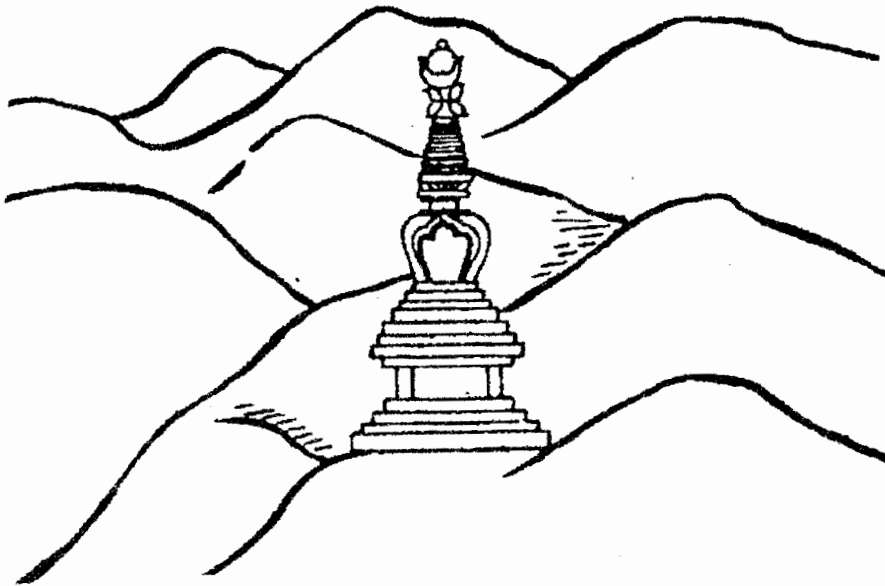


Bulletin Of Tibetology



1996

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No. 3

2 NOVEMBER 1996
SIKKIM RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY
GANGTOK-SIKKIM

The Bulletin of Tibetology seeks to serve the specialist as well as the general reader with an interest in this field of study. The motif portraying the stupa on the mountains suggests the dimensions of the field

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**A SURVEY OF TIBETAN PAPER CURRENCY
(1912-1959)¹**

-Wolfgang Bertsch

Paper currency was introduced fairly late into Tibet, although this country for more than a thousand years was in close contact with China and India where paper money circulated centuries ago before it made its appearance in Tibet. Most Tibetans were both illiterate and conservative, preferred the barter trade and where this was impossible, used to pay for their goods obtained in large transactions with silver coin or ingots. These circumstances would have made next to impossible the issuing of bank notes at an earlier date² and it is not surprising that even after 1912 the introduction of banknotes in Tibet was watched with great suspicion by the majority of the Tibetan people.

Tibet's paper notes are possibly the most beautiful and artistic specimens known among the world's 20th century banknotes. They represent a unique blend of the printer's skill, who could draw from a printing tradition which is more than a thousand years old, and artistic genius inspired by an equally long tradition of painting in Tibet.

The woodblock printing technique which was used for the early banknotes is most probably foremost inspired by the printing of Tibetan paper charms, amulets and prayer-flags³ Not only sacred texts were printed on these flags or paper amulets, but also images, mostly set into a frame, the most popular being the "wind horse" (*lung rta*) which is surrounded by the animals who guard the four quarters; it is possibly not mere coincidence that the latter animals appear on the backside of the multicoloured 50 Tam notes (plate V).

Before the first banknotes appeared, printing in Tibet was done uniquely using black ink. As far as I know, the production of the banknotes represents the first attempt in colour printing in Tibet. This technique was perfected with the introduction of the multicoloured 50 Tam note in 1926, when the use of different printing blocks, one for each colour became necessary.

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- 1: This article has been extracted from my manuscript, entitled "A Study of Tibetan Paper Currency" which I hope to publish as a small volume in the near future.
 - 2: Two paper notes of the Yuan dynasty were found in 1959 in Sakya monastery and a Chinese author takes this as evidence that Chinese paper notes circulated in Tibet in the context of the close financial relations which supposedly existed between China and Tibet during the Yuan Dynasty (13th century). I believe however that this singular find is not sufficient evidence to support this thesis. Taking into account the great respect which Tibetans show for everything printed, one could expect that more than just two Yuan Dynasty notes should have survived, if these notes actually did circulate in Tibet. cf. Anonymous (Committee for the Administration of Tibetan Cultural Relics): *Xi Zhang Sa-Jia Si Fa Shian De Yuan Dai Zi Bi* (The Paper Notes of the Yuan Dynasty Found in the Sakya Temple). In: *Wen Wu*, 1975, pp. 32-34.
 - 3: cf. Douglas, Nik: *Tibetan Tantric Charms and Amulets*. New York 1978. An example of the four guardian animals is given on plate 51, an illustration of the windhorse, surrounded by the four guardian animals, can be found on plate 52.

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The main subjects represent on the Tibetan banknotes are religious and in this way the notes reflect Tibetan culture in an admirable way. However the design of the face of all the banknotes are inspired by a deep nationalistic feeling. The snow lion, or a pair of these animals, stand for Tibet⁴ and probably existed already as part of the design of Tibet's national flag before they made their appearance on the banknotes, coins and post stamps of this country.

Mention should be made of some Chinese notes with both Tibetan and Chinese legends which were issued by the Provincial Bank of Xikang in Kangding. Also known are notes of the Central Bank of China and of the Farmers Bank with overprint in Tibetan language. These notes were issued in the 1930ies for the Tibetan speaking population in Western Sichuan and in Xikang, a province which was formed by Chinese by incorporating former Tibetan territory which was annexed by China in the beginning of this century. However these notes never circulated in Tibet proper and are therefore outside the scope of this brief study.

1. The Tam Issues

(plate I-V)

The first banknotes issued by the Tibetan Government had the denomination "tam" (this unit is better known as "tangka" or "tamga"; three tangkas were equal to 1 Indian Rupee in 1912), are dated T.E. (Tibetan Era) 1658⁵ and it is now generally assumed that they were issued in the year 1912. However there are some reasons to believe that these notes were not released before January 1913. The year 1912 saw a lot of fighting and political upheaval in Lhasa while the Tibetans were trying to drive out the Chinese who found themselves in a weak position after the fall of the Manchu Dynasty. It is unlikely that the ambitious programme of introducing paper currency was initiated at this time. The Dalai Lama had left his Indian exile in mid 1912, but delayed his arrival in Lhasa to January 1913⁶, waiting till the last Chinese troupes had left the Tibetan capital on January 6th.⁷ Reportedly the red seal of the

-
- 4: cf. Brauen Martin : *Heinrich Harrers Impressionen aus Tibet*, Innsbruck and Frankfurt a.M. 1974, p. 112. According to Brauen the couple of snow lions as illustrated on the face of the 100 Ssang notes represents the political and religious power of Tibet. In this case the precious objects. Since these objects are related to the perfect religious ruler, I think it more likely that the lions and the bowl mainly represent the political power (Tib. "srid"), while the religious power (Tib. "Chos") is represented by the mostly buddhist motives on the backside of the notes
 5. The Tibetan Era starts in 245 A.D. when according to tradition the first Buddhist scripts fell from heaven at Yumbu Lhaxhang near the Yarlung Valley at the time of Tho-Tho-Ri who is considered as the founder of the Tibetan Government. cf. Rhodes, Nicholas G: *Obscure System. The Dating of Tibetan Banknotes*. In: *Coin & Medal News*, January 1987, pp. 89-90.
 6. The Dalai Lama was waiting in Samding Monastery for the surrender of the Chinese in Lhasa. Cf. Shakapba, Tsepon W.D. : *Tibet. A Political History*, New York 1984, p. 242-243
 7. Shakapba, Tsepon D.W. : *op. cit.* p. 245.

first banknotes in Tam denomination was applied in the presence of the Dalai Lama.⁸ While some of the banknotes may have been printed already in 1912, the presence of the Dalai Lama being necessary for their issue, they were most probably not sealed and released before the second half of January 1913. Since the T.E. year 1658 starts in February 1912 and end in February 1913, the T.E. date on the first notes still corresponds to the year of their first release. The first notes to be issued had the value of 5 Tam (green or blue) and 10 Tam (plate I). In the following year notes of 15 Tam (violet ; plate II), 25 Tam (brown or yellow; plate III) and 50 Tam (blue; plate IV) followed; these notes bear the T.E. date 1659. Frequent counterfeiting of the note with the highest value, the blue 50 Tam, obliged the Tibetan Government to release a new, multicoloured 50 Tam note in 1926 (T.E. 1672). This note was printed with yearly changing T.E. dates until 1941 (T.E. 1689) (plate V).

On the face of all Tam notes the following legend is printed in black ink:

gangs ljongs bod rgyal khab chen boi lugs zung chab/
srid dbu kyi lo chig stong drug brgya lnga bcu nga brgyad/
(or: dgu/; or other dates on the multicoloured 50 tam notes)
phun tshogs sde zhii dpal mnga phan bdei spyi nor/
chos srid gnyis ldan gyi rab byung bco lnga bai shog dngul/

The following translation has been suggested for this legend:

1658 years from the founding of the religious-secular form of government in the great country of Tibet, the land of snows, paper money of the 15th cycle (rab byung) of the government of religion and politics (chos srid gnyis ldan) the universal Jewel of benefit and bliss, endowed with the four types of auspiciousness⁹

The date 1658 which is mentioned in the second line of the legend, was not altered on the 5 Tam notes which were issued after the year. However it was altered to 1659 on the red 10 Tam notes some time after serial number 3600. So far the notes of 15, 25 and 50 Tam (monochrome first issue) are only known with the date 1659, but I believe that some notes of these denominations must have existed with the date T.E. 1658. There is evidence that all the known 10 and 15 and most of the 25 and early 50 Tam notes dated T.E. 1659 were printed with blocks on which the original date 1658 was altered to 1659, since several notes exist, where a gap between the Tibetan word for 1659 and the final vertical stroke (Tib. "shad") at the end of the second line of the legend remains (plate I-IV). This is due to the fact that for the Tibetan word "eight" (brgyad) three spaces are necessary, while the Tibetan word "nine" (dgu) occupies only two spaces and hence there remained a gap when the part of the block

8. Surkhang W.G.: Letter to Hugh Richardson of 19. 07. 1966. I thank Mr. Richardson for making this letter available to us.

9. This translation has been suggested by the staff of the Museum of "Tibetan Works and Archives" in Dharamsala. A somewhat different translation of the last two lines is given in: Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection and other Lamaist Material in the Newark Museum, Vol. V, Newark 1971, p. 30: "Paper money of the 15th cycle which is endowed with religion and government, being the crest jewel (spyo nor) of the fourfold perfection, namely power, glory, welfare and happiness."

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with the "bygyad" had been cut out and replaced by a small slab bearing the word "dgu". Notes of 25 and 50 Tam (monochrome) with higher serial number are known without this gap after the word for "nine" and were obviously printed from new block.¹⁰ The lowest known serial number of the 15 Tam note is 482; this note is printed with the gap after the word "nine" (plate II): this means that only very few notes of this denomination, if any at all, can have been printed with the date 1658. This supports our assumption that the first 5 and 10, and possibly a few 15, 25 and 50 (monochrome) notes were printed towards the end of T.E. 1658 (i.e. January 1913) and that in that year there was not enough time to issue large quantities of notes with this date.

The 13th Dalai Lama certainly had opportunities during his exile in China and India to acquaint himself with paper currency and decided to introduce it into Tibet as part of his scheme for modernization of his country. During his Indian exile he was in close contact with Charles Bell who often acted as his interpreter while dealing with the British. One of his officials or the Dalai Lama himself may have approached Bell regarding the introduction of paper currency into Tibet. Bell notes in April 1912: "The Government hopes also to issue Currency notes and so to make money; I pointed out to Palhese some of the difficulties and requirement of a note currency, and he said Shatra (Shatra Lönchen) was ignorant of these."¹¹ probably one of the requirements that Bell pointed out of the Tibetan was the necessity of gold backing for the paper currency. It seems however that measures towards such a backing with gold were not taken until about 1925 at the instigation of Tsarong Shabpe who was in charge of the mint. Supposedly from the year onwards 300 gold ingots weighting 27 tolas each which had been imported from India, were stored away in the Potala.¹² Before that time depreciation of the Tibetan paper currency was avoided by strictly limiting the number of notes issued.¹³ In 1925 a bank (the name "Finance Department" is probably more appropriate for this institution) was also established in Lhasa whose first manager was Phungkhong Kung and later Tsarong joined as head of this establishment.¹⁴

It seems that the early Tibetan paper notes were not received with great enthusiasm by the Tibetan population and during the first years of their issue were hardly used outside the few cities of central Tibet. Even 10 years after they were first released the banknotes were, according to A. David-Neel, regarded as curiosity and traders did not accept them in the Lhasa area.¹⁵ For Chamdo and Batang in Eastern Tibet it is however reported for 1922, that

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10. Bertsch, Wolfgang: Some notes on Tibetan Paper Currency. In: *The Tibet Journal*, vol. XVI, Nr. 1, Dharmasala, spring 1991, p. 128.
 11. Bell, Charles: Diary entry 15 April 1912 (unpublished)
 12. Taring, Rinchen Dolma: *Daughter of Tibet*, Reprint New Delhi 1978, p. 107.
 13. Bell, Charles: *Tibet past and present*. Reprint New Delhi 1990 (originally published Oxford 1924), p. 255.
 14. Ya Hanshang: *The Bibliographies of the Dalai Lamas*, Beijing 1990. According to Xiao Huayuan (Xizang Difeng Huobi, Beijing 1987, chapter 5) a Tibetan bank was already established in 1913.
 15. David-Neel, Alexandra: *My Journey to Lhasa*, Reprint, London 1983 (first published in 1927), p. 268.

Tibetan silver money and banknotes from Lhasa were circulating and had driven out Chinese copper coins.¹⁶

The first series of Tibetan banknotes was issued between 1913 and 1934, the year when the notes were withdrawn from circulation. As mentioned above, the date on the new, multicoloured 50 Tam note was altered every year while the notes of the first set were printed with the date 1658 (5 Tam note) 1658 or 1659 (10 Tam note), 1659 (15, 25 and blue 50 Tam note) at least till the 1920ies. This means that after the date had been changed from 1658 to 1659. These fixed dates are sometimes referred to as "frozen dates" in numismatic literature.

The early notes were printed by hand from woodblocks at the Mint Grva bzhi glog 'krul khungs (Tra bshi lotrü kung) which had been closed temporarily by the Chinese in 1910 and was reopened by the Tibetans in 1913.¹⁷ The multicoloured 50 Tam note was the first Tibetan issue which was printed with machines from metal blocks or metal sheets mounted on wood blocks. It was printed between 1926 and 1932 in the Dobe Mint which had been established in 1904 in the valley of the same name in the northeast of Sera. It is reported that some multicoloured 50 Tam notes were also printed in the Luo Dui mint (Chinese transcription; this mint is better known as "gser-khang" mint) near the Norbu Lingka before 1931.¹⁸ From 1932 onwards they were printed in Trabshi Lekhung (Grva bzhi las khung) which had been established in late 1931 as the only Tibetan Government Mint at a place north of Lhasa¹⁹ where a mint of this name existed already. This new institution incorporated the different mints which had existed earlier on. It is not known if the early 5,10,15,25 and blue 50 Tam notes were printed after 1926. If this was the case, we can assume that they continued to be printed with woodblocks and by hand, since the surviving notes of this series do not show any evidence of a change in the printing technique.

The ink for printing of the notes was imported from India. It seems that with each new batch different colour shades were produced unintentionally on the notes. However the notes with similar colours do not form blocks of serial number as one could expect. Therefore one has to take into account that the colour on the notes probably changed as well after printing due to exposure to the elements and due to long use in every day transactions.²⁰ This may be

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16. Teichmann, Eric: *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet*, Cambridge 1922, p. 146.
 17. Xiao Huayuan, *Xizang Difeng Huobishi (The History of Tibetan Money)*, Beijing 1987, Chapter 5.
 18. Numismatic Research Team of the Institute of Finance of the Tibet branch of the People's Bank of China: *Xi Zhang-He-Ping-Je-Fang-Qian-Yin-Zi-Qian-Bi-Gai-Kuang (Brief Information on the Minting and Printing of Tibetan Currency before the peaceful Liberation)*, in: *China Numismatics*, Vol. 20, Nr. 1 (Beijing 1988), pp. 50-55.
 19. During a stay in Lhasa in October 1995 I was told that the Mint Trabshi Lekhung was located at a place which is now occupied of the Xinhua Printing Press, about halfway between the centre of Lhasa and the Sera Monastery. It seems that none of the old Mint building has survived.
 20. Narbeth, Colin (ed.): *Tibetan Paper Money*, in print. Different colour shades have been recorded for the 5, 10, 25 and early 50 Tam notes. Most of the known shades were recorded by: Shrestha, Bhupendra Narayan: *Tibetan Paper Currency*, St. Albans 1987, p. 25

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the case particularly with the five Tam notes which show numerous varieties of colours; there exist also some specimens on which the colour has faded almost completely as to make it impossible to recognize the design.

The notes were printed on paper which made in Tibet where paper making has a tradition which goes back many centuries. Authorities on Tibet however do not agree on the ingredients which were used for the production of the paper for the early banknotes. Chinese sources report that banknote paper was produced with the root of a spurge plant in Sgyom Stor (Jung Dong district).²¹ A Tibetan source mention the bark of a tree called Shog-Phing and the place of production is given as Kemdong district in the province of Dhakpo.²² At any rate, it is clear that for the early banknotes a special paper, different from the one used for books, was developed. This paper had to be very durable, resist to insects (we have indeed not encountered any notes half eaten by insects or with worm holes) and difficult to imitate. The paper for the early notes is generally thicker than the one used for the multicoloured 50 Tam note. Most probably the obverse and the reverse of the early notes were printed on separate sheets and then these were pasted together after a third smaller sheet had been inserted in the middle on which was printed a security legend which shows like a water mark when the notes are held against the light.²³

After the printing, the paper notes numbered by hand by specially trained calligraphers, both for controlling the number of notes issued as well as protecting the notes from possible forgers. These calligraphers were called E-ba, were trained from childhood in the art of calligraphy and those who numbered the notes worked in a special office called "dngul par yon brtan" (could be translated as "money quality supervision").²⁴ Supposedly this office was also responsible for detecting forged bank notes. Another name for the calligraphers

21. Xiao Huayuan, *op. cit.*, chapter 5. I was unable to identify Sgyom Stor on available maps.

22. Rhodes, Nicholas G.: Tibetan forgeries made in Calcutta. *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 1982, p. 93. the information was given in Calcutta by the Tibetan official Ngawang Tsultim Kesang in 1927.

An informant who is now living in Switzerland mentioned the plant "Arwo drawo" (Tib. Ar-bo Gra-bo meaning letterally "multicoloured Aloe") as one of the ingredients used for the production of banknote paper. cf. Gabrish, Karl: *Geld aus Tibet*. Winterthur 1990, p. 49, footnote 3.

23. Shrestha, Bhupendra Narayan, *op. cit.* p. 2

However, at least for the multicoloured 50 Tam notes the three papers must have been pasted together before printing, since there exists a note in Shrestha's collection which shows part of the design of the backside on the face of the note on a portion of paper which had folded up. cf. Shrestha, *op. cit.* p. 2-3. There is no doubt that the Srang notes were pasted together before printing, since numerous 100 Srang notes exist, showing what is generally called "Kissprint", i.e. the paper had creased during printing and when carefully drawn apart reveals white stripes on both side of the note. Had the parts been glued together only after printing then white stripes would show only on one side of the note or - more likely - not at all.

24. Rhodes, N.G., *loc. cit.* Rhodes gives the name "Currency office" for the place were banknotes were numbered.
Xiao Huaiyuan, *op. cit.*, chapter 5

was l-trug-pa.²⁵ It seems that the calligraphy of the number on the banknote is nearly perfect and not easy to copy which makes forging very difficult.²⁶

The last and most important step for the production of the paper notes was the application of two seals, one red on the left and one black on the right side of the obverse of the banknotes. The red seal is generally taken as the one which represent the authority of the Dalai Lama and it is reported that it was - at least in the case of the early paper notes - used only in the presence of the Dalai Lama. The red seal does not show any script, it is purely ornamental and its design is called "yig man" (without script) in Tibetan.²⁷ The central part of the black seal of the early notes is filled with two columns of "phags-pa" characters whose transliteration is: "gzhung dngul khang." This can be translated as "government treasury" or "government bank" and most probably refers to the financial institution (most referred to as "bank") which according to some Chinese sources was founded already in 1913 or, as mentioned above, in 1925.

2. The Srang Issues (plates VI-IX)

After the thirteenth Dalai Lama had died in December 1933, Tibet entered a period of political instability. The first Tibetan banknotes had been issued in strictly controlled number and - as we have seen - to a certain extent had a gold backing. It seems that both these precautions were already largely abandoned after the opening of the Trabshi Lekhung Mint whose operation started in 1932. Banknotes were issued in ever large number to cover government deficits and inflation became ever bigger, particularly after the 100 Srang notes were released in 1937. By 1959 the price for barley, the main Tibetan staple, was twenty times that of 1936.²⁸

While the early notes in Tam were monochrome with the exception of the second 50 Tam issue, each of the notes in "Srang" (1 Srang +6 2/3 tam or tangka) was printed with more than one colour which made it necessary to use more than one block for printing of each side of the notes. Apart from the already mentioned 100 Srang note which was printed until 1959 (plate IX) the following issues were released :

1. 10 Srang (1941-1948; plate VI)
2. 5 Srang (1942-1946; plate VII)
3. 25 Srang (1949 -1955; plate VIII)

25. Goldstein, Melvin C.: A History of Modern Tibet, Indian edition, New Delhi 1993 (U.S. edition 1989), p. 150, note 5. According to Goldstein the l-trug-pas were also employed as carvers of woodblocks, copied official reports and files and kept the diary of the Dalai Lama. However we don't know if they were also employed to carve the woodblocks for the first banknote series.

26. Harrer, Heinrich: Sieben Jahre in Tibet, Wien 1952, p. 174.

27. Surkhang, W.G.: Letter to H. Richardson dated August 9 1966.

28. Xiao Huaiyuan, op. cit., chapter 6.

For further examples of inflation in Tibet see: Gabrisch Karl: Geld aus Tibet, Winterthur 1990, p. 52 and Bertsch, Wolfgang: Exotisches Papiergeld aus Tibet, Part II. In: Der Geldscheinsammler, Vol. 8, July 1994, p. 18.

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The first 50,000 notes of 100 Srang were in the denomination "tam srang" and had the same red seal printed on them as the earlier "tam" notes. Subsequent Srang notes however bear a newly created, smaller red seal, on which the Tibetan character "cha" can be seen together with other undecipherable characters (plate IX). While the black seals printed on the 5 Srang and 10 Srang notes (plates VI and VII) has the same inscription in "phags-pa" as the one found on the earlier "Tam" notes, but is of smaller size, a new black seal was created for the 25 and 100 Srang notes (plates VIII and IX). Its inscription is also in phags pa letters which read: "srid zhi dpal 'bar' which has been translated as "may every form of being increase the good"²⁹ While Chinese authors, basing their view on Tibetan documents, believe that this seal refers to the mint Trabshi Lekhung³⁰, other authorities relate it to the Council of Ministers (bka' gshags).³¹

Only in 1947 it was decided to send a trade mission abroad whose main task should be the purchase of silver and gold for backing of the paper currency as requested by Tsarong Dzaza, Trunyichenmmo Cawtang and Tsipön Shakabpa who jointly headed the Trabshi mint at that time. In May 1949 the trade mission of Tibet actually bought \$ 425,800 worth of gold from the United States.³² We cannot be sure however if this gold was actually used to back Tibet's paper currency; anyhow, the amount of gold would have been insufficient to back the ever increasing numbers of notes which were issued from 1950 onwards : According to statistics of Trabshi Lekhung between 1951 and 1959 banknotes to the total value of 97,900,000 Srang were issued. Between 1935 and 1950 the total value of the banknotes issued was 71,150,000 Srang.³³ Some or all of the gold purchases were stored in a treasury, called Langsai according to a Chinese source which reports that 30 ingots of gold and 100 silver ingots each weighing about 1000 Chinese Liang (= ca. 37 kg) were taken to India in 1950.³⁴

The paper for the Srang issues and that of the later 50 Tam issues was not produced any more in provinces southeast of Lhasa, but near Lhasa in a special paper factory, called Jing-Dong which was established in 1932 in a former cartridge factory. It was only operated

29. Gabrisch, Karl: Geld aus Tibet. Winterthur 1990, p. 49.

30. Zhu Jingzhong, Ci-Ren-Ping-Cuo and Yan Lungzhan: Yuan-Xi-Zang-Di-Fang-Qi-an-Bi-Gai-Kuang (A general introduction to the Tibetan local currency), Lhasa 1989.

31. Surkhang, W.G.: Letter to Hugh Richardson, dated 9. 8. 1966.

32. Goldstein, Melvyn, A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951, Indian edition, New Delhi 1993, p. 570-571 and p. 606, footnote 124.

A copy of a letter from the Reserve Bank of India, Calcutta, to L. Y. Pangdatshang, Tibet Government Trade Agent, Kalimpong, dated 7th July 1949 mentions as import licence which allowed Tibet to import 12,044.090 fine Troy ounces of gold from the USA. (a copy of this letter is presently in the possession of the author)

33. Zhu Jingzhong, Ci-Ren-Ping-Cuo and Yan Lungzhan: Yuan-Xi-Zang-Di-Fang-Qi-an-Bi-Gai-Kuang (A general introduction to the Tibetan local currency), Lhasa 1989

34. Xiao Huaiyuan, op. cit., chapter 7

during three months each year³⁵ and manned by forced labour which was recruited from five large estates. The paper produced there was only used for banknotes and its sale to private persons forbidden. The monthly paper production is estimated at 3000 boxes each containing between 500 and 1000 sheets of paper.³⁶ Most probably this paper was produced from different raw material than the paper used for the first banknote series³⁷ In general one can observe that the paper used for the Srang notes is much thinner than that used for the early Tam notes and it tends to become thinner yet during the later years of issue, obviously in order to make the same amount of raw material last for larger number of banknotes.

The Srang notes show the same legend in two lines printed in between the two sheets which are glued together, except for the 5 Srang note which has a one line legend as "watermark". However the method of producing this "watermark" was not the same as the one in the case of the Tam notes. Examples of late 100 and 25 Srang notes which were examined recently, have shown that the interior legend was not printed on a separate piece of paper but directly in reversed script on the backside of the sheet of the face or in normal script on the backside of the back sheet of the notes.³⁸ This new method may have been initiated already in the course of the printing of the multicoloured 50 Tam notes.

The colours for printing the banknotes continued to be imported from India³⁹ and for the Srang issue the colour varieties during the many years of issue are not as great as was in the case of early Tam notes. They are particularly noticeable among the 100 Srang notes which are spread over the largest period of issue.

The Tibetan banknotes were demonetized together with the Tibetan coinage in August 1959; this date marks the end of Tibet's short history of paper currency. The official exchange rate was fixed by the Chinese at 50 Srang in paper currency equals one Yuan Renminbi.

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35. Spencer Chapman visited Trabshi Lekhung in late 1936 or early 1937 and writes "I had heard that owing to the fact that the paint on the paper notes will dry only during the three months of summer, the Tibetans are saved from the dangers of inflation: but this story, attractive as it is, is not true." (*Memoirs of a Mountaineer*, London 1945 (first published as "Lhasa: the Holy City", London 1938), p. 375. Chapman's informant most probably confused the banknotes paper production with the printing of the notes.
 36. Institute of Finance of the Tibet Branch of the People's Bank of China: Xi-Zhang-Di-Fang-Zhen-Fu-De-Zhao-Bi-Chang (The Mint of the local Tibetan Government). In: *China Numismatics*, Nr. 28 (Beijing 1990.1), p. 29-42.
 37. According to analysis the fibres in the paper of the 100 and 25 Srang notes are of *Daphne Papvracea* and *Daphne Bholua*. Cf. Bower, Peter: *Banknote Examination. Five Tibetan Banknotes* from the collection of Colin Narbeth. London 1995, p. 6.
 38. Bower, Peter, *op. cit.*, *passim*
 39. One of the suppliers of colours to Tibet was John Dickinson & Co. Ltd. of Calcutta. An invoice of this company, dated 11. 5. 1950 and addressed to Tsipon Shakabpa (sic for Shakabpa who was Tibetan Government agent in Calcutta at that time) mentions the following colours: scarlet red, bright green, brilliant blue, primrose chrome, bronze blue. Some of these colours were possibly also used for printing post stamps which were produced in Trabshi Lekhung at the same time as the banknotes. (my thanks to Jigme Shakabpa for kindly leaving me a copy of the Dickinson invoice).

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At that time the Chinese silver dollar was exchanged for 1.566 Yuan Renminbi or 3 Rupees. According to these exchange rate the value of the Rupee in paper Srang was 26.1 and the value of the Silver dollar 78.3 Srang.⁴⁰ Twelve years earlier (in 1947) 50 Srang were worth 3.33 Mexican silver dollars in Sakya.⁴¹ Taking the Mexican Dollar as being at par with the Chinese Dollar we can calculate that in 1959 the Tibetan paper Srang (in relation to the silver dollar) was 5.22 times worth less than in 1947.

Despite the fact that after 1935 the paper currency lost more and more of its value, it was accepted by the population and it is reported for 1949 that in Lhasa it was even preferred to Tibetan coins. However it had to compete with Indian paper currency which was also used in Lhasa at that time.⁴²

In Western literature it is mentioned that notes of 100, 150 and 500 Tangkas were issued.⁴³ If such notes ever existed, it would be surprising that none of them has survived. Chinese authors who had access to Tibetan government documents do not mention such notes of high denomination in Tangka.

It is however probable that the Tibetan government was preparing the issue of new banknotes, possibly some of higher denominations, as late as 1959. In March 1959 the Chinese Army closed down Trabshi Lekhung and confiscated printing blocks and unissued banknotes.⁴⁴ Among the confiscated printing blocks there were probably some destined for new issues. In the collection of the author there is a printing block of the middle part of an unissued note of unknown denomination⁴⁵: the central design shows two snow lions standing on either side of a double dorje (visvavajra). The design is engraved on a thin metal sheet which is mounted on a woodblock. Possibly this block was produced for the planned issue of new notes (plate X).

40. Xiao Huaiyuan, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7

41. Cassinelli, C.W. and Ekvall, Robert B.: *A Tibetan Principality: The Political System of Sa skya*, New York 1969, p. 376 (Appendix D)

42. Lowell, Thomas: *Tibet in Gewitte. Die letzte Reise nach Lhasa*. (original title: *Out of this World*), Berlin 1951, pp. 26-27.

43. cf. Macdonald, David : *Cultural Heritage of Tibet* (originally published as "The Land of the Lama, London 1929), New Delhi 1978, p. 222. Maraini, Fosco: *Secret Tibet*, London 1954, P. 194. Macdonald mentions 150 and 500 Tangka notes is bright blue colour, while Maraini writes about 100 and 500 Tangka notes

44. Xiao Huaiyuan, *op. cit.*, chapter 7

45. Bertsch, Wolfgang: *Some Notes on Tibetan Paper Currency*. In: *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. XVI, Nr. 1. Spring 1991, pp. 137 (Plate V).

PLATES

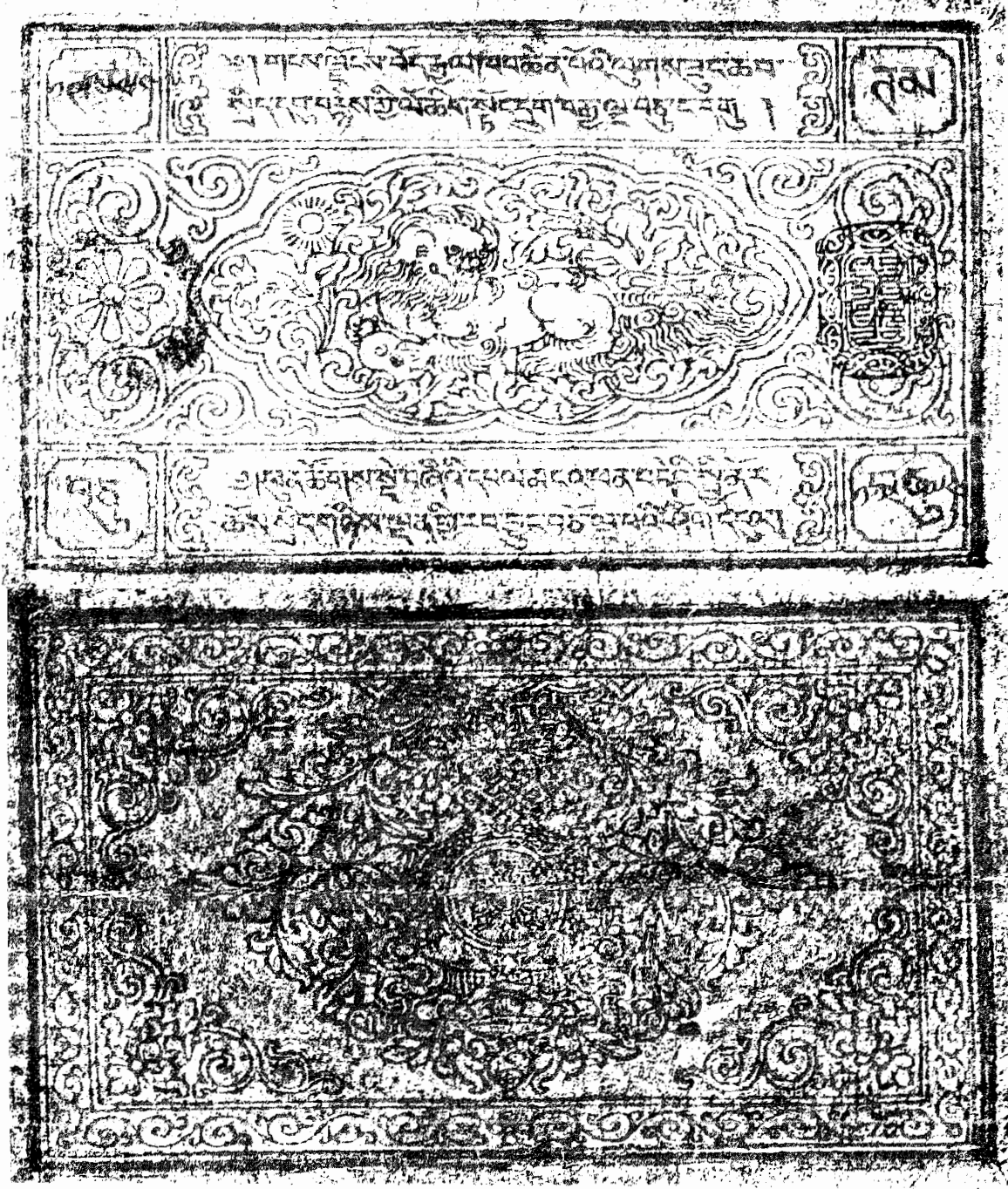


Plate I
10 Tam noie (red). Serial Nr. 17674. Date: T.E. 1659 (15th cycle)

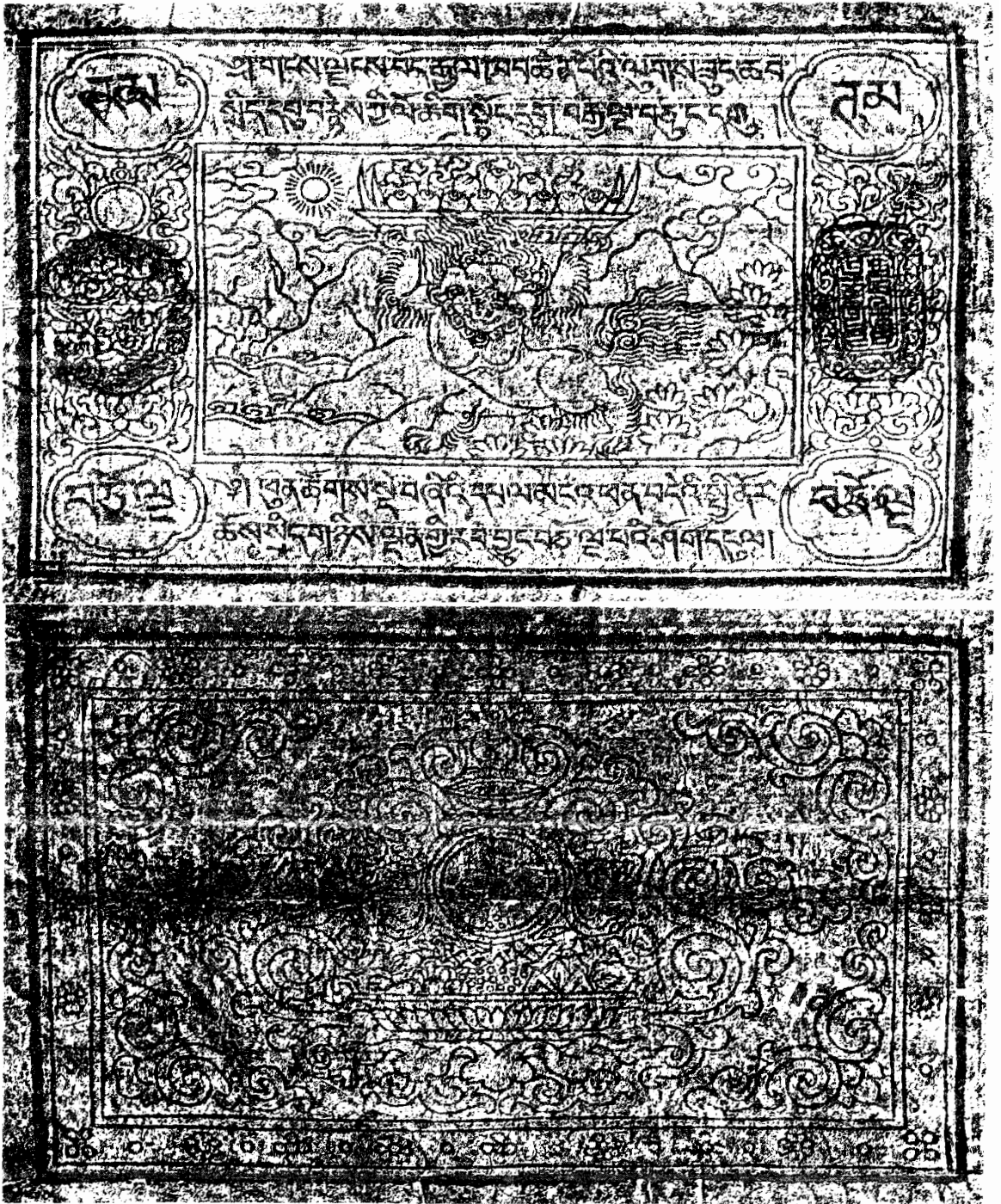


Plate II

15 Tam note (violet), Serial Nr. 482, Date: T.E 1659 (15th cycle)

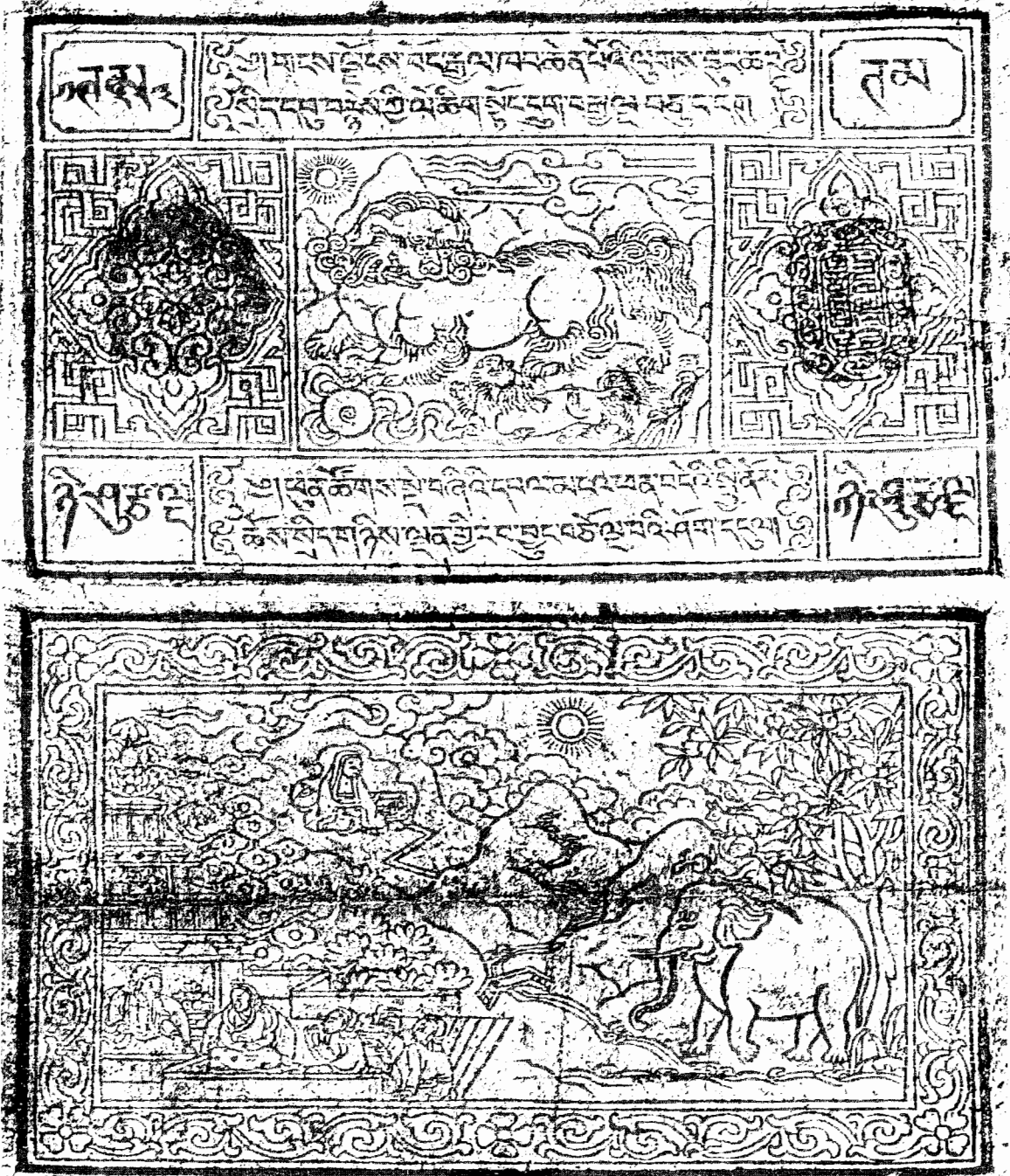


Plate III

25 Tam (brown). Serial Nr. 15383. Date: T.E 1659 (15th cycle)



Plate IV

50 Tam (blue), Serial Nr. 25200, Date: T.E 1659 (15th cycle)

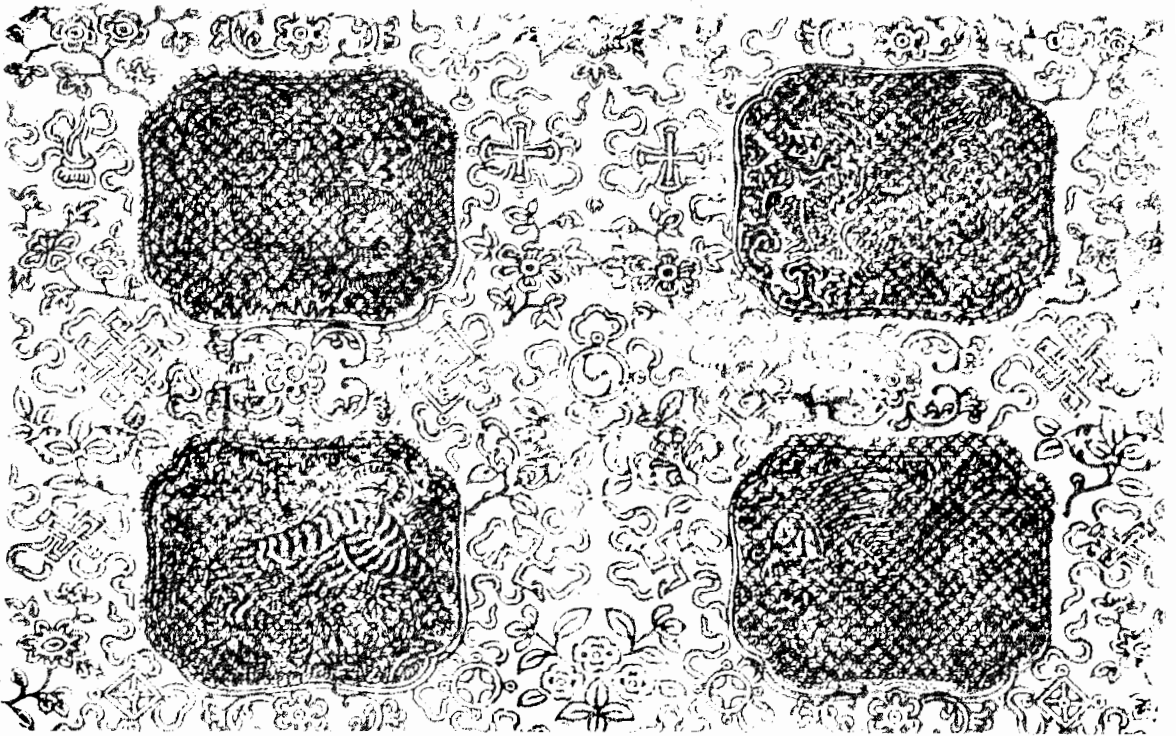


Plate V

50 Tam (red/yellow/blue). Serial Nr. 100894. Date: T.E 1687 (16th cycle)

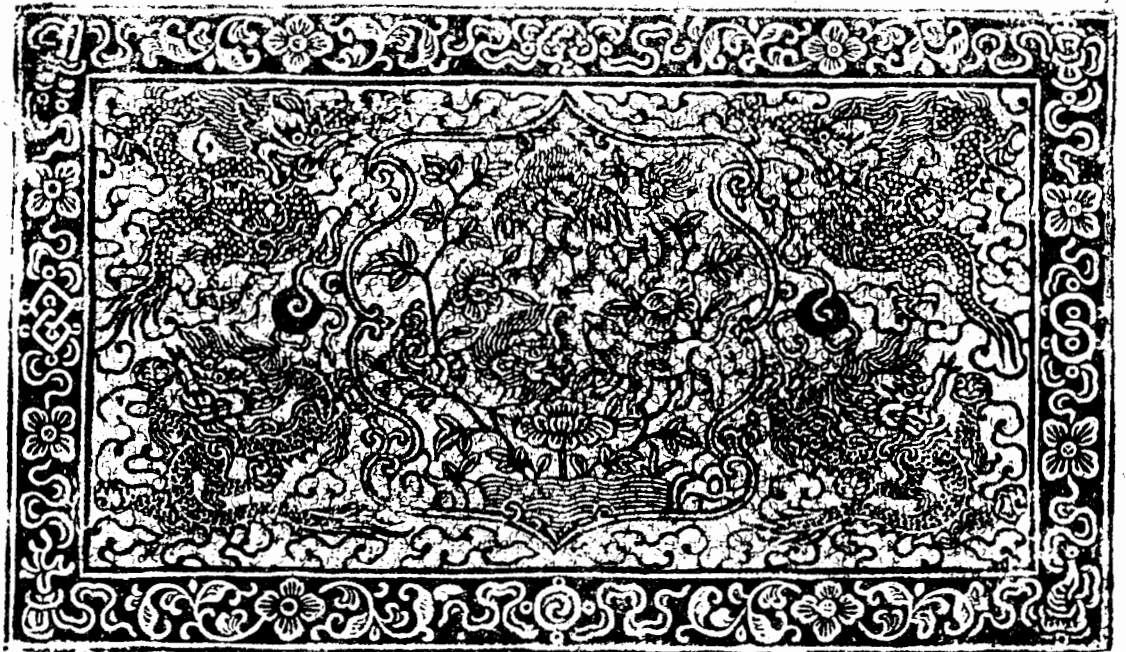


Plate VI

10 Srang (blue/red). Serial Nr. ga 020014. Date: T.E 1693 (16th cycle)

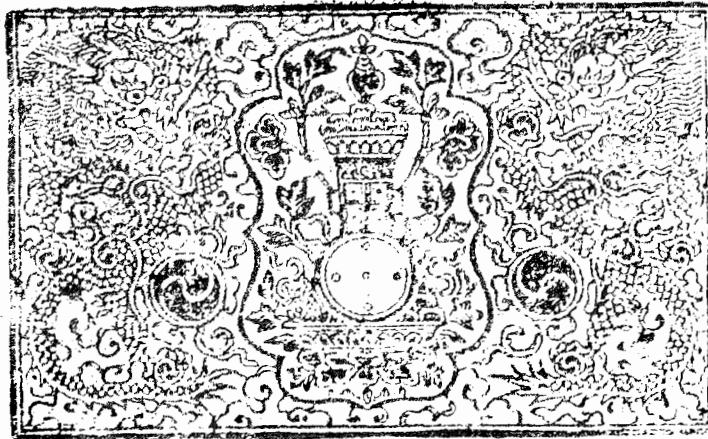


Plate VII

5Srang (blue/red), Serial Nr. ka 000122, No. T.E. Date: (16th cycle)

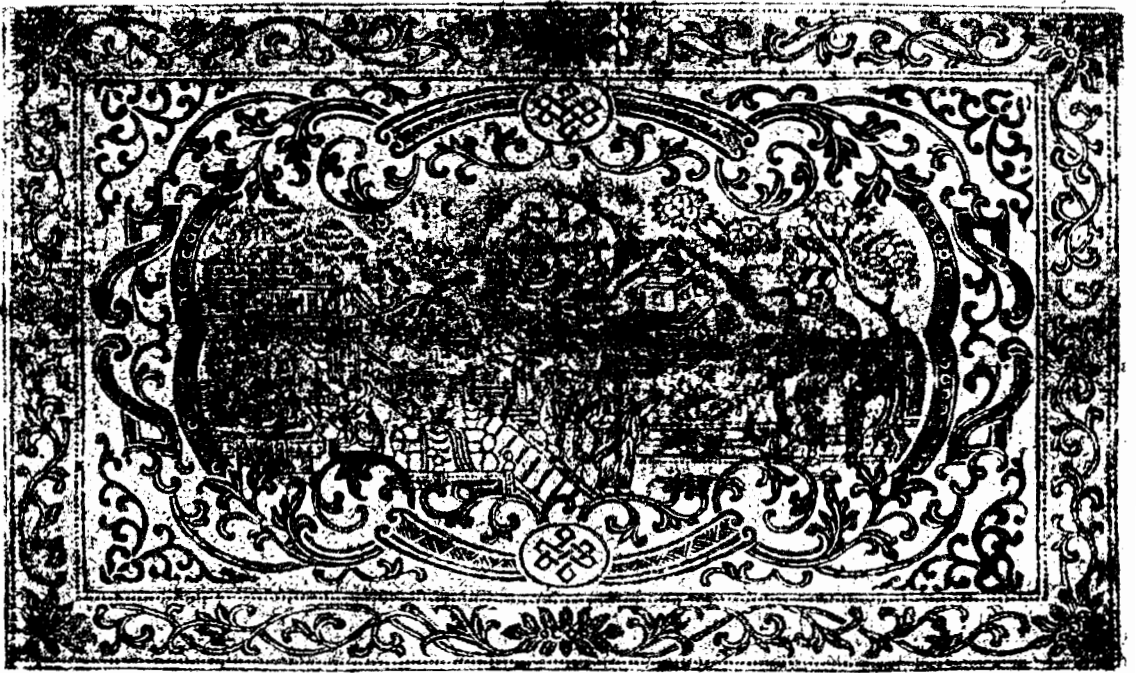


Plate VIII
25 Srang (red/yellow/blue). Serial Nr. ka 035308.
Neither T.E. date nor cycle are indicated on this note.



Plate IX

100 Srang (red/yellow/green/blue). Serial Nr. tha 04776
Neither T.E. date nor cycle are indicated on this note.



Plate X

Middle part of face side of unissued note of unknown date and denomination.
Late 1950ies.

CULTURAL HISTORY OF LADAKH PART - I

-Mrs. Kamala Mukherjee

Ladak which is aptly known as western Tibet, is situated between 70°15'E to 75°15'E longitude and 32°15'N to 36°N latitude in the Trans-Himalayan region. It is strategically located at junction of four or five important regions; Afganistan-Turkestan on the North and North-West, China-Tibet on the North, Pakistan (since 1947) on the West, and India on the South. At 12000 feet, Ladakh with its capital Leh, is one of the highest inhabited plateaus in the world. Owing to its location, it served as an overland Trade Centre between Central Asian regions like Yarkhand, Kashgar, Khotan, Tibet as well as the Indian regions of Punjab and Naggar in the bygone days. During the summer months ranging between July and October, caravans from all these regions arrived here after negotiating various mountain passes and the place would suddenly be turned into a veritable market for exchanging goods and commodities through the barter system. The lowest of the passes is Zozi-la which once comprised the boundary between Kashmir and Ladakh; and the highest ones are Mutag-la (19000ft.) and Karakoram (18002ft.). Besides being the only routes for transporting merchandise, these passes were veritable highways for cultural exchanges, linking people representing diverse cultural groups and thus helped in furthering mutual acculturation and assimilation of thoughts. These again were the routes through which invaders and plunderers galore made inroads into the mainland of India ever since the time of Alexander. Portuguese and Jesuit Fathers also trudged their way to Central Asia, Tibet and the adjoining regions through these routes.

Ladak, hailed as one of the principal bastions of Tibetan Buddhism, was annexed to the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1843 A.D. by the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh with the tacit approval of British. The aforementioned routes are less frequented now more on account of political imbroglios and consequent blockades rather than any natural hazard or physical barrier. The pristine virility and vigour with respect to the practice and dissemination of Buddhism has been adversely affected though the Buddhist creed still thrives miraculously amongst the devout ones. But the fact remains that the association of Ladakh with the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not only incongruous from socio-religious stance, but equally self-effacing. The influx of tourists from all over the world and the resultant process of acculturation may very soon obliterate the culture and religion that once shaped the history of Ladakh. Despite their incessant and impassioned appeals to be granted an autonomous status, the people of Ladakh are agonised at the Union government's stoic refusal and the more palliative means adopted. Persistent importunities by the people to be recognised at least as a Union Territory has ultimately resulted in the formation of the Ladakh Autonomous Council which was inaugurated by a representative of the Indian government in the month of September, 1995.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It has been rightly surmised that the broader dissemination of Buddhism began with the second Buddhist council which was held in 237 B.C. during the reign of emperor Ashoka.

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(Some Scholars attribute this to be the third council considering a convention held at Vaishali under the aegis of the king Kalashoka to be the second council). Priyadarshi Ashoka sent his Buddhist emissaries, scholars and teachers to farflung countries like China, Korea etc. However, it was after the fourth council held during the reign of the Saka king Kanishka at Kashmir that the passes of Kairong and Kuti bridging Nepal and Kashmir as well as the old trade routes became once again active with Buddhist Pandit and Lamas traversing through them. Fa-Hien, Huen-Tsang and such other travellers from China came through these inaccessible routes. Kashmir remained as an important centre of Buddhist learning for ages long receiving zealous patronage from the kings, a fact corroborated by Kalhana's Rajatarngini.

In the history of Tibet, the first great who introduced the Buddhist creed as the State religion was the accomplished ruler Srong-bTsan sGam-po who was a contemporary of King Harshavardhana Siladitya of Kanauj, Prophet Muhammad of Mecca, Huen-tsang and the Chinese emperor named T'aijung. It was he who directed his minister Thu-mi Sambhota to devise a script and grammar for the Tibetan language thereafter presiding over the gargantuan task of translating canonical and non-canonical works into Tibetan from their original SANSKRIT AND PALI.

Another great landmark in the annals of Tibet was during the reign of king Khri-srong-ldeu-bTsan when at the behest of the royal preceptor Pandit Santarakshita (Shi-ba-hTsho), the great Master of esotericism Guru Padmasambhava arrived at Tibet and firmly established the Buddhist religion after taming and exorcising the Bon-po priests and its votaries. In the year c. 816 A.D., Ral-Pa-Chen sat on the throne of Tibet. He was the younger son of king Khri-lde-srong btsan who in turn was the second son of king Khri-srong-lDeu-bTsan. Ral-Pa-Chen was a paragon of human excellence, a veritable blend of administrative skill, military valour, and devotion to the Dharma. While his expansionist ventures extended the territory of his kingdom far beyond the frontiers that he had initially inherited, he also patronised the Buddha Dharma with such zeal that its reverberation could be felt throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom. All these took sudden turn when one day, he was assassinated by his elder brother named Glang-darma who had been nurturing a deep-rooted hate for the king who had been by dint of his merit, their father's choice as the successor superseding his claims as the eldest son. The ascent of Glang-darma to the throne ushered in, an age of total anarchy. At his behest, monasteries were closed, religious ceremonies banned and monks were forced to give up their vows of renunciation and celibacy and instead live the lives of ordinary laity. His well garnered hate for the popular spread of Dharma which he took to be the elementary factor behind his brother's successes turned to be his achilles' heel till atlast, he was killed by a monk named Lha-lung-dPal-Gyi rDo-rJe masquerading as a dancer attired in black, in the year 841 A.D. Thus ended a saga of ruthless religious persecution. It took decades for the wounds inflicted by this apostate king to heal and much longer for the scars to disappear. Chaotic condition prevailed all over the country with the Bon priests once again returning back with vehement resurgence. The successors of Glang-darma proved to be weaklings and could not consolidate their authority over the kingdom. They lost their hold over the mighty empire that had been built by the valiant Khri-srong-lDeu-bTsan. dPal-'Khor-bTsan (906-923 A.D) was the last king in this line who left Lhasa and migrated to western Tibet where he is famed to have brought the

three districts-Ladakh, sPurang and Guge* under his suzerain control and later let his three sons rule over them. These kings and their descendants were consummate patrons of the Buddhist faith and caused the translation of many Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. They also sent regular emissaries to Kashmir and the adjoining lands. Among these luminaries, the name of Jnanaprava or Ye-shes-hod also known as Lha-bLama shines exclusively for being instrumental in bringing the famed master Atisha Dipanakar to Tibet. He relinquished his throne in favour of his nephew so that he could devote his time to religious matters. With the noble intention to introduce religious reformation in his country, this great prince invited Atisha Dipanakar Srijnana who hailed from the Vikramasila Vihar. Till his death in 1054 A.D., the Acarya travelled to many places and instilled discipline and faith among the monks encouraging them to live spartan lives dwelling more on practice and rigorous study. During the course of his journey in Tibet, he also met the great translator Rinchen-Zanpo or Ratnaprabha. The latter is believed to have been spiritually inspired by the Acharya and is famed for the establishment of 104 monasteries which was accomplished with munificent help from the royalty. Acarya Dipanakar's multitudinous activities gave a fesh fillip to the dwindling spirit of the Buddhist faith in Tibet which gained universal acceptance and popularity. Based on the teachings of Asanga and Maitreya, he established a new order called Bka'-gDams-pa which received further impetus under the able stewardship of his principal disciple named Brom-sTon-pa and other successive teachers and lineage holders. Atisha enjoined strict discipline among the monks and forbade the people from indulging in occult practices. Many siddhs and teachers flourished and fed the flame of Atisha's reformativ tradition which never allowed the creed to be maligned by impurities of precept and practice. Reformers and teachers galore appeared on the horizon fired by the example set by Atisha, to purge the faith and its doctrine from vulgar dilutions. Among the teachers who belong to the earlier period of transmission, the names of Marpa and Mila-respa stand out distinctively. Marpa Lo-Tsawa or Marpa the translator who was a disciple of Naro-pa of Magadha ushered in a new era of doctrinal dissemination based on the direct teaching of the Buddha. This new school was known as Bka-rGyud-pa and its doctrine was widely taught by his chief disciple Mila-respa, the cotton-clad yogi. This school further developed into four major and eight minor school in the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The 13th century saw the beginning of Sakya hegemony over Tibet when the high abbot of Sakya went to China on invitation by the Chinese emperor to become the latter's preceptor and returned to Tibet to be installed as the ruler of the country. The Mongol emperor or China Kublai Khan was infact initiated into the Buddhist faith by Phags-pa, the Sakya hierarch who was allowed to rule Tibet as a theocracy. Thus a new school of the Buddhist esoteric tradition called Sakya-pa was introduced whose doctrines were widely disseminated through out Tibet. The rise of king Byang-chub rGyalchen in the 14th century eclipsed the power of the Sakyas and ushered in a new dynasty which ruled for around three centuries till its overthrow by the king of Tsang in 1635 A.D. The latter was in turn vanquished by the Mongol king Gushi Khan who offered the spiritual and temporal sovereignty of Tibet to the great fifth Dalai Lama in year 1642 A. D. Meanwhile, dwelling

*The three regions of western Tibet collectively known as MNga-Ri-sKor-GSum consisted (1) sPu-Rang, Mang-Yul & Zaugs-DKar (2) Zhang Zhung, Khri-Te sTod-sMad (3) 'Chim Mam Li, Bru-Sha, sPal Ti. Ref. : Bod rGya 'Tsig Mrdzod Chan-Mo

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on the fourth important Buddhist school of Tibet, the great reformer Tsong-Khapa who was born in 1357 A.D. was much inspired by the tradition established earlier by Acarya Atisha Dipanker. He reorganised the monastic order and streamlined the curriculum of the monks laying great emphasis on learning based on logic, discipline and academic erudition. He founded the dGa'-lDan monastery in the year 1408 A.D. and established the order known as dGa'-lDan Pa'i-Lugs which later on became famous as the dGe-Lugs-Pa School. The third hierarch of this order named bSod-Nams rGya-mTsho who lived in the 16th century was conferred the title of Tale bLama by the Mongol emperor Altan Khan which in the Mongolian language meant the same as the Tibetan word rGya-mTsho or Ocean. The first hierarchy too was recognised in retrospect as the first Tale Lama and the subsequent successors were recognised as the Avatars or re-incarnations of the Tale Lama, a term which came to pronounced as Dalai Lama in the subsequent years.

The fate of Ladakh or western Tibet was more linked with Turkestan and central Asia during the early 13th century although Lhasa remained the religious pilgrimage/centre and sanctum sanctorum. In 1207 A.D. during the rule of bKra-Shis-dGon, the Mongol terror Jenghis Khan overran this region during his victory march and the king was compelled to surrender. Not much is known about the genealogy of the succession of kings following bKra-shis dGon. One of the later rulers who ruled in the year 1533 A.D. had his capital in Leh. He established a monastery and installed there in a huge statue of Maitreya Buddha and another of Avalokiteswara. His palace is in ruins though the monastery stands till this day. He seems to have been adept in warfare and annexed Baltistan, Guge as well as some regions in the west. He is also reputed to have thwarted the invasion by Mirza Haider in 1549 A.D. In 1675 A.D., the next king Jamyang rNam-rGyal was captured by the Balti ruler Ali Mir and was forced to embrace the Islamic faith. Ali Mir gave his daughter in marriage to the royal captive and eventually allowed him conditional freedom. His Tibetan wife bore him a son named Senge rNam-rGyal who shifted the capital to Basgo. He was a powerful king and a patron of learning. Many Sanskrit texts were translated during his time and some books were printed in letters of silver and gold. He amassed a fortune through his conquests and even made an abortive attempt to conquer Lhasa. His son Deleg too was a mighty king who quelled innumerable rebellions. The famous Shey monastery was built by him. He died in a disaster in the year 1645 A.D. This king died as Muslim proselyte since he was forced to accept the Islamic faith after his defeat at the hands of the Mughals. He even built a mosque in Ladakh and remained the rest of his life in Kashmir. His son and successor Nyima rNam-rGyal established peace and once again paved the way for progress in various fields like art, literature and small industries like publication of manuscripts in calligraphy and even setting up a paper marking factory. He also built memorials in the form of chaityas or mChod-rTen and monasteries in Zaskar, Rupsu and Nubra districts. Nyima rNam-rGyal who ascended the throne in the year 1705 A.D., died in 1734 A.D. bringing to a close three memorable decades of progress, peace and prosperity. Following his death, there were regular incursions by Muslims from Turkestan and Tibet. Ladakh lost huge tracts of pastureland and gold fields which seriously jeopardised its overland trade and commerce. Heavy war indemnities and taxes exacted by the conquerors further impoverished and destituted the inhabitants of Ladakh. Despite all such reverses, the Ladakhis dauntlessly held on to their faith in the Dharma with fortitude and devotion. The downfall of the Mughal empire gave Ladakh some moments of

respite but the sanguinary designs of the Dogra chief Zorawar Singh for the conquest of Tibet once again blew the clouds of war over its sky. The Dogra ruler had to pay dearly with his life while clashing his sword with the Tibetan army.

In the year 1843, Gulab Singh the Dogra ruler of Kashmir annexed Ladakh with Lahyul-Spiti with the concurrence given by the British. In the wake of this, many of the monasteries of Ladakh were plundered and the king of Ladakh who was also the head of Hemis monastery was banished to Stok. In due course of time, the British took back Lahyul and Spiti from Sardar Gulab Sing in exchange for some other areas with a view to enhance their inland trade with Tibet and Central Asia. Eric Shipton was the last political agent in Kashgar upto 1947.

After the partition in 1947, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union along with Jammu and Kashmir. The western part of Gilgit and Baltistan came under the domain of the Republic of Pakistan in 1984 and a portion of the eastern part of Aksai Chin was annexed by China in 1962. All these developments left their impact from the geo-political stance and enhanced the strategic importance of Ladakh which had to face the brunt of Pakistan's belligerence during the Indo-Pakistan war. Despite all such vagaries of events, the theistic favour of the people of Ladakh remained wholly intact and firm. Ladakh still remains a stronghold of the Buddhist faith. Monks as well as the laity still throng the precincts of the monasteries during festive occasions to absorb the lilting melody of the ritual symphony, blending with the rich baritone of the chanting monks.... which is proof of the fact that the Enlightened one still lives in the hearts of the people of Ladakh and His doctrine continues to pervade all the quarters of Ladakh:

**GOMPAS ON THE WAY FROM SRINAGAR TO LEH
PART II**

-Mrs. Kamala Mukherjee

GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Main cultural and religious centres of Ladakhi Buddhists are the Gompas (Gon-Pa) the solitary place of meditation.

There are sixteen big and extensive gompas in Ladakh of all the sects of Mahayana Buddhism. Besides, each village has its own Gompa-with many walls, chortens, mendok and stones carved with Om Mani Padme Hum everywhere. Ladakh or Western Tibet is thus carrying the tradition of Buddhism from 10th century A.D. - when this religion suffered in the Capital Lhasa. From the Srinagar-Leh bus route which followed the former caravan route at the ancient travellers route-ancient ruins of gompas or chorten can be seen after crossing the Zo-zila (11,570') which was once the boundary of Kashmir and Tibet. After the partition-Karghil the capital of Baltistan inhabited by Muslims of Sunni and Shia sects was annexed to Ladakh-thus changing the environment.

After crossing Zo-zila-there is a halting place in Dras-which is the second coldest place in the world. Two ruined statues-known as Avalokiteswara and his companion can be seen with nearly obliterated rock carvings. North of this place reside Dards and Baltis-converted now to Islam. Then comes Karghil-now second city of Ladakh inhabited mainly by Muslim people of high and important position. After this comes the first Gompa-

(1) namely Shargola-Particularly from here the Buddhist region begins. It is a cave temple on a high hill, mainly of black stone-except the front which is painted white. It means morning star (as it faces east). On the bank of Waka river-built by a Tibetan lama of Drukpa sect who named it as Ma-Khang (House of the mother) now it belongs to Gelugpa order or Yellow Hat Sect.

(2) The road then leads to a flat land-Mulbeik pronounced Mulbek-where a twenty feet High Maitreya (designated as a future Buddha) statue carved on rock in Indian style-with knee length sacred thread. The dress is kingly with a crown a top the head, with anklets in both hands reminding one of Vishnu. In the four hands there are prayer wheel and Abhaya Mudra and beads (Rosary Wheel) and lotus on the left hand.

It was built by the famous lotsawa (translator) Rin-Chen bZang-Po during the reign of saintly king Gu-ge Ye-Shes-'od in 1054. Due to arid climate, it still exists after 1000 years, the face of the statue is fully wrought with contemplative aura.

Below the alter, there is a small underground gompa with a beautiful reclining figure of Avalokiteswara with eleven hands on each side and nine heads. In a cave nearby there are stone and metal statue of Sakyamuni, Padmasambhava and Tara as well as of Kusak Bakula, Tashi lama and Dalai Lama, with a small library. It belongs to the red hat Drukpa sect built by an unknown lama.

After passing Naika-la (flying Pillars) 12220'- is Bodh Kharbu with statue of Avalokiteswara now in ruins. This was once the capital of king Dilden (1620-40) but defeated by the Muslim invaders. Then came Khaltsc (means snowy mountain) with some

statues of different Buddhist pantheon and some rock carvings of the Dards both in Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts with figures of ibex and fighting scenes with bow and arrow. In this area mostly Darbs and Mons live-now embraced Islam.

From Khaltse one has to cross another 13470' Fatu la pass-again to descend 2000' ft. to Lamayuru-the oldest of the gompas built by Naropa in 12th century. It belongs to Brigunpa sect and is now under the Tobdan Bakula of Bhutan (detailed later) It was built on a lake dried up by the divine power of Naropa.

East of Khaltse is Basgo-capital of Ladakh during the reign of Sengya Namgyal-Apart from the ruins of old palace there was a beautiful statue of maitreya Buddha-now broken. Next comes the village of Saspol where the ruins of the old monastery spread in a wide area. It was built 400 years ago. It was destroyed by the Balti invaders during the reign of Deleg Namgyal (1640-1680).

From Saspol-one has to reach the famous Alchi Gompa on the other side of the Indus river. It was also built by Rinchen Zangpo-1000 years ago with a huge statue of Avalokiteswara, manuscripts with a historical chronicle of Ladakhi kings. Rinchen Zangpo appointed some of Kashmiri artists-as proved by the decorations on the wooden arch (Details later).

Next comes another famous gompa Likir of the Gelugpa Sect on the wayside hill on the road from Saspol to Nymo. Then comes Phyang means External forces-which is situated 25 Km from the road to Leh. It belongs to Brigunpa Sect also. There is a statue of Buddha of exquisite beauty with long ears (one of the signs of greatness in Buddhist belief). There is a good library also besides other statues (Later described in detail) near the airport on a hill. It belongs to Yellow Hat Sect-founded by the great teacher Tsongkhapa-whose big statue draws the attention of visitors and worth seeing. There is a huge statue of Mahakal covered with tinkers.

REPORT ON THE MAIN GOMPAS OF LADAKH

Report on some main gompas of Ladakh are given here so that the life-style and history of Ladakhese can be learnt. The root word of Gompa is Gon-pa (secluded place), by verbal utterance it is transformed to Gompa. Most of gompa are situated on roadside of the trade route, the merchants used to take shelter here. The Gompas in brief are named as follows:

1. Lamayuru : Of all the gompas this is the oldest in Ladakh. At present this is the monastery of the Brigunpa community. The chief of this community lives in the monastery of Bhutan-teachings and appointments are done from there. It is said and written in old books too that here was a lake in the past. According to the legend, the illustrious Siddhacarya Naropa meditated in this cave during his life. The whole valley was a lake which Naropa is said to have dried by spell of mantra before founding this monastery in 990 A.D. On one side in the low land there is a loess of yellow earth indicating existence of lake in the past. By the side of Hoang-ho river in China such yellowish sandy-earth loess of this type are renowned. Sang-gang is the oldest of the temples of this place, built somewhat in a style which resembles Tabo of Spiti - this again is thought to be built imitating Ajanta. Below this old temple exists Yung-Drung temple of Bons (Yungdrung/Swastika) - though the frescos are now illegible and spoilt. The sign of Swastika is well-known token of welfare among the followers of

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Bon religion and Mongolians.

This gompa is situated on the top of a 12000 ft. high mountain below two thousand feet from the pass. The height of the temple is 30-31 ft., the roof is a square and plain. On the roof exist six flags and one Trishul on which fly-whisk and horn of sheep are tied. Two big Mani-chakras and various images are there in several rooms. Statues of Padmasambhava, Kushak (guru-preceptor) Atish Dipankar, Sakya Thupa are there, a big image of Avalokiteshvara is there, besides, image of Tara etc. goddesses with gold and silver plates. Apart all this, Thanka is there, i.e., pictures on wall or silk of Buddha on ten postures, six types of movements, the king Yama, the preceptor Lama, heaven and hell. On the other side wrapped in silk, Buddhist canonical works Kanjur and Tanjur are preserved. Water in small bowls and lamps of female yak butter ('Bri-Mar) are placed in front of each image. Ritual worship is held four times a day by lamas under an aged lama. On the other side, in small caves of a high mountain, lamas used to live-when in 1925 A.D. Roerichs came here, they used these caves. From yore, the lamas live in a mendicant life take lessons and impart doctrinal teachings to novice.

In the eleventh century the king of Ladakh brought the famous translator Rinchen Zangpo (Ratna bhadra) in Ladakh-he then built 108 monasteries in the whole country. Amongst these, Lamayuru was the central gompa. The temples around are tottering condition hence Lama do not reside here. At that time this area was under the influence of Kadampa community initiated by Atisha Dipankara. About the end of the sixteenth century, leprosy of king Jamyang Namgyal was cured by a lama of Brigungpa community named Namu-Dhan-Math-Sang. In exchange, the king gave him this place and monastery in charity. About one and quarter kilometre of this place of all four sides are considered as holy place. A revenue free village was endowed to meet the expenditure of this monastery. The gompas of the village below also belong to this community. Festivities with dance are held for three in March. The chief of this place is called Kushab Tobdang. Brigungpa community have two gompas in Ladakh-Phiyang and Bodhkharbutey.

2. Likhyr : means Sarpamondal (Klu-dKyil) or Akashbedis on way to Nyema after Saspull (Saspol) proceeding a little West from roads, on the north of Sindhu river near the old trade route but crossing the small river one has to climb a few step. We followed the route for going to Khalsey from Basgo, the old route is a long round - about way. This was built at the time of La-chen Gal-Pore (1050-80 A.D.). It is learnt from the stone inscriptions that this is a gompa of the Gelugpa community. The prayer hall has provision of sixty-seventy square seats. There are images and wall pictures around the walls of the room. Crossing three gateways and climbing steps at a height of 14000 ft. we were very tired. The Lamas accorded us receptions by uttering 'Jule Juley' (welcome) and showed us the hall. On one side of the alter we found a community emblem of the community of the present lama and a big board with a signature of the lama. The walls and wooden beams are full of decorative art works. All the pictures of are of gods and goddesses of Mahayana Pantheon. There is statue of the first Dalai Lama Gedundup (Gyalwa Rinpoche). The facial expressions of the lama preceptor and gods and goddesses are calm and noble. At the middle are retained 'Mendoke' or memorial mounds (Stupa) with relics of dead and famous Lama e.g., nail, hair, teeth mixed with gold and silver. Images of gods and goddesses abound all around. A side room is some-

what dark, one has to use lamp even in day time. The manuscripts wrapped in cloth are retained in wooden shelves on one side-apart from this there are big images of Sakya thubpa, Manjusri along with many small images. The facial expression of them are pleasant and compassionate. Outside are drawn pictures of Lord Buddha and Potala palace of Lhasa (main residential place of Dalai Lama). I was allowed to enter a small side-room, whatever I could, I saw from outside. I learnt earlier and it also appeared to my mind that-this room probably contained weapons previously, may be they are existing even now. In the past, if invasion of outside enemies occurred, these weapons were preserved for defence.

Next we were taken to roof by the lamas. Snow capped Karakoran mountain ranges were visible. The Kailash mountain seen far was mentioned as 'Ti-Si' by the lamas. From here the panorama all around is well visible. On the west lied the river Sindhu or Senge Khabab. The wealth, movable and immovable properties and the number of this Gompa almost equal of that of Hemis. There is good demand of earthen pots and other objects made of earth of this place. The sun is visible for long hours as the altitude of this place is high.

3. Alchi : To reach Al-Chi one has to go from Saspole crossing the hanging bridge over the river Sindhu. This was constructed about thousand years ago by the chief priest of the king of Ladakh and famous translator Richen Zangpo. This is situated at seventy Kilometres distance from Leh. The influence of Kashmir style is explicit in its architecture. Six temples are here. At the time of Khri-Sen-Namgyal during 1500-1532 A.D. the temple at the middle was renovated. We saw very costly and rare shawl with various fine needle-work and wooden objects with artwork of decorative flowers and plants. The chief temple is small 3m x 3m. On the three side walls of the room are retained innumerable images-on the right is a statue of Avalokitesvara. There are three images of three storey height made of earth in a narrow lane. The images are painted in various hues. In 985 A.D. the king of Ladakh brought Kashmir artisans for wall painting or frescos. This was once a centre for study of doctrine and cultural aspects of Buddhism. Here is preserved the hand-written manuscript. 'Ladakh Chronicles' - (Ladakh Gyalrab) - the history of kings of Ladakh are narrated here. But now the condition of Alchi is not good-the wall pictures are fading-they were getting spoilt with water of molten snow percolated from roof. Their wealth is lesser and number of lamas too is small.

4. Pe-Thub (Spituk) : The meaning is peak. This three storied Gompa is situated at five miles distance from Leh-on the southern bank of the river Sindhu near the aerodrome. The Gompa is situated at height, to reach it one has to get on steps. The old one has been renovated, besides a new temple too has been constructed. The images are six hundred years old and are wrapped in cloth-the Lamas uncovered them and showed to us. A large image of Mahakala cover by cloth is retained in the old temple, the cover is removed and shown to devotees on festive days. Images of Tamdin, Chamunda Kali etc. are there. Besides, there are few gilt images of Tara also. All the images are glittering - that means they are well looked after. But Sangka-pa image is the chief one. At the time of King Crag-Bumida (1410-1440 A.D) the famous Sangka-pa sent two ambassadors. The incarnate Lama of Kushak Bakula or Gelugpa community reside here. He is the religious head of all Gelugpa monasteries and temple of Ladakh.

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5. Hemis : The meaning is thought of Wisdom (Bodhi-Chinta Chara). This Gompa is the principal and largest of all in Ladakh. The distance is forty kilometre from Leh-one has to cross the bridge on river Sindhu to reach the monastery. There is also a mountainous path but is not visible easily, after crossing the river on proceeding some distance chorten or white Chaityas are viewed, then one can presume the existence of this Gompa. All around is the Hemis village. In the beginning this belonged to Nyingmapa order, at present it is possessed by Karju-pa sect. King of Ladakh is the chief of this monastery. He went to Lhasa to acquire religious education in 1947-48 A.D., but did not come back. Later on, a child of five years among the refugees of Tibetan camp was found as his incarnation. He was consecrated as the abbot of the Gompa after being successful in various examinations - and then he was taken inside the Hemis with his parents. Now he is aged twenty years only. As a chief he is seated on the throne to witness the great festival that displayed in Hemis in June. Above the Hemis mountain, there is another mountain Gosang (gateway to Heaven). There, he will have to stay for few years, he will be under the tutelage with both internal and external teachings before he is finally enthroned as religious chief of Gompa after he succeed in final examination.

Religious ceremonies and fairs are held in Hemis in June after considering the lunar day. Hence, very many people can participate and witness this festival. Other gompas of Ladakh hold their ceremonies in winter. Hence, men from outside cannot witness them. There are some ceremonies which must be observed everywhere such as New Year (Losar), worship of books and defeat of evil power. We reached there just two days prior to witness the ceremonies. We were permitted to stay inside in a room of Lama for two days, so we got an opportunity to see good portion of the arrangements inside.

A good number of Gompas were looted during the Dogra king Pratap Singh's reign. Then the chief of Hemis monastery of Ladakh arranged for shelter and provision for the Dogra soldiers, as a result the intruders left the monastery unharm. It also achieved the favour of Dogra king. Many images are enshrined there, most of them are plated with gold and silver. Large images of Sakyamuni, gods and goddesses of Mahayana pantheon are placed on the altar. There is another statue, that of Madarparva, consort of Padmasambhava. From the almost illegible fresco illustrations of Sisshacharya and their miraculous powers on the opposite of the main entrance dwelling, it may be guessed that this Gompa previously belonged to Druk-pa or Nyingmapa community. This Hemis gompa covers a land area is five bighas surrounded by mountains on all sides. The Gompa is five hundred years old, but the images belonged to the tenth or eleventh century, Images have been picked up from the locality of Miru or Meru and placed here. There are many small and big monasteries under Hemis. The biggest of the ceremonies is the famous lama Dance held in June - the dance is about defeating evil power by benevolent power. The Lamas participate in this ceremony of two days. The first day covers-emergence and spread of evil power and on the second day, driving away of that evil power by persons holding spiritual power. That is the main theme. (Detailed descriptions of this ceremony are found in many ritual books).

These shown through display of play at dance and instrumental music-Besides, large and picturesque "Thanka" painted on silk or specially prepared paper are unwrapped and shown open every eleventh year-1990 was one such year. On this occasion, the fair held for three-four days is attended by people from far and wide-many commodities are brought and sold. The name of Hemis is Byang-Chu Sam-ras-chin, it means 'though of wisdom'. Senge

Namgyal (1599-1640), one of the Drukpa community Mohanta (chief) Tag-Sangra prepared it for the Chinese. Construction of this gompa started in 1602 A.D. and completed in 1642 A.D. This community followed the Druk-pa community of Bhutan. But some images of tenth and eleventh centuries from the ruins of Miru or Meru gompa in Rupshu have been brought here. Hence, Meru is called "Mother of Hemis".

GOMPAS AROUND LEH

(1) **TIKSE** - situated on a hill 14 Km away from Leh. It has a huge statue of Buddha with 7 small temples with beautiful frescos within.

(2) **SHEY** - situated at a distance of 16 Km. from Leh, on Leh Manali Road on hillock. A 7.5 m. high Buddha statue made of white copper from Zanskar with gold plating in one of the biggest statue of its kind built by Delden Namgyal, son of Seng Namgyal, in memory of his father who was imprisoned and forced to embrace Islam religion by his captors and banished in Kashmir by the Moghul rulers. A butter lamp burns throughout the year. It was built by a Nepalese sculptor with the help of three Ladakhi craftsmen. Five Kg. of gold was required for plating.

(3) **STOK GOMPA** - was built in a village across the Indus when the king of Ladakh was banished from Leh by the Dogra ruler. He was the head of Hemis Gompa upto his death.

(4) **TSEMO-GOMPA** - is on the top of a hillock built in 1400 A.D. by the king Takspa Bumde. It's statue of Maitreya Buddha resembles that of statue at Mulbeik (13.7m high) with Manjusree on left and Avalokitesvara on right. It is built by Mahayani Buddhists.

(5) **SANKAR GOMPA** - is 3 km. from Leh. It has many golden icons built 100 years back. Stories of Panchatantra are painted on the walls around. Kushok Bakula, M.P. (present) is the head of this one.

There are gompas as Deskit and Tegart in Rupshy by Gelugpa Karjupa and Nyingmapa Sects also have some but most of them are only 100 years old.

(6) **ZANSKAR** - This district lay south of Leh, has many ancient gompas, namely: Mather, Taklat, Takram, Karsha, Rangdom, Karoha and Phutcol. The last one is situated on a high hill-famous for the visit of a Hungarian and renowned scholar and Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Körös (1784-1842) during some months in 1823-1826. He travelled through Central Asia routes and Karakoram and was stopped at Leh. The adventurous traveller D. Moorcraft requested him to stay at Yangla in Zanskar. During his stay for some months he prepared a Grammar and dictionary in Tibetan language before proceeded to Calcutta. His name is engraved in a piece of stone here. He started for Lhasa in 1842 and died on way at Darjeeling.

(7) **GILGIT** - (D. Ladakh) During 1931 a mass of brick-bark and a few paper manuscripts were found in Naupore near Gilgit cantonment in a circular chamber 7 ft. 9 1/2" diameter inside the dome of a stupa. These ascribes to 6th or 7th century A.D. These were published later in 7 volumes. They present Sanskrit texts - many of which are only known through their Chinese and Tibetan translations, now discovered first in Indian soil. These include a number

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of Sutras, PRAJNAPARAMITA, SADDHARMA-PUNDARIKA and the Sanskrit VINAYA PITAKA of MULA-SARVASTI-VADINS. Apart from the manuscripts, the relic chamber yielded hundreds of small votive clay-stupas containing within the Buddhist creed and relieved plaques.

Concluding Remarks :

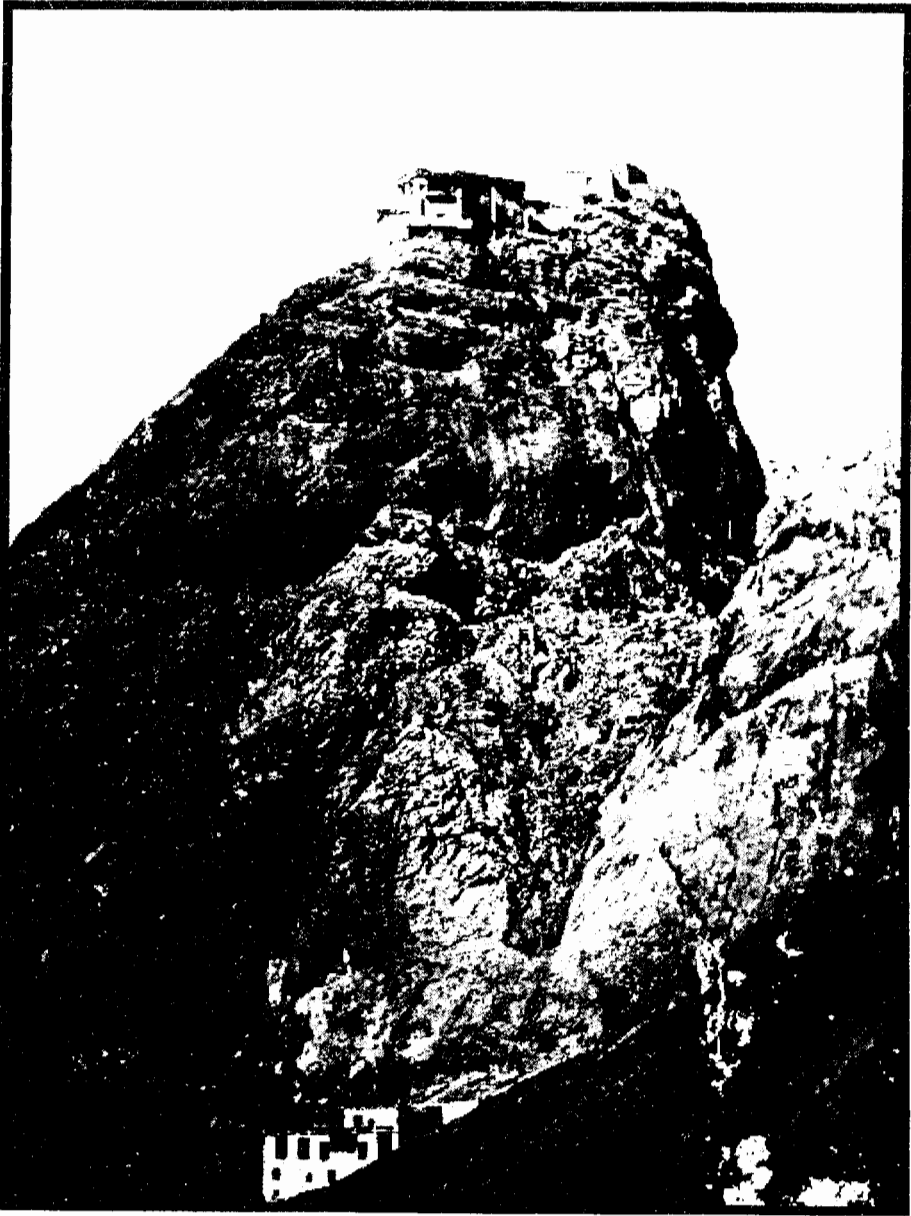
After 1959, when Tibet was occupied by the Chinese Government after the exile of Dalai Lama from Lhasa, Ladakh is considered as the main centre of Tibetan Buddhism by all the Tibetans in exile. Still some noteworthy ceremonies like Kala-Chakra have been conducted by the present Dalai Lama (1) in Leh (1986), (2) Bodh Gaya in 1988, (3) Saranath in 1991-92. Thousands of lamas and devotees from here and abroad attended these in large number facing great natural hazards.

List of illustration of Gompas

1. SHERGOLA
2. MAITREYA BUDDHA (20 ft.) ROCK-CARVED STATUE at MUZBE
3. AVALOKITESWARA with 11 hands on each side of hands at Mulbeik.
4. LAMAYURU - the oldest gompa.
5. PHIYANG - Statue of Buddha
6. LIKYIR - Gompa
7. SPITUK - (Near Airport)
- 8-9. ALCHH - Wooden carvings of the gate and large statue of Avalokiteswara (standing) inside.
10. Way of Hemis Gompa
11. FRONT OF HEMIS
- 12-13. Decorations on the wall and Frescos inside Hemis Gompa.
14. Statue of Founder (inside) Hemis.
15. GOSANG cave above Hemis.
16. TIKSHE MONASTERY - Statue of Buddha.
17. Buddha statue in Sher Gompa.
- 18-19. RANGDOM and KAROHA Gompa - Zanskar.
- 20-21. Decorations of Front page on Gilgit Manuscripts.

Acknowledgement

1. Photographs 1-16 : Taken by Shri Sushanta Chattopadhyay of Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.
2. -Do- 17-18 : Were taken by Ms. Sunanda Banerjee.
3. 2 Decorated Covers from a newspapers.



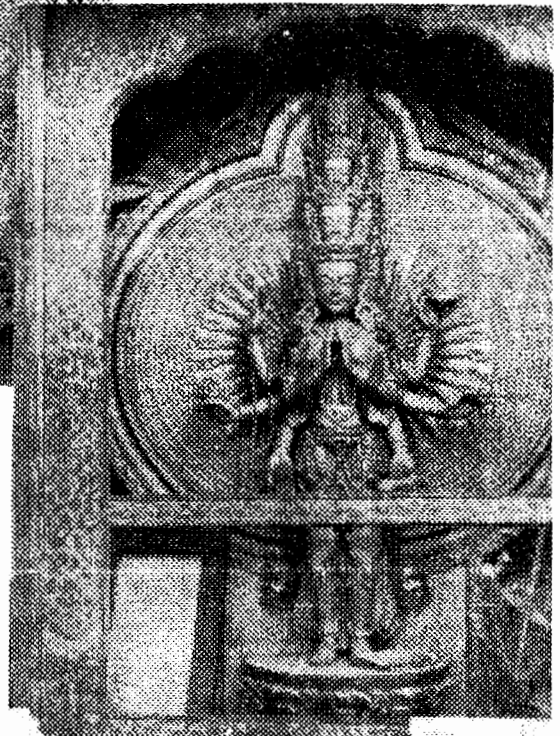
SHER-GOLA
The 1st Buddhist Gompa of the East after Kargil.

No - 2



Towards Mulbeik
Maitreya Buddha ^(20th)
Mulbeik Rock carving

No - 3



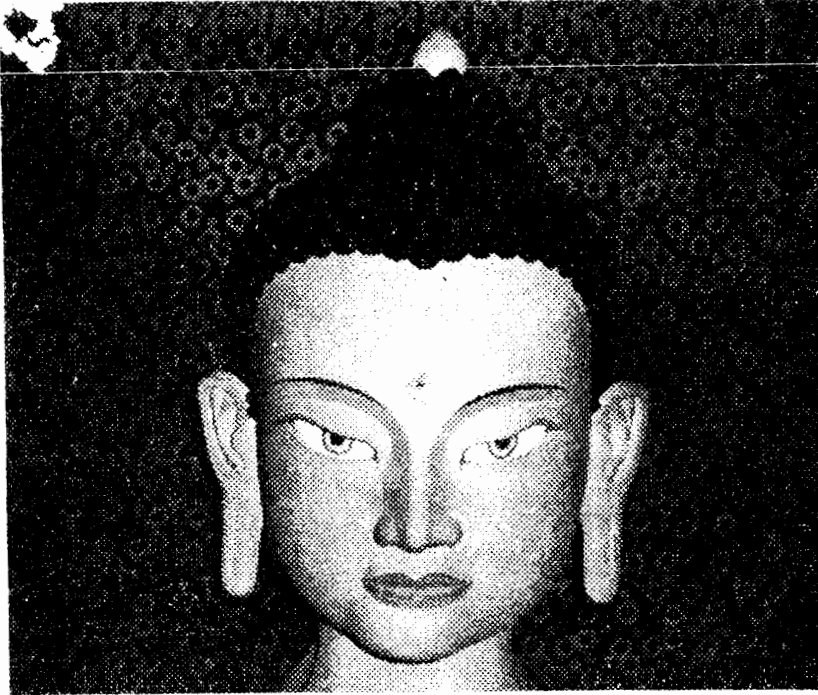
Avolokiteswara



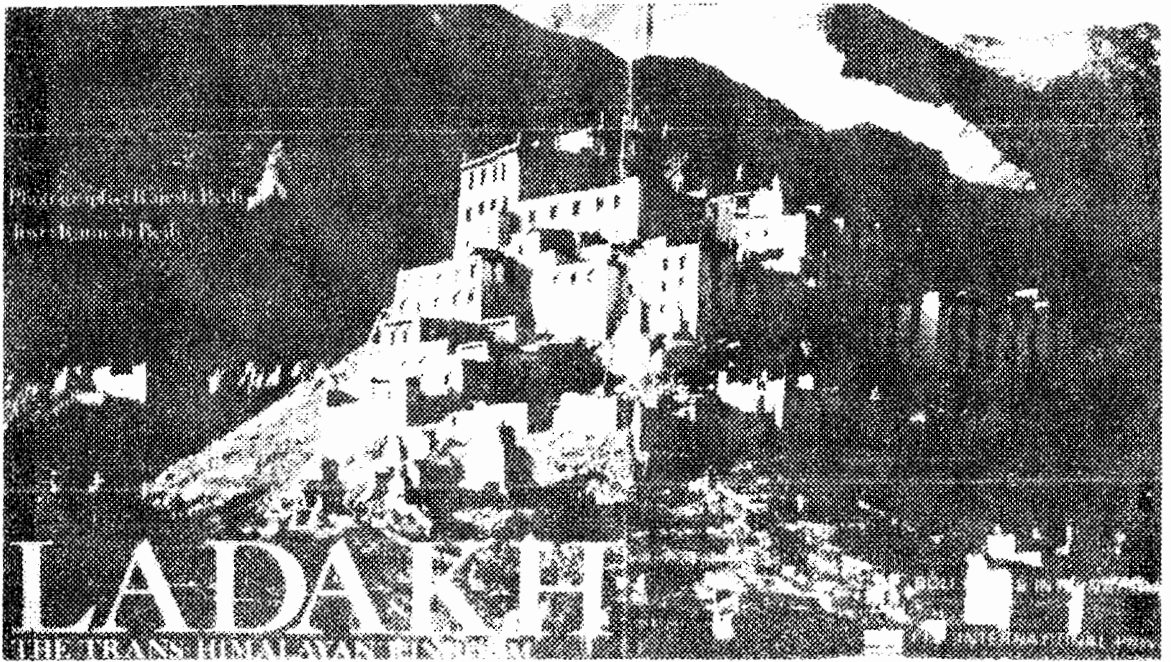
Lamayuru
The oldest gompha

No - 5

Phyang Gompa
Buddha Statue.



No - 6

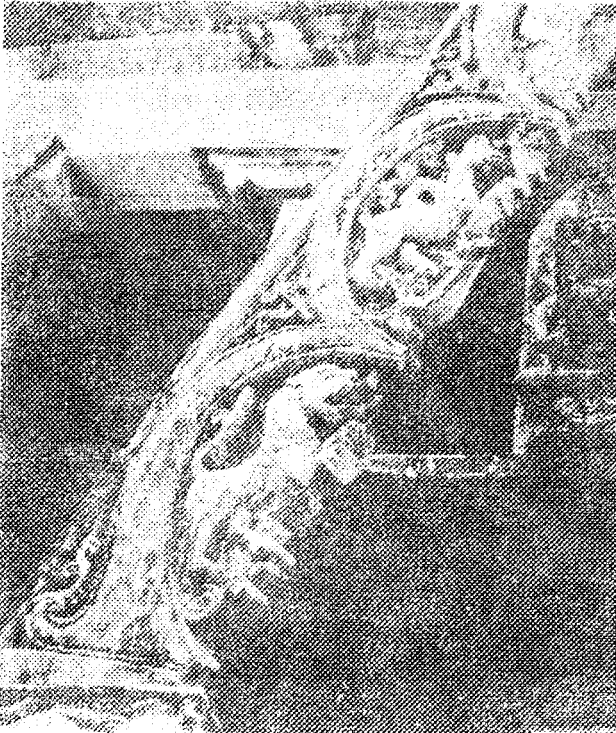


(Likyir Gompa) It was lake, drained by Naropa to build the Temple.

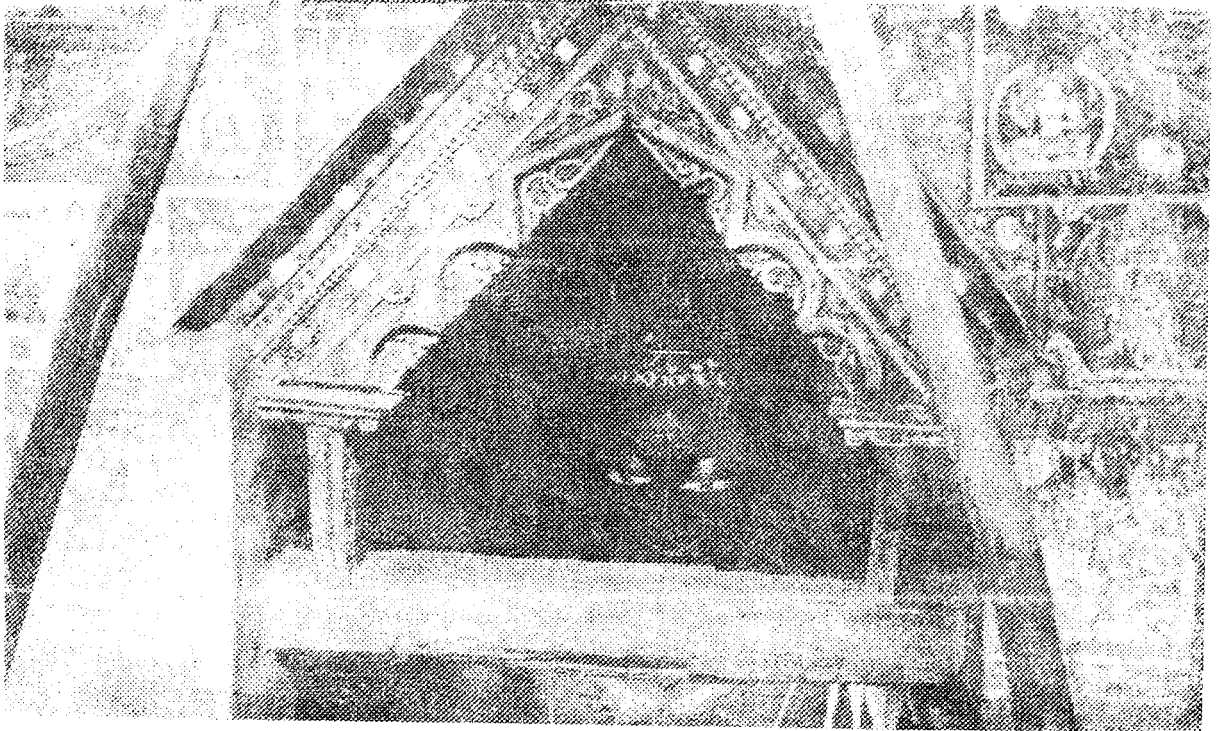


Spituk

Al-chi Compa
Wood carving on gate.

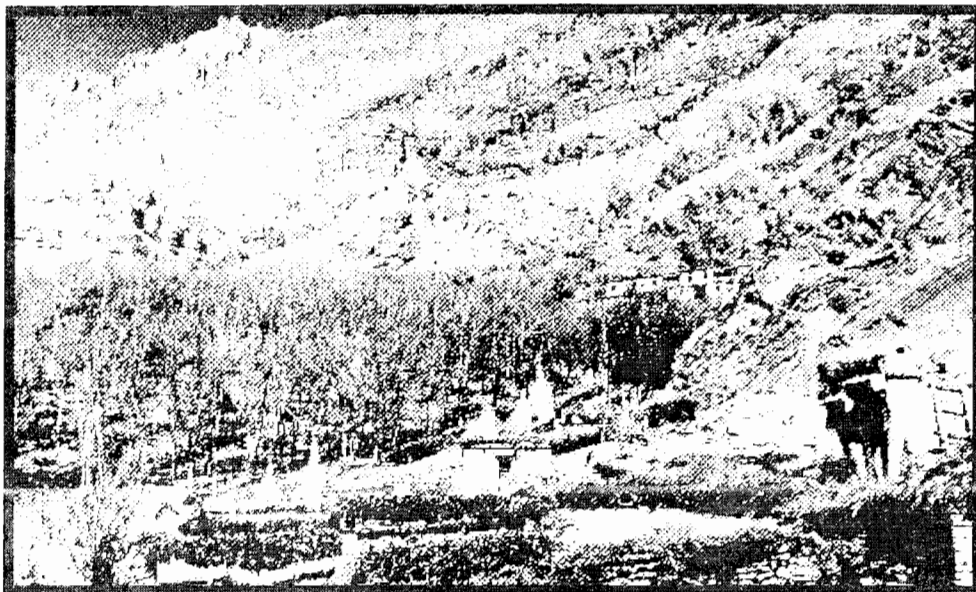


No - 9



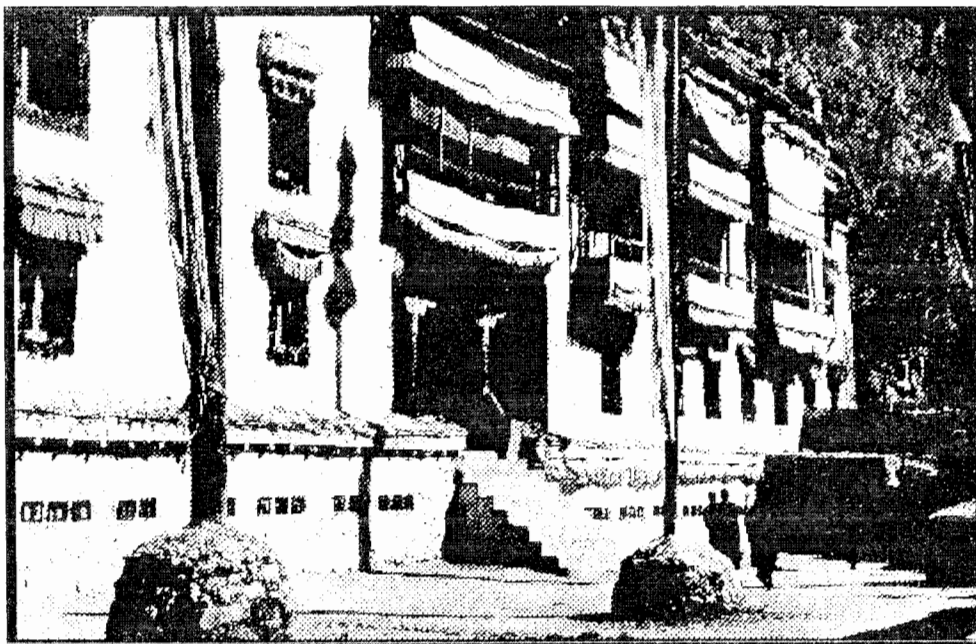
Avalokiteswara in Al-Chi

No - 10



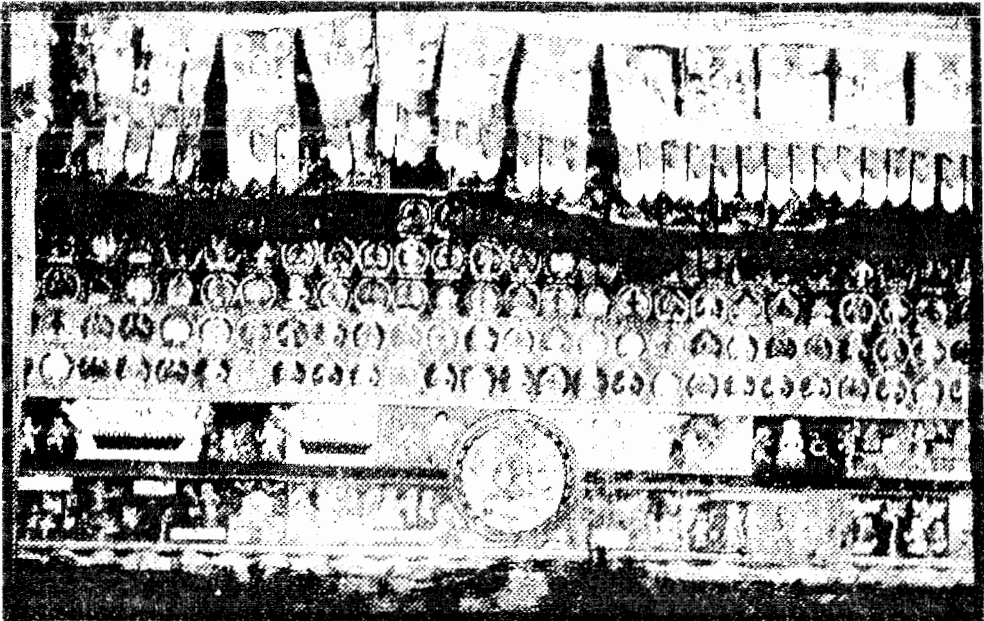
Way to Hemis

No - 11



Front of Hemis

No - 12

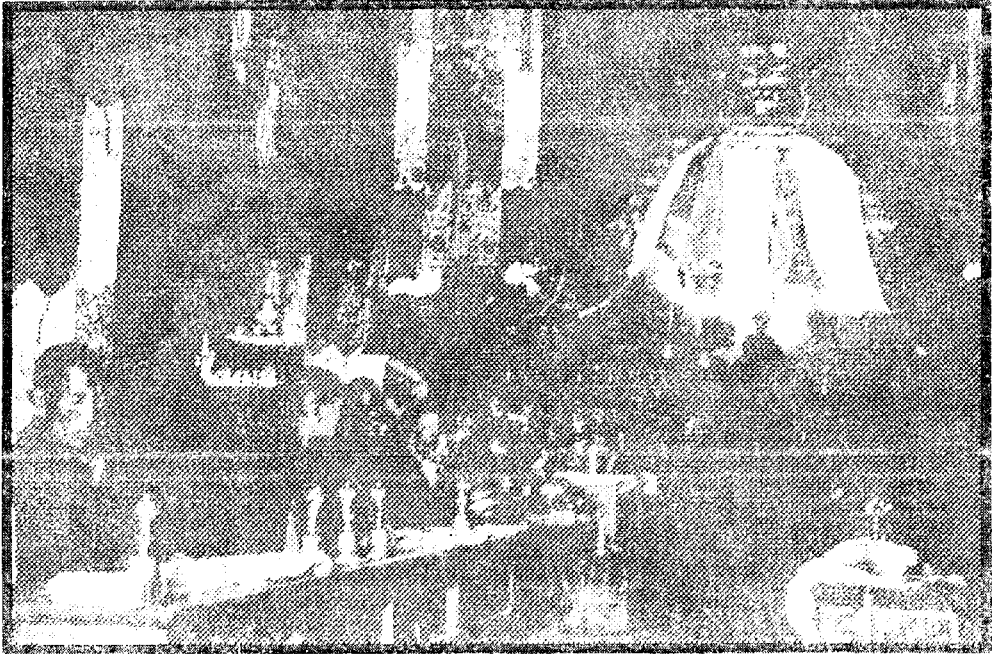


The famous Thangka - Shown every 11th year

No - 13



Frescoes of Hemis

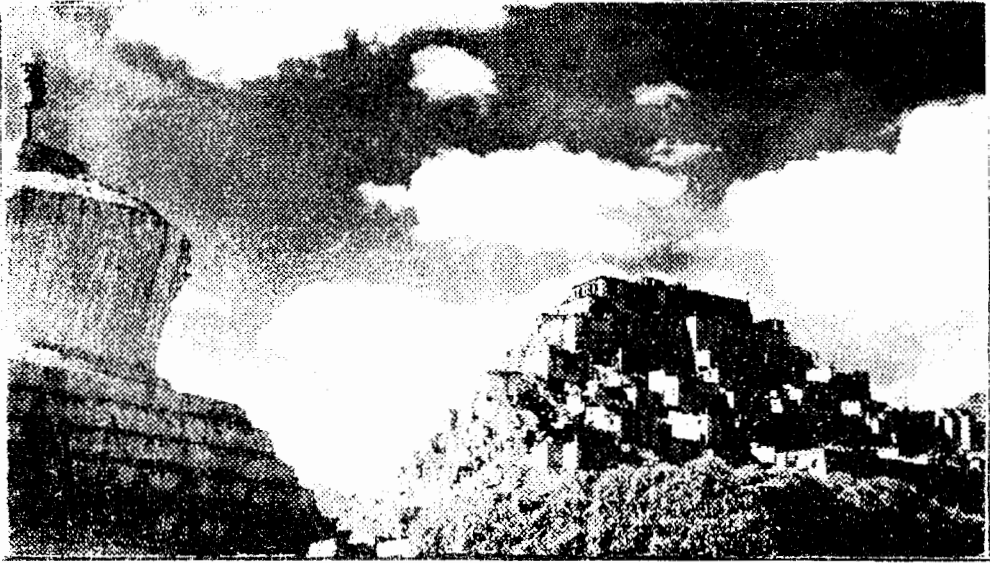


Hemis - Statue, Front Side (Fountain)



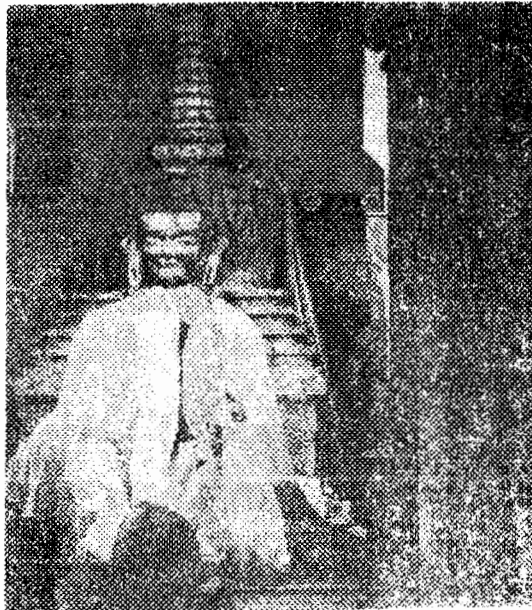
Gosang Cave

No - 16



Tikse

No - 17



Shey Gompa
Buddha Statue

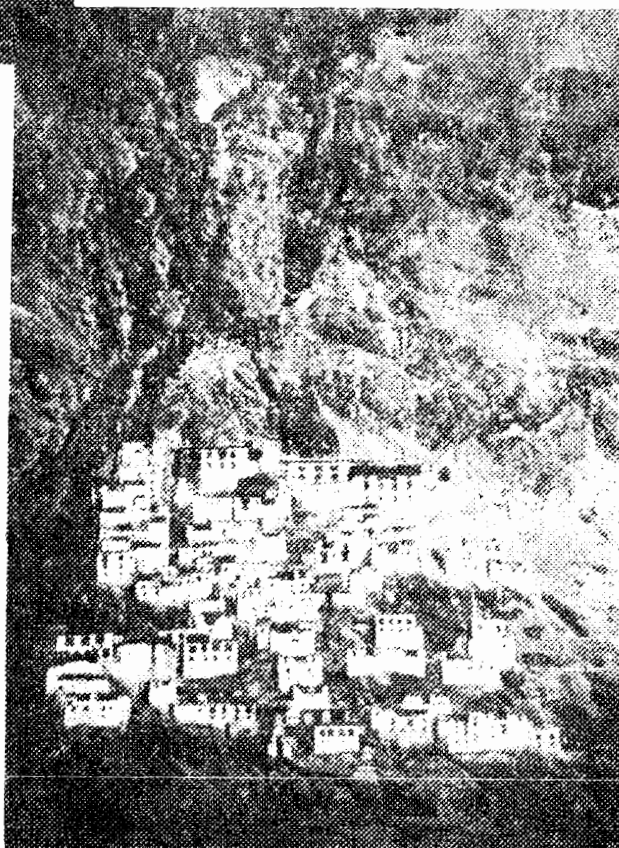


No - 18

Rangdom (Zaskar)

No - 19

Karoha (Zaskar)



No - 20



Decorations on cover of some Manuscripts found in Gilgit (West of Leh)

No - 21



NOTES AND TOPICS

**MAHA SIDHI(A) OF MODERN SIKKIM
(VENERABLE LAMA CHODA ALIAS LABRANG GOMCHEN)**

-S. D. Tsering (I.E.S)



Lama Choda was born at Namok Village to a humble farmers family. He had an interest in the Buddhist doctrine from his early childhood. When his family moved to North Sikkim he enrolled himself as a novice monk at Labrang Monastery. He spent most of his childhood as a monk learning to read and write the Buddhist Sutras. When he had mastered the basic sutras he came to Gangtok where he met the venerable Bermiok Rimpoche and under him he spent to learn the more advanced mantras and sutras. He spent a number of years under venerable Bermiok Rimpoche and mastered most of the advanced mantras and sutras. He then shifted to Ghanam and took to studying the tantras under the venerable Ugen Tenzing Rimpoche. Under Ugen Tenzing Rimpoche he learnt the secret tantric practices and got the empowerment to various tantric rituals. he also took lessons in advanced practices from venerable Khayche Thunka Rimpoche. To learn more of the advanced Zogchen doctrine he went to Tibet and became the disciple of the famous tantric yogi Thodhay Sakya Siri under whom he mastered the six outer and inner Yogas. He also received empowerment to the secret tantra of Rig-dzin-srog-grub-kyi-cho. After the death of Thodhay Sakya Siri he continued his studies at Cho-bu-ri under the chief disciple of Sakya Siri named Thiphay Rimpoche. He spent many years at Cho-bu-ri and mastered the Dzogchen teachings. He then came to Tsa-ri and got further teachings from venerable Khayab-ghen-dupchen Rimpoche. At Tsari he mas-

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tered the art of generating psychic body heat which allowed him to meditate on snow covered mountain peaks naked without feeling cold. He also mastered the art of Tsa-lung which allowed him to travel hundred of miles per day without feeling tired. He went on a pilgrimage to all the holy sites in Tibet and then returned to Sikkim. After his arrival in Gangtok he went for meditation at Lukshama for several months and then to Takse where he spent several years in meditation. He then went for a pilgrim to Pathing and met venerable Ghongchuk Tshampa Rimpoche who taught him some tantric practices. After his return from Pathing he went for pilgrimage to Tibet and also to Bhutan where he visited the holy sites of Bhumthang, Kargay and Paro. From Bhutan he went to Kham where he learnt the secret practice of Chod from the venerable Chami Ragashey Rimpoche. After finishing his studies at Kham he returned to Sikkim and spent some time learning from the venerable Yathang Rimpoche. He again retired to meditation in a cave above Chongu Lake for several months. From there he went to Yathung in Chumbi Valley and spent two years in meditation.

He then returned to Gangtok and went to Lingdum where he meditated for several months. He returned to Gangtok and spent some time receiving teachings from his Holiness Dhujhom Rimpoche.

On the invitation of the venerable Khambu Lama of Mongolia, Labrang Gomchen went there with some followers. He was received in Mongolia with the highest honours by the lamas of Mongolia. In Mongolia he paid a special visit to the AlpoLakiand Hungress Monasteries. He gave a number of sermons to the Buddhist community in Mongolia and also cured a large number of sick people by his blessing. Labrang Gomchen and Lama Khambu also discussed the effect of the Vietnam war on the Buddhist community and appealed to them to stop the war. On his return journey from Mongolia he stopped at Moscow where he visited a small Buddhist Monastery. In the following year he went to Thailand to represent sikkim at the World Buddhist Conference and later to Malayasia for the same Conference.

Labrang Gomchen had many students from different monasteries in Sikkim most of his Students rose to the high positions of Dorjee Lopen in various monasteries. Labrang Gomchen was connected to most of the monasteries of Sikkim but he spent a major part of his life at the Enchey Monastery in Gangtok. After spending most of his life in service of Buddhist doctrine he passed away to his heavenly abode in 1985 at the age of 95 years. Labrang Gomchen will be always remembered for his many miracles of curing men and animals possessed by evil spirits. He can be said to be one of the greatest tantric yogic to appear in the last few decades of Sikkim's history.

MONASTERIES IN SIKKIM*

-N. Dorjee

The hidden valley of rice called 'sBas-yul-hBras-Mo-lJongs' discovered by the Great saint Herukapa LhabTsun Nam-mkhah hjigs-'med' or popularly known as rGyalwa Lhabtsun Chhenpo in the early 17th century was the land blessed and graced by Maha Guru Padmasambhava or known as the second Buddha as a Paradise on earth or a heavenly shelter for the grieved ones in the cruel world of the future is the same that we now call 'Sikkim', the youngest state of the Indian Union. rGyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo's entry into Himalayas from Tibet and his great discovery of Sikkim, as per the Maha Guru Padmasambhava's prophecy, marks the beginning and spread of Mahayana Buddhism, particularly known as 'hDyays-lJongs rZogs-Chhen rNyingma', in Sikkim and also the establishment of Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim.

rGyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo, along with two other lamas, namely mNga-bDag Sempa Chhenpo and Kathog Rig'hZin Chhenpo, built many monasteries and lhakhangs (small shrines) in Sikkim after the consecration of the first Dharma king of Sikkim, Chogyal Phuntsok Namgyal at Yuksam, by the above three lamas in 1604. The first monasteries established by rGyalwa-Lha-bTsun Chhenpo were the sDrup-sThe monastery, gSang-sNgags Chhos-gLing monastery and Padma Yangs-rTse monastery in the West Sikkim. The monasteries first built by mNga-bDag pa and Kathog pa were bTra-Shi lDing monastery in the west and Kathog monastery in the east respectively. Further, in the course of time many more monasteries were added, including the monasteries of Karma Kagyutpa sect. Thus, now, one will see a monastery or a small shrine almost on every top of a hill, particularly in the western part of the state. The present number of monasteries and lhakhangs in Sikkim exceeds 160, besides an almost equal number of mandirs and a few other religious institutions.

Among the oldest monasteries established by rGyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo, Pedma Yang-rTse monastery was further developed and reconstructed during the reign of Chogyal Chhyak-Dor Namgyal, the third Dharma king of Sikkim and skyabs-mGon hJigs-med-dPaw, the third reincarnation of the Great rGyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo and since then it has become the principle monastery of sikkim. Almost all the other rNyingma monasteries were once the branches of the monastery and the Head Lama of each subsidiary monastery deputed from Padma Yang-rTse monastery.

Besides, Pedma Yang-rTse monastery, the other big and important monasteries of Sikkim are bTra-Shi-lThing monastery in the west, Ralang monastery in the south, RumsTegs monastery in the east, Pho-dang monastery and Phen-bZang monastery in the north. The present position of the above six monasteries may be described as below for the benefit of those interested :

Pemayongtse monastery is located on the hill top of Gyalshing town, the present west District Head Quarter, and near the recently built Tourist Lodge of Sikkim. The monastery has undergone various repairs and renovations from time to time and present building was

* Reprint 'SHUNYATA' Vol. 1. No. 1. 1977, Sikkim Buddhist Accociation, Gangtok.

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thoroughly repaired and renovated during 1960-70. A special mention may be made of a heavenly structure called 'Zangdok-dPal-ri', a wooden structure built and installed on the top floor of the monastery. It is a wonderful and artistic work worth seeing and is a masterpiece of Rev. Duzgzin Rinpoche of Pemayangtse who solely worked on it for a period of 5 years. The total strength of lamas in this monastery is 108 and the main ceremonial grand puja of the monastery is held in the last week of the 12th month, according to Tibetan calendar, with lama dances for two days every year.

bFra-Shi lThing monastery is located in between the hills of Pema yongtse and Ralong. This place is believed to be the centre of Sikkim from the religious point of view. On this heart shaped wonderful hill top, there are two main buildings called Chogyal lhakhang and Guru lhakhang. Chogyal Lakhang is the main monastery of Tashiding built originally in the 17th century. This is the monastery in which the famous Holy Water is opened for public audience once in year on the 15th of 1st Tibetan month, which usually corresponds to March. The Chorten Tongwarangdrol, the most famous Chorten of Sikkim, renovated about three years ago is also located at this holy place.

Ralang monastery located near Rabangla Tea Estate in the South District, originally, was the first monastery of Kargyutpa sect established in Sikkim, during the reign of the 4th Chogyal of Sikkim, Chogyal hGyurmed Namgyal. The existing building of the monastery was recently dismantled and the Government have already started its reconstruction.

Rumtek monastery was originally built during the reign of Chogyal Gyurmed Namgyal and follows the same sect as that of Ralang monastery, Karma Kargyut. This monastery, situated just below the now famous Rumtek monastery 'Dharma Chakra Centre' of H.H. the Gyalwa Karmapa, the Supreme Head of Kargyutpa sect of Buddhism, was reconstructed a few years ago.

Phodang monastery located in the North-District, about 40 Km. away from Gangtok as old as Ralong and Rumtek monasteries. This monastery also belongs to Kargyutpa sect of Buddhism. The present monastery building is in delapidated condition and is under the process of reconstruction.

Phensang monastery was originally built in 1721. This monastery is situated in the North District near Phodang monastery, about 30 Km. away from Gangtok town. This monastery was gutted by fire in 1947 and the present building is a recently reconstructed one. This monastery follows red sect of Buddhism 'rNyingma'.

To sum up, the monastic establishments in Sikkim have played, and to some extent still play, an important part in the welfare of the Sikkimese Buddhist people. Till the recent popularity of modern education in Sikkim the monasteries were the only institutions imparting education and lamas the only teachers. At present, however, the monasteries fulfil the religious and spiritual needs of the people as modern education has taken over the function of vocational preparation. In future the monasteries in Sikkim might attract Buddhist scholars from out-side and thus acquire a new significance.

Bkra-Shi IDings (TASHIDING)*

-N. Dorjee

Bkra-Shi IDings (Tashiding), a heart shaped hill, situated in the midst of sloping mountains dominated by the Majestic Gangs-Chhen mZod-INga, the great snowy mountain of five treasures, in West Sikkim, is considered one of the holiest places in Sikkim. It is a small hill surrounded by two rivers called Rothok Chu and Ringnak Chu at its base, and is beautifully located in front of the Pemayangtse hill. Looking at the hill one cannot escape an impression that the hill must have majestically arisen on a specific divine command. According to Buddhist mythology, it is the very spot where Maha Guru Padmasambhava, along with his 25 disciples, blessed this land of Sikkim for future discovery by human inhabitants and is also believed as the centre of the sacred land of Sikkim. We find many references of this in ancient scriptures describing this place as 'gNeys-Ki-ITewa (Neyki Tewa) which means the centre of the place.

In the early 17th century, when Sikkim was formally discovered or opened for human habitation by three Lamas in accordance with Maha Guru Padmasambhava's blessing and prophecy, mNagh-bDak Sems-pa Chhenpo, one of the three Lamas, moved to bkra-Shi IDings and began the propagation of his doctrine of Buddhist Dharma called 'mNgah-bDagpai-Lugs' with the founding of a small Gompa (monastery), which later on served as the nucleus of the present complex.

On this important place of the glorious past, we now find three important places for worship. They are (i) the famous Tashiding monastery, which is one of the six principal monasteries in Sikkim, (ii) Chorten Thongwa Rangdrol, the oldest, holiest and one of the biggest chortens (Stupa) in Sikkim and (iii) 'Bhum Chhu', the supernatural sacred Pot with Holy Water on Golden Alter in the main monastery building.

Among the buildings, the original or the main monastery building is called Chogyal Lhakang. Chogyal Lhakang was built during reign of the third king of Sikkim, Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal, in the form of extension and renovation of the original monastery built by the founder mNgah bdag Sempa Chenpo. It has now become very old and is in dilapidated condition. However, a scheme is under way for renovation or reconstruction of this building by the Government.

This Monastery, with about 100 Lamas is autonomous in all respects and meets its expenses out of the monastery's own revenue and public contributions, under the general control and supervision of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs of Sikkim Government. It also receives substantial aid from the Government from time to time. The main function of the year in this monastery is the 'Bhumchhu' ceremony which is celebrated for all practical purposes, as a 'Mela', on the 15th day of the first Tibetan month every year.

Bumchu the super-natural sacred pot with holy water is officially sealed for safety by the Government and kept on a Golden Alter in the main hall of monastery (Chogyal Lhakang). This super-natural pot is believed to have originally flown to this place from an unknown

* Reprint 'SHUNYATA' Vol. 2. No. 1. 1978. PP. 13-16. Sikkim Buddhist Association, Gangtok.

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direction and the holy water in it is more than 100 years old. This sacred object of worship is opened only once in a year on the occasion mentioned above for public audience and worship. While opening, a little quantity of holy water is taken out, duly refilling the same quantity with fresh water from Rothok river, on this occasion for, distribution to devotees every year. This occasion therefore is considered a very important one, and devotees even from far distance like Bhutan, Nepal, Ladhak etc. comes to Tashiding every year for this purpose. The 'Bhumchu Mela' is observed for 3 days from the 13th to 15th morning of the first Tibetan month which usually corresponds to March. During the period of these 3 days, devotees go round the monastery building, and chortens (Stupas), especially Chorten Thongwa Rangdrol, clock-wise, chanting prayers.

Among Chortens, Chorten Thongwa Rangdrol is the most important one, and is located in the centre of all other Chortens. It was originally built by Gyalwa Lhatsun Chhenpo, the founder of Sikkim, in the 17th Century and it is therefore, as old as the original monastery at Bkra-Shi-Ldings. In the recent years it was thoroughly repaired and renovated by the Government and H.H. Dingo Khentse Rinpoche of Bhutan performed the reblessing ceremony on its completion in 1975. The importance of this Chorten is described by its name. It is called Thongwa Rangdrol which means : the one which has power to get every one who sees it automatically freed from ignorance.

For tourists we may mention that this scenic beauty spot with its welcoming prayer flags in countless number can be clearly viewed from Kewzing, near Rabangla Tea Estate 40 Km. from Singtam. But, the thought of trekking upto bkra-Shil Dings (TASHIDING) would interest many tourists.

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