

Dead and Living Settlements in the Shöyul of Mustang

-Charles Ramble and Christian Seeber

Introduction

The nineteen villages of Mustang district that comprise the enclave known as Baragaon are, for the most part, Tibetan-speaking. The exception to this linguistic homogeneity are the Shöyul, a group of five settlements located north of Tiri and south of Samar, whose inhabitants speak the Tibeto-Burman language known as Seke (Tib. *se-skad*). The more general cultural similarity of these communities to the people of Panchgaon and Thak, south of Baragaon, was first remarked upon by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, who aptly refers to their inhabitants as "Ur-Thakalis" (1966: 157).

It is likely that Seke was once spoken in other parts of Baragaon, too, prior to the Tibetanisation of the region. The growing evidence to support this assertion will not be discussed in detail here; we may cite, as examples, the large number of Seke toponyms in and near the Muktinath Valley; and the fact that, during the seasonal propitiation of territorial gods in the village of Purang, the

language in which the priest (*lha-bon*) addresses the divinities is not Tibetan but Seke. Until a generation ago this was also true in the neighbouring settlements of Dzar and Khyenga.

The following pages are an attempt to pursue the research on settlement in the Shöyul that has been begun by Simons, Schön and Shrestha, who have already identified and mapped many of the cave systems in this region (Simons, Schön and Shrestha 1994). Our aim here is primarily to provide a brief description of the abandoned and inhabited sites; and secondly, to summarise the available literary and oral accounts concerning the migrations of people into and out of this enclave.

Tibetanisation may have been the principal cause of the disappearance of Seke in the Muktinath Valley. The findings presented here will suggest that the size of the Seke-speaking enclave in northern Baragaon may also have been reduced: not through Tibetanisation but as a result of the abandonment of settlements and the concentration of the

population in a limited number of centres.

A note of caution may be sounded here. One of the documentary sources discussed below is of real historical importance insofar as it refers to the abandonment of certain settlements as contemporary, or at least very recent, events. For the most part, however, the nature of the accounts is such that they cannot be regarded as historically authoritative. The tentative character of this material should be borne in mind, even when, in the following pages, assertions are not always prefaced by qualifying phrases of the order "it is stated that..." or "according to local informants...".

Settlement names

The five Seke-speaking villages are collectively referred to as the Shöyul (Tib. Shod-yul). The meaning of this name is somewhat ambiguous. With reference to land, *shod* signifies a low-lying area, and this is how the name generally appears to be understood in the present case: while the five Shöyul stand at a higher elevation than the settlements immediately to the south on the Kali Gandaki (namely Tiri and Kag), they are lower than the other surrounding villages (Samar to the north, Sangdak to the west and the communities of the upper Muktinath Valley to the south-east). However, a few informants outside the enclave have also suggested that the word *shod* is a reference to the relatively low status of the five villages in the social hierarchy of Baragaon. This interpretation is partly justified by the fact that the villages of Phelag and Khyenga are also, in spite of their relatively high elevation, sometimes referred to as *shod*.

However, since Tibetan documents from the five villages show that they systematically refer to themselves as "the Five Shöyul" in correspondence with neighbouring areas, we shall also refer

to the area as Shöyul, and to the people as Shöpa, on the grounds that, as far as the people themselves are concerned, the names carry no pejorative overtones.

A few words may also be said here concerning the names of the settlements in and around the Shöyul. There is a certain amount of confusion owing to the fact that the names differ in Nepali, Tibetan and Seke. As a general rule, we shall use anglicised forms of the Tibetan name. The choice of this language is somewhat arbitrary, since the selection has been made for no better reason than the fact that our field research has been conducted through the medium of Tibetan. The following represents a comparison of the different names of the main settlements with which we are concerned.

Nepali	Seke	Tibetan
Tangbe	Tangbe	Taye
Chusang	Tshugsang	Tshug
Tetang	Timi	Te
Chaile	Tsangle	Tsele
Ghyaka	Gyu/Gyuga	Gyaga
Jhong	Muga	Dzong

Finally, it is worth noting that that advent of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in northern Mustang has incidentally enriched the local toponymy still further. Visitors to the area will have noticed the trilingual green signboards - Nepali, English and Tibetan - that stand at the entrances to the villages. In a number of cases, the Tibetan script represents not the usual Tibetan appellation of the locality but a Tibetanised version of the Nepali name. To cite just one example, the name Tshug (Nep. Chusang) is generally given in Tibetan documents as Tshug, and myths concerning the foundation of the settlement

relate the name to homonymous expressions such as **tshug**, meaning mustard, or *'tshugs-pa*, "to settle". In reproducing the Nepali "Chusang", the ACAP Tibetan version has unwittingly created a new myth by opting for a similarly-pronounced *phyugs-bzang*, which would mean something like "excellent cattle".

Geographical scope

Although we are dealing primarily with the five Shöyul, the alleged migration patterns of the inhabitants are such that we are obliged to take into consideration a number of locations situated some distance from the enclave. The order in which the various inhabited and abandoned sites are dealt with is not a straightforward matter, since a number of abandoned places now constitute "islands" of territory belonging to villages that may lie a considerable distance away. To simplify matters, therefore, the rather complex question of territorial association will be discussed only after an overall picture of populated and abandoned settlements associated with the Shöyul has been presented.

The territory of Taya

The southern limit of the territory of the Shöyul begins at Gyalung/Gyagalung (both these forms of the name were given by our informants), a western tributary of the Kali Gandaki a short distance to the north of Tiri. On the southern side of this valley there is said to be an abandoned site known as Gyathang, although the location was not visited by the present authors. As in the case of many narratives within the region, the abandonment of the place is attributed to the failure of the irrigation system. In order to increase the productivity of their fields and the abundance of their livestock, the story goes, the community of Gyathang began by making periodical sacrifices of

chickens to their territorial gods. The success of this measure encouraged them to make more substantial offerings of goats, with similarly encouraging results. They then increased the value of their offering by sacrificing a yak. Since the prosperity of the village increased proportionately to the size of the offering, the community finally undertook to sacrifice a horse. The result was catastrophic: the wooden aqueducts to the fields collapsed, the reservoir dried up and the people were forced to leave. A part of the community, it is said, went to settle in Sangdag, on the way to Dolpo. (It may be worth noting that although this village is Tibetan-speaking, it is sometimes referred to as a Shöyul, the implication being that it was once populated by Seke-speakers.) The rest of the community is said to have settled in an extensive area of caves on the east bank of the Kali Gandaki where it is joined by the Gyalung River.

The area of caves is known as Gyagalung in Tibetan and Gyagagyung in Seke. To the north of the caves is an area of abandoned fields said once to have been cultivated by the community. The water for Gyagalung was the stream of the Dröyong Lungba (called Gayang Gyung in Seke), which is also the only source of irrigation water for nearby Tangbe. When, over the course of time, the quantity of water in the stream diminished so that there was inadequate surplus from Tangbe, Gyagalung and its fields were abandoned. The community occupied the area of caves above Tshognam (see below) for a certain period before moving up to Gyaga. The name Gyaga is said to be derived from the names of the places previously inhabited by the people, that is to say, Gyathang and Gyagalung. As we have seen earlier, the Seke name of Gyaga is Gyu or Gyuga.

North of Gyagalung, on the west bank of the Kali Gandaki, is an area of caves called

Khyungpegyung, a Seke name meaning "the valley of the Khyungpo". Khyungpo (Tib. Khyung-po) here may refer to an important clan that will be discussed further below. The caves are said to have contained a temple, called Gompabrag in Seke and Gompadrag (dGon-pa-brag) in Tibetan (both names mean "Temple Crag"), and a community of tantric lamas (*sngags-pa*). The name of the area above the caves, Shabtithang, is said to be derived from the customary use of the site for drying the vast quantities of lees from the beer produced by the lamas (Seke *shabti*: "beer lees"; Seke and Tib. *thang*: "plateau, flat area").

Taye

Taye itself (the name is usually spelt Tang-yos, gTang-yos etc. in local documents) is a village of thirty-one estates (*grong-pa*) and six subsidiary households (*pho-rang mo-rang*), three of which are landless. Perhaps more than any of the five Shöyul, Taye's population has been reduced in recent years by permanent or long-term outmigration of the younger people. The present village lies between two apparently older abandoned settlements. No particular names for these were obtained. The local people to whom we spoke referred to them simply as Dzong-gog, "ruined fortresses".

The remains of a ring-wall surrounding the ruins above the village suggest that this was a defensive settlement. It is located on a promontory with a good view over the main valley and the principal trade routes to south and north. At the foot of the hill, between the houses, are a few, apparently very old, apricot trees. Apricot trees are normally located on field margins, indicating that the area on which the present settlement is built may once have been occupied by cultivated land.

On the eastern side of the village is a

disused nunnery, still containing books and images that have been effectively abandoned to the elements. The collected documents of Taye, including a historical "register" (*dkar-chag*) of its present temple, have recently been photographed. It is hoped that an examination of their contents will yield further information concerning this nunnery and, perhaps, the abandoned settlements.

There are certain grounds for supposing that Taye may once have been abandoned before being resettled, as in the case of other villages that will be discussed below. The Tayepas are said - both by themselves and their neighbours - to be relatively recent immigrants from Manang. The Seke name of Taye, Tangbe, is explicitly linked to an abandoned village in Manang, where the group's ancestors are said to have lived. According to Nareshwor Jang Gurung, the ruins of the original village, called Tangbache, are situated half a kilometer west of Braga in Manang. He gives the following account of the inhabitants' displacement:

In Tangbache a group of people called the Tangdathe [*sic*: presumably for Tangbathe?] had lived.... The Gurungs moved out of this valley to the northern parts of Lamjung when the settlements of the Nyesyangba increased in this valley, but the people of Tangbeche [*sic*] were driven away by the Nyesyangba.... The people of Tangbache migrated to Tangbe of Mustang from this valley (Gurung 1977: 9).

And later:

According to Manang villagers [the people of Tangbache] were the first settlers of Nyesyang valley. They probably migrated to this valley from Tibet.... The other

villagers were exploited by them.... Finally, they were driven away from their village by all the people of the surrounding villages. They fled to Baragau Mustang from their village and settled in a place called Tangbe.... There are ruins of houses of the ancestors of Tangdathé [sic] of Tangbache in Phraka [i.e. Braga] village. Some old individuals of Manang village said that they probably were driven away from this valley earlier than three or four hundred years ago (*ibid.* : 108-9).

One of the documents which we photographed in Tangbe was the text of an invocation to the territorial gods of the community performed annually by the village priest (*lha-bon*). A brief examination of this work - representing a mixture of Tibetan and Seke - reveals a preoccupation with place-gods east of the Thorang La, in Manang's territory, that we have not encountered in similar recitations from other Baragaon villages. Another feature of Taye worth noting in this context is the diminutive size of its territory by comparison with that of the other Shöyul, especially Te and Tshug. The small area of pastureland is especially surprising in view of the earlier grandeur suggested by the ruins. Although we have not found any documentary evidence to support the suggestion, it is possible that Taye may once have been abandoned and, as in the case of other old settlements that will be examined below, its territory occupied by its neighbours, who may then have ceded a part of it to accommodate new settlers from Manang.

Tshug

About an hour's walk north of Taye, at the junction of the Narshing Chu and the Kali Gandaki,

is the village of Tshug. The village, comprising a total of more than sixty estates, consists of three distinct units: north of the Narshing Khola is Tangma; to the south of it is Braga, and west of Braga, towards the Kali Gandaki, is Cikyab. These locations are referred to by Tibetan-speakers respectively as Kyangma, Dragkar and Tsekyab.¹ The community is further divided into four sectors (*tsho*), corresponding to the three main settlement areas, with Kyangma being divided into two parts, Jowo Shartsen Gyalpo (Jo-bo Shar-btsan rgyal-po) and Jowo Lhaptsen (Jo-bo Lha-btsan). The names signify clan gods (respectively of the Khangtö and Rele clans: see below), who are now also territorial divinities. For certain administrative purposes, the community is divided more simply into two moieties, Kyangma on the one hand and Braga/Cikyab on the other. This is apparent in the case of recruitment of village officials. Of the two annually-serving headmen (*rgan-pa*), one is recruited from Kyangma and the other from Braga/Cikyab. In addition to the two headmen there are also six annually-serving constables (Tib. *rol-po*; Seke *tshowa* < Tib. *tsho-ba/ tshogs-pa*). The recruitment of headmen within each moiety alternates annually between the two sectors of which it is composed. The sector that provides the headman in each moiety furnishes only one constable, while the remaining two must choose two each. The actual procedure for selecting headmen is a complex matter that will be discussed elsewhere.

The population of Tshug consists of eight named clans. In addition to these there are several houses of nameless "low-caste" (*mendrik*; Tib. *smad-rigs*) households and one family of outcaste Tailors (Duli; Nep. Damai).

A few words may be said about the named clans and their supposed provenance.

1. The oldest clan in the village is the Khangtö Gyupa (Tib. Khang-stod brgyud-pa), which takes its name from the house in Kyangma, the "Upper House" (Tib. Khang-stod), where the clan is believed originally to have lived. The Khangtö are regarded as identical with the Khyungpo clan of nearby Te, and further information about their migration history will be given below. There are now three households of the clan in Tshug.

2. Kag Pönpe Gyupa (bKag dpon-po'i brgyud-pa), the Clan of the Kag Noble. The ancestor of this clan is said to have migrated from Old Kag (Kag Nyingba), and settled in Tshug. In accordance with local conventions of kinship and hierarchy, since the clan has married with commoners for more than three consecutive generations it is no longer regarded as being of noble status. The interesting (but at present unverifiable) implication of this account is that nobility, presumably Tibetan-speaking migrants from northern Mustang, were once resident in Old Kag.

There is only one household of this clan in Tshug.

3. Kyuden Gyupa: Kyuden is an abandoned settlement between Tsele and Samar from which the clan migrated. Historical evidence in support of this claim will be discussed below.

4. Tsumpag Gyupa: this clan came from the old village of Tshumpag, on the western side of the Kali Gandaki opposite Tshug. The location is discussed further below.

5. Khyarku Gyupa: Khyarku is the name of an abandoned site near Tshumpag (see below).

6. Nyeshang Braga Gyupa: like Tangbe, Braga is reported to have been founded by migrants from Manang who gave the name of their original home to the new settlement. Braga is a large village a short distance south of the main town of Manang. In this case, the Braga clan are said to be descended from a family who fled their home to escape reprisals for a murder that they had committed there, bringing with them their clan god. The god in question is housed in a small temple, called sMan-rtsi lha-khang, that is the common property of the six households of the Braga clan (three of which are located in Braga itself and three in Cikyab). The temple itself is a mud-brick building inside a cave a short distance up the Narshing Chu. A gap between the temple and the cave wall permits circumambulation of the construction. The temple walls are decorated with paintings of saints and buddhas, and clay images include figures of Avalokitesvara and the five *kulesa*. The clan god itself is a stone hexahedron about 75 cm high with a surface of perhaps 30 cm², covered in oil and topped with a few smaller stones.² The six households take it in turns, one month at a time, to make daily offerings in the temple. (Interestingly, contrary to the usual practice of offering water (*yon-chab*) in the morning and lighting a lamp (*mchod-me*) in the evening, the clan has contracted the two rituals into a single occasion, performed in the mid-afternoon.)

7. Rele Gyupa: Rele is an abandoned village a short distance from Tshug, on the west bank of the Kali Gandaki (see below). The clan is also represented in *Dolpo*.

8. Tamshel Lame Gyupa (the Priestly Clan of Tamshel): the clan is said to have come from

Tamshel, an abandoned settlement north of Samar (see below).

In some cases, the clan affiliation of houses in Tshug can be told from their external appearance. Thus the Rele clan may use no colours at all, other than plain whitewash, on the outside of their house walls; the Khangtö houses (but not the Khyugpo houses of Te) are distinguished by their red and blue (or black) stripes on a white background, while the Tamshel Lama clan paints its houses with red stripes.

Concerning the origins of the Khangtö Gyupa, there is an intriguing story, related by one of the senior members of the clan, that is worth summarising here. Jowo Shartsen Gyalpo, also known as Shartsenpa, is the god of the Khyungpo clan, and is worshipped in the main settlements where the clan is represented (namely Tshug, Te and Tangya; the single representative of the clan in Gyaga actually described himself as a member of the "Shartsenpa Gyupa"). In Tshug, even though Shartsenpa is also a territorial divinity, rituals to him may be performed only by members of the Khangtö (i.e. the Tshug branch of the Khyungpo) clan. Traditionally, in the fourth month, Shartsenpa would receive a blood-offering of a white sheep, in accordance with the practice of animal sacrifice that was customary through most of Mustang. When, in response to moral pressure by the celebrated Shangba Lama three or four decades ago, the custom was largely abandoned in Baragaon, Tshug (unlike Te and Samar) adhered to the letter of its promise not to sacrifice animals *within* the village. Nevertheless, without violating this promise, the Khangtö clan has managed to perpetuate the tradition of blood offerings to its divinities. Periodically, members of the clan make a trip to the

vicinity of Takam and Dharapani, primarily Magar settlements located some three days' walk south of Tshug on the way to Dhorpatan. Growing here are three old juniper trees, which are regarded by the clan as representations of Shartsenpa and his two accompanying divinities, and blood sacrifices are performed to them. A certain amount of discretion, not to say secrecy, seems to surround this cult, and detailed information about it has not been obtained. However, the reason given for this distant choice of location is interesting: the Khangtö clan claim to have resided in the Takam-Dharapani area for an unspecified period during their migration from the west. No further information on this migration route was obtained, and the story itself was not confirmed. As we shall see presently, the Khangtö clan also claim to have come to Tshug from Kog, a day's walk to the north-east, and it is therefore unclear whether the full version of the obsolete account was an *alternative* to the latter, in accordance with the fashion for a western provenance that once prevailed in much of the area, or whether it took the clan via both Takam-Dharapani *and* Kog before bringing it to Tshug. It is worth noting that the Takam-Dharapani area is the scene of an annual festival, attended by large numbers of people from the middle hills, that features many animal sacrifices. It may be that the Tshugpas' worship of Shartsenpa takes place within the context of this festival.

Directly opposite Tshug, in the high cliffs on the west side of the Kali Gandaki, is an extensive area of caves called Thagshing Grangma. *Thagshing* (< Tib. *'thag-shing*) and *grangma* are Seke terms for certain wooden components of backstrap looms. The name derives from the fact that these items were once visible in the caves. To the south of these is a raised area on which there stands an abandoned nunnery. The area, and the temple

itself, are called Gompa Gang (dGon-pa-sgang), the "Convent Ridge".³ A sizeable collection documents relating to this nunnery, contained in a private house in Tshug, was photographed in April 1995. It is hoped that these documents will provide some insights into the history and operation of this institution. The main hall of the temple contains twenty pillars, one of which is said to stand on top of two goat-loads of gold concealed there by the founder, with the intention that it should be used for restoration when the structure fell into disrepair. The fine murals are now badly damaged by leaking rain-water, and a few years ago the main image of Maityrea was broken open by thieves. It is not known what, if anything, was taken from the interior.

Immediately to the south of the nunnery is a stream, the Tshumpag Chu, which runs from the west and flows into the Kali Gandaki. On the southern corner of the confluence are the remnants of a settlement, identifiable by its abandoned fields. The name of this area is Rele, the original habitation of the Rele clan of Tshug. A short distance upstream, in the cliffs on the northern side of the Tsumbag Chu, is an area of caves called Dabrangdzang (Seke *dabrang*: "raven"; *dzang*: "nest"), a name which is extended to the general area of the valley in front of the caves. Some of the caves are quite easily accessible, and it is also possible to see in the cliff face eroded tunnels, extending from a single entrance at the valley floor and giving access to extensive galleries located higher up the cliff face. The trail follows the valley through a stretch, called Muna, where the valley walls close to form a deep gorge, and less than an hour and a half from the Kali Gandaki, reaches the ruins of Tshalthang gompa. The gompa is situated in the cliffs at the top of a scree slope on the northern side of the Tshumpag Chu. The building is in ruins, but there is

evidence that some of the cave rooms have been used in relatively recent times as meditation retreats. Other rooms have apparently been restored to accommodate local goatherds. None of our informants was able to recall the temple functioning as an institution during his lifetime. A document from Tshognam refers to a certain "Tshering Dorje, the great meditator (*sgrub-chen*) of Tshalthang temple", who made a donation of *ltam* towards a funeral ceremony for a dead woman of Te in a Fire Pig year. The names of Tshognam lamas that occur in this document were unrecognisable as ancestors to the present priests, and it is therefore likely that the year in question is earlier than 1887. 1827 would be the latest likely date. For the present, then, there is no firm documentary evidence to indicate that Tshalthang gompa was a functioning institution later than the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the valley floor below the gompa, and somewhat upstream, are three stupas and a number of goat pens. The abundance of juniper growing at this point confirms the assertion that trees are not cut in the vicinity of the gompa. There is apparently no law expressly forbidding collection; protection is effectively ensured by a conviction that the removal of any natural resources from the area will provoke divine reprisals. There is in fact evidence that a number of trees have been cut; this violation is attributed to the Khambas, who maintained a military base nearby until the 1970s.

Half an hour after the stupas, the trail ascends the high southern bank of the Tshumpag Chu, following a well-made zig-zag horse track, and reaches the plateau after a further twenty minutes. This is the site of the old settlement of Tshumbag. The site is now occupied by a large area of recently-built, but now empty and decaying, houses: the old Khamba camp. Occupying one of the houses

is an elderly Khamba and his family, to whom Tshug has given official permission to farm some of the old fields free of rent in exchange for protecting the trees and shrubs against wood-poachers from Taye. Signs of earlier settlement are sparse. In the southern cliffs up the valley from the horse trail is an area of caves, also called Tshumbag, and at the southern end of the plateau, on a slope called variously and Brag Olo (Seke "Red Crag") Brag Maru (a hybrid name: Maru is the Tibetan term (*dmar-po*) for "red"), is a single derelict building. The elderly Khamba maintained that the ruin was a gompa rather than a watchtower. The site does afford a view of Tshug and Te, but the intervening distance may be too great for any form of signalling to have been effective.

An extensive area of fields, some of which were farmed by the recent Khamba residents, stretches eastwards down the slope of the plateau.

A visitor standing at the northern edge of the plateau and looking across the Tshumbag Valley is presented with some dramatic examples of traditional natural resource management. On the plateau opposite, north of the valley, is a ruined settlement and an area of abandoned fields. This is the old village of Khyarku, which gave its name to the clan that now inhabits Tshug itself. In the cliff-face just downstream of Tshalthang gompa, and on the same level as the ruined building, is a horizontal passage resembling a cliff trail, that emerges a few hundred metres further down onto the Khyarku plateau. East of Tshalthang gompa it is possible to make out traces of this passage, extending upstream in the cliff face until it touches the valley floor above the stupas, at a junction reinforced with stone walling. This is in fact not a trail but an old irrigation canal, cut out of the cliff, to serve the lower fields of Khyarku. Now some distance further

upstream it is possible to see what appear to be two parallel rows of caves. These almost certainly trace the route of two other irrigation canals that would once have fed the upper cultivated area of Khyarku. The irrigation canals in this case are tunnels inside the cliff, parallel to the valley, and the "caves" are actually holes through which the accumulated sediment would have been thrown out from the inside during the annual or biannual clearances of the watercourse. Although it was not possible to examine the holes closely the likelihood that they are part of an old irrigation system is greatly increased by the existence of such an underground canal - in fact, a series of tunnels - in Taye at the present time. This remarkable system, consisting of a series of six tunnels (one of which takes some forty-five minutes to crawl through) linked by aqueducts and canals, was explored by the authors of the present article, and will be described in a future publication.

Tshognam

East of Tshug, some twenty minutes' walk up the Narshing Chu, on the northern bank of the river, lies the little settlement of Tshognam. The community comprises just three households: Tshognam Og (*'og*), Tshognam Barma (*bar-ma*) and Tshognam Nyama (*nya-ma*) - Lower, Middle and Upper Tshognam. The community is not an independent entity to the extent that it has no land of its own. Lower and Middle Tshognam stand on Tshug's territory, and upper Tshognam on Te's. The territorial boundary is marked by a *thowo* (*mtho-bo*), two stones piled on top of a large rock in the bed of the Narshing Chu. In the cliff behind Tshognam is the set of caves, called Tshognam Dragphu (*brag-phug*), the "Cliff-caves of Tshognam", that has been referred to above. Mention has already been made of the belief that these caves, which lie in Tshug's territory, were

once inhabited by the population of Gyaga. In more recent times, one of the larger, more accessible caves was converted into a tavern (*chang-ma*) run by Tshugpas for Khamba customers.

The family inhabiting Upper Tshognam have served for several generations as the priests of Te. The priests in question are married Nyingmapa lamas of the Shari Pöngyuta clan. The clan is said to have originated in Surkhang/Zurgang (Zur-sgang: "the Ridge at the Edge"), a small village of just three houses on the eastern side of the Kali Gandaki, opposite Dri. The first part of the clan name derives from the fact that this entire eastern region (consisting of the villages of Zurgang, Yara, Gara, De, Tangya and Dri, the last being in fact on the western side of the river) is known as Shari (spelt in a variety of ways: Sha-ri, Shar-ri, Shwa-ba-ri etc.). The second part of the name (*dpon-brgyud-pa*) simply signifies "noble lineage". One branch of the family is said to have prospered in Tibet as the noble Pön Lugukar clan. The ruins of what is believed to be the old family house stand on a low ridge a short distance to the west of the present village. The house is called Zurgang Gang-ga (possibly < *sgang-khang*, the "House on the Ridge"?), and its associated divinity, Meme Gang Tshebten (Mes-mes sGang Tshe-brtan?) is worshipped annually at a nearby cairn.

Middle Tshognam is now occupied by a Tepas family, who purchased the house from its previous, Chongkhor-born, owners. The inhabitants of Lower Tshognam are referred to as Drenjong Gyalpe Gyupa ('Bras-ljongs rgyal-po'i brgyud-pa), the Clan of the Kings of Sikkim. The documents that have been photographed in the house shed little light on the implications of this name. The lineage was preceded here by the priestly Lama Domari clan, with patrons in Tshug, who maintained a long-

running enmity, marked by spell-casting and magical battles, with the lamas of Upper Tshognam.

The inhabitants of Upper and Lower Tshognam are Tibetan-speakers, who speak Seke only as a second language.

Te

Te consists of forty-eight households (several of which are subdivided estates) distributed through two main settlement areas: Dzong (a fortified settlement with only two entrances) and Yul (lit. "Village"). Yul itself is divided into a number of smaller areas: Yangba Cangba, Yangba Thewa (*cangba* and *thewa* mean respectively "lesser" and "greater"), Sumdu, Madang and Töpa.

There are five main clans: Khyungpo, Yangba, Paten, Butra and Cimden. In addition to these five there is one clan descended from the illegitimate son of a Tepas woman and a nobleman of the Kyukar house in Purang, in the Muklina th Valley. The clan is now represented exclusively by female descendants and is therefore due to be extinguished in the next generation. (In the complex hierarchical system of Te this clan is actually regarded as being of low status.)

The origins of the main clans are summarised in an undated document photographed in Te in 1993. The author explains the background to his work as follows:

gTer yul thun mong nas skul bzhing / dbon
po ngag dbang chos 'phel kyis skyid sdug
'byung mtshul sogs sdo tsam mdzod pa dge
/

At the insistence of the ordinary people of Te, Önpö Ngawang Chömpel has set down in brief the manner in which the

community came into being, and other such things.

As the writer implies, the work is effectively a brief compilation of various oral accounts. Since many of the details contained in the latter are not relevant to the present article they will be largely disregarded here, and a translation of the relevant passage in the written summary will suffice.

Text⁵

7. chags rab dor 'dus su rjod na / kog bya pa'i yul 'dir / khyung po brgyud-dang / yang ba brgyud-dang /
8. spar brten brgyud pa bcas brgyud pa gsum du dus skyang / lce stong dgon-nas dbon po bla ma bhi byu
9. yab sras bcas kog du sbyon-as dbon po brgyud bcas brgyud pa bzhi rdzoms du gnas bzhing /
10. sa cha rid-phu / phu ser bogs / gser la / la gsum mtshun dang / ta so la mtshun gyis ri rgya dang
11. rlung rgya spyod bzhin lha bde mi bde 'di skyd phun gsum tshogs par lo mang song dug byes /
12. bla-ma mkhyen-no / bla ma mkhyen-no / nor sags pa'i mtha' ma mdzad pa mthong / bu skyes mtha'
13. ma 'chi ba mthong / mkhar tsig pa'i mtha' ma gyel pa mthong / 'dus byas rmi tag
14. mthong nas bsam glo kyo /bde yang gro zhon zla pa'i tshe bcu dgu'i nyin / blo bur du
15. char rgod drag po zhin tsan thabs-su 'byung nas / yur mgor sho rag chen po ' byung nas /
16. lo shas bar du bka' las byas kyang yur mgo ma tshugs par thar / mtha' khyar gro gos 'byung bzhing /
17. yul phyed snar phyogs song zhing / yul phyed ted phyogs la yong pa yin / ted gyi yul du / na 'u
18. rdzong nas dgon drug lcang gi gtson ci ldan brgyud pa chags dug / dar rgyas tshe ring gis gtsos
19. khyung po brgyud pa dang zla ba chos 'phel bcas dbon po brgyud pa nmams chags dug / yang ba brgyud pa
20. dang spar brten brgyud pa gnyis / 'a ga ru lo shas sdad nas slad du gter yul du chags dug / smu ga
21. yul phyogs nas skyang bu spra brgyud pa mtshur yong gter du chags dug / na'u mrdzong dang khyung po brgyud gnyis
22. sngon la chags pas / gter yul khyung mrdzong dkar po yul ming zu grags so / yul 'di yi ri
23. tsham ni / dbro ya la / gang zhur po / rta phag la / mu ya'i la / phud tshang gang mtshun gter
24. pa'i ri tsham yin /

Translation

A brief account of the origins [of Te]. In the community called Kog there were three clans together: the Khyungpo clan, the Yangba clan and the Paten clan. The Önpö Lama Biju of Cetong temple came to Kog with his sons, so that, with the Önpö clan, there were altogether four clans living there. They made their territory the extensive hills and valleys on the near side of Ribu, Phuserbog and the Serla Pass - those three passes - and on the near side of the Tasola Pass. The gods and the people

were glad. But after many year of blessed happiness had gone by - the lama knows! - the end of the wealth they had amassed came: they watched it disappear; the end of the sons who had been born to them came: they watched them die; the end of the castle they had built came: they watched it fall. And seeing the impermanence that marks the passage of time they grieved.

For on the nineteenth day of a Gro-zhon month, all of a sudden there came a violent torrential rainstorm, causing severe damage to the head of the irrigation canal. In spite of their efforts over the course of several years they were unable to restore the head of the canal, and in the end they had to leave. Half the community went to Nar, and half came to Te.

In the community of Te there settled (*chags*: lit. originated) the Cimden clan, led by Göndrugcang, from Naudzong; the Khyungpo clan led by Dargye Tshering, and the Önpo clan, led (*bcas* for *gtsos*) by Dawa Chömphel. After spending a few years in A, the Yangba and Paten clans subsequently settled in Te. The Butra clan came here from the vicinity of Muga and settled in Te. Because Naudzong and the Khyungpo clan had originated (*chags*) first, the village was named Teyul Khyungdzong Karpo (gTer yul khyung rdzong dkar po): the Treasure Community, the White Garuda-Fortress.

The territorial boundaries⁶ of this community are as follows: the Roya La Pass; Gang Shuru; the Tawag La Pass; the Muya La Pass; and Phutshang Gang - the land that lies within these boundaries belongs to

Te.

The document continues with a description of the surrounding hillsides in terms of conventional Buddhist imagery, a list of the sacred sites of Te and a note on its main annual festival.

A few explanatory remarks may be made concerning some of the names in this extract. First, the Önpo clan. The term *önpo* (*dbon-po*) signifies a type of astrologer-priest, generally belonging to the Nyingmapa school: thus the hereditary priests of Chongkhor, near Muktinath, are usually referred to as *dbon-po*. In the present case the word obviously denotes a particular lineage, descended from a certain Biju Lama.⁷ This lama is now popularly believed to have visited Te in person, and a number of stories in Te recount his religious and magical activities there. The content of this document, however, effectively scotches the historicity of this notion. We have not yet been able to identify the Cetong Gompa where the early members of the clan are said to have lived. However, in a remote corner about two hours' walk to the south-east of Tangya is a ruined building, known simply as Gompa Gang ("Temple Ridge"), where the people of Tangya claim that a certain Biju Lama - presumably the same - once lived and engaged in battles of magical bombs (*mthu*) with a magus dwelling in the caves of their own cliffs. The Önpo clan in Te is now extinct. Unlike the Shari Pöngyuta priests, the Önpo are said to have intermarried with the other Te clans and to have lived within Te itself. The old Önpo house is situated in the ruined section of Dzong.

As the narrative suggests, the village of Kog has a place of some importance in the origin stories of the Tepas, since it was the original home of the three most prestigious clans.⁸ The ruins of this settlement are situated a day's walk north-east

of Te at the foot of Gang Shuru, a snow mountain on the border of Mustang and Tibet. We were unable to visit Kog because of heavy snow, but there are said to be extensive ruins and caves. The importance of Kog is also implied by the particular attention given to the gods of Gang Shuru in the libation ritual (*gser-skyems*) for Te's territorial divinities that is performed by the lamas of Tshogam.

As a general rule, the territory of an abandoned settlement remains the property of the emigrants, and becomes part of the land of whichever village subsequently becomes their home. As we have seen, one of the three clans inhabiting Kog was the Khyungpo, and the people of Tshug claim that they, too, should have a share in the surrounding pastureland on the grounds that the Khangtö clan, a branch of the Khyungpo, also came from Kog. The Tepas have not yet given serious consideration to these claims.

The Cimden clan of Te, according to this account, originally came from Naudzong. This old settlement is situated on a sandstone spur about two hours' walk uphill to the east of Te, a short distance below the main trade route from Muktinath to Tibet via Tangya. Sections of rammed-earth wall are still standing, and the presence of a ring-wall indicates that it was a defensive settlement. The site affords a clear view down to the castle ruin above Tshug and to the abandoned village of A in the north.

The large number of abandoned fields surrounding Naudzong suggests that the settlement may once have contained a sizeable population. A large, apparently natural cave at the base of the low cliff west of Naudzong provides shelter for several hundred Tepas goats and their herders.

The abandoned village of A is located approximately an hour's walk north of Naudzong on

the way to Tangya. (It may be noted that there is another old settlement called A in the Muktinath Valley, above the village of Putra.) The authors of the present article have seen the settlement and its fields to the east of the trail during the course of a fieldtrip made in 1992, but a more recent attempt to reach the site itself was foiled by deep snow. The etymology of the name A is open to speculation. The local pronunciation of the word might suggest a Tibetan orthography *wa*, a term signifying a wooden aqueduct. In the Seke dialect of Te, however, the word for aqueduct is *ku*. Furthermore, the fact that the author of the document spells the name 'A-ga suggests that he, at least, did not have this Tibetan derivation in mind.

The brief note in the document concerning the origin of the Butra clan apparently summarises a more elaborate version. We are told that the clan migrated to Te "from the vicinity of Muga". Now Muga is the Seke name of the settlement of Dzong on the northern side of the Muktinath Valley.⁹ Thus the Dzong La, the Tibetan name of the pass from the upper Muktinath Valley north into the territory of Te, is called the Muya (pleonastically Tibetanised in the text as *Mu-ya-la*,¹⁰ the southern boundary of Te) in Seke. A well-known story in Baragaon has it that the original settlement of Butra was located on a hillside just to the west of present-day Putra, but that it was destroyed when the entire promontory on which it was built broke off and slid, upside-down, to the bottom of the valley. The site of the buried village may be identified by a recent plantation of willows and poplars on the northern bank of the Dzong Chu just west of Putra. An earlier group of migrants from Butra, it is said, crossed north of the Muya Pass and established a new settlement. We did in fact find the ruins of a large, apparently fortified, settlement in this area, standing amid old

field terraces to the east of the trail from Te to Dzong on the northern side of the pass. Our informants were unaware of any name for the settlement itself, but everyone to whom we spoke identified it as the home of the Te Butra clan. The area in general is known simply as Chumig Gung (Chumig-gung), the Middle Spring.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the settlement occupies a strategic position at an important crossroads. Just to the west of it there passes the route from the Shöyul to the Muktinath Valley; and a few hundred metres to the east, meeting the latter trail at the Muya Pass, is the main north-south trade route to Tangya over the Tiu La. Another trail, descending from the Muya Pass and skirting around to the west and north of the ruins crosses the Dröyong Lungba to Tshethang and ascends to join the eastern trail below the Tiu La. Dröyong Lungba is the name of this stretch of the stream that provides Taye with its sole source of water (see above). Further down, it also constitutes the boundary between Taye and Te. Tshethang (Tshe-thang: "Ephedra Plateau") is the site of a long-term encampment of three tents, inhabited by a family of refugee nomads from Khartang in Tibet. Near this junction are the ruins of a single stone house amid abandoned fields. This location, called Oldog Kamsa (*Oldog* skam-sa: "the Place for Drying Turnips")¹¹, is a staging post on the north-south route where traders from the Muktinath Valley customarily spend the night before travelling on up to Tangya the following day. The house itself is said once to have been inhabited by Tsabgyepa Lama before the village of Purang, in the Muktinath Valley, gave his sons the area of land on which the priestly community of Chongkhor was subsequently founded.¹² Oldog Kamsa incidentally features as one of the sacred sites invoked by the village priest (*lha-*

bon) of Purang in his annual libation (*gser-skyems*) to the territorial gods of the region.

The spelling of Te as gTer, meaning "treasure", that appears in line 22 of the extract, occurs in a number of other documents from Baragaon. The name Khyungdzong Karpo, too, appears in certain local texts as well as in a eulogy of Te that is sung in the village on ceremonial occasions. While the spelling gTer may perhaps represent an attempt to find a flattering Tibetan etymology of the settlement's name, the suggested derivation of "Khyung-rdzong" may also be a rather strained effort to establish a harmonious union between the different strands that contributed to the present population of the community. Khyungdzong Karpo, in fact, appears to be quite a common name for palaces or fortresses in Western Tibet.

At the eastern end of Te is a single house, called Baza (Ba-tsha) "Soda", after the white soda-stains on the surrounding earth. It is currently inhabited by the family of one of the Shari Pöngyuta priests, a brother of the lama of Upper Tshognam. In the cliff behind are a few caves and with derelict mud walls, called simply Baza Ug (Seke, < Tib. Ba-tsha-phug), the "Baza Caves", which are said once to have served as hermitages. High up in the cliff face on the north side of the Narshing Chu is a line of caves which the Tepas call *Khe ne mam mi dim*, the Houses of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers.

Tsele

The next inhabited Shöyul north of the Narshing Chu is Tsele, situated half an hour beyond Tshug on the western slope above the Kali Gandaki. Tsele is a small community of thirteen estates (altogether seventeen hearths). On a promontory to the east of the village, directly overlooking the Kali Gandaki valley, are extensive ruins, said to have

been the original site of the settlement. The name of this promontory is Dzongbagang (presumably rDzong-ba-sgang, which would mean "the Ridge of the Fortress-dwellers"). The frequently-related story concerning its abandonment runs as follows. Once upon a time, Tsele used to levy taxes on goods travelling up and down the Kali Gandaki. The revenue office was located at a site now marked by a mani wall on the trail that passes along the foot of Dzongbagang, between the river and the village. Tsele at that stage had 108 houses, 100 on the promontory and eight where the present village stands. One day, a lama of Namgyal monastery (just north of Lo Monthang) came through Tsele on his way from the south, and the officials manning the customs post insisted that he pay duty on a huge copper cauldron that he was carrying. The lama argued that, since the cauldron was for the monastery kitchen, it should be duty-free. But the officials stood their ground and the lama was eventually obliged to pay. A short time later, however, he took his revenge by smiting the village with a destructive spell (*mthu*). As a result of this assault the 100 houses on the promontory that had insisted on the levy being imposed were destroyed, while the remaining eight were spared. The present settlement grew from these eight households.

In a layer of soft alluvial material in the cliff opposite Tsele, east of the Kali Gandaki, is a row of twenty caves. It is said that sixteen of these caves were treasuries, insofar as each was found to contain one volume of the Prajnaparamita in sixteen volumes. These volumes were reputedly placed inside the two-storey image of Maitreya that stands inside Gompa Gang, opposite Tshug, as part of the sacred paraphernalia for consecrating the sculpture.

Gyaga

The boundary between Gyaga and Tsele is formed by the deep gorge of the Gyaga Lungbe Chu. The route to northern Mustang used to pass along this gorge, but about a decade ago the people of Tsele cut a trail along the northern cliff-face. Gyaga may be reached either by descending into the valley from this new trail and following a path up the opposite cliff, entering the village through a tunnel some sixty metres long. Alternatively, one may follow the valley of the Gyaga Lungbe Chu from where it joins the Kali Gandaki south of Tsele. A short distance above this confluence, in the south-facing cliff, are areas of caves for which we were able to obtain no name other than simply Gyaga Phu - the Gyaga caves.

There is an abandoned settlement a short distance to the west of Gyaga. We did not visit or even obtain a name for this site, and it will therefore be referred to below by the provisional name of "Old Gyaga".

Kyuden

Beyond the point where the trail from Gyaga meets the main route between Tsele and Samar, the road turns northwards and crosses a low pass, the Donge La, marked by a cairn. Before the pass, to the west of the trail, is a large area of abandoned fields, in the middle of which stand a number of stone goat pens. On a ridge above these pens are some stone foundation walls. These ruins, and the old field terraces that surround the ridge (to the south of the ridge it is even possible to discern an old reservoir), are called Kyuden. Although Kyuden is bounded by the territory of Samar, Gyaga and Tsele, it forms part of the territory of Tshug. The reason for this apparent anomaly will be discussed presently.

Samar

As stated above, the area with which the present article is concerned is the territory of the five Seke-speaking Shöyul of southern Mustang and the settlements that stand on it. Samar, the next village to the north of Gyaga and Tsele, is people by Tibetan-speakers and, although classified as part of Baragaon, it does not belong to the Shöyul. Nevertheless it will be considered here because of certain peculiarities in the relationship between its territory and that of Tshug.

The territory of Samar begins at the Donge La. Samar itself is a little village of just twelve households that takes its name from a red-coloured ridge (Tib. Sa-dmar: "Red Earth") extending eastwards from the northern end of the settlement. This ridge is said to have been the site of an earlier community containing a far larger number (variously given as 136 and the ubiquitous 108) of households. One informant suggested that the original settlement had been destroyed in the course of warfare with Jumla, leaving just three households from which the present village grew. The ridge bears clear traces of old buildings. The name of this location is Samar Chöde Drag (Sa-dmar chos-sde-brag, "the Convent Ridge of Samar"), although one informant gave the second word as Chorten (*mchod-rten*), explaining that, seen from below, the ridge resembles a stupa. The ruins at the eastern end of the ridge are said to be of a nunnery, and those immediately to the west, of a fortress. Ruins of an old ring-wall indicate that this was a defensive settlement.

South-east of Chöde Drag, in the bay of the hills facing east, is another ridge called Mokhar Gata on which stand the ruins of a building. From the foundations and ring-wall ruins it may be concluded that this, too, was a fortified settlement.

Below the ridge, the path descends along the base of a south-facing cliff. This area is called Mokhar Gyam, and in the cliff above it are a few caves said to contain arrows and spindles. Although our companions from Samar interpreted these items as signs of past habitation, it may be noted that, in certain exorcistic rituals, arrows and spindles are used as emblems of men and women respectively.

Some fifty metres beyond these caves are the stone ruins of the settlement of Mokhar itself.

The depression between Mokhar Gata and Chode Drag is called Hrung Gyung. At this point it may be worth remarking that the toponyms of Samar mentioned so far include both Tibetan and Seke names. A fact that may be significant is that the two ridges have Tibetan names, whereas the depressions are designated by Seke terms. Thus *gyam* and *gyung* in the names Mokhar Gyam and Hrung Gyung signify respectively "path" (the path in question runs along the base of the cliff) and "valley", whereas Drag (*brag*) and Gata (Dz. **gata**) in the names Chöde Drag and Mokhar Gata, mean "crag" and "ridge" in Tibetan. While this difference may be coincidental, it may also suggest that the fortified constructions on these ridges were built by Tibetan-speakers, while the low-lying Mokhar and its fields were built and farmed (perhaps earlier?) by Seke-speakers.

In the north-east face of Chöde Drag is a set of caves, known simply by the Tibetan name of Chöde Drag Phugpa (Chos-sde brag phug-pa), Chöde Drag Caves. North of the Crag, from west to east, is a gorge called Samar Drogpo. Drogpo (*grog-po*) is the usual north-Mustang term for ravine. Some five hundred metres below Chöde Drag the Samar Drogpo converges with another stream, the Jowo Drogpo, that rises further north. The name Jowo (Jo-bo) derives from the fact that Samar's two

main divinities stand at the edge of this ravine. The first of them, Samar Jowo - who still receives annual animal sacrifices - is in the form of a large cairn situated some distance upstream, while the second, Jowo Mā (*smad*: "lower") is revered at a juniper tree growing at the confluence. The area of land lying between Samar Droppo and Jowo Droppo is called Chuwer (probably derived from Tib. Chubar, "between streams"). As we shall see presently, there is documentary evidence that there was one a settlement here, although we could find no traces of one. There is, however, an abandoned Khamba military outpost, and it is possible that here, as perhaps also in Tshumbag, this camp was built on top of - or used the material from - the old village. Just below the main trail that crosses Gelung, on the edge of the Jowo Droppo, are stone walls suggesting the foundation of a building. There is a similar construction at a corresponding point on the northern bank. Diagonal cuttings in the cliff face at this point suggest that the main trail once descended into the gorge between these two points, but was moved further upstream after the original path was eroded away. The stone construction might therefore have been the foundations of monumental stupas, or else of buildings with some function such as monitoring traffic on the road. The area between the Jowo Droppo and the Soya La, a pass about an hour's walk further on, is called Tamshel, and was also the site of a settlement. Ruined buildings can still be seen amid abandoned fields, and there is a small cluster of caves in a cliff at the northern end of the plateau. (There is also an old Khamba outpost at the upper, western end.) It will be recalled that one of Tshug's clans is sad to have come from Tamshel, so it is no great surprise to learn that Tamshel still belongs to Tshug. In fact the latter's territory extends north of the Soya La to the place called

Bena, marked by a tavern. The area between Bena and Yamdak - the site of another tavern - is held commonly by Tshug and Gelung, while after Yamdak lies the territory of Gelung alone.

A document kept in the village archive of Te, and photographed in 1993, contains an intriguing reference to the abandonment of certain settlements in the Shöyul area. Since a full translation of this document, together with a commentary, will be published in the near future, a brief summary of the context will suffice here. The text is undated, but appears to have been written some time in the early eighteenth century. It takes the form of a long letter of complaint, addressed to the Kyekya Gangba rulers in the Muktinath Valley, concerning the aggressive behaviour of Tshug towards its neighbours in violation of the law of the rulers. The Tepas themselves, the letter states, suffered badly at the hands of the Tshugpas: thirteen hearths were abandoned, while other villagers were besieged, starving, in their caves. The fate of certain settlements was even more disastrous:

Text of excerpt from document 1:¹³

60. chu bar stong pa'i phral / sa dmar stong pa'i phral /
61. skyus rdeng stong pa'i phral / 'tshum pag stong pa'i phral /
62. de rnams kyi phral khong gi khur yin yod mchi
63. bsam / de rnams kyi ri klung kun 'khong gi 'cad
64. kyin yod mchi pas / de rnams kyi 'o gom 'u
65. lag rnams 'khong gi khur yin yod mchi bsam /
66. yul chung 'di rnams stong stu cug pa'i ca ba

67. tshug pa la thug mchi pas / yul chung
 68. 'di rnams kyi 'o gom 'u lag 'khong la dkal
 69. ba zhu / gal srid 'khong la dkal ba mi
 70. snang na / ri zhing 'di rnams yang na nged
 shod pa kun
 71. la dgos nas snang ba zhu / ri zhing 'di
 rnams
 72. kyi 'o gom 'u lag kun nged shod pa'i khur
 ba
 73. yin mchi pas thug dgong tso ba zhu /
 74. rgya ga tsang le gnyis kyang ma chag na
 75. 'khong la za rgyu yod bsam nas / ri rlung
 76. thams cad la ang che byed kyin yod mchi
 /

Translation:

We think that [the Tshugpas] should pay the taxes for the abandoned settlements of Chuwer, Samar, Kyuden and Tshumpag. They are using the pastures and fields of these places. We think that they should be responsible for [performing] the official corvee obligations [accruing to these abandoned settlements].

The main responsibility for causing these small settlements to be abandoned lies with the Tshugpas. Please allocate the official corvee obligations of these small settlements to them. If you do not so allocate them, please divide up these hill-fields among all us people of Shö, and give them to us. Please note that the official corvee obligations of these abandoned settlements (*ri zhing*, lit. hill fields, i.e. fields without nearby inhabitants) is being borne by all of us Shöpas. [Even] if Gyaga and Tsele, too, have not yet been de-

stroyed, [the Tshugpas] think that they should take them over, and they are putting pressure on all their pastures and fields.

Tshug, then, is accused of being directly responsible for the abandonment of four settlements, Chuwer, Samar, Kyuden and Tshumpag, and for nearly seizing Gyaga and Tsele. (Earlier (lines 30-31), we are told that "The responsibility for depopulating the community of the people of Tsele lies with the Tshugpas"). Chuwer, in fact, was part of the territory of Tshug (although the ownership was disputed by Samar) until the beginning of the present decade, when a prominent member of Samar swore a solemn oath to the effect that, as far as he knew, historically the land belonged to his village.

This document does, however, imply that Chuwer, as a settlement and not merely a tract of pastureland, was once a political entity independent of Samar until it was forcibly seized by Tshug. One particularly interesting assertion of the document is that Samar was actually *abandoned* at the time of writing. Now the present inhabitants of Samar are reputedly recent settlers who have largely replaced the older, mainly noble residents. To our knowledge there is only one remaining noble household. The clan in question is the Shari Pöngyuta, a branch of which has been encountered earlier as the priestly family of Upper Tshognam. It was the presence of these nobles that gave Samar its status as one of the "capitals" (*rgyal-sa*) of Baragaon; but since the ritual function of its nobles that corresponded with this status continued until a generation ago, the population which the present document claims was displaced by Tshug must have been some other group, not necessarily of Tibetan-speakers. If the text is to be believed, Samar, like the other "small settlements" listed, was depopulated by Tshug and

its fields and pastureland exploited by the Tshugpas. It therefore seems likely that the village regained territorial independence at a subsequent period, probably under the Tibetan-speaking noble settlers. It is worth remarking that one estate in Samar is even now regarded as being the property of Tshug. The only remaining documents in Samar are said to be those in the Shari Pöngyuta household. We did not obtain permission to photograph the village archive, which is contained here, since certain members of the caretaker committee were absent, but hope to do so on a future occasion. The private documents of this house were, however, obtained, and a study of their contents may shed light on some of the historical questions regarding the settlement.

Conclusion

The findings discussed above provide us with a substantial list of abandoned (and in the case of Samar, reinhabited) settlements within the territory of the five Shöyul. Setting aside the numerous cave systems within the area, they are: Tshumpag, Rele, Khyarku, "Old Gyaga", Dzongbagang (in Tsele), Kyuden, Samar, Mokhar, Chuwer, Tamshel, the two settlements of old Tangbe, Kog, A, Naudzong and the nameless ruins at Chumig Gong.

We do not know at present the extent to which the lifespans of these settlements overlapped. The evidence suggests that several of the villages on the west bank of the Kali Gandaki may have been contemporary: Tshumpag, Kyuden, Samar, and Chuwer were probably dissolved about the same time. The situation on the eastern side is less clear: Kog, A, Naudzong and perhaps the settlement at Chumig Gong may have existed contemporaneously, but in view of the unreliability of the documentary evidence this must remain speculative. These last four

settlements are conspicuously absent from the letter in which Te describes Tshug's expansionism in the area; there is an apparent reference to Naudzong, but as a pasture area of Te rather than as the fortified town its ruins suggest it once was. If they were in existence at that time they would surely have played some part in the conflict. These sites, then, were probably already abandoned at the time the western settlements were disintegrating, that is, roughly at the end of the seventeenth century. Whether there was any overlap between them, however, is a matter for further archaeological and documentary research.

Whatever the case, it is clear that, over the course of time the demographic pattern of the Shöyul changed, with the people abandoning the outlying settlements and becoming concentrated in a few - more precisely, two - centres of population. The centres in question are Tshug and Te. Tshug absorbed many of the inhabitants - and the territories - of at least the western villages: Tshumpag, Khyarku, Rele, Kyuden, Samar, Chuwer and Tamshel. Te had earlier been a melting pot for those on the east: Kog, A, Naudzong and the Chumig Gong settlement. The reasons for these two processes of concentration were, however, quite different. In the former case, the process was one of small communities being absorbed by an already existing powerful centre: the reason for this may have been either a quest for security in what was obviously a period of regional instability or, if we are to believe Te's "eyewitness" version of events, sheer oppression and land-grabbing on the part of Tshug. In the case of the east, the abandoned communities were themselves large fortified settlements, and it is not even clear yet whether Te existed prior to their dissolution. They may all have been abandoned, as Kog and A are said to have been, because of natural

disasters, and those of their inhabitants who remained in the area eventually pooled in Te.

An important question that may be raised concerns the ethnic identity of these old communities. A closer study of toponymy will undoubtedly be useful in this respect. Most of the place names we have collected appear to be of Seke, rather than Tibetan provenance, but the names of the settlements themselves provide no clear answers. Some names, like Samar, are Tibetan; others, such as Kyuden, are more probably Seke, while the majority - Kog, A, Naudzong for example - are indeterminate.

When cultural homogeneity is attained between two cohabiting ethnic groups, the culture that achieves ascendancy is usually that of the politically dominant population. This is what appears to have happened in the case of the Muktinath Valley, where the language and culture of the Tibetan-speaking rulers from the north has all but eclipsed the older, non-Tibetan culture. Conversely, the clans that found their way into Tshug could conceivably have been Tibetans who adjusted to the language and culture of their powerful hosts. This being said, it would be surprising if the "small settlements" destroyed by Tshug had existed as little islands of Tibetan culture in a predominantly Seke-speaking area; they, too, are referred to in the Te chronicle as being a part of the Shöyul, a name which, as we have seen, does have cultural implications. As for the eastern settlements, there is nothing to suggest that Te was a politically powerful centre of Seke-speaking culture, which might have changed the language of the groups who settled there: on the contrary, the narrative of the origins of Te's clans suggests that the migrants themselves were the dominant group - if indeed they themselves were not the founders of Te. Thus Kog, A, Nau-

dzong and the Chumig Gong community are also likely to have been Seke-speaking.

The picture that emerges from these preliminary explorations may be summarised as follows: the territory of the Shöyul once contained at least fifteen settlements (excluding cave systems) other than the five existing villages. Those on the east side of the Kali Gandaki were abandoned earlier than the majority of those on the west. Just how many of these settlements were inhabited contemporaneously is not yet known. And as for the inhabitants of the settlements, the balance of probability suggests that they were not Tibetan but speakers of Seke.

Notes

1. For Tibetan etymologies of these names see Snellgrove 1981: 170.
2. Somewhat surprisingly, Snellgrove's description (1981: 171) of the temple does not mention the stone.
3. A description of this temple, properly called *Kunbzang chos-gling*, is given in Snellgrove 1981: 172-173.
4. The text is presented in its original, unedited form.
5. The Tibetan text is unedited. Hyphens signify contracted forms.
6. *Ri-tsham* (for *ri-mtshams*): *ri* literally means "hill" in Tibetan, but in the Baragaon dialect of Tibetan, usually in the form *ri-kha*, it signifies simply uncultivated land. *mTshams*: "boundary".
7. The name may have its origin in the Nepali word *bijuwa*, denoting a shaman or sorcerer. This lama's name is in fact usually pronounced as "Bichuwa/Bijuwa".
8. Although the story that part of Kog's population

settled in Nar is well known in Baragaon, there seems to be no corresponding version of the tale in Nar itself. The foundation of Nar is, however, attributed to a migrant from an unspecified location in Mustang (Fürer-Haimendorf 1983: 97).

9. A Nepali document from Dzong refers to a certain "Muwakot", apparently denoting the castle of that settlement (cf. Karmacharya n.d.).

10. *Ya* in *Seke* means "pass". Our addition of the word "Pass" after names ending in *-ya* or *-la* should be understood as an exegesis, rather than a translation, of the name.

11. The term **oldog** in fact denotes only dried turnips.

12. *Tsabyepa* (rTsa-ba brgyad-pa): "having eight foundation points". The name is said to be a reference to the architectural style in which this lineage traditionally built its houses. The ruins of two examples of these houses, each shaped like a wide, shallow letter H, can be seen in the area. One, called *Gompa Gyang*, stands a short distance to the north of *Chongkhor*, and the other is at *Oldog Kam-sa*.

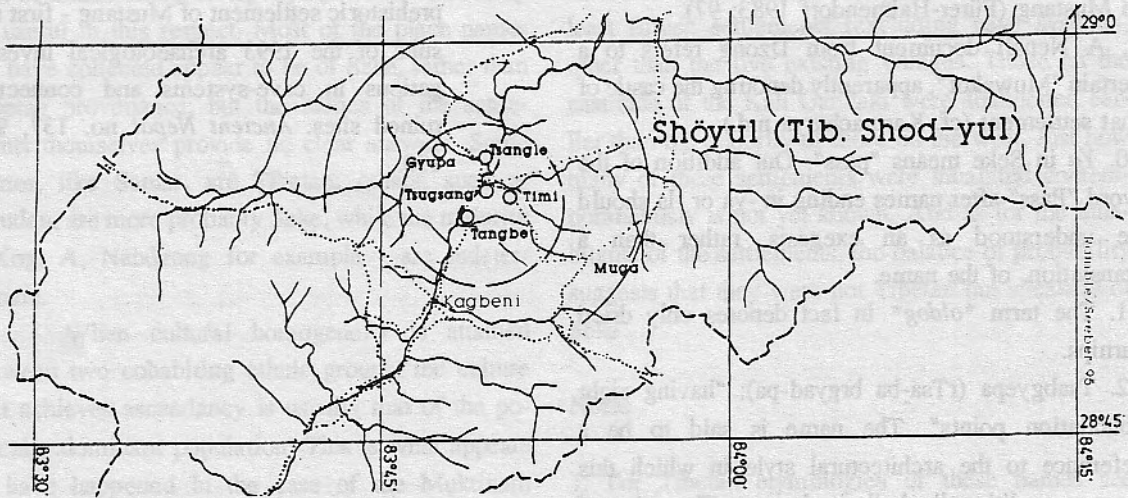
13. The text is unedited. It should be noted that there are certain problems of interpretation that have not been indicated in the following translation.

Gurung, N.J. 1977. 'Socio-economic structure of Manang village'. M.A. Thesis, Tribhuvan University.

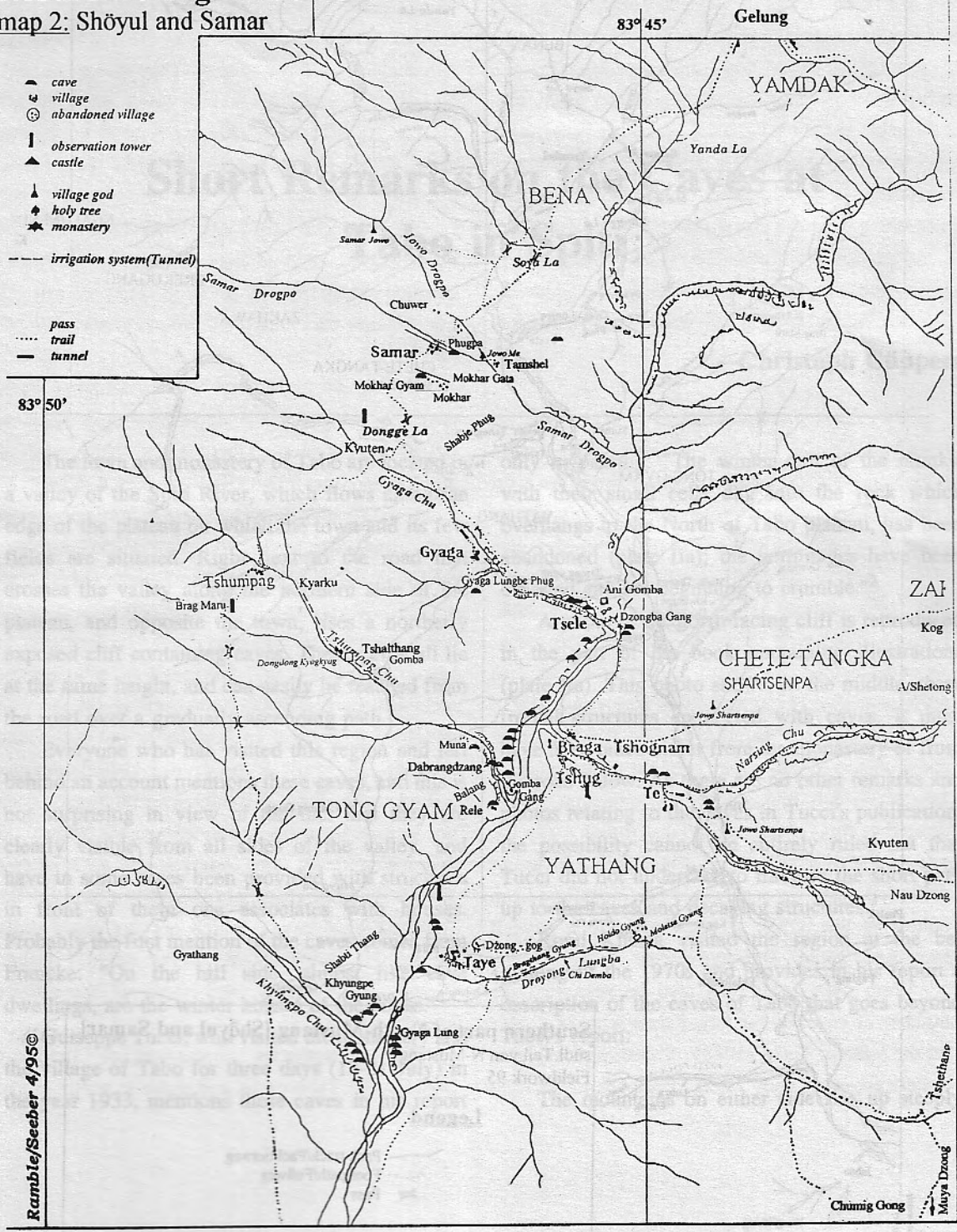
Simons, A, W. Schön and S. S. Shrestha 1994. The prehistoric settlement of Mustang - first results of the 1993 archaeological investigations in cave-systems and connected ruined sites. *Ancient Nepal* no. 137, 93-130.

References

- Fürer-Haimendorf, C. von 1966. 'Caste concepts and status distinctions in Buddhist communities of western Nepal'. In C. von Fürer-Haimendorf (ed.) *Caste and Kin in Nepal, India and Ceylon*.
- Fürer-Haimendorf, C. von 1983. 'Bhotia highlanders of Nar and Phu'. In: *Kailash*, vol. x (1-2), 63-118.



North Mustang Part I
 map 2: Shöyul and Samar

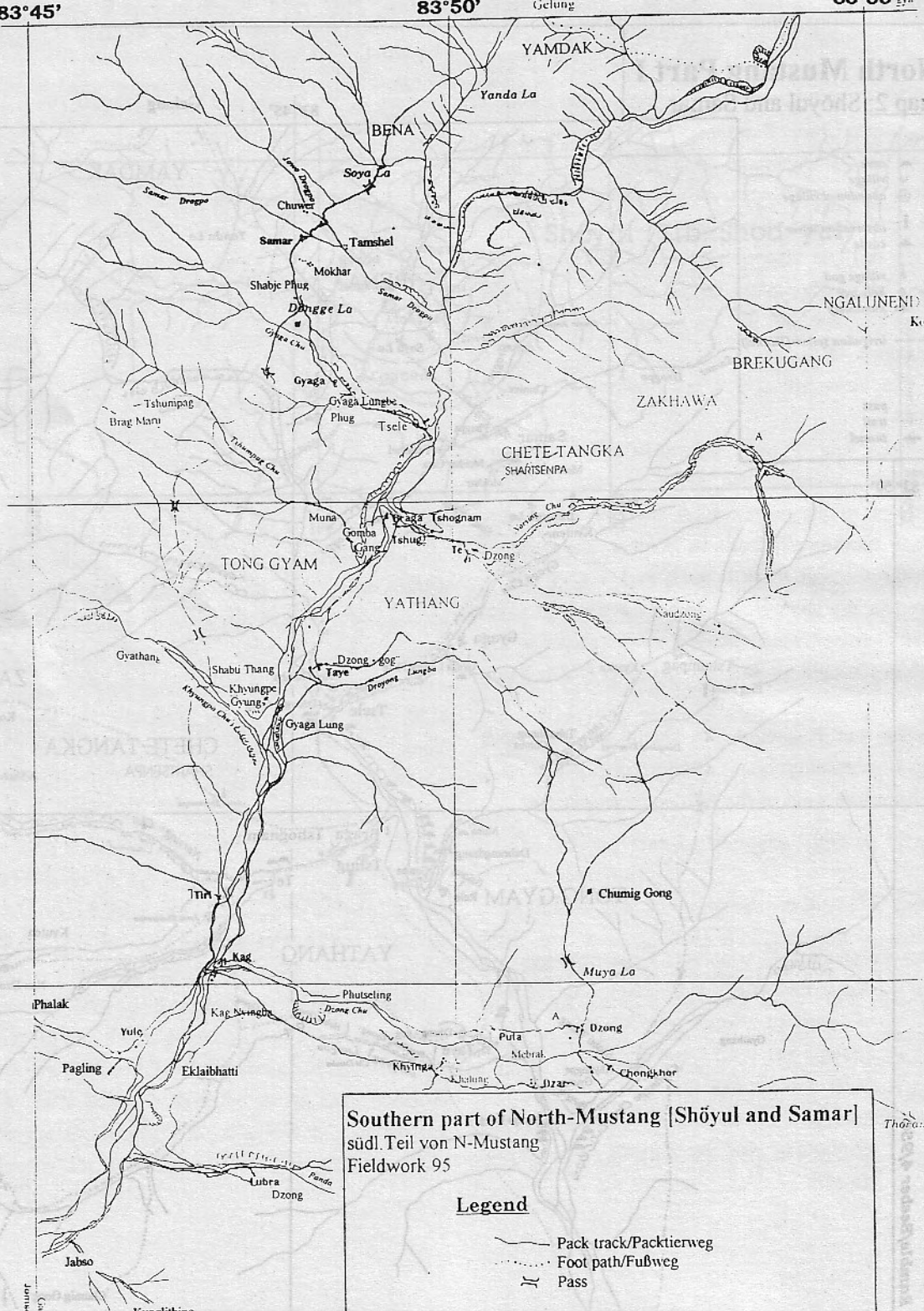


Ramble/Seeber 4/95©

83°45'

83°50'

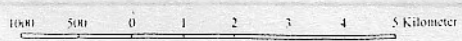
83°55'



Southern part of North-Mustang [Shöyul and Samar]
 südl. Teil von N-Mustang
 Fieldwork 95

Legend

- Pack track/Packtierweg
- Foot path/Fußweg
- Pass



Cart 120