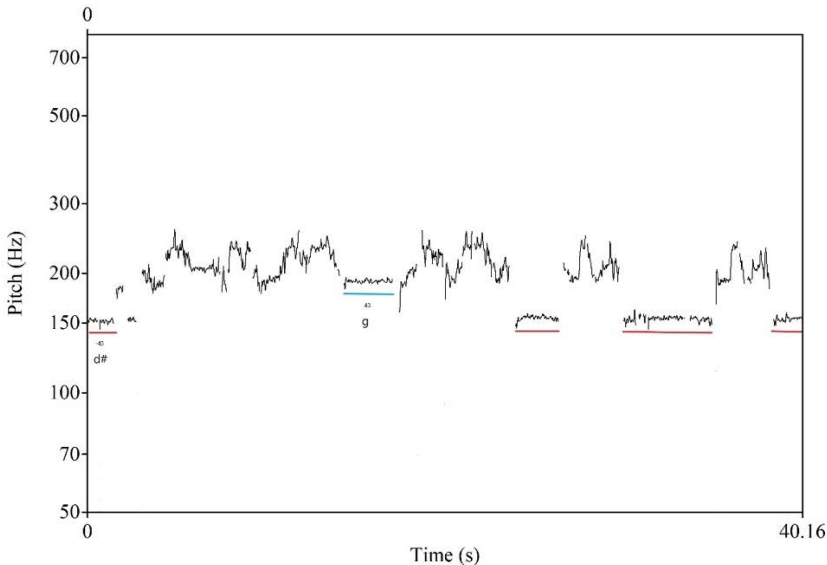

Figure 2 Part Transcription of "Tashi Laybay"

The clear notes in this piece are d#(-43.53 cents), f#(-25.42 cents), g(-44.71 cents), g#(-43cents), a#(+0.13 cents), c#(+11.31 cents)[9]. To illustrate this clearly, a transcription of these notes as played on Bhutanese lute in the Moveable Do system can be seen in as Figure 3. It is in pentatonic scale: 4, 5, 6, 1, 2. Especially, 4# was sung in this song.

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6(a#+0.13 cents)     2(d#-43.53 cents)   5(g#-43 cents)
                     6(a#+0.13 cents)
1(c#+11.31 cents)    4 (f#-25.42 cents)
                     4#(g-44.71 cents)
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Figure 3 Notes on Bhutanese lute in the Moveable Do system with absolute pitch in the Fixed Do system in brackets

The long and sustained tone line on Figure 2 is 2(d#), the same note tuned as the tuning of the middle strings. It is sung at the beginning and end of the piece, representing the importance. The first phrase pauses at the long note 4# (g). This note is not in the regular pentatonic scale and creates a special sonic effect that cannot be found in *boedra*. This musical characteristic can also be found in Bhutan's national anthem.

In addition, unlike Tibetan musicians strongly plucking pairs of strings, Bhutanese musicians pluck each string softly. The shape of pick is also different from the pick used with the Tibetan lute. The Bhutanese lute's pick is long and thin, not designed for producing loud sound but small soft tones. These small tones form a continuous ornamental melodic line. Therefore, the strings, the notes played, and the manner of plucking the strings create special musical effects that make *zhungdra* distinct from *boedra*.

2. *Boedra*

"*Boe*" (བོད་) means Tibet, and again, "*dra*" (སྒྲ) mean sound. There are two sayings about the origins of *boedra*. The one is that "'aBod sGarp" (འབོད་ སྒརཔ་) refers to the government's officials, so this genre was associate with government. The other claims that "Bod sGra" (བོད་སྒྲ་) is more generally refers to music from Tibet (Kunzang Phrinlas 2004: 169-170). No matter which is correct, *boedra* is still attributed to the era of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. In addition, it is suggested that the third king of Bhutan loved the genre coined the name, *boedra* (Herman & Kheng Sonam Dorji 2013: 11).

The current ensemble to perform *boedra* usually consists of the lute,

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[9]   These are the absolute pitch on the Fixed Do system.

flute (སྒྲ་སྙན་), fiddle (པི་ཝང་), and dulcimer (རྒྱུངས་ཅན་). Research on Tibetan
musical culture has asserted that the dulcimer was transmitted to Tibet
from China in the eighteenth century (Gyesang Chugye 2000: 27). On
the Bhutanese side, it is claimed that *boedra* came to Bhutan with
Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and his attendants in the seventeenth
century, before the dulcimer had been introduced. According to Nut-
tall's research, the dulcimer was introduced to Bhutan in the 1960s,
when the Tibetan refugees fled to Bhutan and began to participate in
the Royal Academy of Performing Arts. This multi-instrument ensem-
ble accompanies only *boedra* but not *zhungdra* (Nuttall 1993: I:22). Al-
though microtones can be played on the lute, flute, and fiddle, it is not
possible to achieve them on dulcimer. Playing the tone near 4#, as in
zhungdra, is not characteristic of *boedra*, nor can the dulcimer produce
that tone.

The song "Welcome" (ཕྱིན་པ་ལེགས་པས།) performed in the *Zhungdra &
Boedra* concert is transcribed in Figure 4 as an example. The melody is
pentatonic with no special tonal effects. A regular rhythm and several
musical ornamentations were marked the singing and were played in
the melodic lines.

Figure 4 Transcription on ཕྱིན་པ་ལེགས་པས། (transcribed by Yanfang Liou)

Musical Modernity

Rigsar (རིག་གསར་) is a new Bhutanese genre that has absorbed more and
more foreign musical elements. It is suggested that "Zhendi Migo" is
the first modern song in Bhutan and dates from the 1960s. The melody

comes from a song in *Love in Tokyo*, an Indian film. This song was even choreographed by the Royal Academy of Performing Arts and performed at Trongsa Tshechu, an annual festival in dzong. In the 1980s, because many songs were adapted from Hindi, Nepali, and English songs, Dasho Thinley Gyamtsho composed *dorozam*, a new subgenre in the national language Dzongkha, for teaching purposes in 1979-1980. In the mid-1980's, *Ngesem Ngesem*, a song and musical programme, was composed for entertainment and played on electronic instruments. In 1995, the popular album *Pangi Shawa* was released that influenced the style of songs that followed. These songs forms are more closely related to the Hindi, Nepali, and English music (Sonam Kinga 2001: 145-146).

In addition to musical elements introduced through cultural contact and mass media, the third king's efforts to promote modernity also included the development of Bhutan's own music. He sent musicians to India to record traditional music in 1968 because there was no recording technology in Bhutan at that time. This was regarded as the first recording of traditional vocal music (Music of Bhutan Research Centre 2015:2). Aku Tongmi was sent to India for two years at the third king's request to learn band instruments. He returned to Bhutan to become the instructor for the new army band and composed the national anthem's melody (Hancock and Herman 2018).

The symbols and images of Bhutan's natural environment are an important theme in the lyrics of folk songs. It is claimed that this is the main difference between folk songs and *rigsar* songs. Most lyrics of the *rigsar* are related to love, but other themes included religious and social issues, health and environment, and social change. It has been argued that the popularity of *rigsar* songs challenges Bhutan's traditional values (Sonam Kinga 2001: 153-157).

On National Day, as the modern armed forces paraded in the ceremonial field, the tune, "Happiness in Bhutan" (འབྲུག་གཞུང་འདི་ན་དགའ་བ་ལུ་), was performed by a brass band. This tune transcribed in Figure 5. The main theme is happiness. It resonates with promoting GNH and pursuing happiness, key Bhutan national policies, which means new genres can also become instrumental to promoting national goals.

Figure 5 Transcription on "Happiness in Bhutan" (འབྲུག་གཞུང་འཇིན་དགའ་བ་སྐྱ) (transcribed by Yanfang Liou)

Furthermore, the brass band represents modernity promoted by the third king. The performers in the brass band wore *gho*, the national dress, and helmets of medieval times connecting the performance to the seventeenth century when Bhutan became a united country. The independence and identity of Bhutan are repeatedly expressed through the performances at its ceremonies. The National Day, *rigsar* songs performed by young people did not refer back to ancient times but look forward to the future. *Rigsar* is thus not only influenced by other musical cultures, but also promotes national goals and continues to build on Bhutan's image and ethos.

Conclusion

In the narratives of performance, Bhutan's present is repeatedly connected with the nation's founder, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Just as Tibetan culture informs Bhutan's politics and religion, it is inevitable that Tibetanness is foundational for Bhutan's religious expression and cultural performances. Since Bhutan has chosen to pursue and present national independence, however, political and cultural actors create a Bhutan identity distinct from Tibet. In the process, however, the culture of the Nepali community is not represented; the nation-state identity created by the localized Tibetan descendants and local

inhabitants excludes its "other" immigrants.

In religious and folk musical performances, distinctive, localized, and new cultural forms continue to express Bhutanness. It is always claimed that *zhungdra* and *boedra* are attributed to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal. Newly created performances, such as "Dance of Heroes," also refer back to the establishment of the country. These and other cultural events insist on the unitedness and independence of Bhutan. The constructed national ethos is not single but multiple. Bhutan's narratives, music, and performance always connect its present to Buddhism and the glory of the past. Official policy and development goals are embodied in its music and performance to present national aspirations. The tradition of Bhutanness continues to change and be created. Bhutan is not a frozen dragon but flies between past, present and future.

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Inner Asian Clans in Early Tibet and their Place in the Nyingmapa and Bon traditions[1]

Todd Gibson

I t is well known that both secular and religious history in the days of the Tibetan Empire and the period immediately following were shaped by the competition between not only religious ideologies and approaches but also the social and political conflicts between important Imperial clans. While there has been some scholarly inquiry into the histories and interests of certain prominent clans, there is still much to be understood on the subject. The present contribution introduces the importance to early Tibetan history of clans that had ancestral roots in an area of Inner Asia that extended from Bactria and Sogdiana across the Tarim Basin to the Dunhuang area.

Looking at the question of the historical and cultural relationship between early Tibet and Inner Asia, it is easy to form the impression that this was a topic of more interest to previous generations of Tibetologists than to the present one.[2] Certainly, one reason for this is the current emphasis put on the Dunhuang materials, owing to their incomparable value in re-examining what were previously considered settled questions. Another reason, however, is that the study of Tibetan religious history still tends to be dominated, at least in the Anglosphere, by the notion of an "Indo-Tibetan Buddhism", which sees religion in Tibet as essentially a matter of Indian Buddhism superimposed on earlier local Tibetan beliefs and practices, and does not concern itself with things outside that framework.

During the Imperial period of Tibetan history, however, Tibet was far more involved with its northern and eastern neighbors than with

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[1] This article is extracted and condensed from chapters of the forthcoming book *Inner Asia and the Nyingmapa Tradition of Tibet*: *The Case of Shri Singha*, by the present writer. Many of the themes touched on in this article are dealt with at greater length in the book.

[2] See, for example Tucci (1974, 1980, pp. 172, 195, 214, etc.), Hoffmann (1970, pp. 25-28). Also to be noted are the numerous articles of Siebert Hummell, who explored possible cultural connections between Tibet and not only Iran, but also the Near East and Inner Asian steppe culture. Kvaerne (1998) composed a bibliography of his works, and while some can no longer stand up to scrutiny, others are still pertinent.

India. Tibetan emperors at various times controlled areas as far west as northern Afghanistan, as far north as modern Kucha, Karashahr and Turfan (Gaochang), and as far east as northern China, and all these areas left imprints on the nascent Tibetan culture. A remarkable example of this is a Tibetan document found at Dunhuang, the so-called *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (P.T. 1287), which has been demonstrated to preserve not only elements of the *Rāmayana*, but also the ancient Chinese *Shi ji* (Takeuchi, 1985), and the myth of Osiris (Hummell 1974, 1975);[3] recently, Bialek (2019) has pointed out themes and phraseology in the same document that closely resemble Avestan literature on Mithra. There is even some evidence of Inner Asian civilization within the Tibetan sphere in terms of material culture, perhaps the most striking example being a beautiful golden ewer designed specifically for the Tibetan imperial court that has been artistically categorized as a creation of "post-Sasanian Western Central Asia".[4] Nevertheless, an examination of historical sources shows that Inner Asian peoples left more than literary and artistic traces on Tibet; some peoples and clans of Inner Asian origin can be seen to have played major roles in early Tibetan history and religion.[5]

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[3]   Images of Serapis, the Greek interpretation of the Egyptian Osiris, have been found on Kushan coinage (Rhie, 2007, p. 66) and near Khotan (Rhie, op. cit., pp. 265-66).

[4]   See the illustration in Pritzker, 2017. On page 108, the author opines that the ewer in question is "emblematic of the unique period in Tibet's history before the dominance of Buddhism, when the rise of the imperial royal court coincided with the twilight and artistic brilliance of Late Antiquity."

[5]   The question of clans in early Tibet is one that has been insufficiently studied, as Davidson (2005) has noted. Several early studies (e.g. Haarh, 1969) dealt with the mythical and historical roots of Tibet's putatively ancient clans, but few systematic treatments of the institution during Imperial times have been attempted since Richardson's pioneering contribution (1977), although discussions of eminent clans connected with Bon are perhaps the exceptions (cf. Blezer, 2016, and Karmay, 2014, pp. 47-56; Davidson, 2005, p. 389 n. 73, also cites Lhagyal in this respect). The problems are many: clan histories themselves cannot be taken at face value, often being composed in order to exalt the origins or reinforce the territorial or other claims of a given family. Further, clans may not necessarily be limited to descent groups, since adoption into a clan appears to have been common, as in the Tibetan institution of *makpa* marriage, in which a male becomes a part of his wife's family. Even entire outlying descent groups may come to be included in a clan, as among the Scottish Highlanders and the Pashtuns of Afghanistan. Nor is association with a certain locale straightforward, as Davidson notes; clans may have been moved by imperial decree, have shifted of their own accord, or, due to the vicissitudes of history, be located in more than one place simultaneously. Most importantly, it cannot be assumed that all Tibetans were concerned with clan; as in much of Europe, family names seem to have been the exception rather than the rule among common people until fairly recently (although biographies of eminent religious teachers very often include information on their ancestral clans). Still, Davidson's table (*op.cit*. p. 81) of noted clans and their seats in Tibet, based on the 16th-century

The earliest recorded example of an Inner Asian clan that had profound effects on Tibetan history comes with the Gars (*mgar*). The name Gar itself derives from the Tokharians, evidently referring in this case to that branch of the people that fled south (towards what is now the area of Gansu) rather than west after their downfall at the hands of the Xiongnu on the Mongolian steppe six centuries earlier.[6] The Gars supplied several famous generals and ministers to the early Tibetan court, and the clan grew in power until they were quashed as potential usurpers to the throne by the emperor Tri Düsong (r. 677-704). The Lang (*rlangs*) were another prominent clan in early Tibetan history, whose importance continued well after the fall of the empire. According to Yamaguchi (1992, p. 64), they were an offshoot of the Sumpa, called Xianbi by the Chinese, a proto-Mongolian people who succeeded the Xiongnu on the steppes.[7] At the other end of the Tibetan plateau, the Dru (*'bru*) clan had roots in the lands of Gilgit and Hunza (Tibetan *'bru sha*) in the Western Himalayas (Martin 1994, p. 5 n. 13), presently part of far northern Pakistan. Tibetan military and political involvement there began in 663 (Beckwith, 1987a, p. 30). The Dru clan were for many centuries one of the most prominent upholders of Bon traditions, but the entire clan was forcibly converted to the Gelukpa school in the nineteenth century (Karmay, 2014, pp. 48-52).

The farthest western marches of the Tibetan Empire also contributed to the aristocracy of early Tibet. In his autobiography, the 18th-century Nyingmapa Buddhist teacher Jigme Lingpa claimed to be part of the Tibetan clan of Nup (*gnubs* or *snubs*),[8] which according to him was in turn descended from the "ancient Dotribteng house of

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Kepe Gatön is very useful, as is Vitali's (2004a) attempt to analyze the history of one clan, the Gya. Now see also Martin (2022, pp. 509-518) for the scholar Deyu's description of clan territories.

6   Richardson, 1977; see also Bailey (1982, pp. 94-95). The Tokharians, known to the Chinese as Yuezhi (although there has been some controversy about the overlap of the two names) fragmented after their defeat by the Xiongnu; the westernmost branch of the people gave their name to Tokharistan, the area of Bactria to which they migrated, and that area and its people were known to the Tibetans by the name Togar (usually spelled *tho gar*). The present writer has occasionally seen the clan name Togar among modern Tibetans, but I have not been able to investigate whether the people who bear the name regard it as coming from outside Tibet or not.

7   In addition, according to Roerich. (1979. p. 110) Tibetan religious histories also often refer to the Li clan, probably indicating an ancestry in Khotan (*li yul*). Khotan's considerable contributions to early Tibet are discussed in my forthcoming book.

8   The clan name here may be based on its geographical seat, Nup being the location where Tri Detsugtsen's royal council met in the winter of 715 (Ryavec, 2015, map 14, pp. 56-57). See also Davidson (2005, p. 80).

Tazig" (Gyatso, 1998, p. 128). According to Smith (2018, p. 4, n. 13), the eminent Tibetan Che (*lce*) clan also claimed ancestry in Tazig. Quibbling over the exact referent of the geographical term "Tazig" during different eras continues among Tibetan specialists, but all recognize that it refers to a cultural area to the west of Tibet, and it has sometimes been taken to refer in a general sense to the Iranic-speaking realms east of the Iranian plateau, although it may also may also pertain more specifically to the lands of the upper Oxus and Indus rivers.[9] Whatever the case, the area in general had been a cultural crossroads for many centuries before the Arab incursions, since at least the time of the Kushans, and its biggest city, Balkh, was one of the largest and most prosperous centers of civilization in the entire world of antiquity. More will be said of the Nup and Che clans below, but it is nonetheless significant that the former seems to have preserved a memory of an eastern Iranian heritage for a thousand years.

There is another Inner Asian people, however, whose contributions to early Tibetan culture have been even less noticed than those of the Bactrians: the Sogdians. These people, who spoke an Iranian language now extinct, and whose home territory was between the Oxus and Jaxartes (now Amu Darya and Syr Darya) rivers in west Central Asia, built up, starting in the fourth or fifth century, trade networks that reached from the Iranian plateau to Manchuria and Siberia. Faxian even speaks of seeing Sogdian merchant chiefs in Sri Lanka (Hansen, 2012, p. 160).[10] Sogdian colonies were founded all along these routes, and many Sogdians became permanent resident aliens in the Chinese Empire. The Sogdians were the primary bearers of not only trade goods but also Iranian, Turkic, Greco-Roman, Indic and Chinese cultures back and forth across Inner Asia throughout the seventh to ninth centuries. For a time during the Tang dynasty, upper-class Chinese admired and imitated many facets of Sogdian civilization, and popular culture in China still retains elements of this interaction.[11]

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[9]   The name itself, however, refers to the Arabs, via the Middle Persian *t'cyk*, pronounced Tāzīk, Tāčīk, or Tāžīg (Beckwith, 2006, p. 170). That it was adopted in reference to areas that were Iranic in language and culture is undoubtedly because Tibet first became aware of these areas at the time of the Arab incursions, when the Tibetan, Turkic, Arab, and Chinese empires were in fierce competition there. Beckwith (1987a) is still the most detailed treatment of these maneuverings based on primary sources.

[10] The Chinese word that Faxian uses is *sabao*, which Beal translated as "Sabeans", but is actually derived from the Sogdian *sarvapao*, a title also given to Sogdian community leaders in China. That word in turn is based on the Indic *sārthavāha* "caravan leader" (d. l. Vassière, 2005, p. 151).

[11] Astrology was one major area of influence; according to d. l. Vassière (p. 140 n.89), "The Sogdian names of the days of the week have been preserved into modern

Most of the other cultures that the Sogdians were in contact with have similarly shown at least some trace of their shared history.

It is certain that that the Tibetans and Sogdians were familiar with each other; the latter were known to the former as *sog po* or *sog dag* in early sources.[12] Tibetan historical and geographical works written both during and after the imperial period long ago proved that the Tibetans were well aware of the Sogdians geographically and militarily (Beckwith, 1987a; Martin, 1994).[13]

It is true that a few cultural connections were already remarked on long ago. Kvaerne (1987, p. 164, citing Stein and Demiéville) says that the lore of the lion came to both Tibet and China from Iran through the Sogdians. The snow lion is a national symbol of Tibet, although lions as we know them probably never existed there,[14] just as the first attested performance of the Lion Dance, now thought of as quintessentially Chinese, was probably by Sogdians in the border regions of China. In a groundbreaking article Beckwith (1979; but now see also Martin 2016) pointed out the connection between Iranians (probably Sogdians) and the introduction of the Greek school of medicine into Tibet, via China, and there is evidence that "Sogdian medicine" continued to be practiced in Tibet into at least the eleventh century (Roerich, 1979, pp. 874-875). Sogdian specialists for their part have noted people who are most likely Tibetan appearing together with Turks, Chinese, and Koreans in the Hall of the Ambassadors mural in Afrosiab, near Samarkand (Ashurov, 2013, p. 51); and attested the presence of temples dedicated to the traditional Sogdian religion in Chengdu (de la Vassière, 2005, p. 145) and Dunhuang (Grenet and Zhang, 1996, p. 175), both of which locales fell under the cultural penumbra of the Tibetan Empire.[15]

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times on Chinese almanacs." Rong (2001, p. 148) says of the Sogdians that "Their commercial expertise, fighting skills, devotion to Zoroastrianism, and dancing and musical talents were to make a deep impression on China's political process, religious complexion, and musical diversity." Aoki (2015, p. 149) says that in the tenth century, "the gods of Sogdian Zoroastrianism were assimilated into the pantheon of Chinese folk beliefs."

12 *Sogpo* later came to refer to the Mongols, but this is simply because the first place the Tibetans encountered the Mongols was in the lands previously settled by the Sogdians on Tibet's northeastern frontier.

13 According to Beckwith (1987a, p. 56) an important Tibetan general was taken prisoner by the Sogdians during the course of one of Tibet's campaigns on its western borders. Beckwith also notes (*op. cit*. pp. 108-110) the presence of Tibetan troops in Sogdiana itself at two junctures in the early eighth century, fighting in alliance with the Türgesh armies and Sogdian rebels against the Arabs.

14 But also see Martin (2023, p. 515, n.1876).

15 The native Sogdian religion has been considered as a variation of Zoroastrianism, but it also incorporated features quite alien to the form found on the Iranian

As far as Sogdian material culture in the Tibetan sphere, probably the most well-known example is a beautiful sculpted silver drinking vessel, now kept in Lhasa, illustrating a Sogdian dance.[16] However, in a very important article, Heller (2013) has analyzed the artwork on coffin panels from the Dulan area of the Tso Ngön (Kökönör) region of the modern Chinghai province.[17] She notes that these panels include motifs similar to those in the murals of Panjikent in Sogdiana as well as in Sogdian burials in China; they include feast scenes, hunting scenes, and a camel caravan. Religious themes depicted include sacrifice, both animal and human, and facial laceration in a funeral context, which was a Turkic custom also practiced by some Sogdians, but was at odds with the Zoroastrianism of Persia. At the other end of the Tibetan plateau, Sogdian graffiti have been found on cliffs near Trangtse, Ladakh; they seem to have been written by an embassy on its way to Central Tibet.[18]

This archaeological evidence of Sogdian culture comes from the Tibetan border areas, but there are indications that there were populations of Sogdian provenance that gained some political prominence at the center of Tibetan civilization, just as they did in China at the same time. One Sogdian clan of importance came to Tibet from Nanam (*sna nam*), a name that Richardson believed to be related to Samarkand.[19] This clan provided not only a queen and a minister named Trompa Kye to the Tibetan emperor Tri Detsugtsen (r. 712- 755),[20] but another minister named Gyaltsen Lhanang to his successor Tri Songdetsen (r. 755- 797?). The competition found between the emissaries of Nanam and China found in some Tibetan historical sources (Sørenson, 1994, p. 360), as well as the fact that the Nanam

plateau. Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Christianity also had considerable support among the Sogdians, but evidently more in the Sogdian colonies rather than in Sogdiana itself. See Gibson (forthcoming).

[16] On the famous Sogdian "whirling dances", one performed by males and the other by females, see Schafer (1963, pp. 55-56), Durkan-Meisterernst, (2004, p. 21), and Zhang (2009, p. 44, fig 22). There is an excellent illustration of this vessel in Heller (2013, pp. 167-68).

[17] Dulan lay on an alternate, southern route from the Tarim Basin to China, which was probably resorted to when the usual route through the Gansu corridor became unstable. (Ryavec, 2015, Map 11, p. 45)

[18] Uray, 1981; de la Vassière, 2005, pp. 309-310. These, however, are rather late (ninth century).

[19] Richardson (1977) citing Das, whose dictionary in turn (2000, p. 765) cites the *Blue Annals* (*Debther sngonpo*) and the *Baidūrya Yasel*; see also Sørenson (1994, p. 365 n. 1183). However, Richardson's association of Nanam (and Samarkand) with people "of Yueh chih [i.e.Tokharian -- TG] stock" is clearly incorrect.

[20] The Western Turks and Tibetans were sometime allies during Tri Detsugtsen's reign.

queen was referred to in Old Tibetan sources by the Turkic title *qatun* (the Turks were the suzerains of Samarkand at the time, and there came to be a considerable Turco-Sogdian community) establish beyond doubt that Nanam was a place outside of Tibet, and it would be difficult to assert that the Nanam clan in Tibet was not connected to it.[21] There were also at least two luminaries of early Tibetan Buddhism from the Nanam clan, as well as a few associated with Bon; these figures will be discussed below.

The link between the Nanam clan and Samarkand could provide a valuable clue to the hitherto-unsolved mystery of the succession crisis in Tibet that took place in 755. As Beckwith (2009, pp.144, 412 n. 73) has noted, the revolt was surely connected to the murder of Tri Detsugtsen and the accession of his successor. That there was some concern over his son Tri Songdetsen's maternal ancestry is clear. In spite of the fact that the oldest and most reliable records clearly identify him as the son of the Nanam queen (who, however, died within a year of his birth), sources such as the *Testament of Wä* have him asserting (at the age of five years) that his actual lineage was through his father's Chinese consort (actually also deceased before the events in the traditional story) rather than through the Qatun (see Beckwith, 1983, p. 8; Kapstein, 2000, pp. 28-30; Wangdu and Diemberger. 2000, p. 34). It is quite likely that, whoever committed the murder, the Chinese sympathizers at court attempted to claim the heir to the throne as rightfully theirs in order to further Chinese interests in Tibet. The "revolt" may have begun as an attempt to ensure recognition that the heir was actually the son of the Qatun, and it is possible that the struggle was part of the larger conflict between Sogdians and Chinese happening at the time, and an attempt by the former (since their own homeland had just been finally and definitively lost to the Arabs) to establish themselves in a place that was free of Chinese domination -- a struggle which manifested in China itself with the sanguinary Rokshan (Ch. An Lu Shan) rebellion that began in the same year.[22]

It has been suggested (Richardson, 1977, pp. 20 ff.) that the Tibetan clan name Ngan (*ngan*) is no other than the Sogdian name that is usually rendered An in Chinese, which indicated ancestry in Bukhara,

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[21] Although the clan later was associated with the Tolung valley area, according to Deyu (Martin, 2022, p. 517) they belonged to the left horn of the early empire.

[22] Alternatively, the violent reaction against the Sogdians in China after the Rokshan Rebellion was quelled may be a reason that the *Testament of Wä* and many sources relying on it were at such pains to establish the Chinese consort as Tri Songdetsen's mother. The *Wä* were a Chinese-oriented clan (Kapstein, 2000, pp. 34-35), and it has even been proposed that they were ethnically Chinese themselves.

and was made famous (or notorious) by Rokshan.[23] While this suggestion has not been conclusively demonstrated,[24] information on the clan and in particular its most famous member in imperial Tibet, Tagdra Lugong, is worth including here. It is noteworthy that two of the ministers mentioned above, Ngan (sometimes Nganlam) Tagdra Lugong and Nanam Trompa Kye, were remembered in many (much later) sources of the Buddhist tradition as enemies of Buddhism, yet Tagdra, at least, is also recorded in early sources as a loyal supporter of Tri Songdetsen during the succession conflict, and a contributor to the construction of Samye, the most important Buddhist temple in early Tibet.[25]

The present writer has elsewhere explored the significant influence that the Sogdian Buddhist master Amoghavajra seems to have had on the Buddhism that reached Imperial and post-Imperial Tibet from the north.[26] While he is not among those early Buddhists that the Nyingmapa school honors as its ancestors, other prominent figures with Inner Asian connections can be detected. If we accept that the Nanam clan of that time did have roots in Sogdiana, and that the Nub clan was indeed of Irano-Bactrian ancestry, then the list expands rapidly. Among the 25 disciples traditionally reckoned as the foremost students of Padmasambhava of Urgyan,[27] we find Nanam Dorje

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[23] Hoffmann (1971, pp. 446-447) objected to this conclusion on the grounds that there was a Nganlam region in Tibet, and Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, p. 61 n. 194) also note the clan's association with the Phenyul region northeast of Lhasa. They describe the Nganlam as being one of the oldest clans, one of the original *ma sang* clans of ancient Tibet, but whether this is a historical or legendary attribution is not clear; according to Richardson, they do not appear in the historical record before the eighth century. In any case, the examples of the Nub and Nanam clans show that groups of foreign extraction could also have hereditary seats in Tibet.

[24] A recent source translated from the Chinese, and cited in de la Vassière (2005, p. 338) is titled *Ngan Louchan che tsi* (*Histoire de Ngan Louchan*), so it appears that an old or local Chinese pronunciation matched the Tibetan, providing some further support for the hypothesis.

[25] It is worth remembering that until the reign of Tri Songdetsen, there was evidently no attempt to distinguish between Buddhism and the other religious traditions of the Tibetan plateau on an official level, and it is likely that the emperor's doing so was a contributing factor to Bon later becoming a catch-all term among Buddhists for any ritual or other practice not found in Indian or Chinese Buddhism. Tagdra Lugong may well have been a Sogdian who supported the Qatun's son during his youth, but continued on with the practices of his earlier religion until it was banned. On the diversity of traditions that later came to be subsumed under "Bon", see Blezer (2016, esp. p. 246). On the black stupa built at Samye, see Karmay (2001, pp. 101, 267).

[26] Gibson (forthcoming).

[27] This list is a post-Imperial creation, and shows minor inconsistencies throughout the various traditional accounts within the Nyingmapa, and some of the

Dudjom, Nanam Yeshe De, Nup Namkhai Nyingpo, and Nupchen (the "great Nup") Sangye Yeshe; in addition there was a Sogpo Lhapel, who, as a blacksmith, may not have belonged to an illustrious clan, but whose name nevertheless indicates his Sogdian ethnicity. Another disciple, Lang Pelgi Senge, would have been of Xienbi descent. If Richardson's proposal is correct, Nganlam Gyalwa Chokyang could be added to the list of Sogdian descendants, and even, centuries later, the great Nyingmapa luminary Longchen Rabjam, usually known as Longchenpa (1308-1363).[28]

Some small support for this conjecture can be found in an unexpected place. The present writer has in his possession a scroll painting (*thangka*) which includes Padmasambhava's 25 disciples. Of those for whom Inner Asian roots are proposed, all but one of those who are portrayed as lay disciples are depicted as having facial hair, which might be expected in people of ethnic Iranian ancestry; the sole exception is Nanam Dorje Dudjom.[29] That these portraits are not arbitrary is shown by the fact that certain conventions of posture and accoutrements are observable in most such renderings. This further might be taken to imply that the pictorial tradition of the 25 disciples goes back to a time when memory of their individual characteristics had not yet faded.

Two of these disciples were particularly prominent: Nanam Yeshe De and Nub Sangye Yeshe. The former is regarded as one of the foremost translators of the early period,[30] and his name appears in the colophons of a great number of texts specific to the Nyingmapa school as well as more general Mahayana works; perhaps most importantly for Tibet, he was a co-translator of the *Avataṃsaka* sutra.[31] Given their

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individuals listed appear to be historically unlikely. Nevertheless, the lists represent a cultural memory if not strict historical fact. English-language sources on this matter that may be referred to are Thondup (1996, pp. 96-108; and 1986, pp. 231-234); Thondup also provides numerous Tibetan references for future research on the subject.

[28] The Eighth Sungtrul Rinpoche of Padma Lingpa, cited in Harding (2003, p. 33), claims that Longchenpa was from the Nganlam clan, and was a descendent of Gyalwa Chokyang. Thondup, on the other hand (1996, p. 109) claims he was from the Rok clan. Thondup cites (1996, p. 369 n. 129) several authors as contributing to his biography.

[29] Those disciples who are depicted as monks, of course, have no hair at all, either on head or face.

[30] See Karmay (2007, p. 30); the others were Kawa Paltsek, Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen, and Berotsana. The first two of these may have been from pre-Imperial Tibetan clans; on the possible Inner Asian connections of the latter, see Gibson (forthcoming).

[31] See Hamar, 2007b, pp. 165-168. He is also said to have helped translate the *Lotus Sutra* into Tibetan, and, according to Overby (2016, p. 262) the mantra text *Mahāmāyūrī* as well. All these texts were evidently far more popular in Inner Asia

history in this regard in other countries, it is hardly surprising to find a Sogdian acting as a major translator in Tibet.

Nupchen Sangye Yeshe is best known to Western scholarship as the author of the *Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*Bsam gtan mig sgron*) a work that compares various approaches to the Mahayana path, ranking Atiyoga (another name by which the teachings of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen, *rdzogs chen*) are sometimes known) as the most profound, followed in descending order by the Vajrayana, the teachings of the Chinese Chan school, and the sūtric teachings.[32] It is now commonly believed, however, that Nupchen wrote in the 10th century, which means that he either would have been improbably long-lived, or that he was not actually Padmasambhava's direct disciple. Nevertheless, his influence was strongly felt, as evidenced by the tales of magical power attributed to him, and the numerous Nyingmapa figures who claimed descent from him either lineally or through rebirth. It also might be mentioned that one of Nupchen's own teachers, Pelgi Yeshe, was a Sogdian, and supposedly a grand-disciple of Padmasambhava. (Karmay, 2007, p. 125 n. 23; Roerich, 1979, pp. 108, 170); he also sometimes appears on lists of the 25.

The Che clan was mentioned above as having roots in Tokharistan.[33] One member of the clan, named Tsenkye, is said to have brought the premier Nyingmapa tantra of the Anuyoga class, the *Gathered Intent* (*Dgongs pa 'dus pa*) from the far western Himalayas, and (possibly with the aid of Nupchen) translated it from the Brusha language (Germano, 2002, p. 254). Another of the clan, Chetsun Senge Wangchuk, is closely associated with a group of texts that are the root of the Instruction Division (*man ngag sde*) of the scriptures of the Nyingmapa's Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) school, the so called Seventeen Tantras. These were supposedly brought to Tibet during the reign of Tri Songdetsen, and hidden away by Nyang Tingdzin Zangpo, to be rediscovered in the eleventh century by one Dangma Lhungyal, and then propagated by Chetsun.[34] It should be remarked in passing that one of the most important of the tantras in this collection, the *Tantra of Self-arising Awareness* (*Rig pa rang shar*) was supposedly translated from several languages (Smith 2018, p. 520), and it contains

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and China than in India, and would have been well known among Sogdian Buddhists.

[32] Since Guenther (1983) and Karmay (1988) brought this work to the attention of foreign scholarship, there has been considerable comment on it. See especially Meinart (2002) and van Schaik, (2012).

[33] On the political and religious role of the Che clan in post-Imperial Tibet, see Davidson (2005, pp. 228- 230).

[34] Gyatso (1998, p. 301 n. 69) believes that Senge Wangchuk "had an important role in the codification if not composition" of the Seventeen Tantras.

much terminology that is not congruous with a Sanskrit back-translation (Davidson, 2005, pp. 240-241). It also shows an unquestionable familiarity with Manichaean mythology.[35]

It should not be thought, however, that Inner Asian ancestry can only be detected in these brilliant early exemplars of early Tibetan Buddhism. According to the *Blue Annals* (Roerich, 1979, p. 110), the Nyingmapa master Zur Sherab Jungne (1002-1062) studied a commentary on the *Secret Matrix* (*Guhyagarbha*) tantra with a Tokharian teacher, Namkha De, who also taught him the important Dzogchen text the *All-Creating Sovereign* (*Kun byed rgyal po*). Another member of the Nup clan, descended from Nupchen, was one of the celebrated Milarepa's early teachers.[36] In addition, the mother of the treasure discoverer Aro Yeshe Jungne was also identified as Sogdian in his biography.[37]

One crucial role that a Sogdian played in the reestablishment of Buddhism after the Empire fragmented has been scarcely noted: this was during the reintroduction of the Lower Tradition of the Vinaya (*smad 'dul*) into Central Tibet from the Amdo region. The event was spearheaded by the famous Lachen Gongpa Rabsel, but, according to the Bon tradition (Karmay, 2001, pp. 105-108), one of the three who ordained him, named Tribar Tsultrim, was before his own ordination a Sogdian refugee from China who had taken a job as a horse herder in Amdo, where he had earlier been known as "the Sogdian with a monkey-skin robe".[38] Whatever the facts behind this tradition, it is known that among Lachen's spiritual descendants, there was a group known as the "Six Sogmo" (male in spite of the epithet). That these were not all strictly Sogdian descendants, however, seems to be indicated by the fact that both the Nup and the Che clans are represented among the names given in the traditional lists (Stoddard,

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[35] Manichaeism was widespread in Tokharistan before the Arab invasion; on this matter, see my forthcoming book. Since Manichaeism was probably extinct as an independent religion in the lands of Islam by the eleventh century, however, this raises interesting questions about how the mythology came to be preserved in the *Rigpa Rangshar*.

[36] His name is uncertain, as the various traditions seem to contradict one another. On this, see Martin (1982, pp 52-57).

[37] Her name was Sogmo Paldrön (Østensen, 2018, p.11).

[38] There are varied and contradictory versions of the story; see Stoddard (2004, pp. 63-71) and Davidson (2005, pp. 88-89). Stoddard (together with most scholars since) does not mention the Bonpo connections to this story, but Davidson does allude to them. Stoddard showed that the location of these ordinations was in a hermitage near Dentig, which is west of Lanzhou on the Yellow River (Ryavec, 2015, Map 15, p. 61), and not in present-day Khams, as many Tibetan histories suggest.

2004, pp. 68-73). Perhaps by this time, *sog* had become a more generic term for Inner Asians, as the word *hu* was in China.

One final personage deserves mention: Zhang Yudrakpa Sonam Drakpa, who was a politically powerful and ruthless (but evidently spiritually accomplished) lama during the start of the so-called "Second Spread" of Buddhism.[39] He was also a member of the Nanam clan, although according to Martin (2001, p. 45) he did not use his clan name until the end of his working life. Although better known for his works in the New Translation context, he came from a Nyingmapa background.

In sum, then, many of the important clans of Imperial Tibet had their origins in the area reaching from the Iranian borderlands (Tazig), through Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khotan, to the eastern Tokharians and the Xianbe. This in itself should not be a surprise; Stoddard (2004, p. 53) has already noted the "multicultural, multilingual ethos" which developed in Tibet during the late Empire, and continued for some time after. Still, awareness of the cultural antecedents of some clans might be useful not only in contextualizing some aspects of Tibetan history (such as the revolt of 755 mentioned above), but also in tracing religious currents in early Tibet.

Including considerations of clan might aid in reconstructions of Tibetan religious history in another way: by exploring the relationships of clans to particular bodies of literature. Guenther has suggested (though without going into the matter in much depth), that using the translator information in colophons might be useful in discovering whether certain translators or teams of translators specialized in working from different types of texts with different origins.[40] It seems, for example, that there may have been more than a random connection between the most important esoteric scriptures that are particular to the modern Nyingmapa school and the Inner Asian clans. To take one example, the primary tantra of the Nyingmapa Mahāyoga class, the *Secret Matrix*, was rejected by scholars of the New Translation schools on the grounds that it was not to be found in India;[41] the fact that Zur Sherab Jungne chose to study

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[39] His life and thought have been treated by Martin (2001); see also Davidson (2005, pp. 328-29).

[40] Guenther (1996, p. 6 n. 13) suggests that Kawa Paltsek was an expert in the Chinese language, while Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen was skilled in the language of Urgyan. Unfortunately, he does not say how he came to this conclusion.

[41] Contrary to the stance widely accepted in later Tibet, this in no way implies that the tantra was "inauthentic". There were many Buddhists outside India who knew Sanskrit, and, more importantly, there are no valid criteria for labeling scriptures composed inside India as "authentic", while rejecting all others. On this issue, see Gibson (forthcoming).

the tantra with a Tokharian teacher indicates that at least some of those who kept this teaching alive in the face of the new material being brought from India were Inner Asian by ancestry. This circumstance might be related to the interest shown by these clans in keeping alive the forms of Buddhism which came to Tibet during the imperial period, when the clans' prominence was at its peak. That Zhang Yudrakpa Sonam Drakpa did not choose to use his clan name when he was writing might indicate not only that the Nanam clan was losing its prestige by his time, as Martin suspects, but also that the clan was still associated with scriptures that did not have an Indian pedigree and hence were suspicious.

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Deroche, Marc-Henri, *Une Quête tibétaine de la sagesse: Prajñāraśmi (1518-1584) et l'attitude impartiale* (ris med), Brepols, 2023, 724 pages.

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Marc-Henri Deroche's *Une Quête tibétaine de la sagesse: Prajñāraśmi (1518-1584) et l'attitude impartiale* (ris med) developed from his 2011 doctoral thesis from the École Pratique des Hautes Études. But this is more than a dissertation book; Deroche has synthesized an impressive amount of new material and scholarship in the intervening twelve years, including the publication of new writings of Prajñāraśmi in 2016 and the discovery of relevant artwork in 2019. Some readers might be more familiar with the titular subject by his Tibetan name Shes rab 'od zer, but Deroche opts for the Sanskrit semantic equivalent on the fair grounds that this is what Prajñāraśmi himself preferred (p. 37). Deroche is to be commended for writing the definitive academic study of Prajñāraśmi. *Une Quête tibétaine de la sagesse* is a 724-page tome that gives an encyclopedic overview of Prajñāraśmi's life, political context, and, especially, intellectual and religious influence, and so will be of use to a much wider range of scholars than its title might suggest, including historians of sixteenth-century Tibet, Tibetan philosophy and intellectual history, the Fifth Dalai Lama, and ris med, although each group of scholars might benefit from utilizing individual sections of the work rather than reading it cover to cover. The book's ten chapters are divided into three parts: L'Homme, L'Œuvre, and L'Heritage. I will treat each in turn.

Part One, "L'Homme," provides a general introduction to Prajñāraśmi, also known as Trengpo Tertön Sherab Özer ('Phreng po gter ston shes rab 'od zer), and thoroughly situates him within his religio-political milieu. Much of Part One shows how Prajñāraśmi's life responded to and was conditioned by the various overlapping political systems into which he had been thrust. Prajñāraśmi was a syncretic teacher and practitioner, initially trained as an adolescent in the Gelug and Sakya schools before ultimately becoming more attracted to Nyingma and Kagyu visions of contemplative practice (p. 85-86). This was despite, or perhaps because of, being born during a time of intense sectarianism, when the various Tibetan Buddhist schools were broadly aligned with competing political interests. For instance, in Prajñāraśmi's lifetime, Gelugpas were banned from the Great Prayer Festival (Smon lam chen mo), which was instead given

over to Karma Kagyu monks. The edict was informed less by purely doctrinal disputes than by the Rin spungs pa desire to publicly demonstrate their consolidation of political power (p. 89). In addition to straddling many different schools, Deroche also observes that Prajñāraśmi is one of few figures in Tibetan history to have been trained as both a dge bshes and a gter ston. Hence, Deroche argues compellingly that the life of Prajñāraśmi can tell us a great deal about a wide swath of Tibetan political and religious life during the sixteenth century.

Prajñāraśmi took lay vows with the master Tshul khrims 'od zer ba (dates unknown) as a child, and began practicing at E wam Monastery, where he received the name Shes rab 'od zer: "Light of Wisdom." When he was eighteen, he left E wam to follow 'Bri gung rin chen phun tshogs (1509-1557), a senior abbot of the Drigung Kagyu lineage, from whom Prajñāraśmi received both Nyingma and Kagyu teachings. 'Bri gung rin chen phun tshogs was an important gter ston, and, after spending ten years as a hermit, Prajñāraśmi himself received and revealed many important treasures from Padmasambhava, namely the *Sphere of Liberation: Natural Liberation of Intention* (*Grol thig dgongs pa rang grol*). Chapter Three, "Activités Et Transmission (p. 123)," provides a comprehensive account of his transmissions and teachings given and received, as well as an overview of his most prominent disciples (p. 138). After a period of revealing treasures across Bsam yas and important monasteries of Tibet, he settled in 'Phreng po, hence the honorific title by which he became known. Prajñāraśmi founded Dpal ri Monastery in 1571 (p. 129), which he led until his own death in 1584. The monastery was decimated by the Dzungars in 1717 and again during the Cultural Revolution.

Part Two, "L'œuvre de Prajñāraśmi," provides an analysis of Prajñāraśmi's works based on four sources: (1) Most importantly, his gsung 'bum; (2) writings found in collections by other authors, including the treasures compiled in the *Sphere of Liberation*; (3) two texts uncovered by Deroche during his field research at Dpal ri Monastery collected under the single title *Aspirational Sūtras and Mantras* (*Mdo sngags smon lam*), which were commented upon by 'Jigs med gling pa (1729/30-1798) and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820-1892); and (4) a new edition of his gsung 'bum published in 2016 that includes some of the texts mentioned above that were excluded from the original gsung 'bum (p. 147). Prajñāraśmi wrote in a number of genres, including doxographical history, precepts for awakening bodhicitta, Madhyamaka philosophy, songs of realization (glu), monastic charters (gra tshang gi bca' yig), ritual texts, and short autobiographies (rang rnam) composed for the edification of his disciples (p. 149). A lengthy section provides a critical evaluation of the new

gsung 'bum, giving an overview of its contents and evaluating the likelihood that particular works and manuscripts were authored by Prajñāraśmi himself (p. 150). Deroche focuses especially on texts that that would prove influential to later thinkers. For instance, a useful table (p. 158) shows how the contents of Prajñāraśmi's grol thig treasures changed as they were transmitted by 'Jigs med gling pa, Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, and Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899).

Chapter Four offers a historical overview and analysis of Prajñāraśmi's oeuvre, while the subsequent three chapters each provide translations of specific texts. Each translation consults multiple witnesses when possible and is accompanied by variant readings and extensive footnotes. Chapter Five turns to Prajñāraśmi's development, or even invention, of the Tibetan doxography of the eight lineages (which in the relevant texts includes the Rnying ma pa, Bka' gdams pa, Shangs pa bka' brgyud, Lam 'bras, Mar pa bka' brgyud, Zhi byed, Sbyor drug, and Rdo rje gsum gyi bsnyen sgrub) (p. 200), which is meant to provide a comprehensive historiography of the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet. Deroche provides a complete translation of Prajñāraśmi's *Ambrosia of Study and Reflection* (p. 219-242) and the first chapter of his *Ambrosia of Meditation* (p. 243-294), as these texts were the subject of a commentary by Mkhyen brtse that would come to serve as "la base de la rédaction du catalogue du Trésor des instructions spirituelles rédigé par Kong sprul (p. 173)," and hence were very influential on what later came to be known as the ris med movement.

Chapter Six turns to *The Lamp Which Illuminates the Two Truths* (*Bden gnyis gsal ba'i sgron me*), which was attributed to Prajñāraśmi and so became an important part of his legacy, even though Deroche argues against Prajñāraśmi's authorship. Instead, Deroche credits Thierry Lamouroux with discerning that the work was actually written by the Kadampa author Lce gsom shes rab rdo rje (1140/1150-1220). Deroche justifies the inclusion of the translation by writing, "Dans la mesure où ce texte est toujours utilisé dans l'exégèse vivante de la tradition rnying ma pa en tant qu'un écrit de Prajñārasmi et que son usage éclaire un autre aspect de la stratégie conservatrice d'union sacrée des anciennes traditions décrite dans le chapitre cinq, nous avons décidé de le garder dans ce travail comme un élément majeur de l'œuvre de Prajñāraśmi, non comme l'une de ses créations originales, mais comme un emprunt significatif et un support essentiel de son enseignement (p. 299)." A critical translation is then provided (p. 324-348). Chapter Seven gives an overview of two texts published under the title *Aspirational Sūtras and Mantras* (*Mdo sngags smon lam*): *The Tree of Happiness: Aspiring toward the Conduct of a Bodhisattva*

(Byang chub spyod pa'i smon lam phan bde'i ljon pa), which discuses the sutra path, and *The Feast that Fulfills All Wishes* (*Gsang ba sngags kyi smon lam 'dod 'jo'i dga' ston*), which discusses the tantric path (p. 349). Deroche sys that these were the only texts attributed to Prajñāraśmi that were still actively incorporated into the daily liturgy of Dpal ri when he was conducting fieldwork there in 2010. Both texts are then translated (p. 356-382).

Part III, L'Héritage, demonstrates the importance of Prajñāraśmi's life and thought to both his own day and to posterity. Chapter Eight argues that the importance of Dpal ri as a Nyingma monastic center has been obscured due to its untimely destruction at the hands of the Dzungars in 1717, even though "il forma en réalité la première grande institution monastique rnying ma au Tibet central (p. 385)," with over three-thousand monastics and other practitioners at its height. The chapter offers a study of the monastery based on 'Jigs med gling pa's account of Dpal ri (*Dpal ri theg pa chen po'i gling gi gtam rdo rje sgra ma'i rgyud mngas*), which has often been mentioned by other scholars but until now had not been the subject of a dedicated study, supplemented by the account in the *Rdzogs chen chos 'byung*. The chapter gives a full accounting of the important texts, artworks, and material objects housed within the monastery.

Chapter Nine is effectively a bridge chapter connecting Prajñāraśmi and Dpal ri to the nineteenth-century "ris med movement" that Deroche wishes to explore at length. The chapter shows Prajñāraśmi's influence on the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) and 'Jigs med gling pa during a period of "Nyingma Renaissance." Deroche shows how the Fifth Dalai Lama utilized Dpal ri's treasure tradition to place himself in the lineage of Za hor, and thereby Padmasambhava and the early Tibetan emperors, providing a Tibetan-centric narrativization of the Gelug political consolidation of central Tibet through Mongol armies. The chapter proceeds to show how 'Jigs med gling pa benefitted from and advanced this Nyingma Renaissance. Even though Deroche concedes that Prajñārasmi influenced both figures somewhat indirectly, the chapter demonstrates convincingly that Prajñārasmi's influence extended far beyond the decline of Dpal ri.

Chapter Ten provides a general overview of the socio-political conditions that cultivated the eventual ris med movement, especially the pluralistic orientation of Derge, in eastern Tibet, relative to the Gelug hegemony of central Tibet. Deroche follows recent scholarship in qualifying Gene Smith's description of a "ris med movement," writing that the phrase describes "sinon un activisme, du moins une intense activité religieuse caractérisée par une production littéraire de grande ampleur (p. 428)." Deroche argues that we can draw a direct line from Prajñārasmi to the great anthologizing projects of Mkhyen

brtse and Kong sprul via 'Jigs med gling pa, particularly with respect to the ris med movement's use of the eight lineages as an organizing doxography. Deroche writes, "Il existe effectivement, selon la tradition, une continuité essentielle entre 'Jigs med gling pa et le mouvement impartial: 'Jam dbyangs Mkhyen bre'i dbang po, le visionnaire d'où le mouvement prit sa source, était considéré comme le Corps d'émanation de 'Jigs med gling pa. Mkhyen brtse donna forme à son éclectisme à travers le modèle des huit lignées de Prajñārasmi dont il avait collecté les œuvres lors de sa visite de Dpal ri (p. 426)." Although this is not necessarily a controversial opinion within ris med scholarship, it might surprise some readers to hear Deroche argue, "En plaçant la transmission du modèle des huit lignées (de Prajñārasmi à Mkhyen brtse, et de Mkhyen brtse à Kong sprul) au centre de notre analyse, nous argumenterons ici que Mkhyen brtse fut davantage l'inspirateur du mouvement et Kong sprul son compilateur. L'éclectisme de Mkhyen brtse se réalisa à travers ses pèlerinages, les collections de nombreuses lignées et la richesse de ses visions. Kong sprul eut le principal rôle d'organiser et de compiler un grand nombre de ces éléments (p. 432)." In addition to their use of the eight lineages, Mkhyen brtse identified Kong sprul as a rebirth of Prajñārasmi, and many of Prajñārasmi's writings, including the *Sphere of Liberation*, were included in Kongtrul's anthologies. This in turn extended Prajñārasmi's influence into the present day vis-à-vis the importance of Kong sprul and Mkhyten brtse to contemporary Tibetan thought. As Deroche writes, "Après Mkhyen brtse et Kong sprul, le modèle des huit lignées de Prajñārasmi est devenu chez leurs nombreux héritiers la présentation classique pour exposer de façon impartiale les traditions du bouddhisme au Tibet (p. 456)." Deroche concludes the section and the book with a summary of Prajñāraśmi's influence, writing, "Si jadis Prajñāraśmi fut pris entre les Rouges et les Jaunes, son héritage lui survécut donc à la fois au sein du système des Dalaï-Lamas et du mouvement impartial, avec comme point commun le rattachement à Padmasambhava, la mémoire de l'ancien Empire et la sacralisation des espaces du monde tibétain par la redécouverte continue des trésors matériels selon une géographie sacrée, une vie visionnaire et une intense activité rituelle (469)."

As I hope the above summary has indicated, Deroche's book is so full of detailed source-work and analysis that almost any scholar of Tibetan Buddhism will find something relevant to their research, even if they don't have any interest in Prajñāraśmi per se. Of the book's many strengths, I would like to call attention to three:

First, and perhaps most importantly, this is the definitive book on the life of Prajñārasmi for this generation, though it will hopefully

inspire further studies on this important thinker. Deroche shows Prajñārasmi's significant but unheralded importance to a variety of philosophical and practice lineages, including those transmitted through the Fifth Dalai Lama, 'Jigs med gling pa, and the nineteenth-century ris med masters. Deroche supports his argument with an incredibly wide variety of sources, many of which are analyzed in considerable detail for the first time in western scholarship.

Second, the translations provided in Part II are extremely careful and could have been published as standalone articles or even a short book in themselves. The depth of Deroche's source-work and foot-notes is genuinely impressive.

Third, the encyclopedic breadth of the book makes it as valuable to historians of the sixteenth century as to scholars specifically interested in Prajñārasmi. The focus on Prajñārasmi provides a snapshot of Tibetan religious life and thought shortly prior to the Gelug consolidation of political power, and Deroche's work will hence prove useful to historians of a variety of time periods, whether as a cap to pre-Dga' ldan pho brang Tibet, or as a way of framing the Gelug ascendency from a non-Gelug (but not necessarily polemical or oppositional) perspective (see p. 467-468).

There are, naturally, a few drawbacks that inevitably accompany the publication of such a large tome. The tradeoff of including such a wide breadth of texts and context related to Prajñārasmi's life and work is that the book as a whole at times seems to lack a single argument or claim, even as individual sections are narrowly focused and tightly argued. What's more, the connection between Prajñārasmi's thought and his political context could be theorized in more detail given the effort put into establishing each component. Deroche shows convincingly that philosophical debates and political power were inextricably linked in sixteenth-century Tibet (and beyond), but the relationship between the two could have been more extensively theorized. At times, Deroche follows Dreyfus in arguing that, "la victoire dans le débat scolastique eut souvent pour enjeu le prestige et la supériorité d'une école (p. 181)," but other times it seems like Deroche is suggesting that philosophical positions were mere proxies for various political factions. I imagine that Deroche would say the relationship between the two is not unidirectional, but it would have been nice to see this point theorized a bit more explicitly, though it is possible I am projecting my own interests onto a project with different concerns.

In any case, this is a minor critique of a gargantuan undertaking that was over a decade in the making, one for which Deroche deserves high praise. Although *Une Quête tibétaine de la sagesse* is too technical to be of use to anyone outside of Tibetan Studies, it will

likely benefit almost all scholars consulting this journal, including scholars of Sherab Ozer, not to mention historians of the sixteenth century in Tibet, Tibetan intellectual and political history writ large, and ris med. This volume should provide Deroche with a firm textual and historical foundation for many future projects, which we are eagerly anticipating.

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Cameron Bailey and Aleksandra Wenta (eds.), *Tibetan Magic: Past and Present*, London (Bloomsbury Academic), 2024. vi + 254 pp. ISBN: 978-1-3503-5494-4.

Reviewed by Per Kværne
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In a certain sense, reviewing this book could be regarded as superfluous, as the excellent Afterword (pp. 221-243) by Nicolas Sihlé provides an insightful and critical overview of its nine chapters and discusses their theoretical foundations and methodological implications. However, given the importance and broad range of topics in this volume, a short presentation of its contents will be attempted in the hope of encouraging scholars – and other interested readers – to delve into it.

In his Introduction (pp. 1-11), Cameron M. Bailey outlines the use of the term 'magic' in anthropological literature, where it generally has had a negative connotation. Bailey, however, argues for a shift in this regard, drawing on older Western, including Muslim, understandings of magic: "Occult philosophers and practitioners in the west did not view magic as bad science and primitive religion in Frazerian terms, or pit religion and magic against each other in hostile, mutually exclusive Durkheimian terms. Quite to the contrary, they often viewed magic as the pinnacle of religion and natural philosophy (i.e. science)" (pp. 3-4).

A recent major contribution to the study of magic in Buddhism, including Tibetan Buddhism, is Sam van Schaik's monograph *Buddhist Magic: Divination, Healing, and Enchantment through the Ages* (2020). While fully acknowledging the importance of van Schaik's work, Bailey argues that facing the difficulty of defining magic, van Schaik "proposed using a Wittgensteinian "family resemblances" approach to the definition of magic, pointing out certain elemental features of magic that tend to recur in similar practices historically across the planet" (pp.1-2). Bailey does not adopt this position; on the contrary, he sees an advantage, in the Tibetan context, in referring to an "esotericist" or "occultist" framework, exemplified in Buddhism by the emic category of Tantra, and adopts the following position: "An esotericist model of magic which is much more in line with the actual emic viewpoints of the writers and practitioners of the texts and methods we are studying, recognizes magic not as opposed to religion but as a specialized form of it" (pp. 4-5).

Thus, Bailey's approach has the advantage not only of doing away with unhelpful prejudices, but also of conforming to the emic Tibetan understanding of those rituals and beliefs that are the concern of this book. His approach is shared to various degrees and in different ways by most of the authors of the chapters constituting *Tibetan Magic* and should be kept in mind when reading their contributions. The chapters may, *grosso modo*, be said to be either based on textual material or on fieldwork (or in several cases a combination of both) but have in common a focused structure and the merit of presenting new material and insights.

Amanda N. Brown's contribution, "The *Zla gsang be'u bum*: A Compendium of Ritual Magic and Sorcery" (pp. 13-34), is a study of a collection of short texts invoking the Buddhist wrathful deity Yamāntaka. While the author characterises the rituals as "aggressive magic or "sorcery"" (p. 16) – their object being to cause harm, to the extent of killing an enemy – she points out that the rituals "are only to be performed by high-level Buddhist practitioners, defined as such through the religious system as a whole" (p. 15). This supports Bailey's approach, indicated above, of seeing magic "not as opposed to religion but as a specialized form of it".

Susan Landesman likewise bases her chapter on a textual source: "Magical Results of the Rituals in the *Tārā-mūla-kalpa*'s Continuation Tantra" (pp. 35-60), a Sanskrit text brought to Tibet in the 11th century and translated into Tibetan two hundred years later. The rituals outlined in the text aim at the attainment of a range of worldly goals, such as obtaining a lifespan lasting thousands of years, gold or silver coins, acquiring a village or an entire kingdom, subjugating a king, a minister, or a prostitute; or becoming invisible, travelling through the sky, and so on. Paradoxically – or so it would seem – these attainments are not only dependent on the relevant rituals being performed with the utmost scrupulosity, but it is just as essential that "religious commitments are maintained, and respect for teachers, teachings, and tradition is upheld" (p. 35). Once again, magic and religion are seen to be inextricably intertwined.

Textual studies are continued in "The *Vajrabhairavatantra*: *Materia Magica* and Circulation of Tantric Magical Recipes" by Aleksandra Wenta (pp. 61-84). The author characterizes the *Vajrabhairavatantra*, composed in India in the 8th century CE, as "a seminal Buddhist *yogatantra*", consisting of "ritual procedures… that deal primarily with magical technology" (p. 61). Wenta raises the issue of whether it is possible, or helpful, to distinguish "between religion – seen as "high", soteriologically oriented – and magic – viewed as "low", popular, and used for pragmatic purposes – often made in anthropology", and arrives at the same conclusion as the authors already discussed,

namely that the distinction makes little sense, as "The execution of tantric magical recipes belongs to the repertoire of the advanced practitioner" (p. 62). The author emphasizes parallels between Shaiva and Buddhist tantric texts and points out their common origin, as far as magical practices go, in the *Atharvaveda* (p. 63). The chapter also discusses various foul-smelling and impure substances and recipes used in Buddhis tantric rituals, including those described in the *Vajrabhairavatantra*, as well as their opposites, such as milk, ghee, and honey; the manipulation of dolls to attract, subjugate or destroy another person; and finally, the driving away a person by means of visualisation. Wenta concludes that "the magical recipes of tantric milieu were embedded in the culture of circulation that crossed sectarian boundaries" (p. 78), namely the (often fluid) boundaries between Hindu and Buddhist tantric practices – a phenomenon which she regards as "a virtually unexplored aspect of tantric tradition" (p. 79).

A widespread phenomenon in Tibetan Buddhism is *smon lam*. In his chapter, "The Magic That Lies within Prayer: On Patterns of Magicity and Resolute Aspirations (*smon lam*)" (pp. 85-102), Rolf Scheuermann aptly translates it as "resolute aspirations", while listing other translations, such as "wishing prayers", "paths of aspirations", and "earnest wish". In any case, the concept plays an important part in standard Mahāyāna soteriology, and on the level of practice, "resolute aspiration prayers are an integral part of the daily liturgies of monasteries and individual practitioners" (p. 91). How, then, does this relate to magic? Scheuermann argues that "the analytical category of magic is quite problematic… as it excludes certain practices, particularly those labelled as religion" (p. 85). Nevertheless, "The practice of resolute aspirations appears as an apotropaic practice in divination texts" (p. 91), used, for example, "to remedy acute health issues" in which context the recitation of specific *sūtra*s is recommended. While such practices are not, Scheuermann argues, magic, they do at least involve "the efficacy of words in the sense of a pattern of magicity" (p. 92). This argument is further refined in Scheuermann's chapter, contributing to a nuanced discussion of the concept of magic.

The following chapter, Cameron M. Bailey, "The *Yogin*'s Familiars: Protector Deities as Magical Guides" (pp. 103-123), likewise involves the study of textual sources but focuses on certain folk beliefs found therein. In view of his approach to magic outlined in the Introduction, it is not surprising that he chooses to discuss a form of magic found explicitly in western esotericism and (implicitly) in Buddhist magic, namely "so-called "demonic" magic in which nonhuman, potentially if not overtly malevolent beings are commanded to carry out a

particular magical action" (p. 103). Bailey explains that a more apt term could be the Greek word *daemon*, referring to "active beings…divine, lesser that the 'great' gods" (p. 105), and hence "worldly" as opposed to transcendent buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Tibetan hagiographic literature such beings are not necessarily depicted as servants, but rather "as spiritual guides, friends and even lovers to the *yogins* and *yoginis* who encountered them in… vital, lived interactions" (p. 107). He examines this phenomenon in the context of an 18th century Tibetan Buddhist master, Sle-lung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje, whose *daemon* (in the above sense) was his personal protector goddess, Lha-gcig Nyi-ma gZhon-nu. This master had apparently spontaneous visions of the goddess, who he believed regularly possessed his wife. Bailey describes three magic practices purportedly taught by Sle-lung bZhad-pa'i rDo-rje, among them "the blessing and empowerment of hot springs water to endow it with healing properties" (p. 115), during which the goddess is visualised as a beautiful *klu mo* (an aquatic divine being), "flirtatious and extremely desirous".

With Valentina Punzi's chapter there is a shift to fieldwork-based anthropology as well as a clearly formulated emphasis on emic perspectives, as indicated in the title: "Emic Perspectives on the Transubstantiation of Words in Tibetan-Script Textual Amulets" (pp. 125-148). The chapter deals with the widespread use of magic amulets in Tibetan religion, illustrated by two carefully observed examples of the production and empowerment of amulets by ritual specialists, one being an elderly monk in southeast Qinghai Province, the other a young lay member of the Baima ethnic group in northwest Sichuan Province (the Baima are officially classified as belonging to the Tibetan nationality, but nevertheless consider themselves to be different from Tibetans).

A striking characteristic of both case studies is the pragmatic approach of the ritualist; for example, while in one case various *substances* (such as human flesh) are, according to the ritual text, required to ensure the effectiveness of the magic, in the actual observed performance of the ritual by the monk they were substituted by the *names* of the substances, written on pieces of paper. Moreover, for the protection of livestock, "once one amulet is put around the neck of a single animal in the herd, it will be effective for the protection of all" (p. 132). In the second case study, the ritual specialist was a young layman specializing on rituals for healing the sick. During the ritual he omitted to use the drum and ritual manual that he had in fact brough with him, explaining that it was sufficient to recite "auspicious words" in the Baima language, and that setting up the poles from which the drum needed to be suspended would take too much time.

Punzi makes the point that these pragmatic procedures are not

random simplifications, but presuppose a "semiotic domain", i.e. a "set of practices that recruits one or more modalities… to communicate distinctive types of meaning" (p. 141). These meanings must be mastered by the ritual specialist, and must be intelligible, though not necessarily directly accessible, to the community of the ritualist. The ritualist can manipulate and alter the actual ritual according to "what is materially and culturally available", but only within "the shared sense of acceptability and familiarity" (ibid.). This approach makes it possible to make sense of the many individual choices made by the ritual expert. She concludes – and this is, in the present reviewer's view, an important point – that the task of the scholar is not necessarily to adopt an emic perspective, 'giving a voice' to her or his interlocutors (who have, as often as not, never expressed an interest in being 'given a voice'), for "such a deep-rootedness would undermine the possibility to elaborate etic theorizing and further prevent the identification of patterns that are necessary to generate a cross-cultural definition of magic" (p. 146).

Eric D. Mortensen takes ethnological observation further, in a truly participant mode, as he himself, on leaving a combined interview and dinner during his fieldwork in Gyalthang in northern Yunnan on the south-eastern rim of the Tibetan Plateau, found himself "nearly doubled over with stomach pain". His chapter, "The Magical Causality of Poison Casting and Cancer among Tibetan Communities of Gyalthang" (pp.149-167), explores a complex system of belief revolving around the local nexus of ideas of poison, the act of magical poisoning, and rumour. In Gyalthang, certain people are accused of "having poison", without necessarily being able to control it, but nevertheless suffering from social ramifications, not least because it is believed that once a person has poison, she or he is likely to pass it on, even to his or her own children. Poison is dangerous, as even the breath of persons affected by it is dangerous, and one "needs to be lucky to survive a visit and a meal inside a house that has *dug* [poison]" (p. 153). Poison is often invisible but can also assume the shape of creatures such as snakes, frogs, or scorpions. Black flags are still sometimes flown to warn would-be guests not to eat food within such houses, as poison can be transmitted through food, but also by a simple gaze, especially from affected women, "in which case there is no cure" (p. 154).

From this it will be understood that in Gyalthang magical poisoning does not necessarily depend on defined ritual procedures or, at least apparently, on specific intent to harm. In fact, some scholars (notably Giovanni Da Col, discussing similar beliefs in Kongpo) do not regard 'poison (*dug*)' as nefarious or as 'black magic' at all. Mortensen provides a most useful overview of related beliefs and practices in a

wide area including Kongpo and Sikkim. Be that as it may, in Gyalthang poison is more like a contagious disease, "an affliction, a scourge, an anxiety" (p. 160), and Mortensen argues that it fulfils all criteria of the concept of magic. Fortunately, after "a several hours of acute pain and a few days of stomach discomfort" (p. 164), he recovered from his fieldwork interview visit and did not develop cancer, as some, conforming to local beliefs, had feared.

From one of the eastern regions of the Tibetan cultural area, the reader is led to a western region, namely Ladakh, located in India: "Is There Magic in *Gcod*? An Expedition into (Some of) the Complexities of *Sādhana*-Text Enactments" (pp.169-191). Nike-Ann Schröder has spent many years in India, principally in Ladakh, and Nepal studying and practicing *chö* (*gcod*), literally 'cutting', a complex Tibetan Buddhist tantric practice. To put it in the simplest possible terms, in *chö* the practitioner, through a carefully choreographed ritual, identifies with a female deity and offers her dissected body to all beings, particularly fierce animals and supernatural beings, as an offering to alleviate their suffering, and – ultimately – obtain enlightenment herself. The ritual can also be enacted collectively, often by monks or nuns in a monastery, in which case it may be internalized, based on fundamental Buddhist philosophical concepts of non-duality.

Schröder bases her chapter on a ritual handbook, short passages of which are translated, and her own experience and observation of Tibetan practitioners in the field. Her description and analysis of *chö* are acute and revolve around the concept of 'a field of magic' which she states that she prefers rather than a single, more precise definition of magic (p. 170). 'Field of magic' is perhaps quite close to 'magicity' as used by Scheuermann's chapter discussed above. Schröder does, however, uphold a distinction, at least provisional one, between religion and magic, although as two ends of a spectrum spanning "a religio-philosophical end" which "provides and array of meanings, elaborate techniques of transformation, and a means of embodying all this within a fine-grained Tibetan Buddhist cosmology", and a ""magic" end with its physicality, materiality, performance and tangibility" (p. 186). This spectrum, more in tune, Schröder suggests, with an emic Tibetan understanding of *chö*, hinges on the concept 'transformation', a ritual and spiritual process through which magic is turned into religion. Schröder would therefore seem to implicitly question Bailey's position, as set out in the Introduction, which "recognizes magic not as opposed to religion but as a specialized form of it" (p. 5).

Schröder points to the importance of the French traveller and author Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969) in forming the popular

western image of *chö* (pp. 170, 181). In the final chapter of the volume, Samuel Thévoz discusses this enigmatic but influential personage: ""Training for Sorcery, Magic, Mystic, Philosophy – for That Which Is Called 'the Great Accomplishment'": Alexandra David-Neel's Written and Unwritten Tibetan Grimoires" (pp. 193-219). Her role in firmly anchoring the association of 'magic' and 'mystery' in Tibetan religion among a large segment of the western public can hardly be overrated, and Thévoz is an expert on her life and literary output. Her importance in this regard is perhaps surprising as her early travel narratives from Tibet and the Himalayas "hardly touched upon the topic of magic" (p. 193). This changed with her second book, *Mystiques et Magiciens du Tibet* (1929), where the concept of magic was introduced and linked to a range of supernormal phenomena allegedly witnessed by David-Neel herself. As Thévoz demonstrates, however, David-Neel essentially relies on her own "invention of Tibetan magic… as a cultural translation" (ibid.).

Thévoz points out that David-Neel originally intended the title of her book to be *Le Thibet mystique*, but in the editorial process it was changed to *Mystiques et Magiciens du Tibet*, thus linking (or possibly contrasting) the two concepts. The American edition (1932) simplified the title to *Magic and mystery in Tibet*, "giving a significant prominence to magic as an umbrella category rather than to human actors" (p. 195). Consequently "magic became the defining feature of David-Neel's presentation of Tibet in her second book" (ibid.). Thévoz then discusses what David-Neel understood by 'magic' in the Tibetan context. She distinguished two categories of Tibetan magic: the first represented by "sorcerers, soothsayers, necromancers, occultists who seek the power of coercing certain gods and demons to secure their help" (of whose real existence they are in no doubt), and the second, "a small number of adepts who employ the very same means as their less enlightened colleagues, but hold the view that the various phenomena are produced by an energy arising in the magician himself" (p. 197, quoting David-Neel). This dichotomy is not entirely unlike that referred to by Schröder in the chapter discussed above (although Schröder has a far more refined and helpful methodology than David-Neel, whose narrative tends to be random and episodical). Be that as it may, her subsequent books tended to define her later writings and aroused considerable interest among contemporary western scholars and scientists, especially in France. Making use, not least, of archival material, Thévoz shows, however, that while "David-Neel has been instrumental in making Tibetan magic a worthy topic in its own right in the scope of the psychic sciences of her time" (p. 211), she was a committed Buddhist, deeply influenced by the Tibetan spiritual practice known as "the Great Perfection" (*rdzogs chen*), into

which she had been initiated during her sojourns in Sikkim (p. 200). Her presentation of magic in Tibet was based on "her own understanding of "true" Buddhism as a "mental training"" (ibid.), and in connection with magic "she… never used the term "supernatural", replacing it with the term 'supernormal' (p. 208). Thévoz' chapter is a fundamental contribution to clarifying the complex contribution of David-Neel to the concept of 'Tibetan magic'.

As mentioned at the outset of this review, the volume concludes with an Afterword by Nicolas Sihlé which richly rewards the reader not only by summing up the preceding chapters, but by discussing each of them critically. Here it will only be pointed out that while concluding that "whereas the category of "magic" enables one to outline broad comparative contrasts and arguments at the macro level, … it remains… a rather blunt analytical tool" (p. 239), Sihlé nevertheless emphasizes that in Tibetan studies, "*the strong presence of "magical" elements [is] at the very heart of a "religious" tradition like tantric Buddhism* [Sihlé's italics]" (p. 240), thus conforming, broadly speaking, to the main argument of this work, so rich in inspiring research and new insights.

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Travers, Alice, Peter Schwieger and Charles Ramble, eds.,
Taxation in Tibetan Societies: Rules, Practices and Discourses, **Leiden and Boston (Brill), 2023. xi+388 pp. [Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, vol. 53].**

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The twelve contributions to this volume on taxation in Tibetan societies study the topic related to rules, practices, and discourses. While in the first eight of them the main focus is on Tibet during the Ganden Phodrang (dGa' ldan pho brang) government period (1642–1959), the final four deal with polities and regions bordering Tibet, the Kingdom of Nangchen, Ladakh and Western Tibet, Zangskar, and Mustang—with the exception of Zangskar, all mainly from a historical, pre-1951/1959 perspective. Accordingly, most of them make use of various historical and modern written sources in Tibetan and also in Chinese, in particular archival documents, and other historical materials. Nevertheless, as is noted in some contributions, missing access to archival documents, in particular in Tibet (PR China), not to speak of proper field research, is a severe methodological difficulty and results in limitations to research, the systematic analysis of general, systemic, and specific aspects of taxation, and consequently the drawing of well-founded conclusions. Therefore, in a number of contributions, oral history data (collected by the authors or drawn from published versions) are used wherever possible. Due to the political sensitivity of the topic of taxation in Tibet and although study conditions did improve between the late 1980s until ca. the early 2010s, expressed by the results of international cooperation between research institutions in Tibet and the PR China, on the one hand, and Europe (such as, for example, Austria, France, Norway, and the UK) and the USA, on the other, (which provided the basis for Diana Lange's research on water transport and Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy's on the performance of Tibetan "opera"—(*a lce*) *lha mo*, in areas of historical Western Tibet *rnam thar*—as part of the tax system), the collection of data in many cases did take place primarily outside Tibet.

This situation was of course much more severe in the mid- to late-1960s when the first specific studies of taxation were made by

Surkhang Wangchen Gelek (1966, 1986)[1] and Melvyn Goldstein (1968, 1971),[2] later followed by George Tsarong (1998),[3] which are referred to by the editors in their "Introduction" (pp. 1–10) to the present volume as the ones who "solidly established in a body of in-depth scholarship" "this field of knowledge". To these should be added, in my view, for example, the works of Barbara Aziz (1978),[4] Eva K. Dargyay (1982),[5] and in particular Dieter Schuh, who dealt with topics related to taxation in a number of substantial publications since the 1970s (see for example Schuh 1988),[6] and recently in works specifically dedicated to this topic (Schuh 2016, 2020, 2022, 2023, and 2024).[7]

[1] Surkhang Wangchen Gelek (1966) Tax measurement and *Lag 'don* tax in Tibet. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, III/1: 15–28; *idem* (1986) Government, monastic and private taxation in Tibet. *The Tibet Journal*, XI/1: 21–40. In these articles, the author, a descendant of the aristocratic Zur khang family, who acted as cabinet minister (*bka' blon*) of the Ganden Phodrang government, presented valuable insights on various aspects and terminologies of taxation in Tibet. His comments on related 19th-century practices and his reading of historical documents, however, seem to represent, to a large degree, retrospective views held by government officials in the mid-20th century and seem not to reflect the actual practices (as recently shown by Schuh 2022 [see below n. 7] with regard to the case of 18th- and 19th-century sKyid grong).

[2] Goldstein, Melvyn C. (1968) *An Anthropological Study of the Tibetan Political System*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Washington; *idem* (1971a) Taxation and the structure of a Tibetan village. *Central Asiatic Journal*, XV/1: 1–27; *idem* (1971b) Serfdom and mobility: an examination of the institution of 'human lease' in traditional Tibetan society. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XXX/3: 521–534.

[3] Tsarong, Paljor (1998a) Economics of a Tibetan state treasury: the barley supply office. *The Tibet Journal*, 23/2: 3–10; *idem* (1998b) Tseja: structure and economy of a Tibetan state treasury. *The Tibet Journal*, 23/3: 23–33.

[4] Aziz, Barbara Nimri (1978) *Tibetan Frontier Families: Reflections of Three Generations from D'ing-ri*. New Delhi-Bombay-Bangalore-Calcutta-Kanpur: Vikas.

[5] Dargyay, Eva K. (1982) *Tibetan Village Communities: Structure and Change*. New Delhi: Vikas.

[6] Schuh, Dieter (1988) *Das Archiv des Klosters bKra-šis-bsam gtan-gliṅ von sKyid-groṅ*. Bonn: VGH-Wiss.-Verlag.

[7] Schuh, Dieter (2016) *Herrschaft, örtliche Verwaltung und Demographie des äußersten Westens des tibetischen Hochlandes: Rechtsdokumente aus Purig und Spiti*. Teil 2: *Spiti*. Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies; *idem* (2020) "Landwirte (*khral-pa*, *khral-'dzin*, *grong-pa*, *khang-chen*) im tibetischen Hochland: Im Elend lebende Leibeigene oder sozial und wirtschaftlich stabile Säulen feudaler Herrschaften? Statistische Analysen zur Vermögensungleichheit." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 48: 123–234; *idem* (2022) "Landwirte (*gZhung-rgyugs-pa*) und Viehzüchter (*sBra-dud*) im Bereich der *dGa'-ldan pho-brang*-Regierung. Untersuchungen zur Steuererhebung, Demographie und Vermögensungleichheit in Tibet: Teil 1 *sKyid-grong*." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 50: 147–477; *idem* (2023a) "Landwirte und Viehzüchter im Bereich der *dGa'-ldan pho-brang*-Regierung. Untersuchungen zur Steuererhebung, Demographie und Vermögensungleichheit in Tibet. Teil 2: Steuersubjekte, Kompensation von Steuerausfällen und Grundsätze der Steuerbemessung nach Vermögen und Ertrag." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 51: 1–147; *idem* (2023b) "Landwirte und Viehzüchter im Bereich der *dGa'-ldan pho-brang*-Regierung. Untersuchungen zur Steuererhebung, Demographie und Vermögensungleichheit in Tibet. Teil 2A: Steuerrechtliche Zusammenfassung (Summary of Taxation Principles)." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 51: 145–159; *idem* (2024) "Landwirte und

The approach in these works was to combine data on specific local social-administrative entities with a perspective on the wider political, economic, and religious system, also in its historical dimension. In the current volume, most contributions aim at studying taxation with regard to selected regional, administrative, thematic, or historical topics and thereby present fresh insights.

Peter Schwieger's "The tax system in Central and far Eastern Tibet towards the end of the Ganden Phodrang reign: an outline of its structure and terminology" (pp. 11–53) is based on *Bod ljongs spyi bshad* (edited by Tshe ring don grub and O rgyan chos 'phel, Lhasa, 1991), translated from a two-volume encyclopedia on Tibet, first published in 1986 in Chinese. Despite the fact that the sources on which the original surveys are based are not accessible, and that these were made by Communist cadres with a biased ideological mission, which is expressed, for example, in terms of the "degree of exploitation", the author asserts that the sections translated by him "offer an approach to the structure and terminology of the Tibetan tax system" and present "general outlines of Tibet's society and tax system" (p. 15). They are presented according to taxes in the farmland areas (field tax; special taxes and lease paid from tax fields; special taxes in corvée labor and in kind paid from tax fields, including a military tax from fields measured in the *'don* unit; taxes in kind and in corvée labor [*khral 'ul*] for the local [i.e. Ganden Phodrang] government), commercial tax (that is, a taxation on merchandise), as well as taxes in nomadic areas, illustrated with b/w images from the German Ernst Schäfer Tibet Expedition 1938/39.[8]

The contribution by Kalsang Norbu Gurung, "A perspective on the Ganden Phodrang's administration of taxation in the 19th and 20th centuries based on archival sources" (pp. 54–82), studies "the variety of tax obligations to the Ganden Phodrang government", gives a detailed list of government offices in charge of taxation, the context and year of their origin, and discusses "the basic tax obligation in accordance with the list of lands recorded in the *Iron-Tiger Land Settlement* of 1830 (*lCags stag zhib gzhung*)", including the not always clear terminology in this document. He presents a *bka' rgya* document from 1830 as well as a *lam yig* from 1894 in facsimile, transliteration, and translation,

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Viehzüchter im Bereich der *dGa'-ldan pho-brang*-Regierung. Untersuchungen zur Steuererhebung, Demographie und Vermögensungleichheit in Tibet. Teil 3A: Dienstleistungen (*rkang-'gro*)." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 52: 1–11.

[8] It should be noted that this expedition was supported by Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS. Dr. Ernst Schäfer, its leader, and Dr. Bruno Beger, participating anthropologist, were both high-ranking SS members who worked for the *Ahnenerbe*, an institution devoted to the task of promoting the racist ideologies of the SS and NSDAP. See, for example, Wolfgang Kaufmann (2009) *Das Dritte Reich und Tibet. Die Heimat des „östlichen Hakenkreuzes" im Blickfeld der Nationalsozialisten*. Ludwigsfelde: Ludwigsfelder Verlagshaus.

showing that, while without the availability and analysis of such documents, studies of taxation are not possible, to achieve a clearer and fuller picture of the circumstances and processes, more information, complementary and comparative data, from archival documents and other historical sources, are necessary.

Alice Travers' "'When you count, everything is there, and when everything is there, everything vanishes': a criticism of tax collecting in Ngamring district (*rdzong*) during the first half of the 20th century" (pp. 83–126) is based on a twelve-page eyewitness account of the accounting and tax collection process at the district (*rdzong*) level from the 1930s to the 1950s authored by a former district clerk (*las drung*), written and published (1994) long after this period. Despite these obvious limitations, the overt political aims of the account, denouncing the practices of the old society, and other shortcomings (e.g. the unclear amount of arable land and its expansion since 1740), it provides a retrospective view on the tax system—"the ensemble of taxes in kind and cash and of corvées and obligations levied" (p. 85)—in Ngamring district, originally under the bKra shis lhun po *bla brang*, since 1923 under the direct control of the Lhasa (Ganden Phodrang) government, including "the diversity of opportunities for enrichment that the tax collection process created" (for the tax collectors) and the collection of "support gifts" on the occasion of legal cases, not available so far from other sources.

"Traditional taxation systems in Western Tibet: a comparative perspective" (pp. 127–154) authored by Nancy Levine (first published in 1992 in *China Tibetology*) is based on data collected by her in summer 1990 through interviews with "ordinary men and women and local officials who also are members of Ruthog (Ru thog), Tholing (mTho lding) in Guge (Gu ge), Purang (sPu hreng), and Khochar (Kho char) villages" (p. 127), over thirty years after the end of the Ganden Phodrang government. Her sketch of the "traditional taxation systems" in Western Tibet (mNga' ris), based on information from these four examples, all representing agrarian economic settings, suggests that taxation must be understood in a broader economic context and take account of the social structure of the local population. Two of the investigated villages, Tholing and Khochar ('Khor chags), were the seats of historically important monastic foundations (with a considerable number of monks, in the 20th century belonging to the dGe lugs pa and Sa skya Ngor schools), which played an important role also in the sphere of taxation, not only as land-owners and recipients/ collectors of taxes, but also in the composition of the different social categories of tax-paying subjects.[9]

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[9]   Despite the article's focus on agrarian systems and arable land, the socio-economic context in mNga' ris was constituted to a large degree by a nomadic population of tax-paying subjects. On this and other information, such as the Wylie spelling of

"*Lam yig*—An official document granting travel privileges in Tibet" (pp. 155–196) is the topic treated by Saadet Arslan. She gives an overview of this type of legal document (literally "route letter") that was issued by the Ganden Phodrang government and its subordinate departments in order to give permission to travel, also for foreigners, and to authorize the requisition of supplies and transport services from subjects as a form of tax obligation. She discusses the authorities which issued such documents, lists different categories (permanent/annual or temporary) and beneficiaries, sketches the socio-cultural background of the administration of the Ganden Phodrang government between 1642 and 1959—territory and land property (estates, landlords); social order; taxation and service obligations; transportation and communication networks (postal stations and *'u lag*-system)—before detailing the characteristics and document formula of *lam yig* and finally presenting selected examples in facsimile, description, transcription, and annotated translation, accompanied by highlighting and explaining the commonly used terminologies. A glossary of relevant terms for the analysis of *lam yig* documents completes this informative contribution, a summary of the author's unpublished Magister Artium thesis (2005).

The next contribution, Diana Lange's "'My karma selected me to become a ferryman': the role of waterways and watercraft in the corvée tax system in pre-1959 Tibet" (pp. 197–210), studies taxation in the fishing village of Jun ('Jun) in Chushur (Chu shur) county in Central Tibet based on field research in this place on several occasions between 2003 and 2012 as part of her Ph.D. research project. Before 1959, the whole population of this village was engaged in fishery and considered as "'low-caste'"[10] (p. 199). Subordinated to Drepung monastery, they paid their share of *rkang 'gro* (corvée labor) taxes (exclusively men's work) by providing ferry and transport services, mainly between Lhasa and Tsetang, as well as through ferry service on the Lukhang (lHu khang) lake in Lhasa during the Saga Dawa festival—in addition to *lag 'don* (taxes in kind) in the form of barley and fish, due to the Ganden Phodrang government. The final section of her paper presents information on water transport services in general as taxes and as private enterprise, including references in earlier historical accounts, with details on the ferry service operation, relevant terminologies and illustrations.

"Performing Tibetan opera as *khral* in the first half of the 20th century: in principle a 'tax', in experience a pervasive obligation" (pp.

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place names ("Diya": gTi g.yag; "Memo Nani": gNas mo sna gnyis aka Gurla Mandhata), see, for example, Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po (2006) *mNga' ris chos 'byung gangs ljongs mdzes rgyan*, lHa sa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang.

10   No Tibetan term given by the author.

211–253) by Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy focusses mainly on the performance of opera ([*a lce*] *lha mo*) by respective troupes on the occasion of the Curd Festival (*zho ston*) in Lhasa in late premodern Tibet. Her comprehensive description encompasses not only the aspect of performance-as-*khral* during this festival and on other occasions but also an overview of *lha mo* troupes in Central Tibet in general, their socio-economic status, prestige, and internal organization, an overview of the ten troupes performing at the *zho ston* as a tax, including their home place, type of landowner, time of foundation, repertoire in terms of plays, and wider economic, social, historical, and regional dimensions. Her analysis also deals with the integration of the *lha mo* performances of the *zho ston* into the taxation system of the Ganden Phodrang government, their conception as *khral* and in particular *lag 'don* (tax in kind), and their important and over time changing role in one of the major state ceremonies. *lHa mo* actors had to perform as *khral* on certain occasions also for their respective aristocratic and monastic landlords, mostly "obligations inherited over many generations, typically with no oral record of their historical origins" (p. 234). While *khral* implies a pervasive obligation for those who produce an activity for free that was received formally by the other, the performance in front of the Dalai Lama, supervised by the Treasury Office (*rtse phyag las khungs*), was considered also an offering, granting pride and an enhanced status. The author points to the fact that in the greater picture *lha mo* performances were fundamentally a folk genre performed in villages with an inherent religious constituent (accumulation of merit [*bsod nams*]) upon the invitation of a patron (*sbyin bdag*) who sponsored the show for the whole community, usually during village or monastic festivals, also on important family celebrations, which brought blessings of Buddhist deities and favor of worldly gods, translating into peace, wellness, fertility, and prosperity for the village and community. By including this religious, merit-making aspect (which may be considered a beneficial component in any discussion of the performance of *khral* in Tibetan Buddhist societies), her analysis of the *lha mo* performances goes meritoriously beyond a purely economic, administrative, and socio-political approach.

The contribution by Berthe Jansen, "A preliminary investigation into monk-tax: the concept of *grwa khral/btsun khral/ban khral* and its meanings" (pp. 254–278), discusses the "concept, history, and the occurrences of monk-tax (*grwa khral*, also *btsun khral*) in Tibetan Buddhist regions before the 1950s" on the basis of references in various Western and Tibetan, often (auto-)biographical and hagiographical sources, from different periods. The picture that emerges "shows the variegated nature of this clerical tax, which affected both males and females at certain times and places" and "although widespread—was by no means in place everywhere and at all times" (p. 267). In addition, it

was not necessarily a "tax" levied by the state but the result of "policies of regulated, or forced, monastic recruitment" predating the Ganden Phodrang government (p. 256). During the time of the latter, the recruitment or conscription of monks as well as nuns in the form of a monk- or nun-tax seems to have occurred in a few documented instances on the occasion of new foundations of monasteries and may have otherwise been related to filling up low numbers of monks and nuns in small or branch monasteries. This could be negotiated and circumvented, also by buying off duties. Jansen points out that *grwa khral* and *sham thabs khral* (literally 'lower robe tax') was also used as a reference for sustenance payments to monks.

M. Maria Turek's paper, "Monastic obligations, hat change and Lhasa encroachment: taxation rights among politico-religious shifts in the Kingdom of Nangchen" (pp. 279–301), focusses on the kingdom of Nangchen (Nang chen rgyal khab) (1300–1951), located in today's Nangchen county in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai. Largely based on Tibetan and Chinese sources published in recent decades, she reviews the historical development since the 17th century and the changes of the fiscal regimes in Nangchen, which saw a "series of political shifts in political and religious authority, involving the Lhasa-centred dGe lugs school, the Qoshot princes, the Qing authorities, and, later [in the 20th century], the Muslim warlord Ma Bufeng" (p. 280). Critical attention is given in particular to the taxation rights given by the Ganden Phodrang government by way of a "fiscal endowment of new Gelukpa monasteries in 17th-century Nangchen" (p. 297) at the cost of bKa' brgyud pa presence in the region, which remained a source of disputes over time, and in 1932 stood at the beginning of a Sino-Tibetan border conflict.

John Bray's contribution, "'By ancient custom and engagements': trade, taxes and diplomacy in Ladakh and Western Tibet between the 17th and 20th centuries" (pp. 302–332), studies the trade (cum diplomatic) relationships between the kingdom of Ladakh and the Ganden Phodrang government following the 1684 Treaty of gTing mo sgang / Temisgang (concluding the Tibet-Ladakh-Mughal war) until the mid-20th century and the role played by taxation in the form of corvée transport labor used by official missions from Leh to Lhasa (*lo phyag*) and by the Ganden Phodrang government's trade missions to Ladakh (*gzhung tshong*). These 'customs and engagements' extended also to the highly profitable trade in shawl wool (Farsi *pashm*, Tibetan *le na*)—produced in areas of Western Tibet and partly also Ladakh, by treaty a monopoly of Muslim court merchants (*mkhar tshong pa*) accountable to the king of Ladakh. In the 19th- and 20th-century British sources referred to by John Bray, the accounts of these court traders' privileges, their profits, as well as those of the Mughal overlords in Kashmir—where the British had installed Gulab Singh as Mahārāja in 1846, as

well as of oppressive trade practices on the part of Tibetan government officials in Western Tibet (leading to their emigration/fleeing across the border), are seemingly not entirely free from "British *interests* in Kashmir, Ladakh and Western Tibet" [my emphasis/CJ].

"Taxes and corvées in the manorial and monastic estates of Zangskar (Western Himalayas)" (pp. 333–340) by Isabelle Riaboff gives a brief overview on taxation—payments in kind and corvée duties (both referred to as *khral*)—liable to royal and monastic authorities by "tenant farmers" (*khral pa*), one of three household categories besides *rang 'bad pa* (freeholders) and *chun pa* (farm servants). Her succinct account, which is based on twenty-two months of fieldwork conducted for her Ph.D. project (*Le Roi et le Moine. Figures et principes du pouvoir et de sa légitimation au Zanskar (Himalaya occidental)*. Paris X-Nanterre University, 1997), reflects the practice in the 1990s.

The concluding contribution by Charles Ramble, dedicated to "The fiscal status of Buddhist and Bönpo institutions in Mustang (Nepal): a historical overview" (pp. 341–370), studies a variety of cases in the southern part of Mustang known as Baragaon and territories to the north of this relating mainly to the 19th and early 20th centuries. While due the relative sparseness of sources the general understanding of changing fiscal obligations of Buddhist and Bönpo religious establishments, in particular monasteries and convents, during this period is still very limited, the picture concerning house-holder priests (many of which were documented by Charles Ramble in the course of notable research projects and published in a masterly manner since the early 1990s), although not representing a large proportion of Mustang's population, is better although also a very incomplete one. As one of the main findings he states that "all the Buddhist establishments in Baragaon had fiscal obligations to the national government [of Nepal], at least during the Rana period [from 1846]" (p. 368), including occasional irregular taxes for the benefit of Nepal's royal family; furthermore that "they were organized into clusters with equal tax liabilities" whose tax burden was distributed according to economic capacity. In addition to a number of Nepali terms (such as *guṭhi*, religious association), some of the documents which are presented in facsimile, transliteration, and translation, show notable terminological similarities with Central Tibet during the Ganden Phodrang period, for example, in the terms *nang khral* and *phyi khral* ("internal and external taxes"), presumably denoting goods and services paid or rendered to one's immediate lord (monastic or private/aristocratic) and the central government, respectively. As for the taxation of Buddhist and Bönpo householder-priests in Mustang, this is elucidated to have been "inversely proportional to the esteem in which they were held by the fiscal authorities" (*ibid*.). In individual cases they were even exempted from taxes. In the case of the Bönpo community of Lubrak, the payment of

the Great Government Tax (*gzhung khral chen mo*) was found to have been funded through the interest of an endowment fund (*sbyor 'jags*) created by a group of lamas, which continued to exist until the 1990s despite the abolishment of the tax in the mid-1950s.

Taxation in Tibetan Societies is an excellent volume in the field of so-cial-anthropological studies of Tibet and an indispensable reference work, in particular for those who dedicate themselves to the study of taxation in Tibetan societies, an important field of investigation with a great amount of material in various places and archives still awaiting to be located, become accessible, and be analyzed in the future. In a number of aspects, the contributions gathered in this volume serve as an excellent introduction to the current state of research in this varie-gated field, including indications for further research, in all cases providing comprehensive references to the sources and methodologies used, with a clear depiction of relevant historical, socio-political, cul-tural, and economic frameworks, and particularly beneficial thanks to the discussion of relevant Tibetan terminologies.

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