



The
Lost
World
of

LADAKH

Early Photographic Journeys in Indian Himalaya

1931 Rupert Wilmot 1934

AHP 31

THE LOST WORLD OF LADAKH

Early photographic journeys through Indian Himalaya 1931–1934



Photographs by Rupert Wilmot

Text by Nicky Harman and Roger Bates

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Back Cover: A Yarkandi trader in the valley of the Wakha Chu river, 1931. Photograph by Rupert Wilmot.

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THE LOST WORLD OF LADAKH

<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>page</i>
Acknowledgements	iv
Foreword	1
Introduction	2
Appeal	5
Bibliography	5
The Lost World of Ladakh	6
Chapter1 - 1931 Journey	7
Chapter2 - 1934 Journey	65
Note on the Photography	131
Glossary	133
Index	135
 <i>Maps</i>	 <i>page</i>
1 - Route of the 1931 Journey	8
2 - Route of the 1934 Journey	66

Rupert Wilmot

Claude Rupert Trench Wilmot was born in England in 1897. Joining the British Army in 1915, he served in both World Wars, retiring in 1946. Between 1923 and 1938, he served with his regiment, the Sherwood Foresters, in northern India, mainly in Rawalpindi and Multan. This gave him the opportunity to indulge his hobby as a travel and natural history photographer, and to make the two journeys through Indian Himalaya that are the subject of this book.

Rupert Wilmot never married. After his service in the Second World War, he retired to run a market garden in Gloucestershire. He died in 1961.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks are due to many people who have been generous with their time and expertise, patiently answering our questions and encouraging us to persevere in this project. They include (in alphabetical order): Monisha Ahmed, Marjo Alafouzo, John Bray, Sally Daultrey, Ann Davey, Philip Denwood, Konchok Gyaltsen, Clare Harris, Brian Heatley, Ingo Hofmaier, Neil Howard, Steven Hunt of Esri UK, Robert Nelson Linrothe, Janet Rizvi, Ulrike Roesler, Virender Sehgal, Shaun Whiteside (for translating the quotation from Heinrich Harrer). In addition, special thanks go to Martin Bates, Liz and Nigel Errington, and the editorial team at Asian Highlands Perspectives without whom this book would not have come into existence.

We owe special thanks to LAMO (Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation), especially Monisha Ahmed, Tashi Morup and Namgyal Angmo, for their additional research into the background to many of the photographs, and to the people of Ladakh who shared their knowledge and experiences with them.

Any errors are, of course, our own.

Foreword

by Khenpo Rangdol



Drigung Kagyud

འབྲི་གུང་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་གཉིད་སྤངས་ཚེར་དཀར་དགོན།

TINGANG TSALKAR GONPA SABHA

(Registered under Act VI 1941, 1713-S of 1991)

Ref No.....

Date: 30/04/2014

FOREWORD by Khenpo K. Rangdol (President of Tserkarmo monastery, Ladakh, India)

I first saw Rupert Wilmot's marvellous pictures of old Ladakh one day in Oxford in 2008. There, I met one of Wilmot's nephews, Martin Bates, and as we looked at the album, I was able to demonstrate some of the dance movements depicted in the photographs Wilmot took of the Hemis Monastery *mela* – in our host's living room!

Wilmot was, in my view, extremely lucky to see the Hemis devotional ceremonies and to have the opportunity to visit Lama Yuru monastery in particular. He was clearly a very talented photographer: in spite of the limitations of black-and-white, still photography, he does a wonderful job of bringing them back to life. While the significance of some of the elements of the ceremonies may be open to interpretation – for instance, the barley figure may either be seen as a harmful demon or (as Wilmot was told), the Tibetan king Langdarmo – he beautifully captures the meditative, spiritual content of these dances.

One should not necessarily feel nostalgic about the 'good old days' in Ladakh; the signs of poverty here are unmistakable. But there are also qualities of contentment and dignity which shine out from the portrait photographs in this collection. Wilmot must be credited for his undoubted ability to put his subjects at their ease – no easy task, according to other twentieth century photographers such as Heinrich Harrer and Reginald Schlomberg.

We were able to welcome Martin and Roger Bates, Nicky Harman and her husband to the inauguration of the new *stupa* at Tserkarmo in 2011. This was exactly a year after the terrible flash floods which claimed many lives across a large part of Ladakh, damaged towns, including Leh, and caused extensive damage to property and infrastructure. As part of an effort to help the victims, Tserkarmo Monastery now organizes annual camps providing free medical care and supports under privileged children with better education in remote villages in Ladakh region. We urgently need to raise money to continue this work so I was delighted to hear about Roger Bates and Nicky Harman's plan to publish these photographs in book form and donate the proceeds to our charitable projects in Ladakh. We appreciate your support and all donations are gratefully received.

Further information please log in to www.tserkarmo.org E- mail: khenporangdol@gmail.com

All the best wishes and prayers,



Khenpo K. Rangdol

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Introduction

“The crossroads of high Asia”, “the land of Gods and humans”, “the last Shangri-La” and “little Tibet” are just some of the names given to Ladakh by Western travellers who made their way there through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The truth is both more complex and more prosaic: Ladakh was hugely important for centuries because of its strategic location at the crossroads of important trade routes running north to Yarkand, east to Tibet and thence to China, south into India and west to Kashmir. In 1902, A. Reeve Heber and Kathleen Heber describe the bazaar in Leh, the largest city, thus: “The Jarkandis [Yarkandis] from the far north offer brilliantly-coloured carpets ... silk from Khotan and thick felt mats [*numdahs*] ... Then there are the Tibetans, trying to persuade the Baltis to accept cooking butter and dried apricots in return for salt, borax and Lhasa tea. The nomads from Changthang offer the featherweight wool of their long-haired sheep [*pashm*]; the Kashmiris ... use it for making their famous shawls. A man from the Kullu valley has brought petroleum to Leh market, while a trader from India offers ... brocade ... underwear, tea, cigarettes, spices and all 101 commodities a housewife needs to run her house properly ... The wares are laid out all over the road and even pedestrians can hardly pick their way through ...” [quoted in FWEL:73,74]

Wilmot’s photographs show just some of the varied activities that went on in the bazaar. Leh was a hive of cultural as well as commercial activity. In the words of Abdul Ghani Sheikh, Leh-based historian and writer*: “Polo, horse-riding and football matches took place in the bazaar and drama troupes from Tibet and Himachal Pradesh would come to perform here during Loser (the Ladakhi and Tibetan New Year).”

Ladakh was thus a melting pot of religions and cultural traditions, and is still noteworthy as one of the few remaining abodes of Buddhism. Janet Rizvi says: “It is certain that Buddhism first entered the western parts of what is now Ladakh, not from Tibet, but from Kashmir ... perhaps as early as the first or second century.” One can still see carvings in deep relief which, Rizvi says ... “certainly belong to the pre-Tibetan period of Buddhism. The best known is the Bodhisattva Maitreya (Chamba) at Mulbekh ... in style ... purely Indian.” [CHA:56]. (This carving is shown in Wilmot’s photograph on page 30.) Ghani Sheikh also notes: “That’s why the earlier monasteries like Alchi have Kashmiri influence. However, after Islam came to Kashmir, people started looking to Tibet for Buddhist teachings and monks were sent to Lhasa to study ... Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism from Tibet spread in Ladakh and it continues

* I am grateful to Ravleen Kaur with whose kind permission I have quoted from her interview with Abdul Ghani Sheikh in “Showcasing Ladakh”, The Hindu, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-sundaymagazine/showcasing-ladakh/article2908778.ece>, last accessed 5 Apr 2014.

to remain so.”

Islam arrived in Ladakh when the people of Baltistan converted from Buddhism to Shia Islam from the 15th century onwards. Historically, the religious communities have mixed harmoniously. This was certainly the case when Wilmot made his journeys. “Inter-marriages were common. The 17th century king, Jamyang Namgyal married a Balti princess Gyal Khatun, who remained a Muslim till death. Earlier, Loser and Eid were celebrated together but not anymore,” says Ghani Sheikh. He is an Argon, one of a community of Muslim traders who settled in Leh and married Buddhist women, and is thus himself a product of this intermingling.

The geography of Ladakh, with its harsh climate and high altitude, has been crucial in shaping its communities. The Buddhist Ladakhis’ historical practice of fraternal polyandry – one woman marrying several brothers – kept families small, thus reducing pressure on their land. By contrast, the Baltis, when they converted to Islam, adopted polygamy and consequently had much larger families to support. A third large group, the Changpa nomads, lived in the Changthang in eastern Ladakh. Located five kilometers above sea level, Changthang is a part of the vast Tibetan Plateau and was, in pre-modern days, the only route between Ladakh and Tibet. “The nomads, mainly pastoralists, exchanged their Pashmina wool, butter and cheese for pots and spices with traders passing through the plateau. ... Still, there are huge rocks in Tang-Tse, a major resting place for traders before crossing over to Tibet that bear inscriptions in more than ten languages,” says Ghani Sheikh.

In the 1930s, westerners visiting Ladakh encountered considerable challenges: they required government permits, which were not easy to obtain, and faced a long hard journey over the passes to the west or south of the country. Once there, they were in a world which, in many aspects, had not changed for centuries. Those who recorded their impressions in books and diaries were struck, as we have seen, by Leh bazaar; and also by the relative harmony in which the various communities lived. They commented on how much babies were treasured – polyandry amongst Buddhist Ladakhis, combined with a high infant mortality rate, meant families were small. They noted that Ladakhi women enjoyed an unusually high status: “She has her own money, trades on her own...and when she meets you on the roadside, she passes the time of day freely and cheerfully,” as Gompertz puts it [ML:62]. Finally, travellers noted that Ladakhis rarely washed! Prem Singh Jina quotes the Moravian missionary, Wilhelm Heyde von der Herrnhuter-Orden: “The older people never bath and the younger people do so only very occasionally in summer....Not unnaturally, bugs of all kinds are ineradicable.” [FWEL:38]

In 1931 and 1934, Rupert Wilmot travelled on two of the ancient trade routes into Ladakh - first from Srinagar in the west, and then from the Kullu valley in the south. At the time of his journeys, the current roads did not exist, and traditional means of travel, on foot and with pack animals, were the norm. Unlike

most other travellers at that time, he confined himself to taking photographs; he provided the briefest of captions in his albums, chiefly noting the date and location, although he did write a few articles to accompany those of his pictures published in magazines.

Wilmot's photographs are notable for the variety of people he captures on camera: traders from Yarkand, nomads from Changthang, Balti schoolboys from Kargil, townswomen and farmers in and around Leh, and Buddhist abbots, monks and novices. He depicts the great monasteries of Lamayuru and Hemis, including the Hemis *mela* and, in a remarkable series of portraits, travellers across the Morey Plain. In spite of the briefness of the information he gave, we have been able to identify almost all his subjects and locate them within their society. Our research, however, takes second place to the work of the photographer, whose technical skill and ability to choose his subjects and gain their confidence, make this an outstanding depiction of a moment of history.

The Ladakh Rupert Wilmot knew has long since disappeared, destroyed by political conflict and the modernization of trade and transport. Wilmot was well aware of the fragile nature of the way of life he was documenting. However, he could not have foreseen that its destruction was to begin a mere three years after his last trip. In 1937, the Soviet Union took control of Chinese Turkestan, and trade on the north-south, trans-Karakoram route gradually came to an end. In the 1950s, the east-west trade route into China through Tibet was also closed.

After his 1934 trip, Rupert Wilmot never returned to Ladakh, but his memories must have been vivid: he acquired a black and tan Tibetan mastiff bitch in 1936, from a breeding programme run at Whipsnade Zoo in England, which imported dogs from Ladakh. He named her Wakha Chu after the river of that name. (In an interesting footnote to history, Wilmot is listed in Kennel Club records as showing Wakha Chu at Crufts Dog Show, London, 1939. However, the war and the shifting political landscape put an end to these imports, and the blood-line died out. It was forty years before these dogs returned to the UK.)

Nicky Harman

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An Appeal

This book is published and sold at-cost by Asian Highlands Perspectives (<http://www.platauculture.org/asian-highlands-perspectives>). Please consider making an additional donation to Tserkarmo Monastery (tserkarmo.org), which provides free medical care and supports education for underprivileged children in remote Ladakhi villages.

THE LOST WORLD OF LADAKH



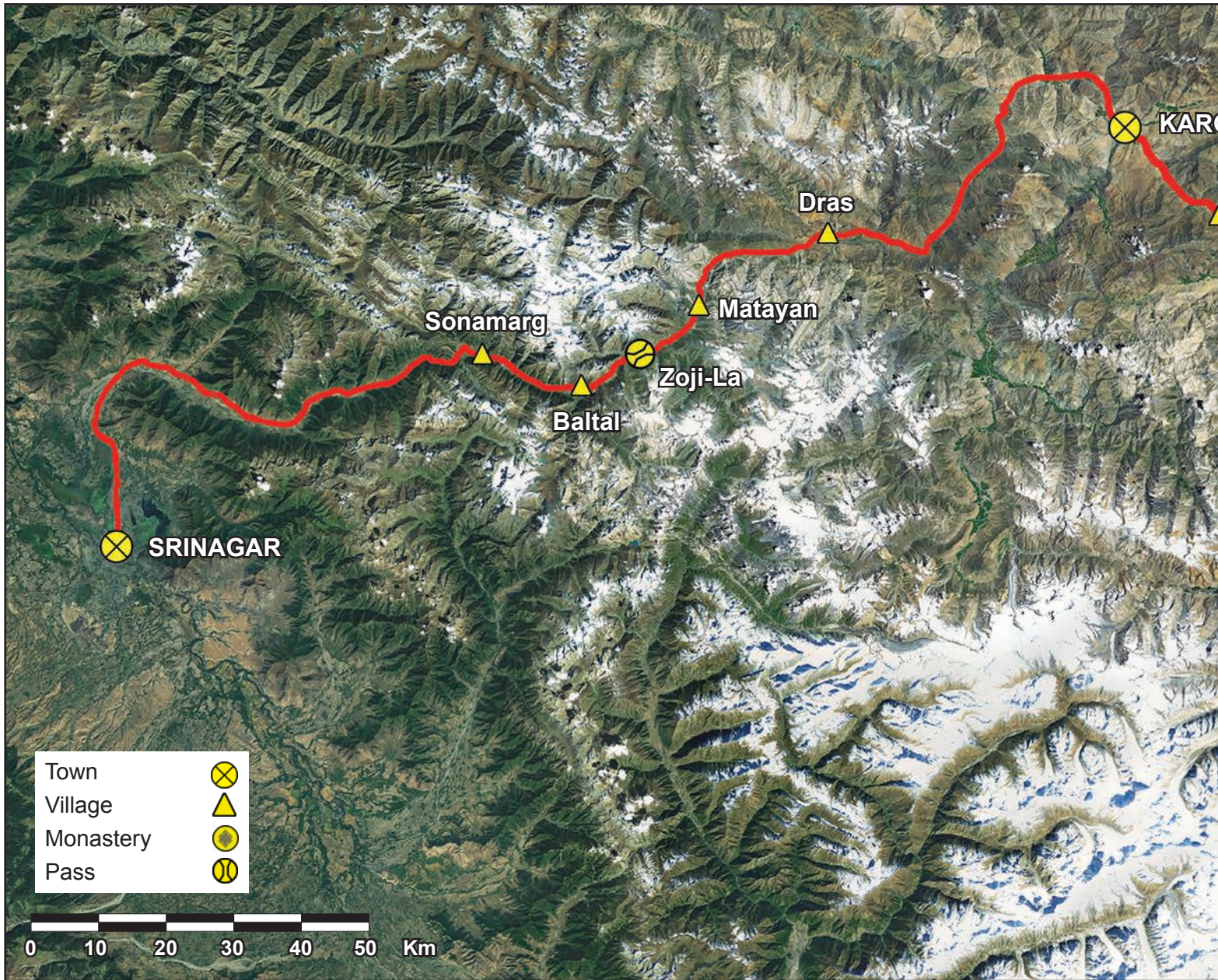
Claude Rupert Trench Wilmot

Chapter 1 - The 1931 Journey

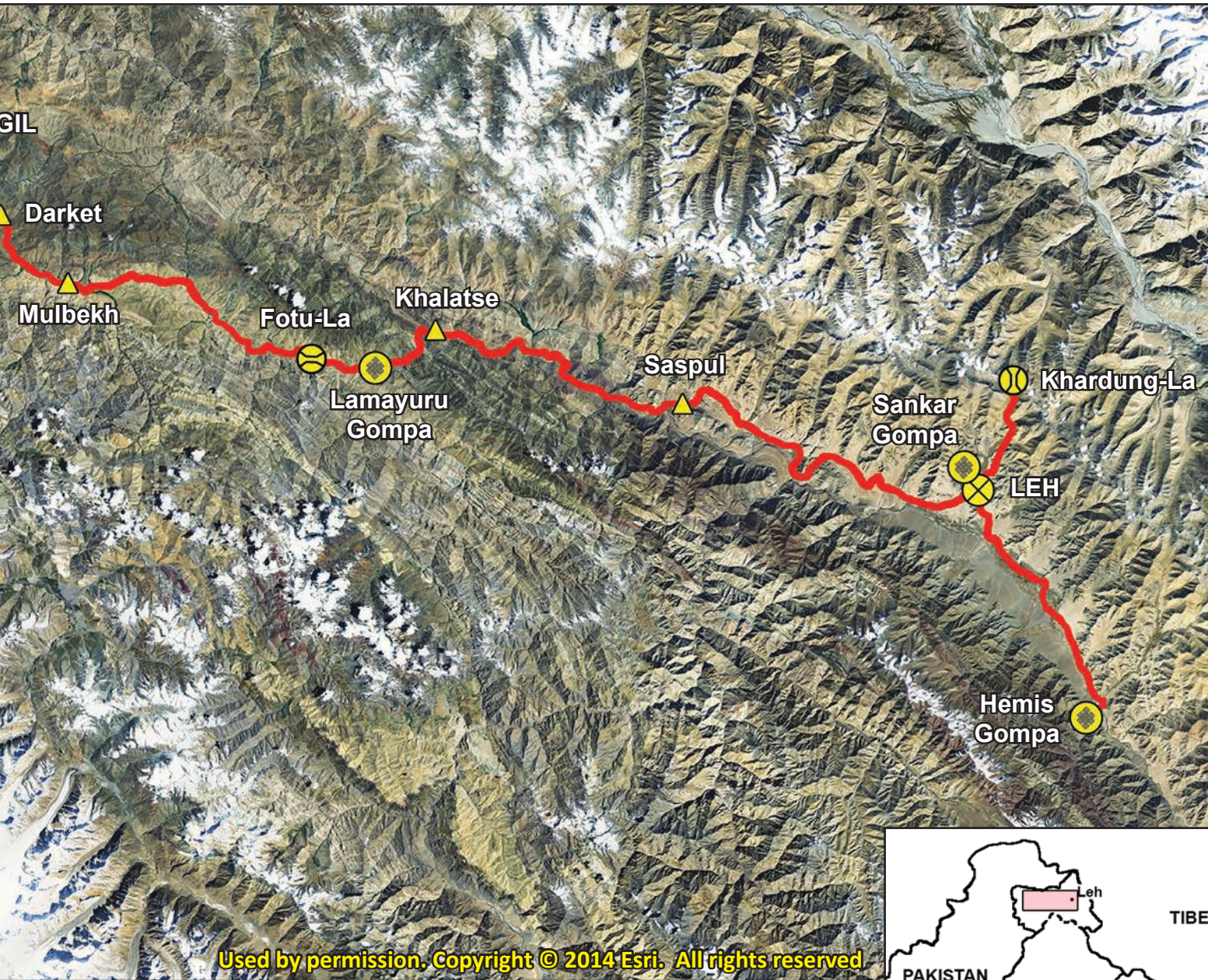
In May 1931, Wilmot set out from Srinagar in Kashmir on his first journey to Ladakh. He and his small party followed the traditional east-west trade route between Kashmir and Leh, then known as the Treaty Road. At that time it was only passable on foot (Wilmot used pack ponies to carry his equipment and provisions). The present road follows the same route but was not opened to wheeled traffic until after World War Two.

On reaching Leh the following month, Wilmot made two side-trips, first to the top of the Khardung-La pass on the Karakoram trade route, and then to the monastery at Hemis. There he attended the annual *mela* or Buddhist festival. As far as we know, he returned to Srinagar by the same route.

The photographs in this chapter follow his journey as far as Hemis, largely in chronological order.



Map 1 – Wilmot's first journey, May-June 1931



Srinigar to Leh



In the Sind Valley

This was the starting point for Wilmot's 1931 journey. The route passes through the picturesque towns of Ganderbal, Kangan and Gund in the Sind valley, before reaching Sonamarg. Sonamarg is situated at a distance of eighty-four kilometers from Srinagar, on the Srinagar-Ladakh Road.





The Sind valley, Kangan to Gund

This is typical of the conditions faced by all travellers on this route before the construction of the modern road now linking Srinagar and Leh. By the 1930s, goods were trucked or sent by train to Srinagar, where they were loaded onto horses. It then took fourteen to sixteen days to reach Leh [THC:28]. The pass of Zoji-La and the Lamayuru defile were the most difficult parts of the route.



Dak runners

These hardy men, travelling on foot, provided the long range postal service in India for hundreds of years. They are still used in certain remote areas beyond the range of wheeled vehicles.

Camping

Apart from those occasions when they could use the bungalows provided for the *dak* runners, the party was obliged to sleep under canvas. The necessary camping equipment accounted for much of the load carried by the pack ponies. Here we see the party loading up after breaking camp at Sonamarg (right), and Wilmot eating his meal in some comfort (below).



Zoji-La



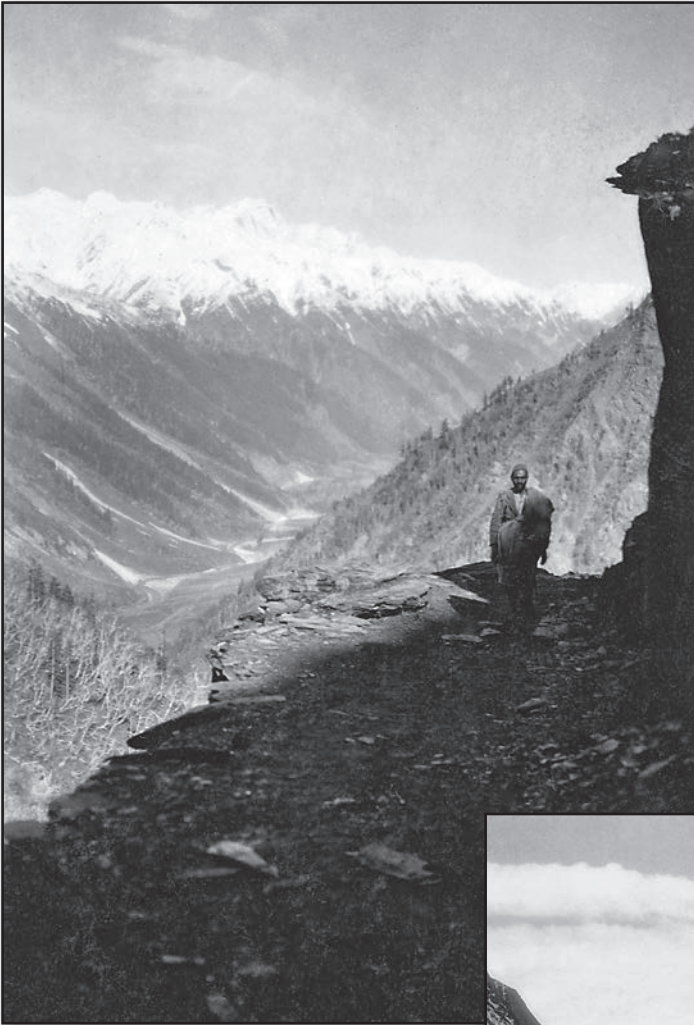
The approach to Zoji-La from Amarnath valley

The trees are birch (*Betula bojpatra*, *Stakpa* in Ladakhi). The bark is used for medicinal purposes. Repeated avalanches have caused them to lean. [App.]

The “Notoriously Treacherous” Zoji-La

Ippolito Desideri, crossing in 1715, says that “its extensive snowfields made the crossing a slow and exhausting business. Snow blindness was another unexpected hazard.” [LP:55] This is the lowest of three passes on the route from Srinagar into Ladakh, at 3,528 meters (11,575 feet). It is low compared to other passes to south and north of Leh, but more exposed to the effects of the south-west monsoon. Wilmot’s party crossed it on 31 May 1931, about two weeks before the usual opening date to general traffic at the time of their journey. The pass is now crossed by a seasonal road, and construction of a tunnel is due to start in the near future.

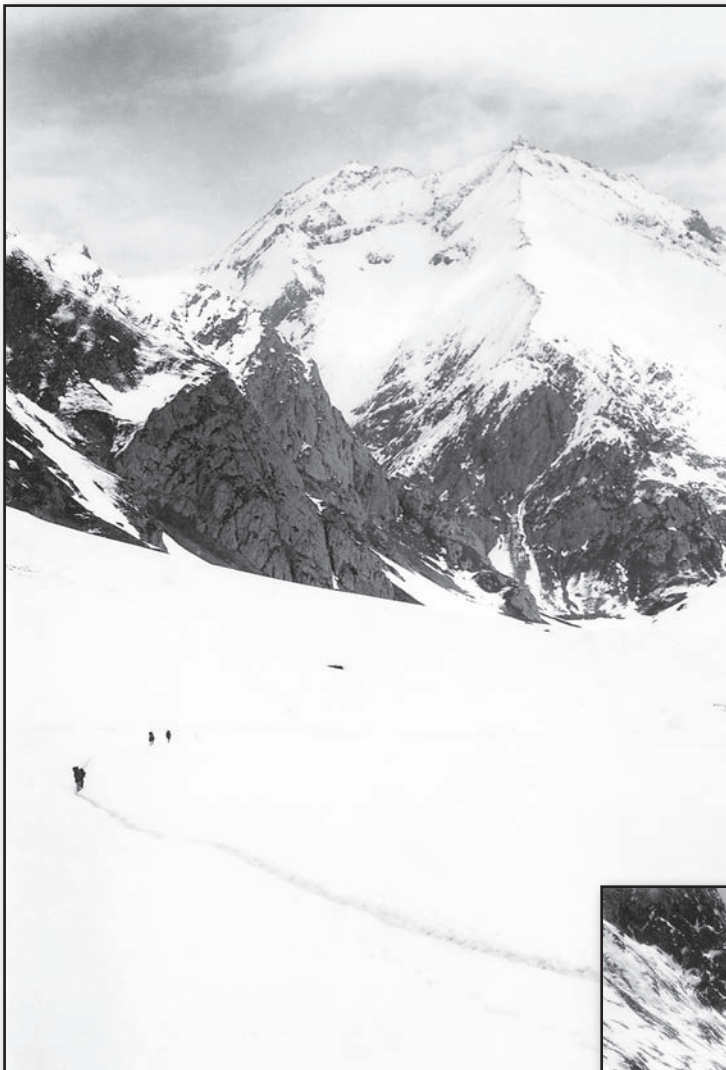
below In the distance, the snowbound pass.





Zoji-La, 31 May 1931

Difficult conditions notwithstanding, the pass was in use throughout the year by local porters because of its importance as a trade route. [THC:257]



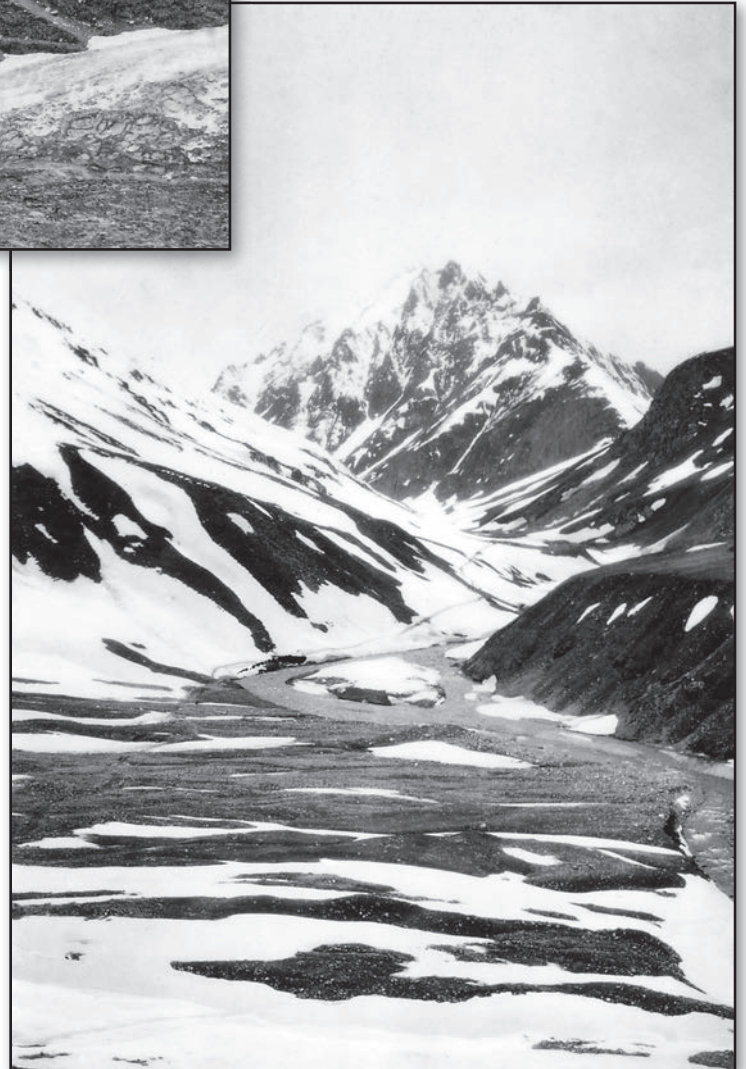
Zoji-La

Originally known as Zoji-Lamo. *La* means pass and *mo* refers to the protective female deity. [App.]





Wilmot's party crossing a ravine near Machhoi. This was one of many such crossings, possibly via a "snow bridge".



Machhoi

Machhoi is a peak to the south of the Dras river, on the descent from Zoji-La. Fed by glacial streams, the Dras flows northeast.

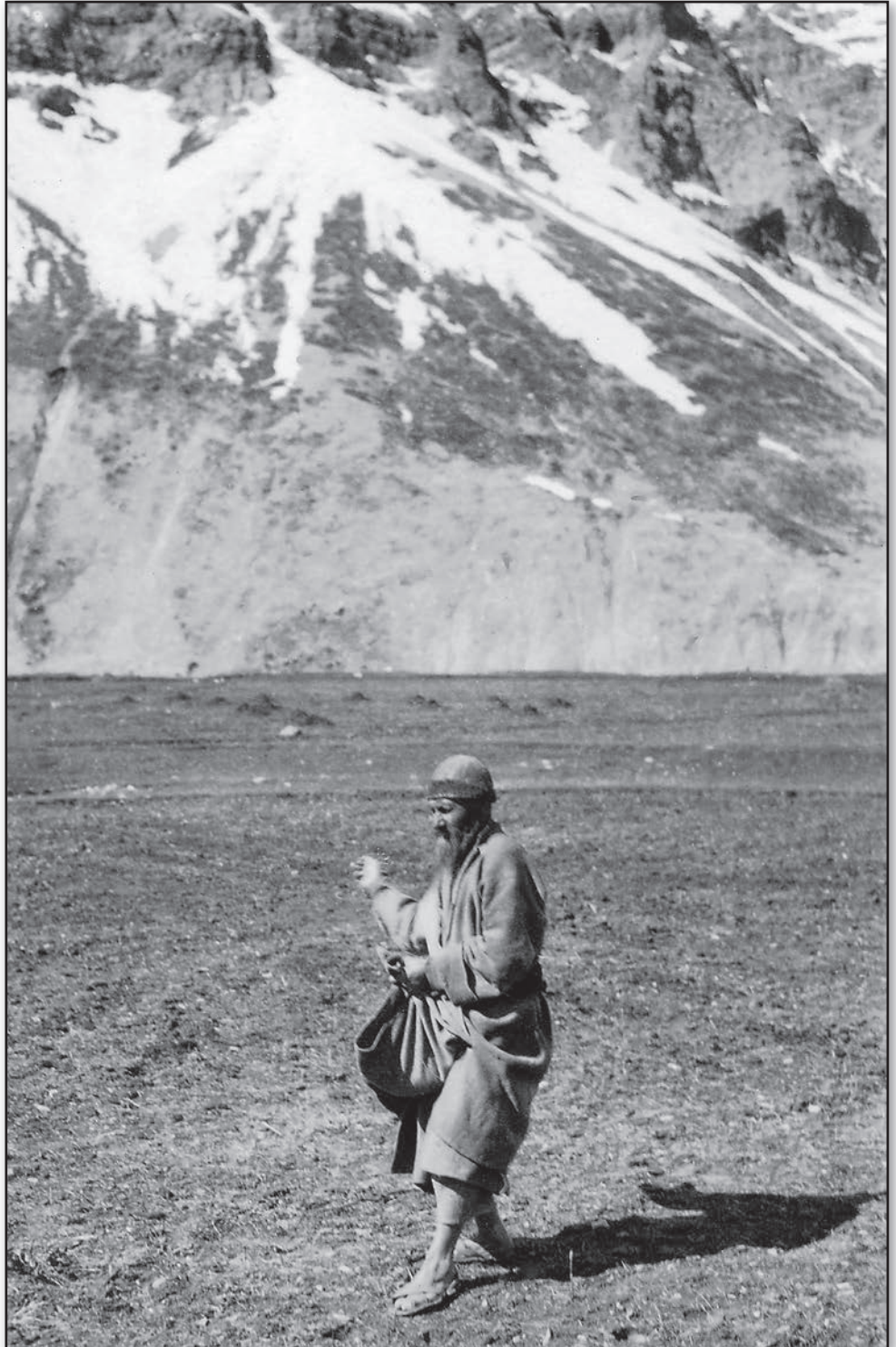


Villages in the Dras valley

Matayan *left* and a village captioned by Wilmot as Gunal *above*. The inhabitants of Matayan village are largely made up of Kashmiris who have married into the local population. [App.]

The high altitude and poor soil of the Dras valley meant villagers had to supplement their income transporting goods along the Srinagar-Leh trade route. [THC:247-254]

Agriculture



Sowing on the Pandras plateau

Here, the altitude is too great, and the soil too poor, for agriculture to be more than a subsistence activity. Near Kargil and in the Suru valley, enough barley was grown to be bartered with the *Shamma* for other goods.

Children and Rural Education



A Muslim school at Dras

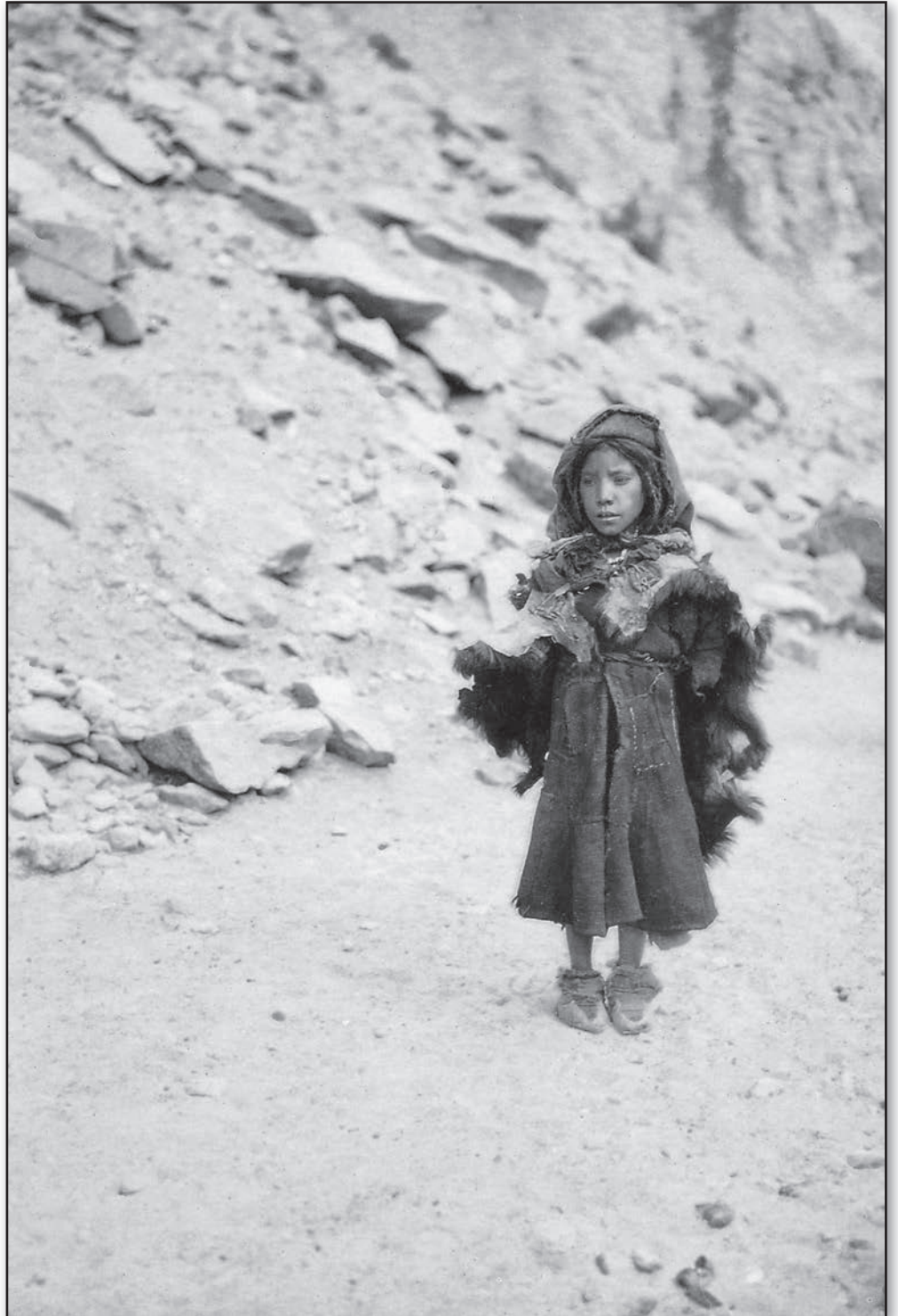
The village of Dras was largely Muslim; the cultural boundary with the largely Buddhist regions of Ladakh lies east of Kargil.

This school is a *madrasa* (Urdu: school) where religion, as well as languages and mathematics, was taught. The scene is typical: proper classroom facilities were lacking and outdoor classes were more comfortable in summer. [App.]

A Balti school boy

This Muslim boy uses a writing board, which was prepared by darkening with soot, then polishing with a stone to make it smooth. The pupil uses mud mixed with water and writes with a sharpened stick. This type of writing board was used in much of South Asia and East Africa.





A Balti girl

She wears a *logpa*, the ubiquitous goat-skin with the fleece inside, used to wrap oneself in and protect the dress from loads carried on the back.

It was common for Baltis to wear black *logpas*, unlike *Shamma* and people from Leh who wore white. She wears a Balti cap with a scarf wrapped over it to hide the hair. Her shoes have wool or yak hair uppers and leather soles. [App.]



Towards Kargil

Approaching the village of Tashgam in the Dras valley.

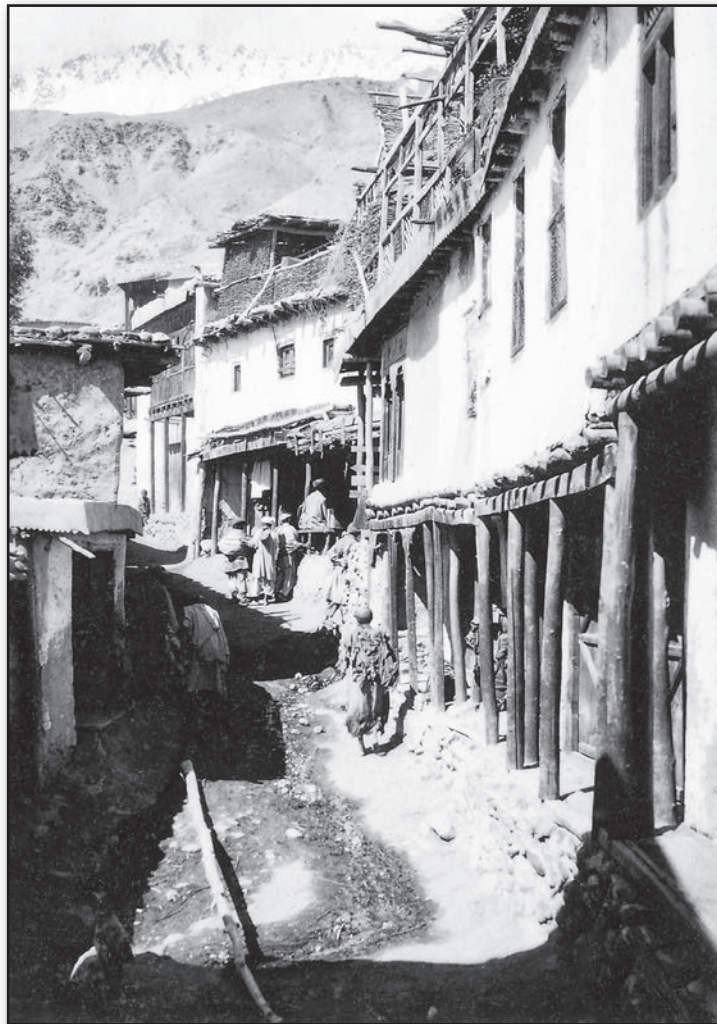
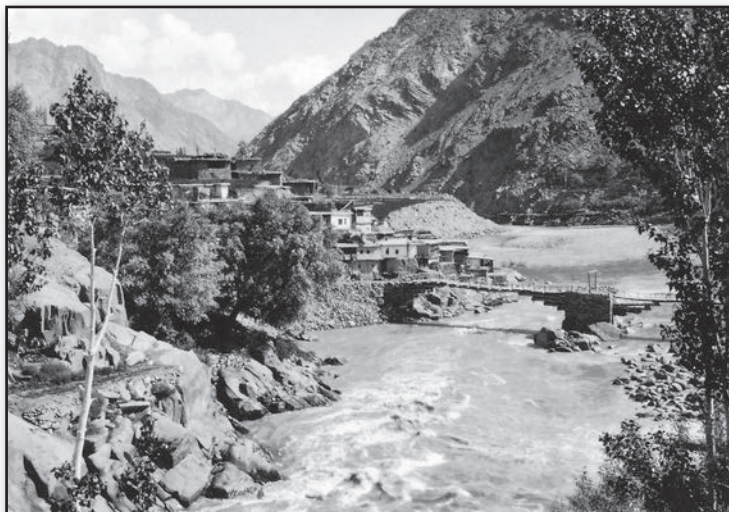
The Shingo river
Kharul Bridge (which is still in place) crosses the Shingo about fifteen kilometers below its confluence with the Dras river. Immediately downstream it is joined by the Suru river and turns north to the Indus and the town of Skardu.



Kargil

A street scene

Kargil is the second most important town in Ladakh and its inhabitants are largely Shia Muslims. It was important as a staging post en route to and from Leh and beyond, and was famous for its apricots. Though Ladakhi apricots were considered inferior to Baltistan's, they were used by the traders from lower Ladakh (the *Shamma*) to barter with the nomads in exchange for wool and meat. This street, which still exists, used to be the main market.



View of Kargil town, probably taken looking downstream on the Suru river, with the old Puyen bridge (leading to Puyen village on the right bank of the river) in the foreground.

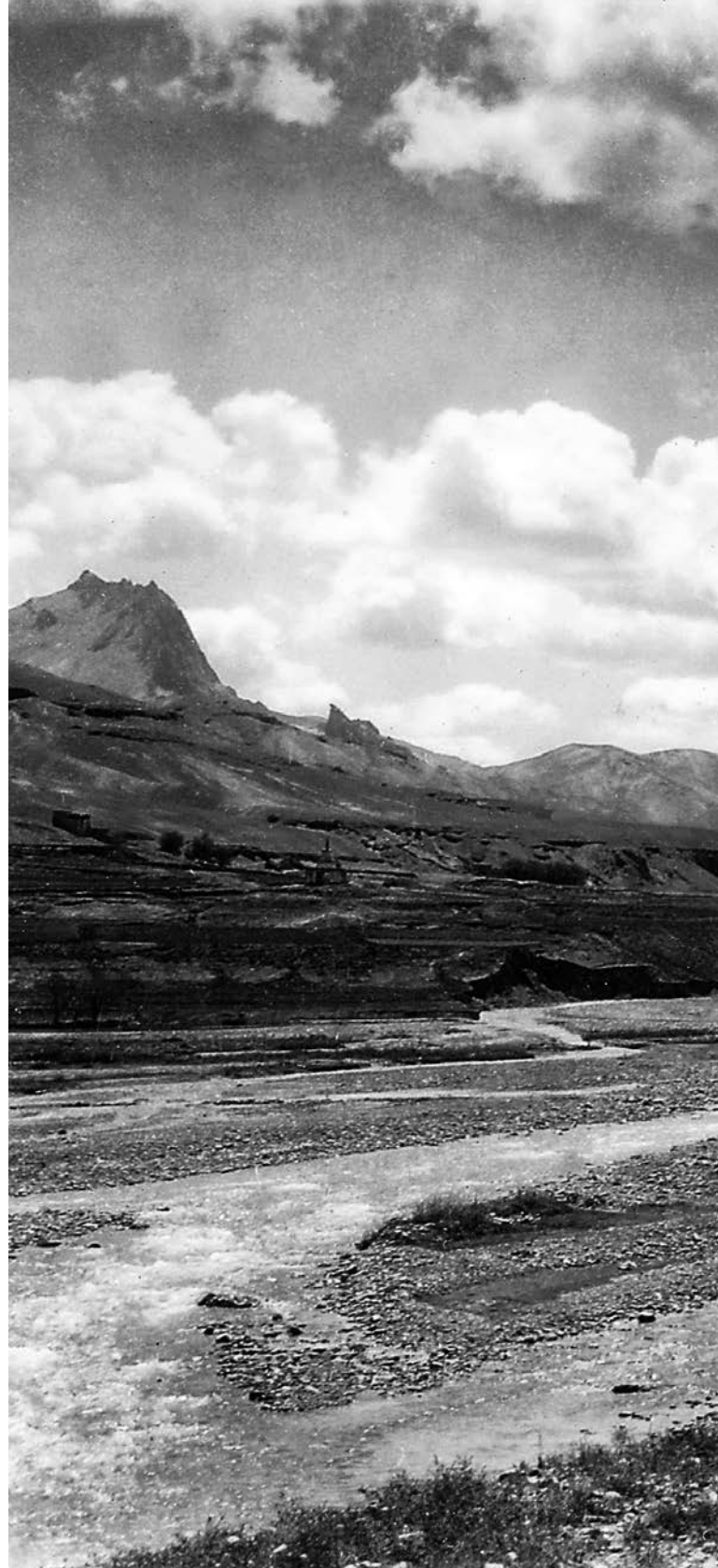


The “Lumbadaress of Durkit”

Wilmot captioned this picture “Lumbadaress of Durkit”. The *lambardar* (Hindi, *goba* in Ladakhi) was the registered headman and tax collector of an Indian village. She was probably the wife of the headman, and her dress and silver jewelry tell us that she belongs to a well-off family. Just below her necklace, the small rectangular bags probably contain blessings for self-protection. Suspended from her waist girdle are two *chhabtse* (Balti, *todchas* in Ladakhi). This is “an openwork brass or gold disc, as big as a saucer” ...for “household keys and manicure and toilet instruments.” [LP:228] A key hangs from one. The village of Darket [“Durkit”] is upstream from Pashkyum, on the south side of the Wakha Chu river. [App.]



The “lumbadaress” with two men. The man in the white overcoat appears to be a travelling trader, selling her some small object from his bag.



Near Mulbekh

The valley of the Wakha Chu near Mulbekh and Darket is strikingly green and lush.





Mulbekh: village polo at Serzing Shagaran

FROM THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY - 30 DECEMBER 1934 - POLO IN LADAKH

A Ladakhi proverb runs, "As food without salt is savourless, so is work without play!"

The Ladakhi is a very cheery soul, and fond of games of a simple nature. The national game is polo (see picture on this page) and although it did not originate there, it was introduced while the game was still in its infancy. Most villages have a polo ground, which consists of a level strip, about two hundred yards long, with a rough stone wall on either side, and goals at the ends.

Any number of players seem to be able to take part in the game, and even when it is in progress, late arrivals join in. The players are mounted on their little hill ponies.

The game starts by the captain of one side galloping up the ground with the ball in his hand, the remaining players following. When he gets about level with the centre of the ground, he throws the ball in the air and strikes it with his stick, before it touches the ground.

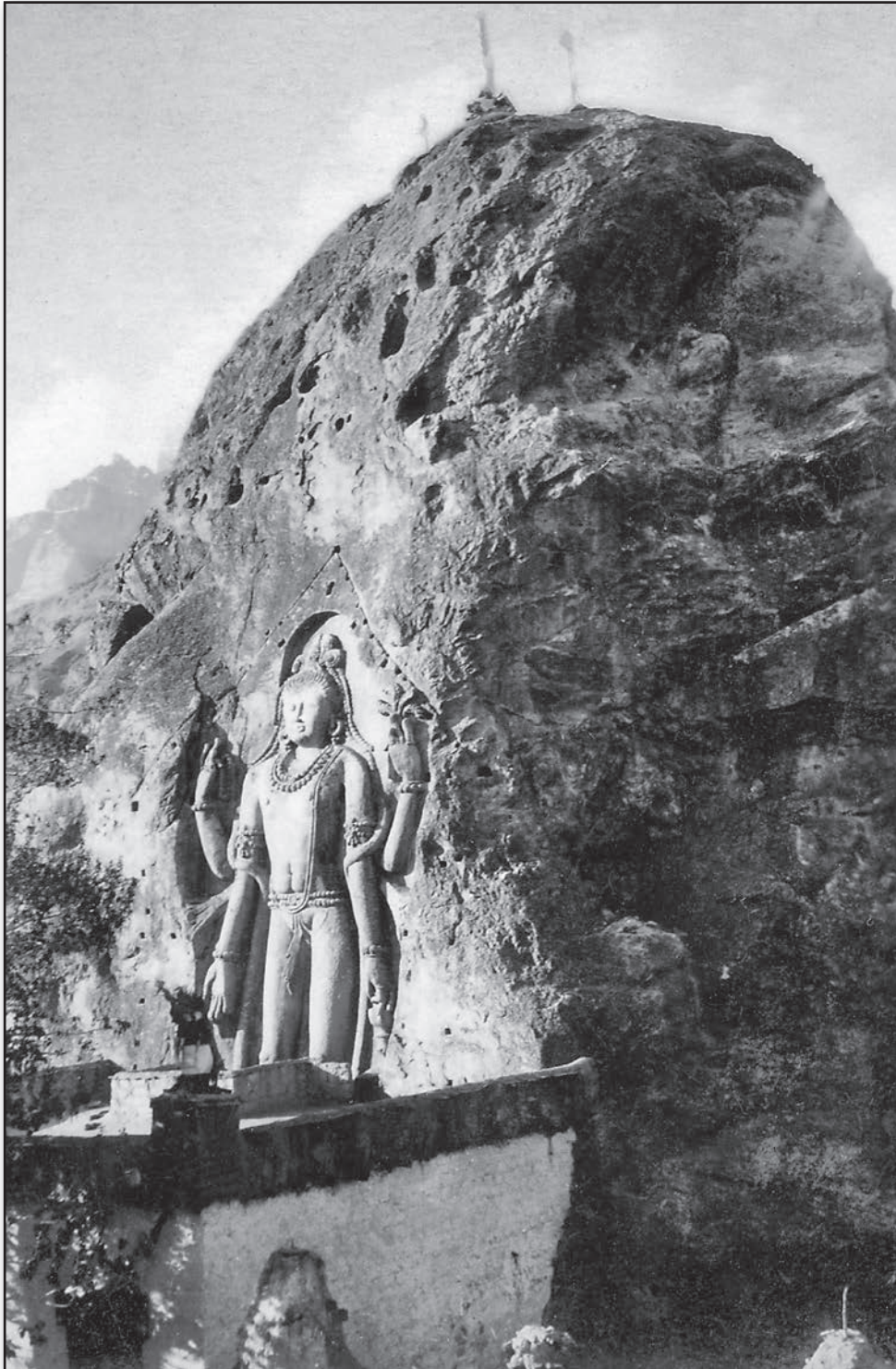
The players must have remarkably good eyes as time after time they will hit the ball the full length of the ground. Once the captain has struck the ball, it is in play and the remaining players join in the game.

A goal is only scored after the ball has passed between the posts, and been picked up by one of the attackers, before one of the defending side can hit it back over the goal line. The sticks used have a head like a hockey stick, and a long handle.

A band plays during the game, their music getting faster and faster as the excitement increases.

In Leh the game used to be played in the bazaar, but this has now been discontinued, and a polo ground has been made just outside the town.





The Buddha of Mulbekh

The nine-meter-high image of the Buddha carved in the rock dates from the late Gupta period of Indian art (eighth or ninth century). It depicts Avalokiteshwara (or Chenrezig), the Lord of compassion, holding typical items such as a flower and rosary. Local narrative also claims that there used to be a rock beside the statue with an inscription about the carving. The stone is still believed to be lying under the earth nearby. Because of its height, the image is called Chamba, or Maitreya. The usage of the term “Chamba” is usually associated with height. There is a blessing in Ladakhi that says “may you grow tall like Mulbekh Chamba.” [App.]



**Wakha Village three miles east
of Mulbekh**

A junction in the high valley between the passes of Namika-La and Fotu-La. The stone pillar is called Wakha Dakbu, meaning the tall stone of Wakha. [App.]

The Yarkandi Trader

In 1934, the Indian periodical *The Statesman* published this photograph of a Yarkandi trader. Wilmot wrote the following caption:

Each time I have been up to Ladakh, I have met him and found him a most interesting character. He and his brother work together. One has his headquarters in Yarkand, and brings down articles made there and in Tibet, and goods from Central Asia, whilst the other brother working from Srinigar brings up things from Kashmir and India and European goods. They move each year as soon as the passes open and meet in Leh, where they open a shop and sell what goods they can. After a while, before the winter snows, they return to their headquarters, each taking with them the goods brought by the other, which have not been sold, for disposal at their destinations. This form of trading has probably been carried out in the hills for centuries, and one wonders how much longer it will continue, before some more rapid means of transport will be able to conquer the obstacles of nature and change the whole leisurely lives of these people. One can only hope that it will be at some very distant date.

Yarkandi traders, ubiquitous along these trade routes and in Leh, were known for being “immensely courteous and hospitable” [THC:210]. This one wears a cap called *saib-e-tibi*, known in English as “solar topee”. [App.]

Wilmot’s last comments were prescient. The trans-Karakoram trade was interrupted in 1937, although not for the reason that he imagined, resumed partially in the 1940s then ended completely after 1949, when the Xinjiang-India border was sealed.



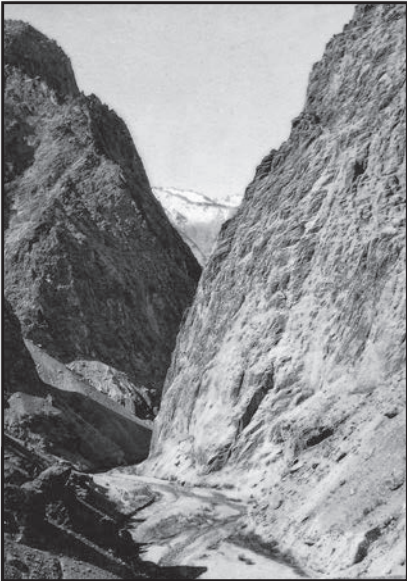


Lamayuru Gumpa

left **Yururong Gorge**, seen from the road approaching the Fotu-la on the way to Lamayuru. It affords spectacular views of the Zanskar Range.

below **Lamayuru Gumpa viewed from the west**

This is one of the oldest monasteries in the region, the present buildings dating from the 16th century. Lamayuru *gumpa* belongs to the *Drikung*, Red-Hat, sect of Tibetan Buddhism [CHA:219-20]. It was at one time considered a sanctuary where fugitives on the run could evade capture if they were able to throw their hats into “Lamayuru village” before they were caught [Khenpo Rangdol, personal communication, 2011].



right One of the many rich paintings adorning the walls of Lamayuru *Gompa*. The paintings are of different manifestations of Gonbo. The goddess Apchi is on the left. [App.]



below right Chenrezig means “one who possesses 1000 eyes and hands”. (The Sanskrit name is Avalokiteshwara, the lord who looks down.) Each hand has an eye painted in the palm. [App.]

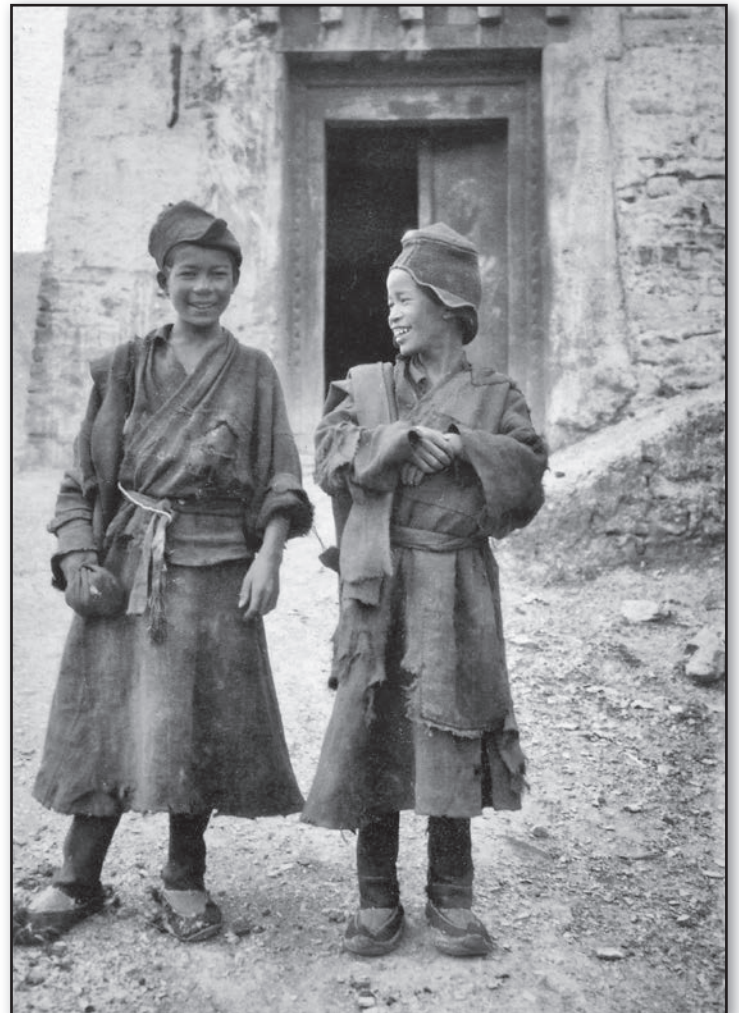


below Chenrezig’s temple.



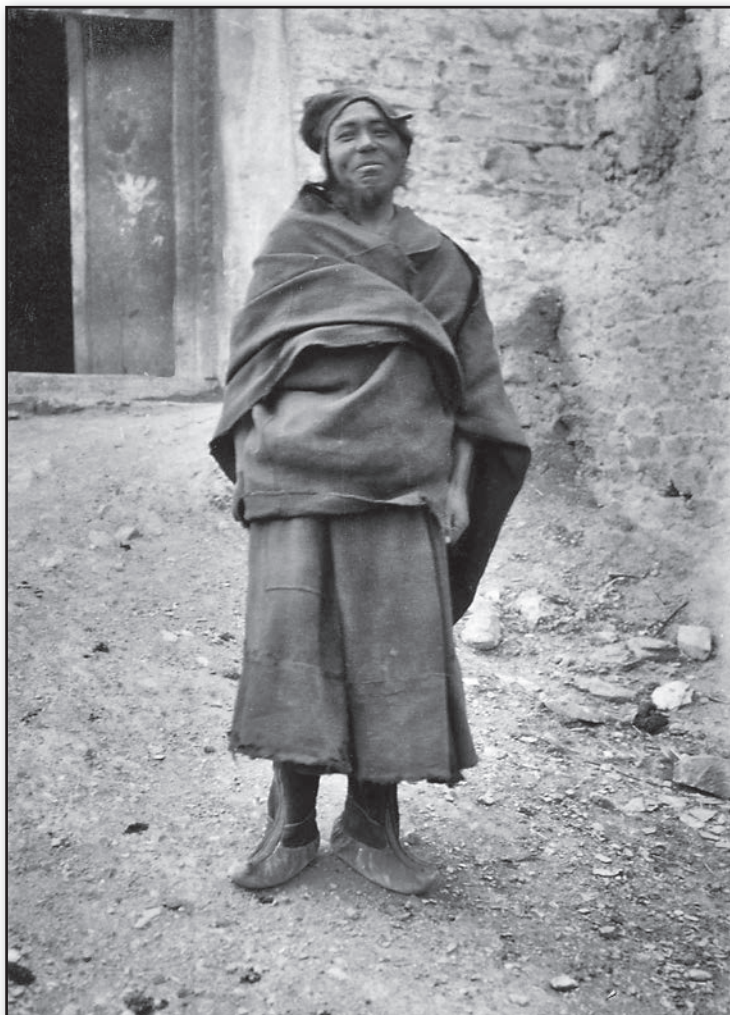
Monks at Lamayuru Gompa

Originally, the monastery housed 400-500 monks. This number was drastically reduced following the invasion by Zorawar Singh in 1834, but recovered when the monastery was re-built. In the 1970s, twenty to thirty monks lived permanently in Lamayuru, [GMH:22] although this number has now increased to between 130 and 190. Lamayuru was one of the few places where nuns could live in a nunnery.[GMH:58]



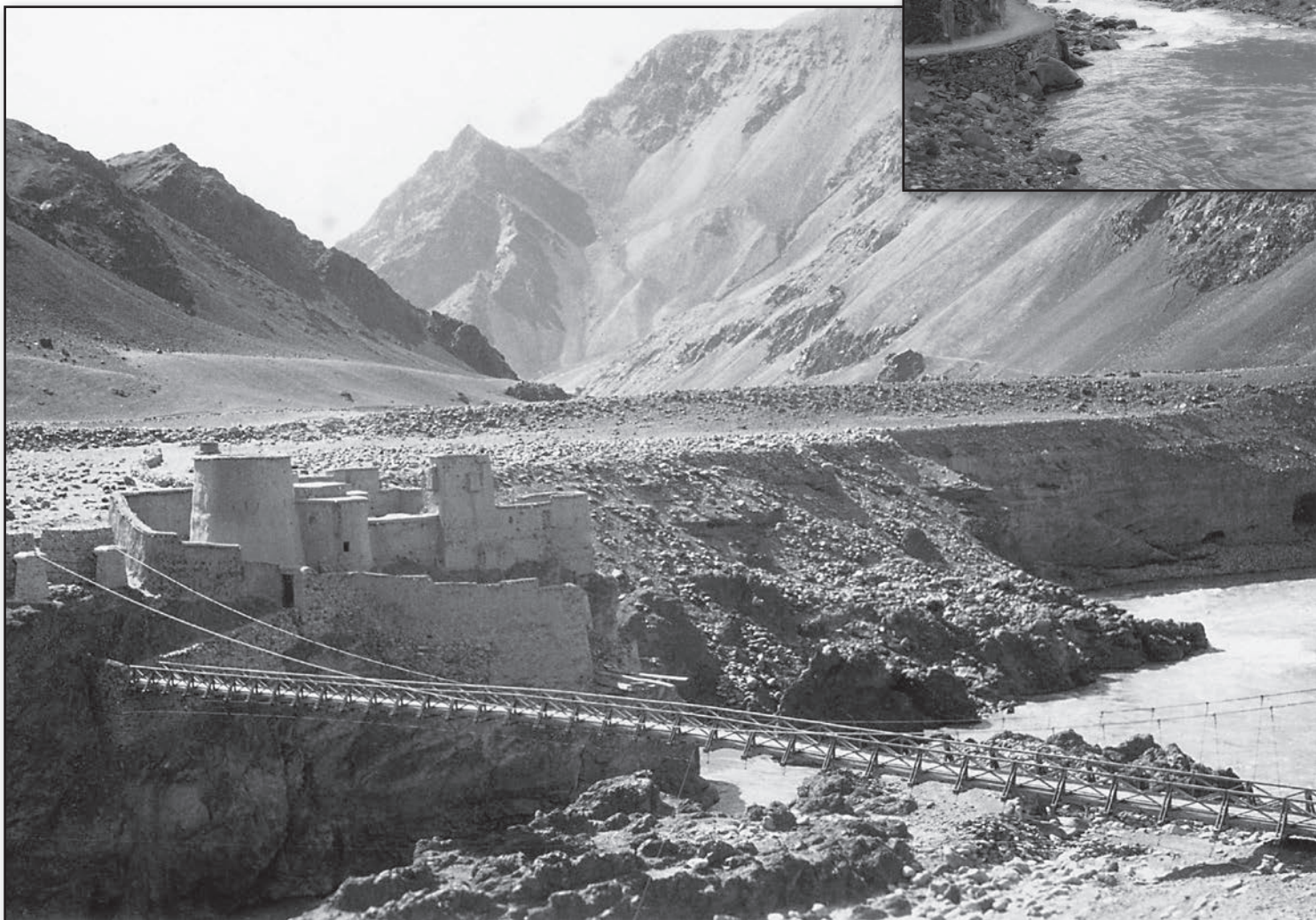
this page Novice monks. The left-hand of the two young monks has been identified as Gyen Thabkas, who became a teacher and was from Yuru village. [App.]

this page Two senior monks. The monk on the right has been variously named as Gyen Baltum or Gyen Chokdup. His shoes are unique to the monks of Lamayuru monastery. [App.]



The Descent from Lamayuru

From the monastery, Wilmot's party descended through the deep Lamayuru defile (*right*) following the Wanla Tokpo stream, into the Indus valley near Khalatse (*below*). The bridge was where the old road from Kashmir reached the Indus [CHA:96]. The fort no longer exists.





Saspul Serai

Saspul was an important stopping place for caravans, including those of the *Shamma*, between Khalatse and Leh. The caravan here seems to be of *Shamma* only, identifiable by their long pigtails. The building served as the tax collection centre, and traders from Kargil also came to pay taxes in the form of wheat. [App.]

Leh

Entrance to Leh bazaar

A Muslim boy on his way into the market from school. He carries a writing board with a handle (see page 20) and also a long, flat book designed to fit into the shelves of a library. Muslim boys' education prepared them to become traders and businessmen.

The Balkhang Gate, seen here, was demolished in the 1970s to allow motor traffic into the bazaar.

Note the western man in the background.



Leh bazaar with the palace above

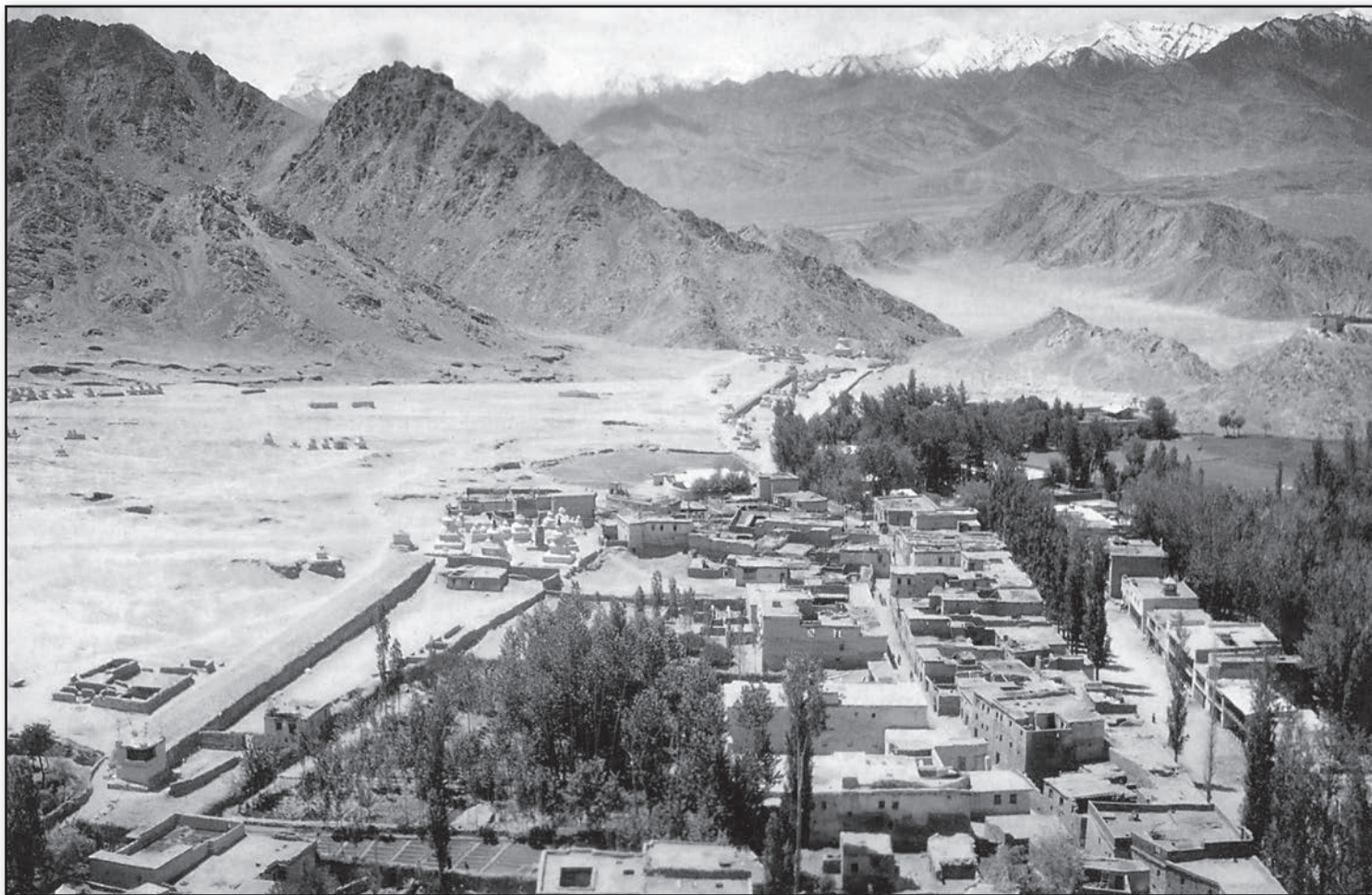
At the time of Wilmot's visit, parts of the bazaar were clearly in a poor state of repair. Business appears slow, compared to the present day scene (*right*).

Note the old mosque at the far end of the street. It was rebuilt in the 1980s and again in the late 1990s.



© Roger Bates 2011





Leh, seen from the palace

On the right is the main bazaar street, of which there are several photos, and on the left the *mane* walls. People circumambulated these, praying or meditating. The wall is covered with flat stones carved with mantras.

Stupas are grouped at the farther, wider, end.

***right* Boys at the Government Middle School in Leh**

This school, with around 190 students, was also called Charas School, according to one informant, because in the building behind the boys were offices where drugs such as *charas* (hashish) were sold at high prices. Mohammad Ramzan Stiri, now aged 94, has identified himself as the boy in the white goncha, ninth from the right. The teacher was Kaga Namgyal from Matho village. He holds a stick bound with wire, “to hit harder” [Meme Samad, 100, grandfather of advocate Lassu Shafi]. The boys were possibly lined up to greet Wilmot himself. Subjects taught were Urdu, Bhoti and mathematics, but not science. Few Buddhist families sent their children to school, partly from poverty, partly because they were needed to work the land. [App.]



Sankar Gompa



Sankar (shown *left* today) is the closest monastery to Leh, and one in which Wilmot took a number of interior photographs under what must have been difficult conditions.

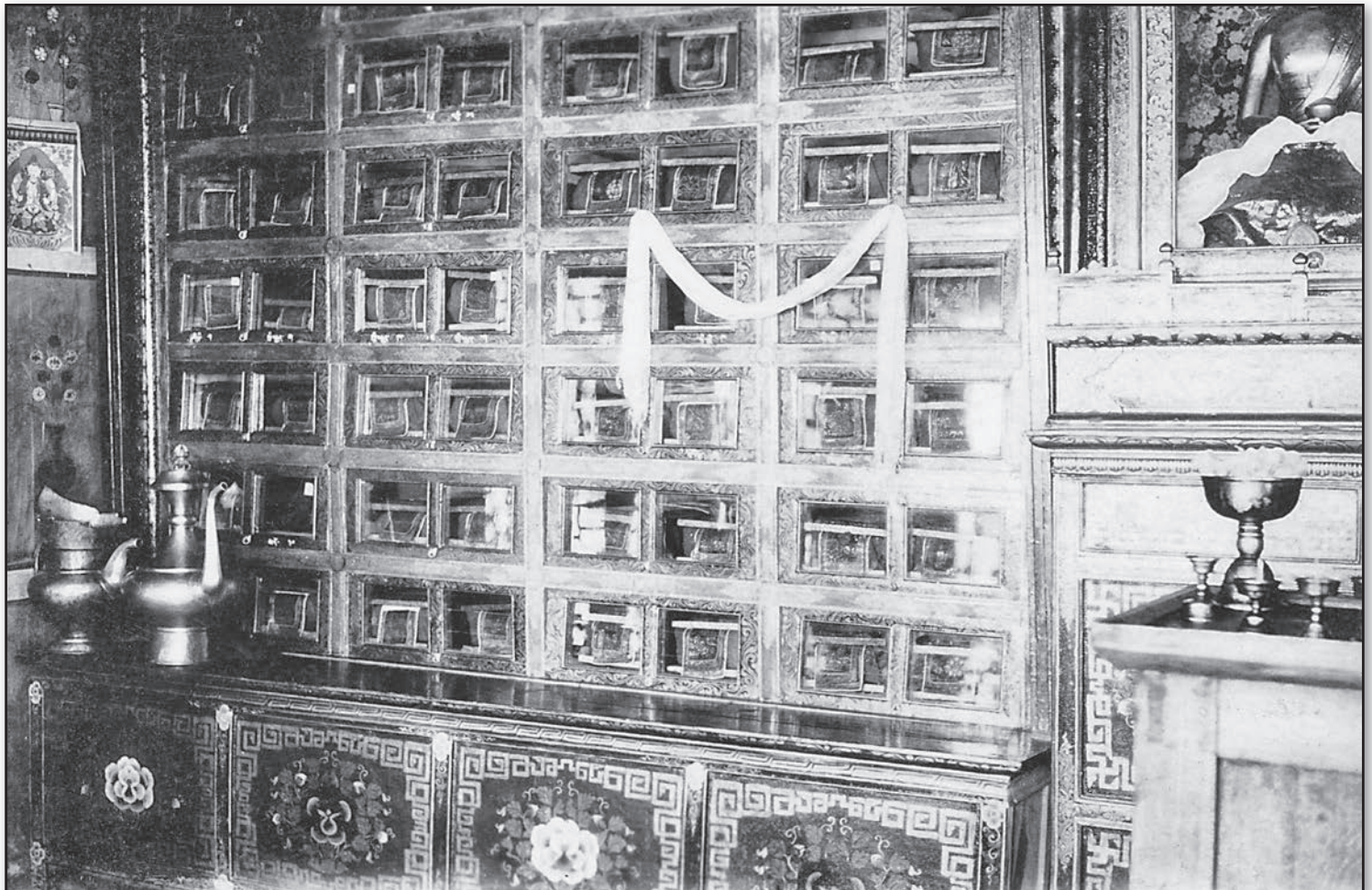
below The main assembly hall.



The library at Sankar Gompa

Buddhist texts are wrapped in cloth and then tied between two rectangular pieces of wood. These are placed on shelves. Once handwritten by scribes, by the nineteenth century, they were block-printed. Blocks were individually carved, and the texts printed on rice paper which, although very thin and variable in quality, lasted well in the arid climate of Ladakh and Tibet. [Khenpo Rangdol, personal communication, 2011.] The ewers contain water, used by the monks for *puja*. Before leaving, they take a few drops of water to rub on the forehead.

A *khatak* silk scarf hangs from the shelves as an offering. It is said that in places devoid of flowers (such as Tibet and Ladakh), silk scarves were offered instead.



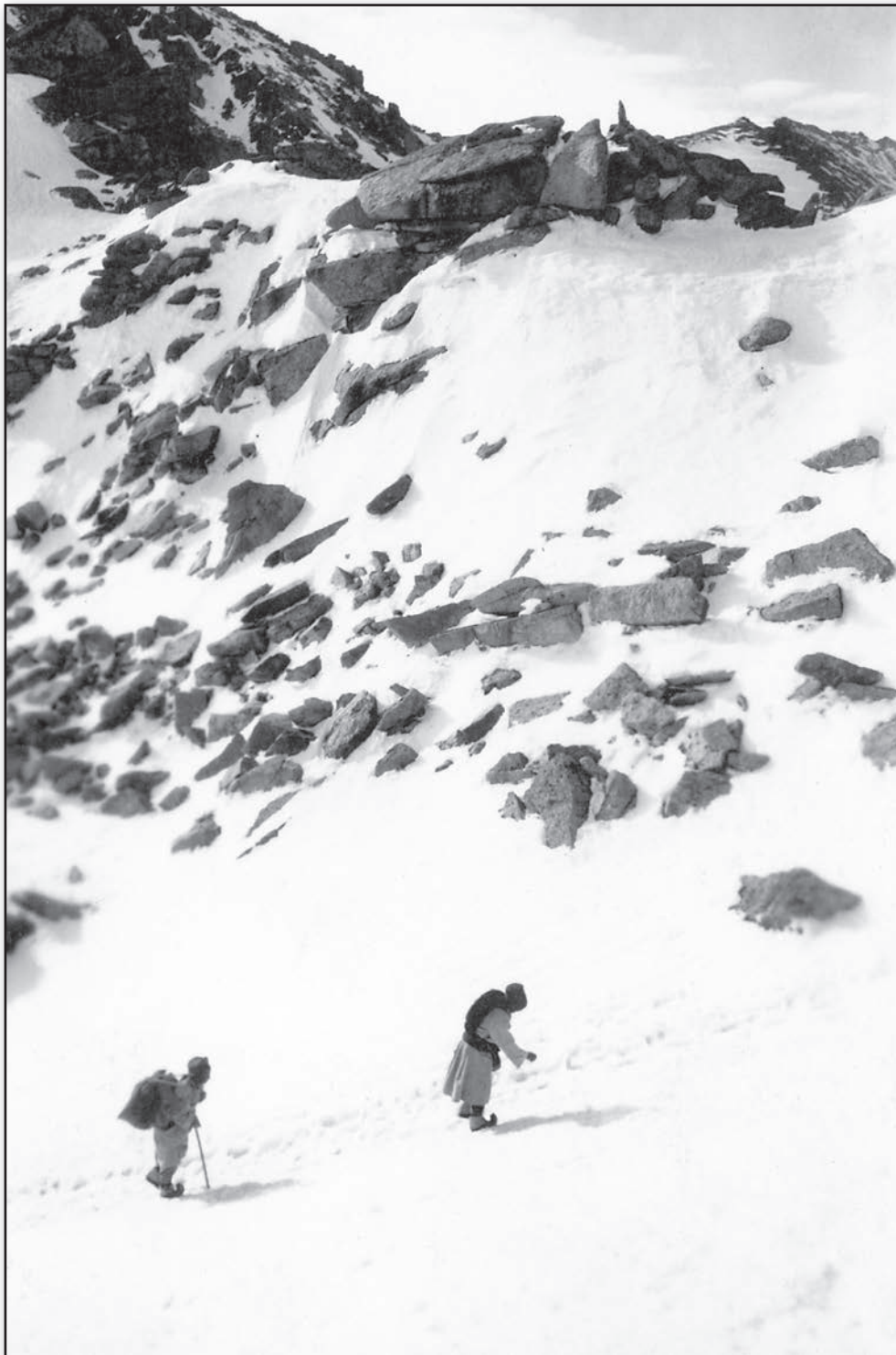


Sankar Gumpa, the Wheel of Life

The wheel of life, also known as the wheel of *dharmā*, or law, is one of the most important symbols in Buddhist philosophy. Yama, god of death, is shown holding the wheel in his mouth as a symbol of the certainty of death and uncertainty of life, within the circle of life and death. The wheel consists of three layers: the outer layer shows the twelve links of interdependence, the middle layer shows the six planes of existence, and the core part consists of symbolic representations of ignorance, greed and anger (the rooster, the snake and the pig). [App.]

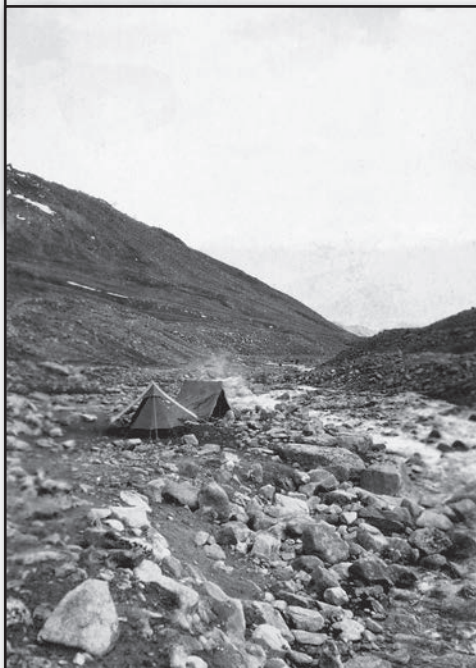


In the palace temple: Sitatapatra
The “Goddess of the White Parasol” (*Dukar*), protector against supernatural danger.



Khardung-La

The motor road over Khardung-La, at an altitude of 5,359 meters (17,582 feet), although in existence in the 1970s, was only opened to the public in 1988. At the time of Wilmot's journey, the route was still used by the Karakoram trade passing between Leh and the Nubra valley to the north. Official records claim that the pass is 5,602 meters (18,379 feet), but recent differential GPS measurements have reduced this.

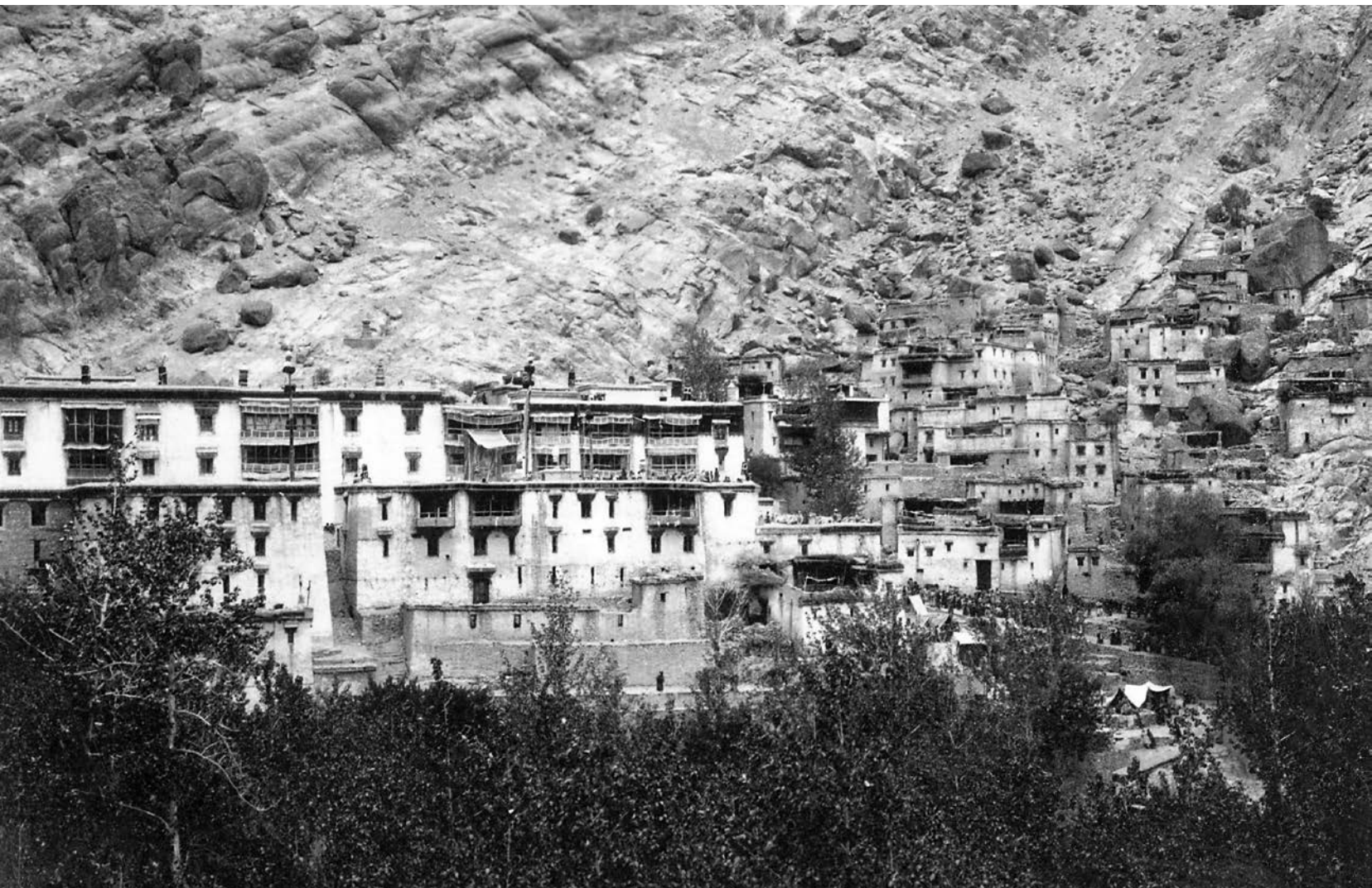


The trade route to Yarkand over Khardung-La

Different routes were taken in summer and winter, but trade continued throughout the year. The travelers were mostly Yarkandis, as this was their only trade route. Ladakhis also used it to travel to the Nubra valley. [App.]

left Wilmot's camp at Polu, 20 kilometers from the top of Khardung-La.

Hemis Gompa



The Drukpa Kagyu monastery at Hemis is located in a steep-sided ravine off the Indus valley, some thirty kilometers southeast of Leh. Established in 1590, it is the largest, wealthiest, and arguably most famous monastery in Ladakh. The *mela* is a spectacular festival held every year in the summer. Today, it is a major tourist attraction; when Rupert Wilmot recorded it, the audience still consisted almost entirely of local people and monks from surrounding monasteries. The festival is in the form of a mystery play that features the triumph of good over evil. It consists of a series of dances and enactments performed over two days. The performers wear a wide variety of garments and ferocious masks, representing the deities of Tibetan Buddhist mythology.

Wealthy women visitors at Hemis Gompa

Note the silk brocade and fleece cape of the women with her back to the camera.

The festival audience gather at the fair, outside the entrance to the inner courtyard. Note the animal shelter that resembles a bridge, on the lower right. The fair was held to coincide with the festival.



The Mela

On the rooftop over the main courtyard, monks herald the commencement of the *mela* with a fanfare blown on the traditional long trumpets (*ragdung*).





The entry of eight manifestations of Padmasambhava along with eight others with various musical instruments. (Note: Wilmot captioned this “Entry of the nine incarnations of Buddha”.) Each masked dancer has a bell or *damaru* (small drum) in their hands. The *thangka* in the background is of Kunkhen Padma Karpo, the first reincarnation of Gyalwang Drukpa. [Monisha Ahmed, personal communication, 2014]



Dancers

Western visitors, Wilmot among them, called these “devil dancers”. In fact, they are “protectors ... we believe in our previous lives and next lives and if we can see these deities in this life then there will be no need to fear [the] intermediate state after death... They are wrathful expressions of the Buddha mind. Some of these deities are manifestations of Compassionate Buddha represented in full form by statues.” [Khenpo Rangdol, personal communication, 2011]

This is a spiritual dance consisting of many movements, which combines motion and meditation. It is accompanied by drums, trumpets, and cymbals. Note the skulls on the fronts of the dancers. Each deity has a different masked costume.

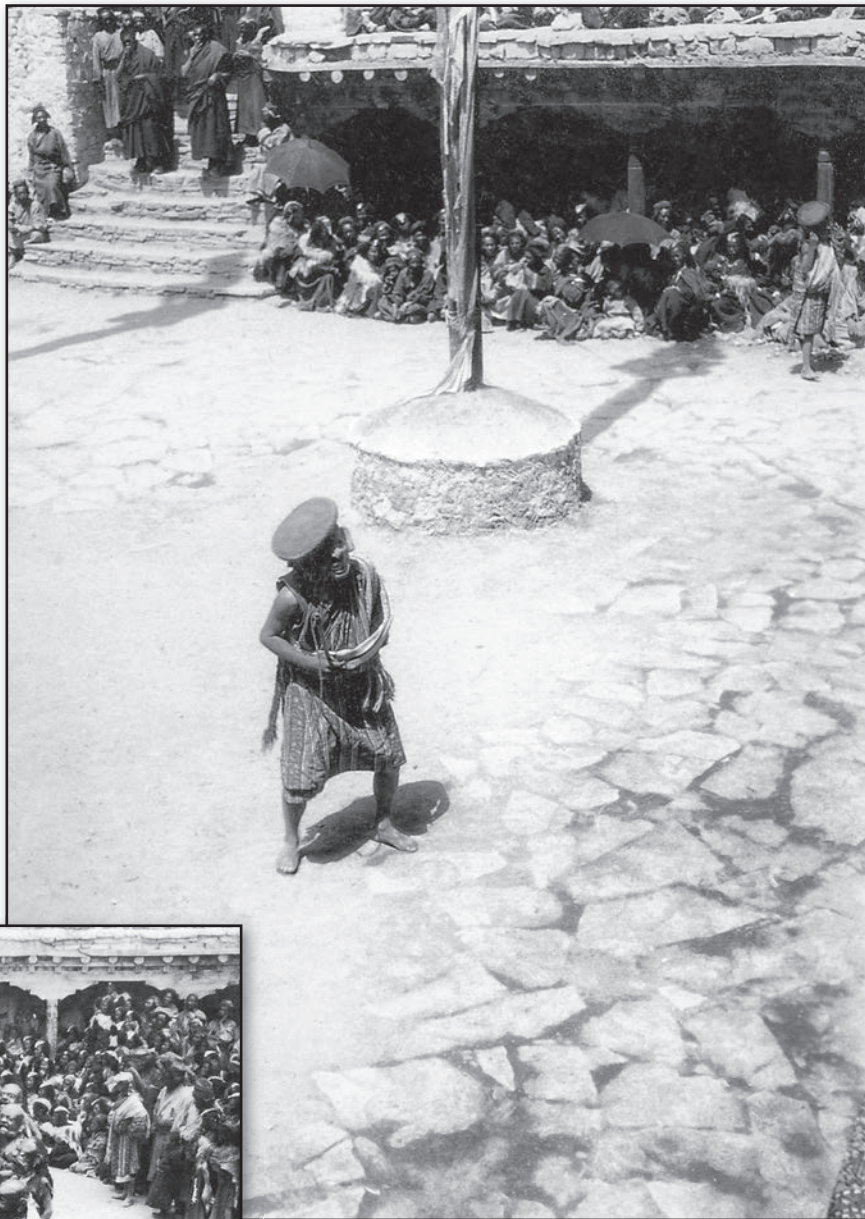


The Orchestra

The orchestra below with guests above, who appear to include westerners and Indian dignitaries.

One of a pair of “comic policemen”

These characters shepherded performers on and off the stage and entertained the crowds with jokes. They are described as wearing “flesh-coloured masks, yellow tam-o’-shanters, yellow shirts and embroidered kilts above their bare legs”. [ML:211]



A mixed dance

Wild human, semi-human, and demon figures.

Stages in the Mystery Cycle

Note: These are Wilmot's captions. In fact, as has been explained on page 54, the "devils" are protectors.

"Ghouls" with the "corpse"

The "corpse" (not visible here, behind the left-hand "ghoul") is a human figure made from barley flour. Wilmot understood it to represent a ninth-century King of Tibet, Langdarma, who is thought to have espoused the Bon religion and persecuted Buddhists, destroying libraries and monasteries. Khenpo Rangdol interprets it as a representation of the one who harms, the human ego which must be slain. [Khenpo Rangdol, personal communication, 2011]





“Devils dancing around the corpse”



“A devil kept at bay by lamas and music”



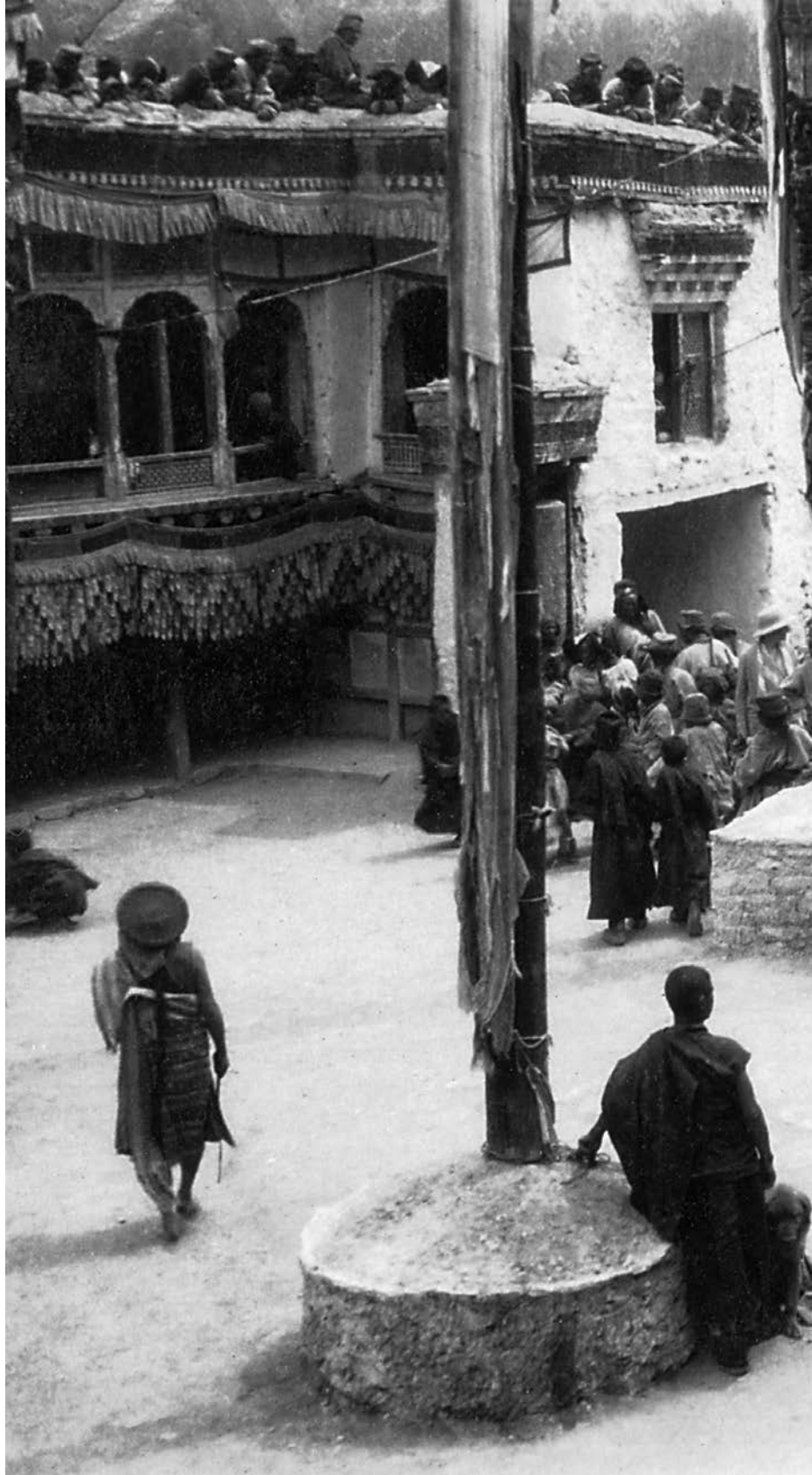
“A devil cuts up the corpse, while a lama stands by”

Blessing Three Horses.

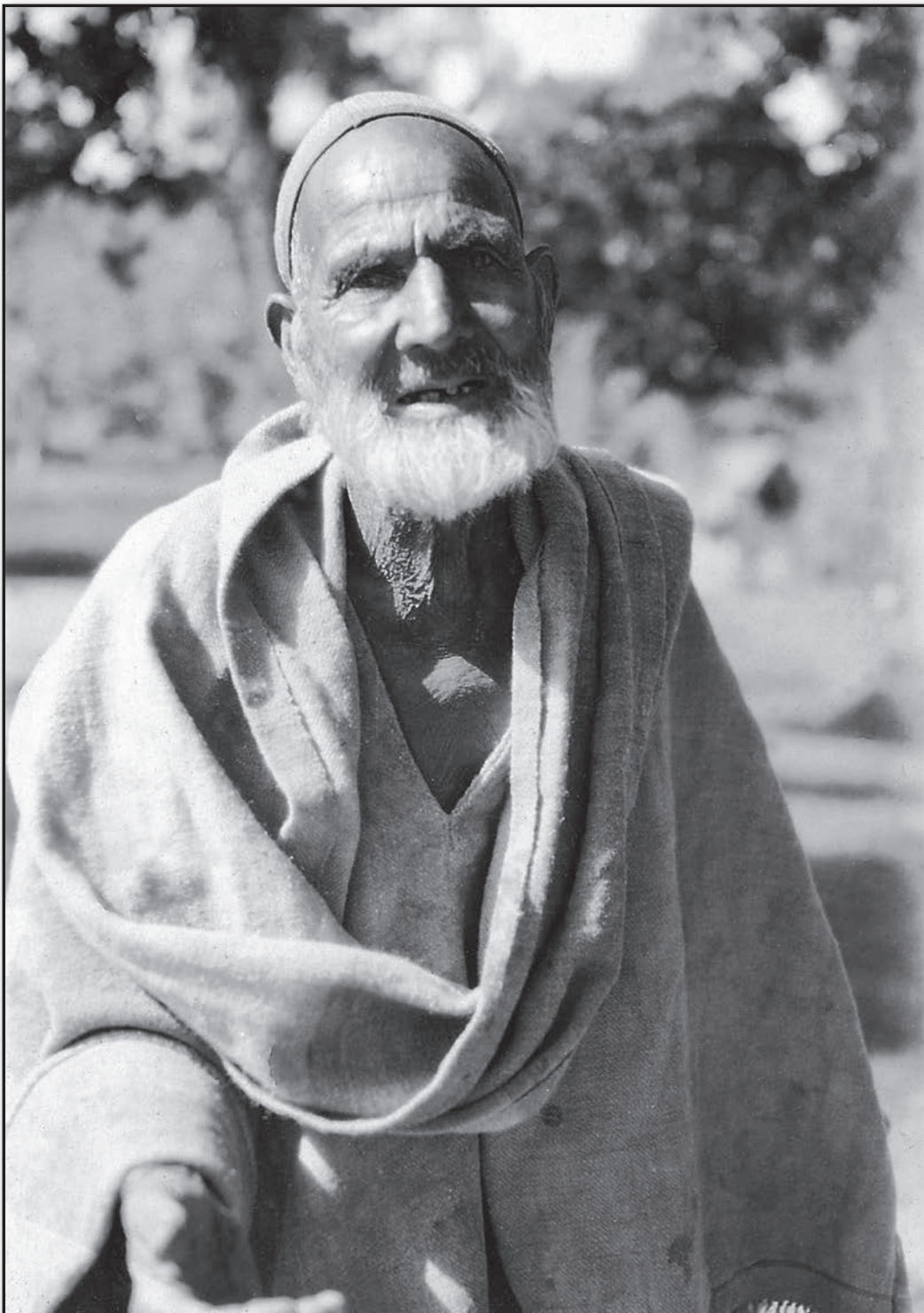
In Wilmot's words, the photo shows "Blessing three horses, who then run three times around the *gompa*. As they go out for the last time they are supposed to take away the sins of the people." After the blessing, the animals were looked after by the monastery until they died.

[App.]

"I have seen similar events at the annual festival at Korzok monastery where, still today, horses, sheep, goats and yaks are brought into the monastery for blessing. The animals each represent one of the three tiers of the Ladakhi pantheon ... inhabited at the top by the gods, in the middle by humans and demons (*tse*), and the lowest by serpents (*klu*) and creatures of the earth and water." [Monisha Ahmed, personal communication, July 2014]







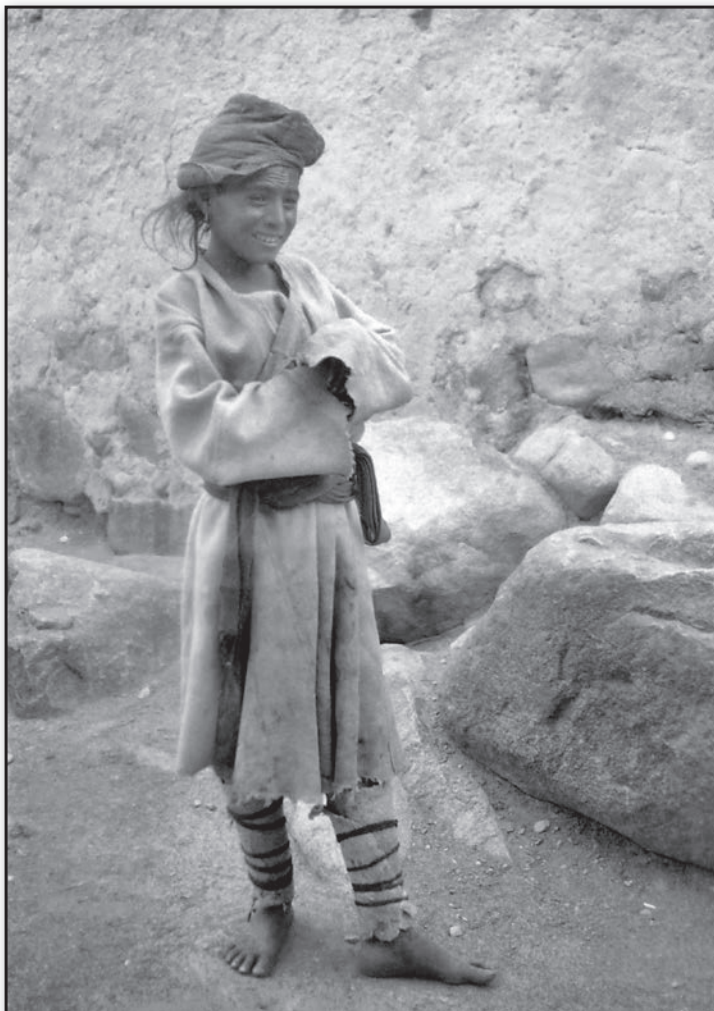
People

One of Wilmot's great strengths shows in his images of the many people he met on his journeys. Almost without exception, they lack the stiff formality often seen in portraits of indigenous people by early photographers. Instead they suggest a strong personal interaction with his subjects – as demonstrated in this further selection of images.

left A Kashmiri man encountered early in the journey.



right A Ladakhi mother and child in Leh. She wears the traditional *logpa* goatskin with the fleece inside.



left **Boy at Khalatse**

The wrappings around his legs are made of felt.



right The man, dressed in a typical home-spun *goncha*, smokes a water-pipe. This type of pipe (*chilim*) was common throughout Asia. It contained water to cool the smoke.

right Identified by Wilmot as a Yellow Hat (*Gelukpa*) lama, with a man who was possibly Wilmot's guide, as he appears to be carrying camera cases.



left Young girl wearing nun's cap in or near Leh Gonchas and nun's caps (*chotip*) were worn by most young children. It is unlikely that this girl is actually a nun. She is also wearing cowrie shells and some amulets with keys hanging from them. [App.]

Chapter 2 - The 1934 Journey

Wilmot set out on his second journey into Ladakh in June 1934, armed with a new camera (a Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex), and accompanied by his two spaniel dogs, David and Peggy. This time, he travelled the south-to-north route, from the Kullu valley in present-day Himachal Pradesh. He crossed the three major ranges south of the Indus: the Pir Panjal, the Greater Himalaya, and the Zaskar. As on the 1931 journey, his party travelled on foot with pack-horses, because the present road would not be completed for another fifty-five years.

This journey was noteworthy for its priceless photographic record of the travellers Wilmot encountered on the way. The monks, pilgrims, merchants, families, and nomads shown here appear largely as they would have done for hundreds of years. Now they are long gone.

Map 2 – The Second Journey,
June 1934



Kullu valley to Lachulung-La



Lachulung-La to Leh

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The Kullu Valley

opposite Kangra valley railway

Wilmot travelled on this typical Indian hill railway (which is still running) between Pathankot and Jogindernagar in Himachal Pradesh, en route to the Kullu valley. From Jogindernagar, the party would have had to proceed on foot, probably with pack animals and porters, across two hill ranges to the Kullu valley.

Children in the Kullu valley

Note the typically round Kullu baskets.



Kullu valley shepherds

Their clothing indicates they are of the Gaddi tribe, probably from near Chamba. The Gaddis were shepherds who followed annual circular routes with their flocks, between the Punjab and Lahaul. [THC:197].





Rohtang-La

This is the first of the high passes on the route. It crosses the Pir Panjal at an altitude of 3,978 meters (13,051 feet) and leads into the Chandra valley in Lahaul. “*roh*” means “corpses”, reflecting the risks of the route: unpredictable avalanches and landslides, leading to many deaths. [App.] A tunnel is now being constructed under this notorious bottleneck for modern wheeled traffic.



left A group of traders camping below Rohtang-La.

Lahauli People

opposite A Lahauli boy

left A Lahauli and his wife

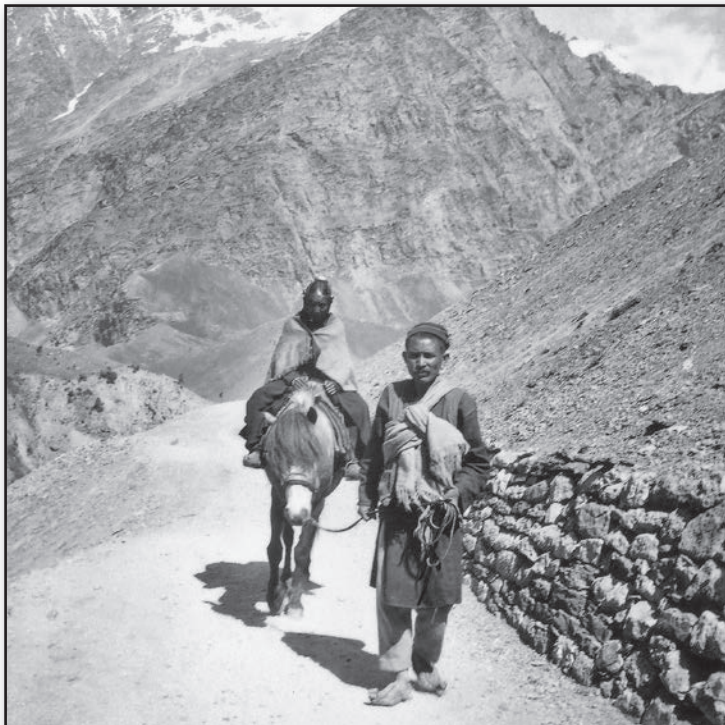
They had probably crossed Rohtang-La from the mountainous region of Lahaul into the Kullu valley.

below left A Lahauli preparing a meal

Probably Wilmot's cook.

below A Lahauli woman and baby

Note the headdress and necklaces typical of the region. She may come from a wealthy family as she has two very large corals on either side of her head. [App.]





In the Chandra Valley

North of Rohtang-La, the route follows the Chandra valley downstream as it curves around the Central Lahaul Massif.

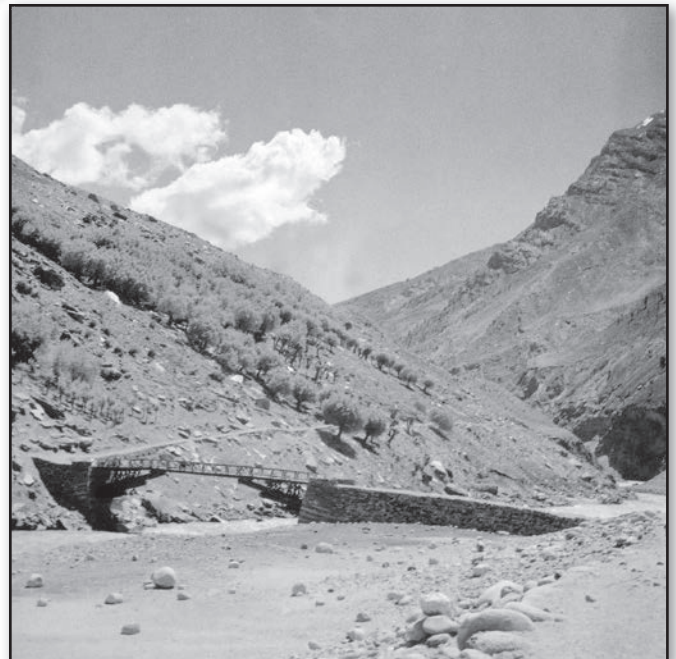
left **The Central Massif**

The picture, taken near Gondla, shows the Central Lahaul Massif, which rises from the Chandra valley to heights of up to 6,500 meters (21,325 feet).



right **Bridge on the Gondla-Keylong road**

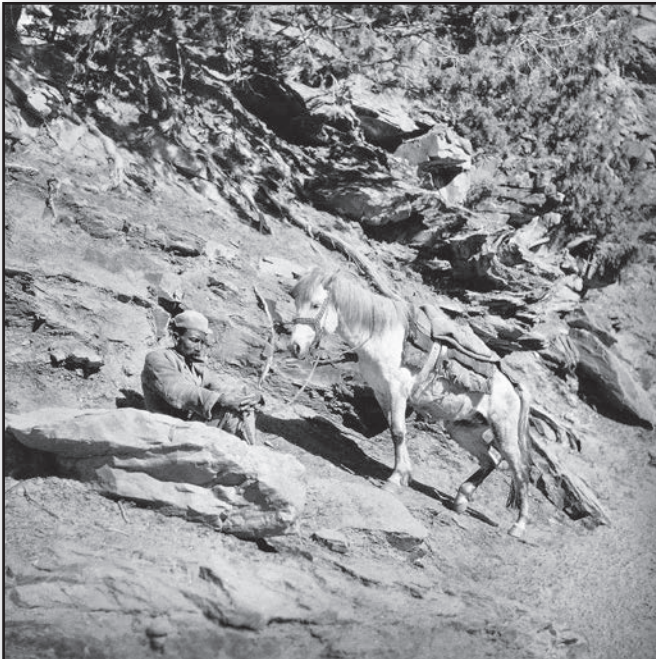
The road follows the Chandra river to the point near Keylong where it turns northwest and becomes the Chenab, which eventually joins the Indus and flows into the Indian Ocean. From that point, the road turns northeast, up the valley of the Bhaga river.



The Manali-Leh Track

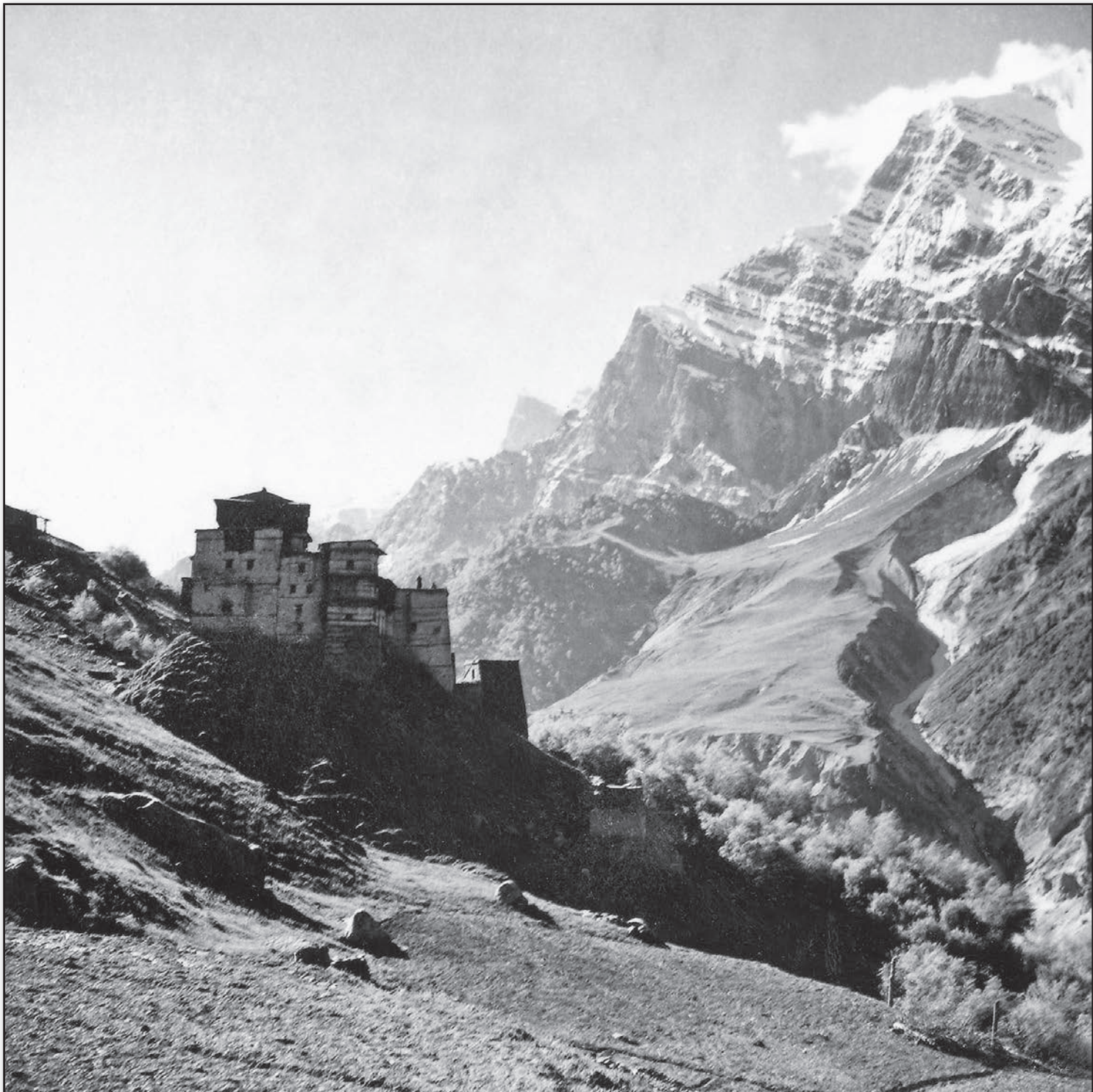
right Track repair work

Over much of its route, the Manali-Leh track was often blocked by landslides. The road capable of taking wheeled traffic was not completed until 1989 and is still only open to traffic from June to September.



left A lone traveller

At the time of Wilmot's journey, parts of the track were little more than a rough footpath.



opposite **Gondla**

A village in the Chandra valley. The photo shows the “castle” built by the local ruler, or *thakur*, in around 1700.

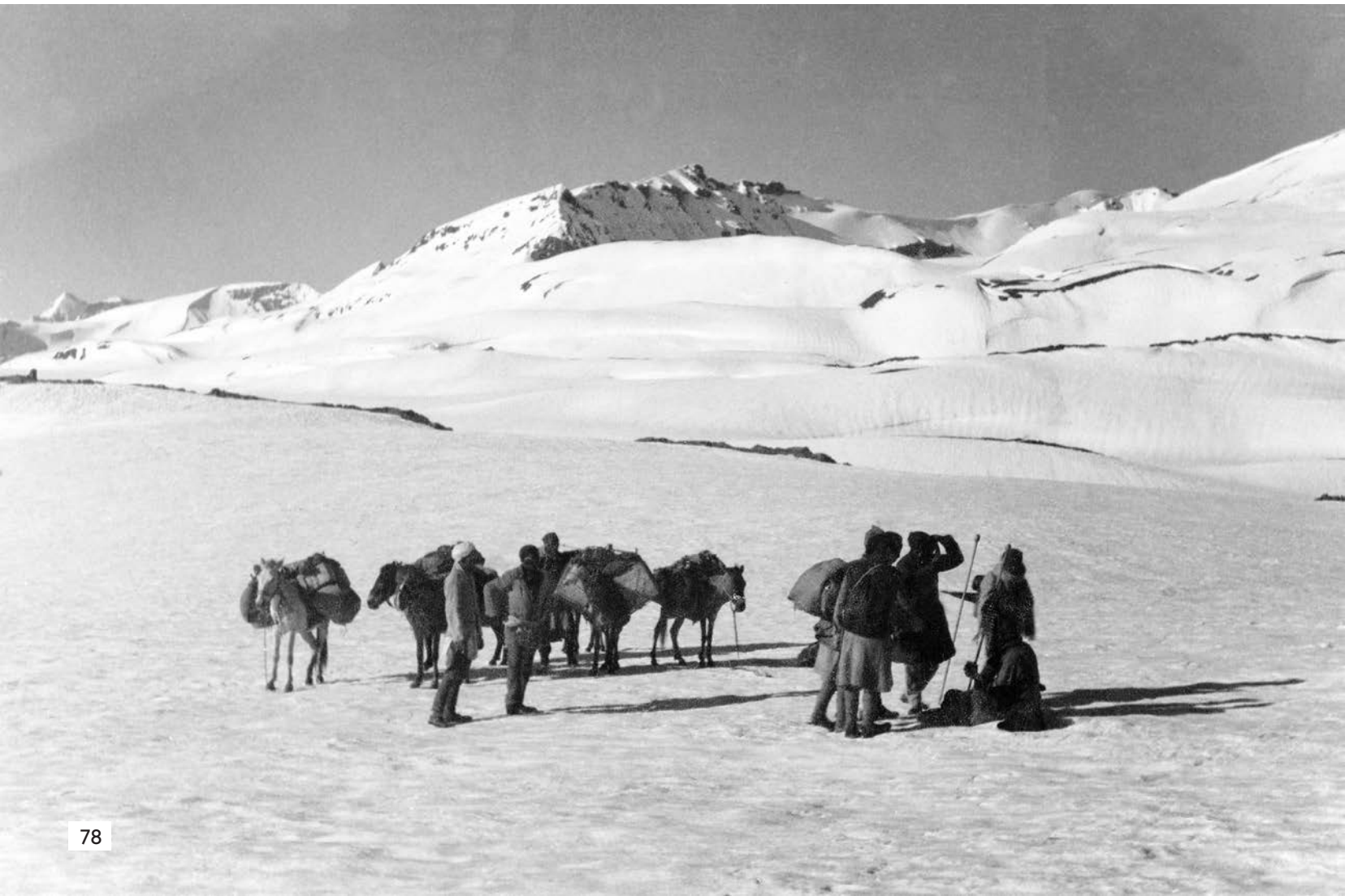


right **Keylong**

Keylong is the administrative capital of Lahaul and Spiti districts. Then, as now, it was a major stopping point on the Manali-Leh road.

Baralacha-La

below Travellers, probably Wilmot's party, pausing at the top of Baralacha-La. The pass is at an altitude of 4,890 meters (16,043 feet), the third highest on the Manali-Leh route. Unusually, it is at the head of three valleys.





above **Coming down from Baralacha-La**

A mixed herd of sheep and *pashmina* goats. Livestock on this route was mainly intended for consumption in the Leh area. Alternatively, this herd could have been with Changpa tribesmen on their return from the annual fair at Patseo on the Bhaga river. [THC:227] The animals do not have much wool on their backs, as the nomads took the animals to Patseo and sheared them on the spot. [Monisha Ahmed, personal communication, 2014]



above **Phalrong Danda, near Sarchu**

This broad alluvial plain is cut through by the north-flowing Yunam river, one of the three rising close to Baralacha-La. This area is now home to several campsites for tourists during the summer season.



right **Peggy (left) and David**

Wilmot's two spaniels travelled with him throughout the journey.



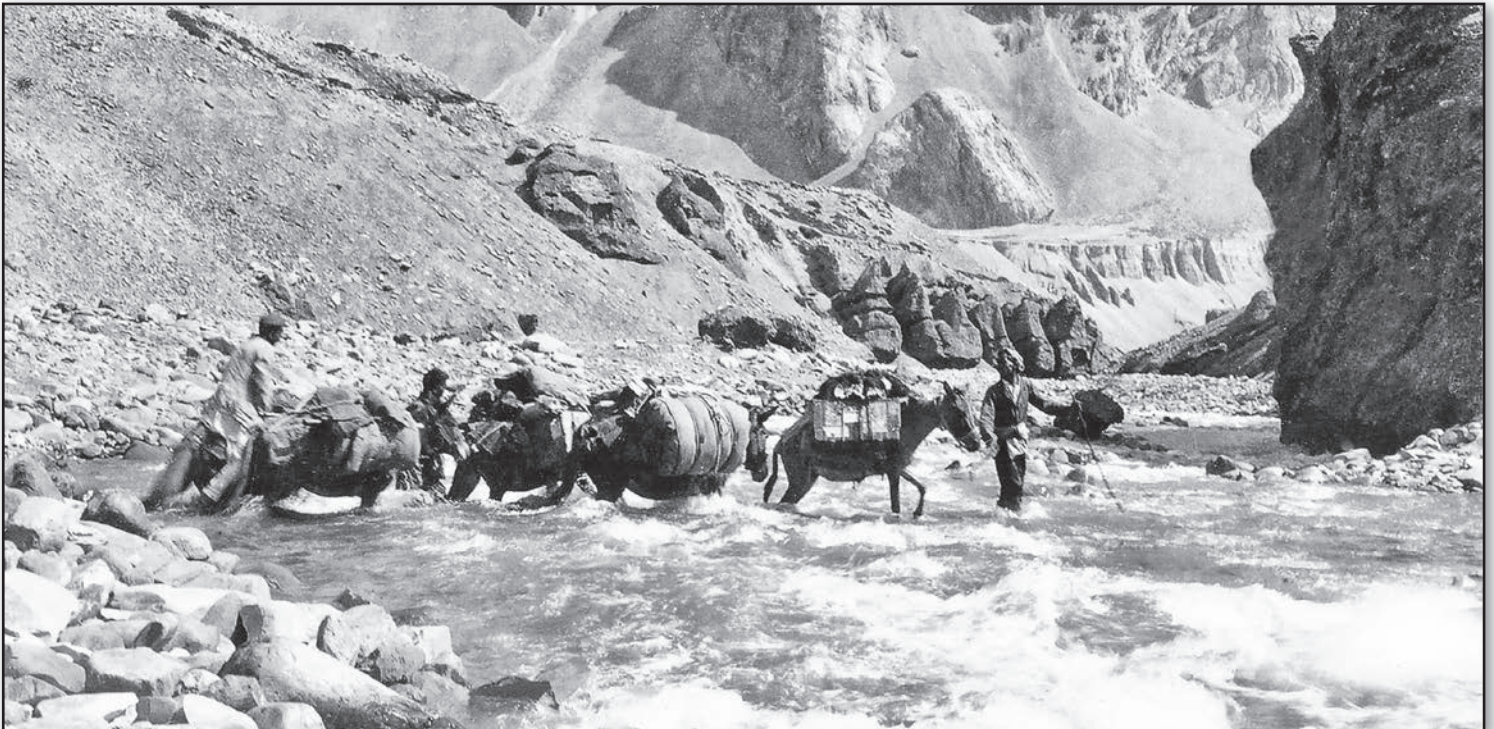
Ascending to Lachlung-La

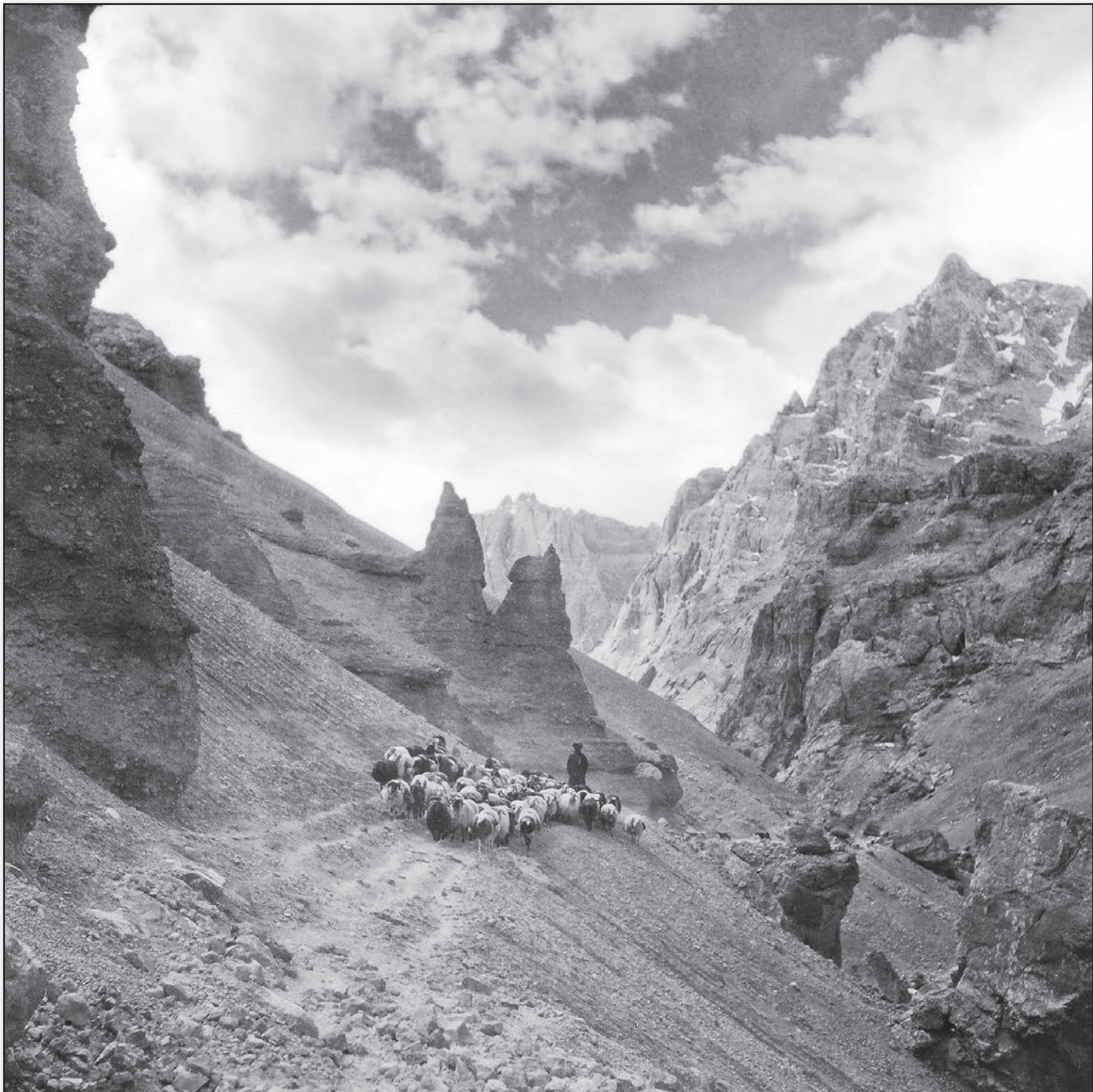
This shows members of Wilmot's party, including one of the dogs. The left-hand figure in the rear suggests that they carried at least one rifle. However, unlike many such travellers, Wilmot would not have used it for trophy hunting.

At 5,100 meters (16,732 feet), Lachlung-la (also known as Lungalacha-La) is the second highest pass crossed by the party.

below **A river crossing**

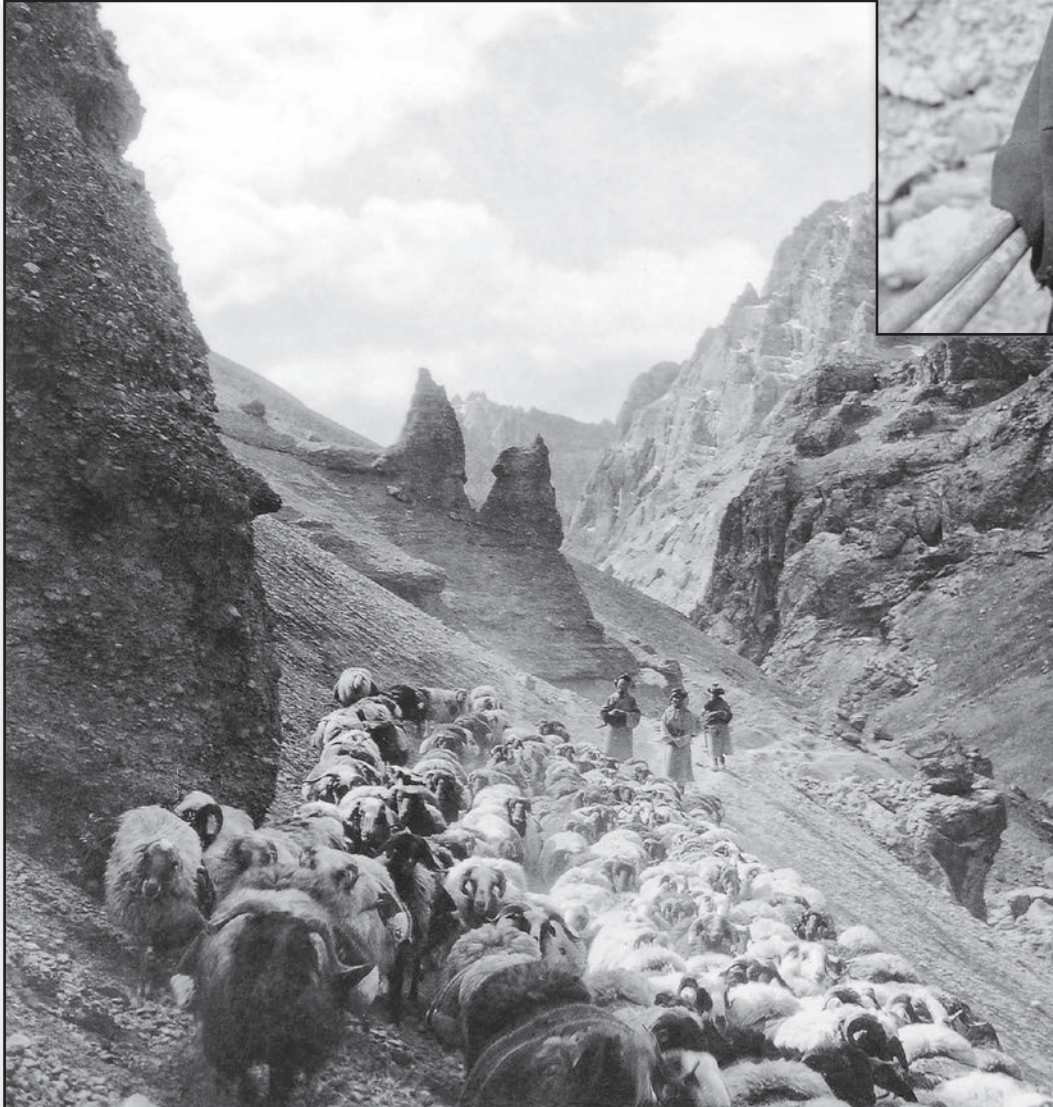
Wilmot's party fording the river near Lingti. The Lingti is a tributary that joins the Yunam river just upstream from Sarchu.





A herd of *chang-luk* sheep

They are accompanied by their Changpa shepherds from the Chang-thang region, which stretches from western Tibet into eastern Ladakh. These sturdy sheep were employed as pack animals (note the saddle bags) and were preferred to ponies, yaks or *dzos*, because of their ability to cover extremely rough terrain, with no requirement to carry fodder as extra loads. The main load carried by the Changpa flocks was salt, often for sale to the villagers in the Zaskar valley. [THC:101 and 122].



A Changpa shepherd.

The Changpa nomads traded in the fibre of the *pashmina* goat, sheep's wool and salt, throughout Ladakh, Kashmir, and the Punjab. In eastern Ladakh, the main product traded was wool, in western Tibet, it was *pashm*. [Monisha Ahmed, personal communication, July 2014]

Wilmot was to enjoy regular encounters with the Changpa and their flocks on his way north.

Sumakhei Lungpa valley

Looking east up the Sumakhei Lungpa valley from Pang.

Pang was a mainly seasonal settlement; it now consists of rows of tea tents serving the tourist and commercial traffic during the summer season, as well as a small army camp. It is situated at the point where the road leaves the Zanskar river system and climbs to the Morey Plain.



right **The Morey Plain, between Pang and Debring**

This is a forty kilometer-wide stretch of land, at an altitude of about 4,400 meters (14,435 feet). It was the setting for many of Wilmot's portraits of Ladakhi travellers.





opposite **A Changpa herdsman**

Probably from the camp in the photograph below. In the background is Rokchen, a peak to the west of the Morey Plain. The rope he holds was probably spun using the ubiquitous drop spindle.

below **A Changpa camp**

This is at the extreme western edge of the region they inhabit, the Changthang, which stretches from Rupshu in eastern Ladakh into western Tibet. At the time of Wilmot's journey, the Changpa moved along established migratory paths across the India-Tibet border.

The photo shows a typical Changpa tent, made of woven yak wool, of a type still in use today (shown *inset* near Korzog village, to the east of Wilmot's route).



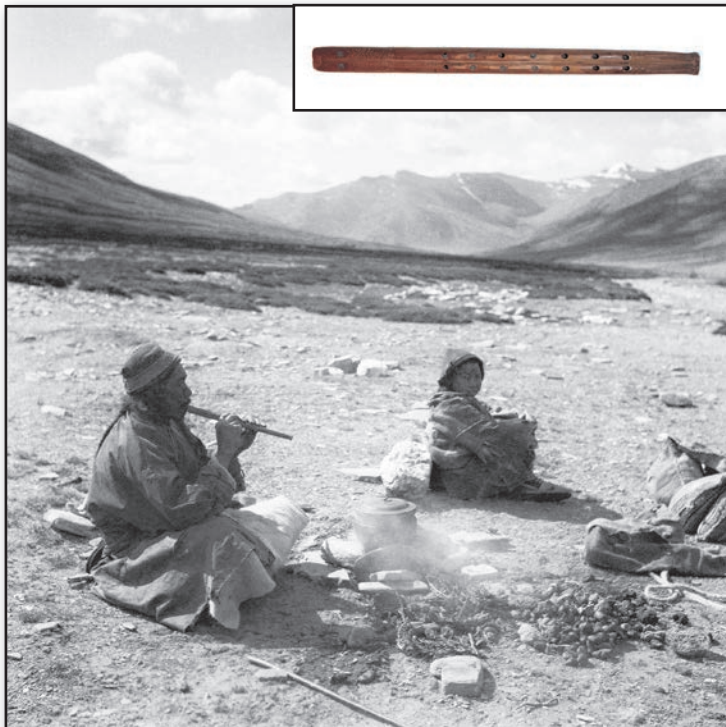


Encounters

In this section of the journey, Wilmot captured a wide range of travellers passing along this ancient trade and communication route. Here, *right*, a Zanskari monk is on pilgrimage, with a prayer wheel in front and a yak-wool backpack on his back. Note the wooden pack support. The pale sack underneath probably holds barley flour, for mixing with a small amount of tea, water or *chang*, as available. [App.]



opposite A Changpa.



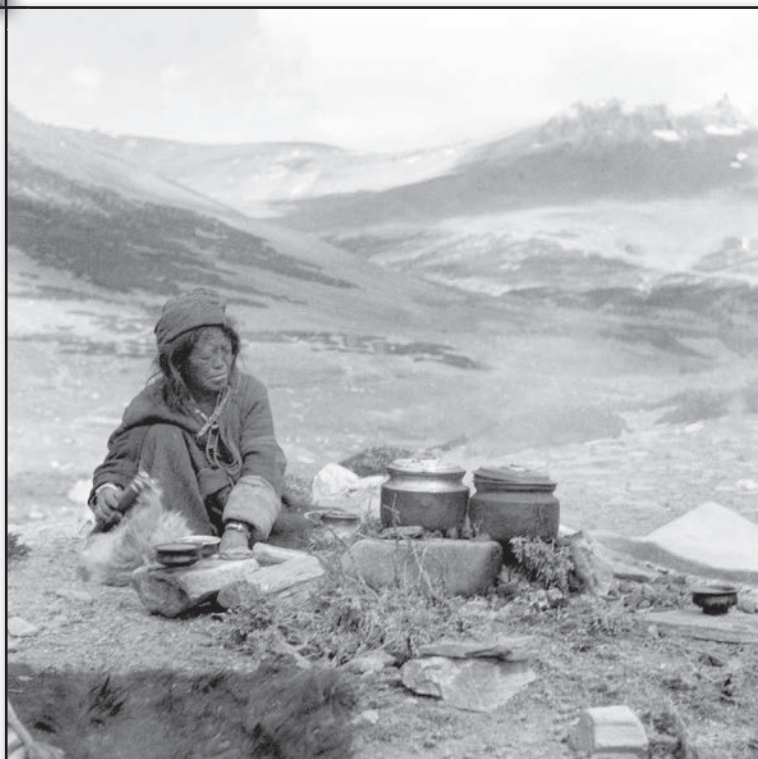
left **A Shamma traveller playing a flute**

The wooden double flute called a *tsakling* was a typical Ladakhi instrument played by *Shamma* and shepherds. It was often decoratively designed, and the two pipes, with parallel rows of holes, were carved from a single piece of wood. [App.]

(inset) Wilmot's own Ladakhi double flute.

opposite **Changpa shepherd at Debring, twisting goat's hair**

As late as the mid-1970s, says Rizvi: "...it was usual to see people, men and women alike, with a hank of raw wool around their wrist and a spindle dangling, abstractedly spinning as they walk..." [CHA:172]. "In Ladakh, women spun, men twisted. The action is different and so is the implement that they used ... the thread women spun was thinner and finer ... while men twisted a thicker, coarser thread." [Monisha Ahmed, personal communication, July 2014]



Cooking

The woman uses a set of bellows to pump the fire under the cooking pots. Note the wooden teacups, one silver-rimmed.

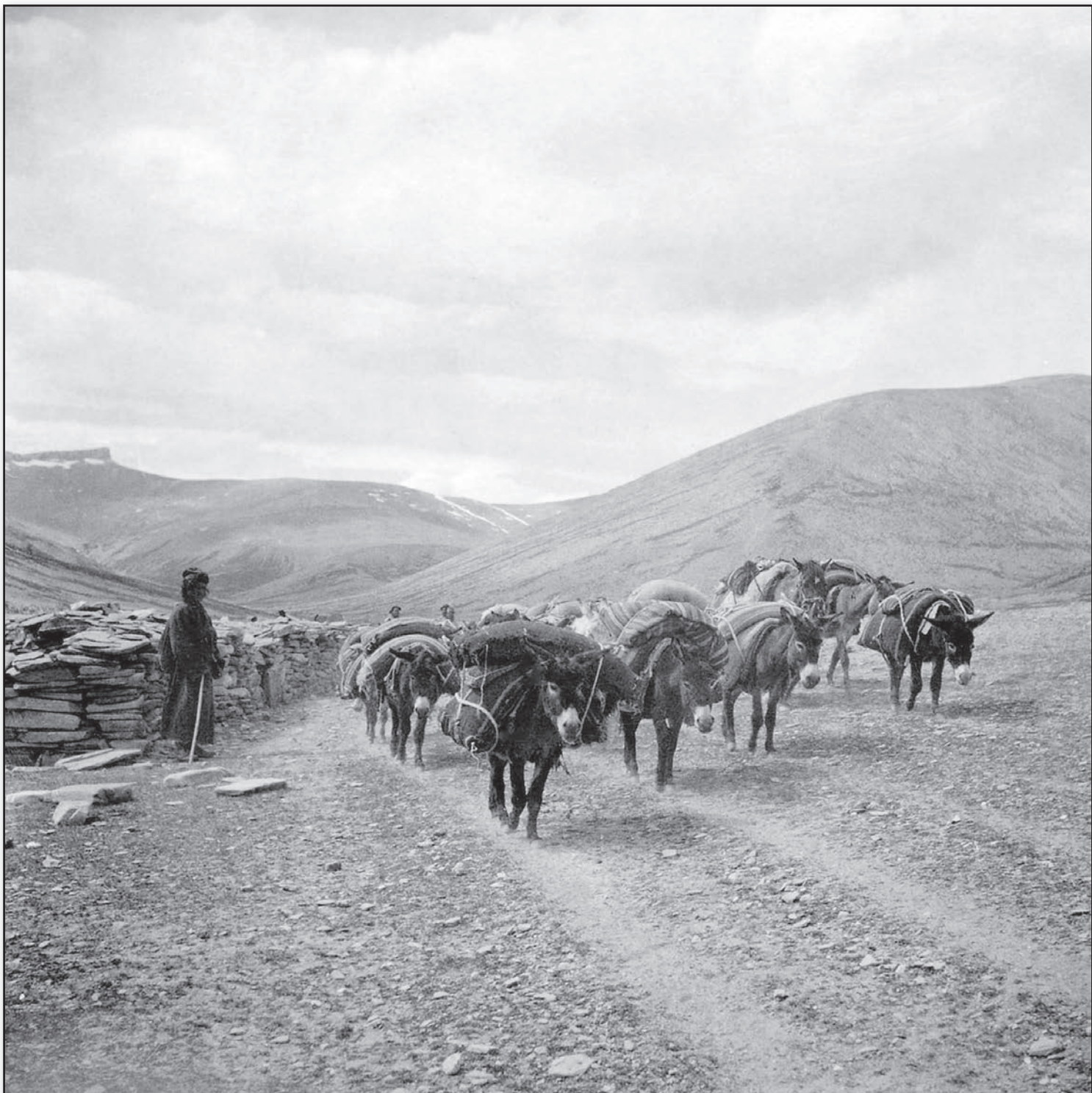


below and opposite **A monk practising *chod***

He holds *damaru* (drum), *drilbu* (bell), and prayer beads. Also with two children *below*. The one in the centre is possibly a shepherd; the other may be the monk's attendant.



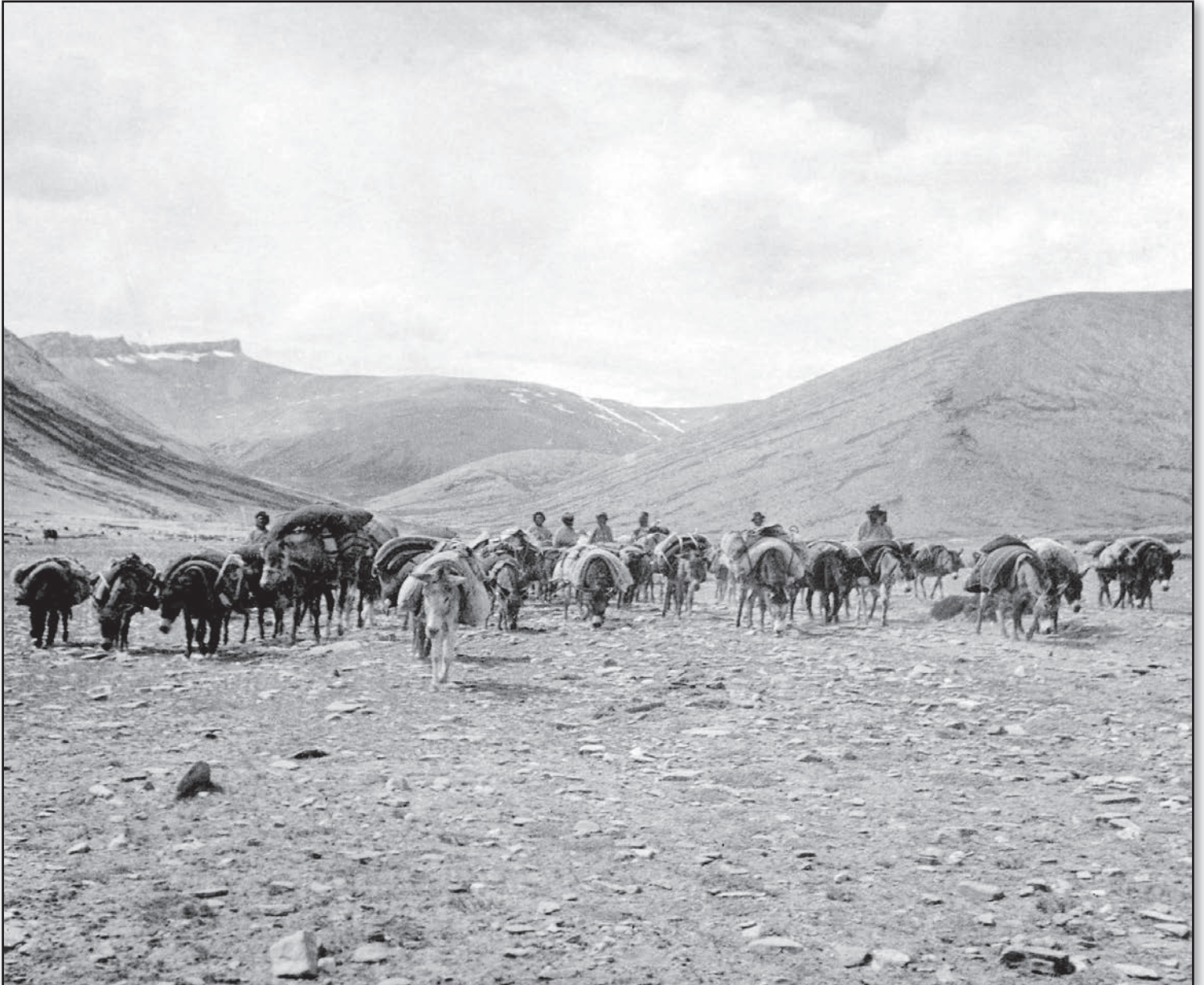




The trade route

These pictures could show *Shamma* traders and their donkeys laden with wool or grain. The party is passing by a *mane* wall, commonly built near to a village.

The deeply furrowed tracks left by pack animals over the centuries are clearly visible.





opposite **A deal being struck**

A traveling salesman, probably a *Shamma*, weighs out goods on a hand-held scale (Ladakhi: *nyaga*), which could weigh up to ten kilos. Another checks the quality of the wool carried by the donkey. The muleteer is probably a Changpa, because he wears his *goncha* with one sleeve off. [App.]



right **A rest break**

Four travellers rest and make tea. Note the ladle. On the right are baskets for collecting dung or fuel. The bags in the background are filled with grain, wool and, possibly, salt.



Monks and Traders

below A group of traders, possibly *Shamma*, and monks. Such traders worked between Ladakh and Changthang in western Tibet. Packhorses can be seen in the background, rather than the sheep normally associated with the Changpa nomads [THC:84]. Note the typical long pigtail of the man at front right. It was common in those days for monks to travel along with traders, for protection.



opposite A monk from the group, probably Zanskari, because he wears a coat of a kind of woolen cloth made only in Zanskar. [App.]

A Family Group

They could be on pilgrimage or going on a visit. He has a knife in his belt and prayer beads. The woman on the right has a spoon hanging from her girdle. Men and women carried different-shaped spoons, all made from copper. Sticks (see also page 83) were carried to be used as tent poles or for loading animals. Wood was rare and not used for fuel. [App.]



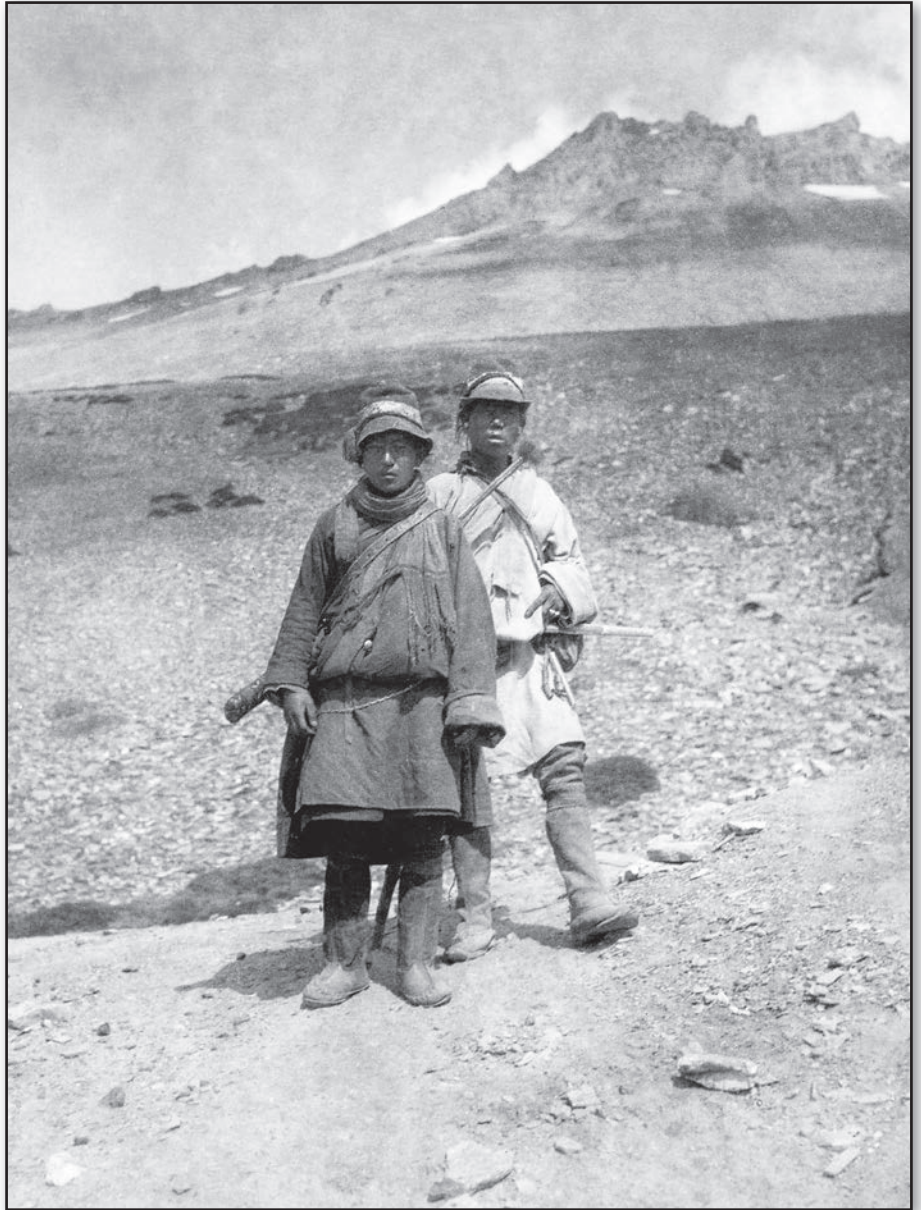
opposite **One of the three women above**
She wears a *logpa*, carries three sticks, and has a spoon
hanging from the *todchas* (traditional waist ornament).





On Tanglang-La

Tanglang-La is the highest pass crossed on the journey, at 5,300 meters (17,388 feet). The photo opposite shows a traveller adding a prayer flag (or white cloth if he was a Muslim) on the summit. Note the Apso dog at his feet. [App.]



Two young men on the descent from Tanglang-La to Upshi. It has been suggested, from their clothing and the fact that they appear to be carrying weapons, that they may be Tibetan border guards. This would be surprising due to the distance from the Tibetan border. [App.]

Nearing the Indus Valley

As he approached the valley of the Indus river, Wilmot had more encounters with Ladakhi families, mostly quite poor, as can be seen from their clothing.

opposite **Mother and child**

Both mother, in a *logpa* (goat-skin cape), and child have amulets on their hats. The woman's are of turquoise and metal. The child's are of protective stones or beads but not the rare *dzi* stone.



above This woman carries the traditional basket for collecting dried dung or apricots.



right A boy in a village on the descent from Tanglang-La to Upshi in the Indus valley.



Women and children in the Indus valley

These families appear to be very poor, but the women (shown separately overleaf) wear the full traditional costumes of Ladakh, including the turquoise-studded *perak* headgear, which is passed down from generation to generation. The single line of stones in their *peraks* indicates their relative poverty (see also page 125). The child being carried wears shoes (*lapul*) that are usually made from yak wool and are warmer and softer than the adult shoe. [App.]

The German explorer and writer on Tibet, Heinrich Harrer, describes the outer garment worn by the people of Ladakh thus:

These coats don't just "shelter" people; the men in particular have turned them into a kind of portable wardrobe into which they stuff everything needed for daily life. With this coat and the things in it, the Ladakhi is self-sufficient. There's a little leather bag with a worked metal edge that holds the yellow flint and some tinder. Of course you can buy matches in Leh, but they run out, while using the old method you can make fire for ever. The next object is the knife, often a cheap industrial product, but also often a self-forged blade with a heavy wooden handle. [There is a] long spoon, as a universal eating utensil, along with the sewing kit, the most interesting object....

From a distance it looks like a rectangular or round bit of leather that fits in the palm of the hand. A bit of string sticks out at either end. The outside is often artfully decorated, bordered with colourful threads or set with little stones. When you pull on the shorter end of the string, a sort of drawer comes out, leaving only the thin outer casing behind. The "drawer" contains the needles, yarn and a small awl, which is often made of the horn of the musk deer. [GMH:100]

Note that the woman on the right and on page 109 is wearing the sewing kit as described by Harrer.









On the approach to Leh

opposite A monk, or possibly an *onpo* (astrologer). Note the glasses. In his belt, he carries a knife for performing ceremonies.

below A group of women approach the *mane* wall outside Leh. Passers-by always kept *mane* walls, like *chortens*, on their right. This area is now a residential suburb of Leh.



In Leh

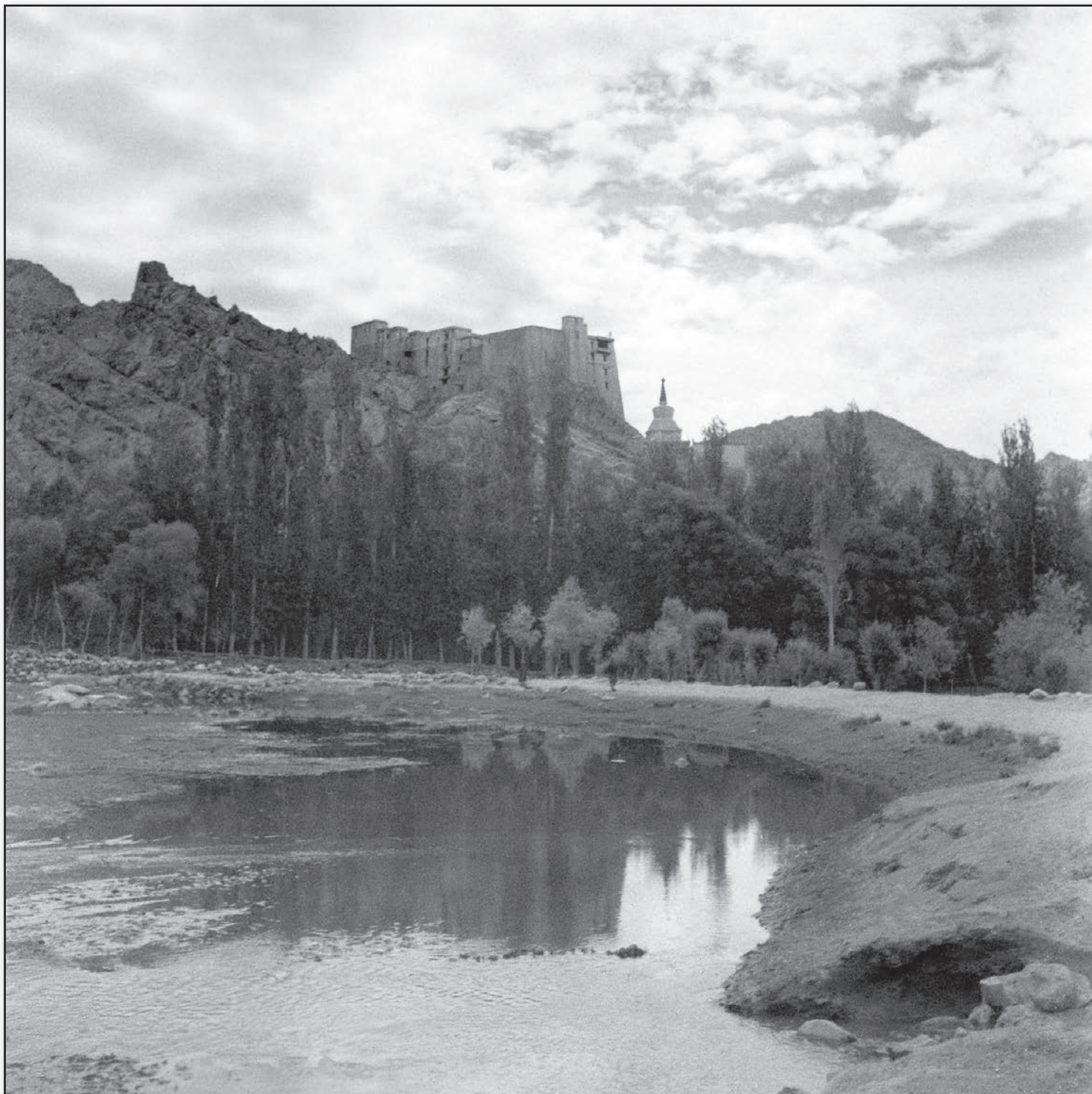
opposite Leh palace

Viewed from Karzu pond (now used as a skating rink in winter). The Moravian Mission school was later built on land nearby. [App.]

Leh *dak* bungalow

The *dak* bungalows were built to provide overnight accommodation for the *dak* runners. Wilmot stayed in this one, which was near the main temple but has since been demolished.





Leh bazaar

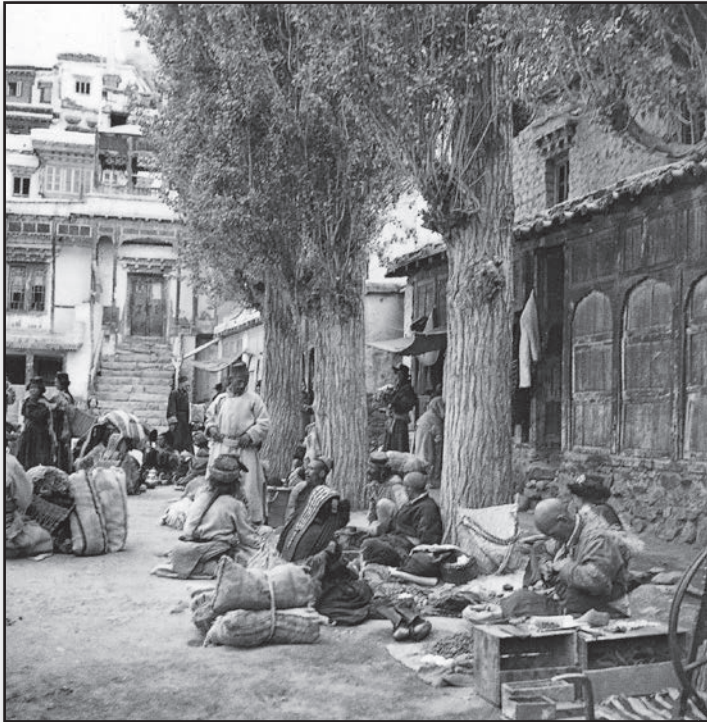
This series of photos depicts the main shopping street of Leh, situated below the palace, which has been its commercial centre for centuries. The town's location, where the Central Asian Trade Route reached the valley of the Indus, made it the natural meeting point for caravans bringing goods in from all directions. At the time of Wilmot's journeys, little had changed.





Leh Palace

Below is the northern end of the bazaar, with part of the old town which is now being restored. “The building [immediately below the palace] now belongs to Chemre monastery and has also recently been restored. Some of the rooms are rented out to the Himalayan Cultural Heritage Foundation” [Monisha Ahmed, personal communication, July 2014].



The Old Mosque

This is partially visible in the background. The stairs now lead into the new mosque. In front is another example of the wide ethnic diversity of people plying their trade in the bazaar at the time.



A seller of Ladakhi beer (*chang*)

The fresh water stream in the foreground no longer exists. [App.]



Women in the Market

These two pictures illustrate the prominent part played by women in the economy of Ladakh at the time of Wilmot's visit. Opposite, women are gathered in front of the old mosque, probably bringing fodder and other food items for sale to merchants passing through Leh on the traditional trade routes. Note the structure above the main door of the mosque, which housed a bell used to summon the faithful to prayer. The women below are possibly preparing to return home with goods bartered at the market. Note the almost universal use of the *perak* head adornment by these relatively well-off women. [App.]





An artisan workshop

This has been identified as the workshop of a famous blacksmith, Azhang Tsetan. The men are annealing copper pots, which need a strong constant heat. A pot of tea is also kept warm on the charcoal. [App.]

An ornate gateway

This gateway (at the north end of the bazaar) was situated beside Marpo Razzak's house, which was next to the mosque. The two women standing there are probably from the old town area. The woman facing the picture is most probably a beggar. The small shop-like structure inside the gateway, visible on the right, was a butcher's shop. Note the goat skins lying on the inverted traditional basket (*tsepo*). This gate led from the mosque and bazaar to a part of the old town called Maney-Khang, the name still used for the area. However, the gate and most of the buildings no longer exist.





opposite **A kitchen in a well-off household in Leh**

This photo was also published in *The Queen* magazine on 13 March 1935, with the following explanation from Wil-mot:

The enclosed photograph shows a kitchen in Ladakh, which at one time formed part of Tibet and now forms part of Kashmir. The stove is made of black mud, which is collected from the banks of rivers. In the centre is a large hole, made to hold a big pot, in which they make their buttered tea. On the sides are other holes, made with projections round them, to hold the other cooking vessels.

Buttered tea, which the Ladakhi so much loves, is made by stewing the tea for a considerable period, and then mixing it in a churn, with butter, soda, salt and milk. The churn used may be seen hanging up at the left edge of the photograph. All the spare utensils are kept in recesses in the wall above the stove. The pots are made of copper, plated over with tin.

The kitchen is thought to be that of Lonpo house, which still exists but now belongs to Chemre monastery. [App.]

right The very long *perak* worn by the householder was typical of Leh women's headdresses. The number of vertical lines of turquoise stones denotes status. This woman's *perak* appears to have seven lines, showing her family's wealth. Only queens from the royal family could have more, nine lines. [LCC:60]



opposite **Ladakhi man**

He wears a typical homespun *goncha* and is probably fairly well-off. In his hand, he is twisting wool, which may be used for stitching, as in Ladakh the men were traditionally the tailors. The two small bags hanging on his chest are either wallets or blessing carriers. The style of collar he is wearing is called a *potzo*. [App.]

below **Ladakhi boy**

This boy is almost certainly from a wealthy, high-status, family. This can be seen from the fine embroidery (*chil-tak*) on his hat.





Lamayuru *Gompa*

Leaving Leh, Wilmot returned to Srinagar via the Indus valley. However, on the way he made one further visit to Lamayuru *Gompa*, the scene of many of his photographs from the 1931 journey.







The 1933 Rolleiflex Standard camera used by Wilmot on his 1934 journey to Ladakh

A Note on the Photography

The Pictures and the Cameras

The starting point for this book was a set of seven albums containing contact prints of photographs taken by Rupert Wilmot (the authors' late uncle) between 1919 and 1934. These covered much of his career as an officer in the British Army, including his travel to and subsequent service in India. Most importantly, they contained the 300 photographs that record his two journeys to Ladakh in 1931 and 1934. Of these, 150 were selected for inclusion in this book.

Although the negatives have been lost, it is clear from the contact prints that Wilmot owned and used several different cameras during the time he spent in India. Unlike the early pioneer photographers in the region, he was at least spared the task of hauling a heavy plate camera over the Himalayan passes. Up until the early 1930s, his photos were probably taken with folding film cameras of the "Kodak No.1" type, with his films almost certainly being developed on his return to base. An early one used the unusual 116 film size, giving a long, thin negative of 4¼ x 2¼ inches. Later, and for the 1931 Ladakh journey, he used the more familiar 120 film giving a 3¼ x 2¼ inch negative. Wilmot was also an accomplished wildlife photographer. There is evidence that he used an early medium-format single-lens reflex camera with a telephoto lens, but he did not take this to Ladakh.

For his second journey to Ladakh in 1934, Wilmot had acquired one of the first Rolleiflex twin-lens reflex cameras, which is still in the authors' possession. Again using 120 film, this gives the 2¼ inch square format evident in Chapter 2.

The Restoration Process

The original contact prints are generally in good physical condition, but exhibit the fading and discoloration expected after eighty years in a photo album. In addition, many show dust, scratches, and other marks suggesting that they were processed under less than ideal conditions. In restoring them, the intention was simply to recreate, in digital form, what could have been produced from the original negatives had we possessed them.

Each print was individually photographed using a digital SLR camera, with the resulting high-definition files given basic adjustments in Photoshop. In general, these were restricted to cloning out extraneous marks and improving the tonal balance where fading had occurred. To eliminate discoloration, they were converted back to black and white using Silver Efex Pro2 software. In most cases, we have retained the whole of the original picture, merely cropping out the white margins of the contact prints. In a few cases, some further cropping has been employed to fit the layout of a page, but without removing significant parts of the picture.

Roger Bates

Glossary

Note: All italicized words are Ladakhi unless otherwise indicated.

<i>Bodhisattva</i>	One who delays entering nirvana in order to save others
<i>chang</i>	Ladakhi beer, usually made from barley
<i>chang-luk</i>	A breed of large sheep from the Changthang plateau used by the Changpa for meat, wool, and milk products, and as pack animals
<i>Changpa</i>	A nomadic Tibetan ethnic group of the Changthang plateau (generally, pastoralists who herd animals)
<i>chilim</i>	Water-pipe used for smoking
<i>chiltak</i>	Fine embroidery on a Ladakhi hat
<i>chod</i>	A spiritual practice found primarily in Tibetan Buddhism, based on the “Perfection of Wisdom” sutras that expound the “emptiness” concept of Buddhist philosophy
<i>chorten</i> or <i>stupa</i> [Sanskrit]	Religious monument, a receptacle for offerings
<i>chotip</i>	Cap worn by nuns and young children
<i>chu</i>	River or, more generally, water
<i>dak</i>	Mail (used to describe runners employed to carry mail in remote areas)
<i>damaru</i>	A hand-held prayer or ritual drum
<i>Dharma</i>	The teaching of the Buddha
<i>Drikung</i>	Red hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism
<i>drilbu</i>	A hand-held prayer or ritual bell
<i>Dukar</i>	Sitatapatra, or the Goddess of the White Parasol

<i>dzi</i>	A type of stone bead, sometimes of agate, used to protect a child against evil forces
<i>dzo</i>	Cross between a yak and a cow
<i>Gelukpa</i>	Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism
<i>gompa</i>	Buddhist monastery
<i>goncha</i>	A long gown or robe with long sleeves, tied with a sash and worn by both men and women
<i>khatak</i>	A strip of silk or loosely woven cotton, offered at sacred places as a form of devotion. Also offered to important people and at significant times such as weddings and the arrival of newborn infants
<i>klu</i>	Serpent (represented in the lowest tier of the Ladakhi pantheon)
<i>-La</i> (at the end of a place name)	Mountain pass
<i>lambardar</i> [various spellings, Hindi], or <i>goba</i> [Ladakhi]	Village headman and tax collector
<i>lapul</i>	Young child's shoe made from yak wool
<i>logpa</i>	A goatskin cape, worn by women, with the hair side turned towards the wearer.
<i>madrassa</i>	An Urdu word for a school
<i>mane</i>	A devotional wall covered with flat stones carved with mantras or prayers
<i>mela</i>	A Hindi word for a religious gathering, fair, or bazaar
<i>-mo</i>	Word extension referring to a protective female deity
<i>numdah</i>	An Urdu word for a felted wool carpet
<i>Nyingmapa</i>	One of the Red Hat Tibetan Buddhist sects
<i>onpo</i>	Astrologer

<i>pashm/pashmina</i>	Pashm is the fine wool from pashmina goats, used to weave pashmina (cashmere) shawls.
<i>perak</i>	Female headdress
<i>potzo</i>	Style of collar attached to a <i>goncha</i>
<i>puja</i>	A Hindi word for prayers
<i>ragdung</i>	A long trumpet or horn used in Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies
<i>roh</i>	Corpse
<i>saib-e-tibi</i>	A type of hat or “solar topee” worn by Yarkandis
<i>serai</i>	An inn, usually with a large courtyard, for the overnight accommodation of trade caravans
<i>Shamma</i>	Peasant traders from the Sham region in the lower Indus valley, below Nyemo
<i>stakpa</i>	Birch tree
<i>stupa</i>	See chorten
<i>thangka</i>	Buddhist religious paintings on paper or fabric, often with brocade mounts
<i>thakur</i>	Local feudal ruler
<i>todchas</i> or <i>chhabtse</i> [Balti]	Large openwork brass, silver or gold plated disc suspended from a woman’s waist girdle
<i>tsakling</i>	A double wooden flute often played by shepherds and other travellers
<i>tsen</i>	A type of demon (represented in the middle tier of the Ladakhi pantheon)
<i>tsepo</i>	Traditional square basket used throughout Ladakh

Index

A

apricots 2, 23, 104
Apso dog 103
Argon 3

B

Balti, Baltis 2, 3, 4, 20, 21, 24
Baralacha-La 78, 79, 80
barley 56
birch 13
blessing carriers 126
Blessing Three Horses 58
Bodhisattva Maitreya 2
borax 2
Buddhism, Buddhists 2, 3, 7, 20, 34, 42, 45, 46, 50, 56
Buddhist texts 45
bungalows 12, 112

C

caravans 39, 114
Chamba *See* Bodhisattva Maitreya
Chandra 71, 74, 77
chang 83, 117
chang-luk sheep 83
Changpa 3, 71, 79, 83, 87, 89, 90, 99
Changthang 2, 3, 4, 83, 87, 99
Chenrezig 35
chhabtse 24
China 2, 3, 4, 32, 56, 83, 87, 99, 106, 125
chorten 42, 111
clothing, Ladakhi 106
communal harmony 3
copper, annealing 121

D

dak runners, bungalows 11, 12, 112

damaru 53, 92

“devil dancers” 54

dogs 4, 65, 81

Dras 17, 18, 20, 22

Drikung, Red-Hat 34

drilbu 92

Drukpa Kagyu 50

dzi 104

E

education 20

F

flute 90

Fotu-La 31

G

Gaddi tribe 69

Gelukpa, Yellow Hat 63

goncha 42, 62, 97, 126

Gondla 74, 77

Gyal Khatun 3

H

Hemis mela 4, 7, 50–59

I

Indus 22, 38, 50, 65, 74, 104, 106, 114, 128

Islam 2, 3

J

Jamyang Namgyal 3

K

Kangra valley railway 69

Karakoram trade 7, 32, 48

Kargil 4, 22, 23
Kashmir, Kashmiris 2, 4, 7, 18, 32, 38, 60, 125
Keylong 74, 77
Khalatse 38, 39, 62
Khardung-La 7, 48, 49
kitchen 125
Kullu 2, 3, 65, 69, 72

L

Lachulung-La 81
Lahaul, Lahaulis 69, 71, 72, 74, 77
Lamayuru 4, 34, 35, 36, 38, 128
Lambardar, “lumbadaress” 24
Langdarma 56
Leh 2–4, 7, 11, 14, 23, 32, 39, 44, 48, 50, 61, 75, 77–79, 106, 111, 125, 128
 bazaar 29, 40, 41, 114–122
 palace 41, 42, 47, 112, 116
livestock movement 79
logpa 21, 61, 100, 104

M

Machhoi 17
madrassa 20
Manali-Leh Track 75
mane wall 42, 95, 111
monks 2, 4, 36, 37, 50, 52, 65, 92, 99, 111
Morey Plains 4, 84, 87
mosque 41, 117, 119
Mulbekh 2, 26, 29, 31
Mulbekh Chamba 30
Muslim 3, 20, 23, 40, 103

N

nuns, nunnery 36
nun’s cap 63

O

onpo 111

P

pack animals 3, 7, 12, 69, 83, 95

Pandras 19

pashm 2, 83

pashmina 2, 79

perak 106, 119, 125

photographic restoration 131

photography iii, 131

Pir Panjal 65, 71

polo 2, 29

polyandry 3

printing 45

R

ragdung 52

Rohtang-La 71, 72, 74

S

salt 2, 29, 83, 97, 125

Sankar 44

Sarchu 80, 81

Saspul Serai 39

school 20, 40, 42, 112

Shamma 23, 39, 99

Sind Valley 10, 11

Sitatapatra 47

Skardu. 22

snow bridge 17

Sonamarg 10, 12

spaniel dogs 65, 80

spinning 90

Srinagar 3, 7, 10, 11, 14, 128

Suru river 22, 23

stupa See *chorten*

T

Tanglang-La 103, 104
tea 2, 84, 90, 97, 125
Tibet, Tibetan 2, 3, 4, 32, 50, 56, 83, 87, 99, 106, 125
Tibetan mastiff 4
todchas 24, 100
trade-route 2–4, 7, 15, 48, 49, 89, 95, 117
 closure of 4, 32
Treaty Road 7
tsakling *See* flute

W

Wakha Chu 4, 26
Wheel of *dharma*. *See* Wheel of Life
Wheel of Life 46
Women, position of 3, 119
wool 2, 3, 23, 79, 87, 90, 95, 97
writing board 20, 40

Y

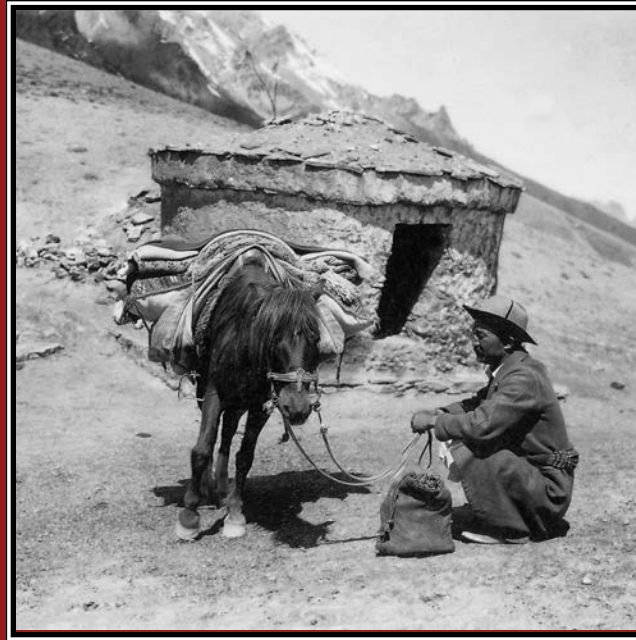
Yarkand, Yarkandis ii, 2, 4, 32, 49

Z

Zanskar 65, 83, 84
Zanskari 89, 99
Zoji-La 13–17
Zoji-Lamo 16

“A wonderfully elegaic set of photographs recording a lost world: an almost mediaeval Ladakh untouched by modernity and still living at the hub of the old trans-Himalayan trade routes – a timeless Central Asia where soot writing boards, itinerant monks, arcane astrologers, masked dancers and elaborate turquoise headdresses were still common. These skillfully restored photographs make me ache to cross again the snowy heights of the Zoji-la and to visit again this most fascinating region to see what is left”

- William Dalrymple, author of *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839-42*



“...Altogether, this is an invaluable record of pre-modern Ladakh and its people.”

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“These illustrations, superb as photographs in their own right, capture in visual form the essence of Ladakhi life as it was in the 1930s...A unique and vital contribution to the history of Ladakh.”

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