

## THE DRUMS OF NEPALESE MEDIUMS\*

Mireille Helffer

An astonishing variety of drums is used in Nepal, both among Hindus and Buddhists. The organological types include: frame drums<sup>1</sup>; cylindrical drums, barrel or tronconical drums, hourglass drums (*huḍko*, western Nepal) and small *damaru*, all with two skins; as well as hemispherical kettledrums with one skin (Helffer & Gaborieau: 1974).

I shall focus here on the drums used by some specialists to establish links with the supernatural—for healing, protection, predicting the future, etc., or as A.W. Macdonald wrote about the *jhānkri* someone who is: "... an interpreter of the world [...] a person who falls into a trance, during which time voices speak through his person, thereby enabling him to diagnose illnesses and sometimes cure them, give advice for the future and clarify present events in terms of their relationship to the past. He is therefore both a privileged intermediary between spirits (who cause and cure illness) and men; between the past, present and future; between life and death, and most importantly between the individual and a certain mythology (Macdonald, 1976: 310).

All of these people, who are considered sorcerers, soothsayers, shamans, intercessors, or, more simply, mediums, are accompanied by a specific drum, generally a frame drum. Existing documentation discloses three principal types: 1) a two-membraned drum with a handle carved in the shape of a ritual dagger with a triangular blade; 2) one skin with two diametrically crossed sticks; 3) one skin without a diametrical stick.

It is interesting to compare the available information on these instruments, as their descriptions are often incomplete—scattered in diverse, sometimes difficult-to-find publications—and as examples of most of these drums are in the Department of Ethnomusicology of the

\*Translated by S. Keyes

<sup>1</sup> Their height is less than or equal to the frame's radius.

Musée de l'Homme, Paris, due to the numerous missions of ethnologists. Moreover, this approach, already attempted by M. Oppitz from a different angle, establishes a framework for ethnologists and ethnomusicologists, as well as for organologists and all those who are interested in complex relationships established over the centuries among followers of the Buddhist tradition and/or Hindus and immigrant populations variously influenced by these dominant traditions.

I studied a dozen of these drums kept in the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Musée de l'Homme or in private collections to successively examine organological characteristics, modality and use, written texts, as well as oral traditions and associated symbolism before advancing various hypotheses related to their provenance.

**Frame drum with double-laced heads and sculpted handle (Nep. *murrā*) in the form of a ritual dagger (Nep. *kila*, Tib. *phur-pa*, beaten with a stick (Nep. *gajo*)**

According to numerous witnesses, the above-mentioned drum, called *dhyāngro* is used from Darjeeling and Kalimpong as far as the Kali Gandaki valley by the *jhānkri* whose ethnic or caste origins vary. The use of the *dhyāngro* drum is relatively easy to observe because of the numerous gatherings of *jhānkri* during the full moon to honour protective divinities (*kul devatā*) or their teacher. The following list will serve as a reminder:

- in the month of *baiśākh* in Gupteshwor at the shrine of Mahādev (from J.C. Marize);
- in the month of *saun* in Kalingchok for the Janai purnima (Macdonald : 1976, and Miller : 1979, p. 45/note 3), but also : in Mahādevpohari (Jest), in Gosainkund (Macdonald), in Kumbeswar (in Patan)
- in the month of *bhadau* during the Kāgeśwari melā (personal observation in 1979 with J.C. Marize and P. Aubry);
- in the month of *pus* in Deoliṅgeśwari among the Tamang;
- in the month of *phāgun* in Rikeśwar (near Daman) (from J.C. Marize, 1980); and

- during the Devikot jatra (near Dolakha) for Dasain (Miller).

This brief enumeration seems to show a predilection for shrines dedicated to Mahādeva; this is not very astonishing as some *jhānkri* consider Mahādeva to have been the first of the *jhānkri* divinities.

"Who was the first *jhānkri*? The majority agree on Mahādeo. Mahādeo and a bhotiyā lama met on Mount Kailāś. The two competed [...] Since Mahādeo had not succeeded in reaching the sun, the latter became angry and began to construct a drum. With this drum he would be able to reach the sun [...]

How was Mahādeo's drum made? [...] "Then he sent the *ghuñrin* to fetch *bet* [...] from which to make the straps to brace the drum heads [...] Mahādeo closed the drum by attaching the *murrā* (handle). Before closing it, he put seven blades of *dubho* and a *rudrācche* inside." (Macdonald, 1976 : 319).

What do ethnologists have to say about this drum?

Following his research in Muglan at the end of the 1950s, Macdonald stated : "The *jhānkri*'s drum is called *dhyāngro* the curved baton with which he beats the drum is a *gajo*; [...] and it is by the sound of the drum echoing far in the night that one knows a *jhānkri* is at work." (Macdonald, 1976:311). This brief information is completed in a footnote: "The *dhyāngro* is a single-handed drum with two heads (generally made of deerskin and monkeyskin); the handle (*murrā*) is made of wood and always sculptured." (Macdonald, 1976:326n.13). Fournier's observations in 1969-70 of the *pumbo* and *ngiami*, who officiate among the Sunwar, allowed him to be much more precise :

"The *dhyāngro* is a double-headed drum with a single handle. The frame is made of one piece of hazel wood (*tsegi*) or of (*thingre*), c. 4 inches deep [= 10 cm], with a circumference of c. 16 1/2 inches [= 42 cm]. The membrane covering each of the two sides is folded over on the outside. It is made of the skin of a three-year-old deer (*rokoshie*) (Sun.), or of a two-year-old goat (*kiarshe*) (Sun.). A leather thong or a thong made of calamus (*guri*) (Sun.) secures the skins by a network of interlaced knots. Between the wood of the frame and the thong, the *pumbo* slips one or more porcupine quills to prevent the skins from stretching. The handle (*goedaki*) (Sun.) which is ca. one foot long [30.5 cm], is pegged to the frame. It is made of the same wood as the

frame and sculptured with various symbolic patterns, usually in forms that are identical to those engraved on the *phurbu* or on the lance. [...] The *dhyāngro*, as well as the *phurbu* or the lance is made under the direction of the *pumbo* or *ngiami* [...]. At the time of the major public Sunwar rituals, each side of the drum is decorated with paint." [N.B. the design is different on the male side and the female side] (See Fournier, 1976:108-111, for a detailed diagram).

After more than two years among the Limbu between 1966 to 1971, Sagant wrote:

"[...] The *yuma*'s instrument is never the gong but mainly the *jhānkri*'s drum, the *dhyāngro*. It is made specially for him (mainly of *koiralo* wood and *murga* skin), and is analogous to the *jhānkri*'s drum. Enclosed are seven grains of rice, seven 'lightning' stones, three kinds of incense and a copper coin. The drum is consecrated at a ritual during which a chicken is sacrificed. The drum, as well as the rest of the gear, is personal. In the case that it changes owners, a chicken must be sacrificed to prevent a possible risk of sickness or death. The baton is identical to that used by the *jhānkri* and is also called a *gajo*. A trident, the sun and moon are painted on the skins." (Sagant, 1976:89, photo p. 99).

The two *dhyāngro* drums brought back by Sagant to the Musée de l'Homme present the following characteristics:

68-35-103 (D. 27 cm, H ?, L. handle 32 cm)

68-35-104 (D. 52 cm, H 13 cm, L. handle 42 cm)

Father Miller, who undertook extensive fieldwork from 1974 to 1978 in Dholaka District and its vicinity, was evidently not interested by the organological characteristics of the *dhyāngro*, but numerous photographs accompanying his work are valuable evidence of the way in which the drummer beat the instrument (Miller, 1979). When Höfer met the *bombo* who officiated among the western Tamang, he discovered that the drum they used was similar to the *jhānkri* but was called in Tamang by the Tibetan term *mga*:

"It consists of a round-shaped wooden frame covered on both sides with a membrane; of a carved handle, the one end of which is fixed in the frame and the other is pointed; and of a curved drum-stick. For the membrane the leather of the wild goat (Nep. *ghoral*) is used; the frame and the handle are of

the wood of a particular tree and the stick of a particular species of cane. The drum is mostly beaten from the front, i.e., towards body of the *bombo* or from the side. While reciting a blessing or another text of a mild type (*siway*, Tib. *zhi-ba*), the face carved on the upper part of the handle is turned towards the *bombo*. While fighting with the spirits, the *bombo* turns this face towards the same direction in which he is looking. Doubtless, the main function of the drum is to provide the recitation with an accompaniment. The sound of the membrane is believed to summon or terrify the beings with which the *bombo* deals, while the handle with its pointed end also serves as a weapon to 'pierce' or to 'fix' the evil to be exorcised." (Höfer, 1974:170; also see Höfer, 1994: 64-68 accompanied by several detailed drawings and completed by Höfer (1997).

In 1979 I purchased a *dhyāngro* in the market in Kathmandu; I was told it was most probably of Tamang origin, and I have based the following observations on this instrument:

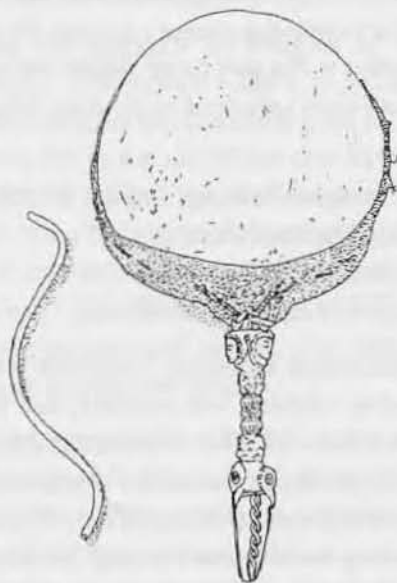


Fig. 1. The Nepalese *dhyāngro* drum (from M. Helffer's collection)

1) The roughly circular frame is formed with a wooden slat approximately 12 cm wide; it is bent so that the edges can be pegged together, thus forming a circle 38 cm in diameter.

2) The frame is covered with two skins. Each was first stretched and sewn on a hoop; the diameter of the skin is superior to that of the frame; the skins placed on each of the openings of the frame were sewn using a lacing in V form, secured by a thin bamboo thong.

3) A pierced opening in the frame allows the introduction of various grains or stones whose clinking accompanies all movements of the drum; a wooden handle, 35 cm high, (Nep. *murrā*, Tib. *rnga-yu*) in the form of a ritual dagger (Nep. *kila*, Tib. *phur-pa*) obstructs this opening.

From top to bottom, it comprises:

a) a triangular part with angles corresponding to three sculpted heads surrounded with a bead pattern;

b) a central, elongated part with an arrangement of the following motifs:

a form resembling a ritual sceptre (Nep. *vajra*, Tib. *rdo-rje*), but which could also correspond to a double row of stylized lotus leaves separated by a kind of coil (Höfer, 1994, p. 66, Fig. 4b(5) : "patterns called *pe:ma* [= Nep./Tib. *padma* = lotus] *cya:ri syi*" and for a different interpretation : Fournier, 1976: 108-110 and drawing Fig. 2). This form is framed at the top and the bottom by the sign of auspiciousness, "an endless knot" (Tib. *dpal-be'u*).

c) a three-edged blade with each side surmounted by a bird's head; a *nāga* serpent protrudes from the beak of each of these birds; the serpent's body is entwined around another serpent coming out of the adjoining bird's head. These serpents form three caducei occupying the intervals separating the blade's edges. This seems to illustrate the antagonism between Garuda and the serpent. However, some informants (Höfer, 1994) interpret this motif as three marine monsters (Nep. *makara*, Tib. *chu-srin*).

Two other drums of different sizes collected by C. Jest in the Kathmandu Valley show similar characteristics. They are kept in the Musée de l'Homme:



68-20-44 (d. 44.5 cm, h. 5 cm, l. handle 30 cm)

68-20-45 (for children, d. 17 cm, h. 5 cm).

It is necessary to examine the symbolism of each of the handle's elements of the *dhyāṅgro* even if there is general agreement on the characteristics of a *kila* or a *phur-bu*. Models can differ and interpretations may vary according to knowledge (generally incomplete) which comes from Buddhist and Hindu written traditions relative to the ritual use of the drum. To substantiate the varying interpretations, it suffices to compare what is said about the three heads found on the top of the handle of the *dhyāṅgro*. According to Macdonald's and Sagant's informants, the heads represent Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar/Mahadeo; according to Fournier, they are three human or lama faces--Tsingé lama, Nima tele [? Tib. *nyi-ma* = sun], Urgin tele [? Tib. *O-rgyan* for Padmasambhava]; and according to Höfer "*haha hihi faces*". If we put aside informants' assertions and examine texts on Tibetan Buddhist iconography, Professor R. Stein, at the end of his erudite investigation of texts related to the *phur-pa*, maintains that he recognises the heads of Vajrapāni, Hayagrīva and Amṛtakundali (Stein, 1977 and 1978), while Huntington (1975) sees three faces of the divinity Phur-pa. I personally prefer the last interpretation because Rdo-rje phur-pa (Vajrakila)

"(...) est le nom d'une divinité particulière, personnification du poignard rituel. Il possède généralement trois têtes et six bras. Les deux mains originelles tiennent un *phur-bu* devant la poitrine. Le bas du corps est également en forme de *phur-bu*. Cette divinité complexe, liée à tout un cycle de légendes et de rituels ne doit être confondue, ni avec Hayagrīva, représenté sur de nombreux poignards rituels, ni avec Guru Drag-dmar, forme farouche de Padmasambhava chez les Bonnets Rouges qui, comme lui, a le bas du corps en forme de poignard rituel" (G. Béguin, 1977: 258/n° 319).

In summary, if one attempts to clarify similarities and differences among the *dhyāṅgro* described above, the following points emerge:

- terminology designating different parts of the drum, apart from a few words borrowed from indigenous languages, generally uses Nepali or Tibetan words;

- these drums have a carved wooden handle and two skins usually linked by a lacing system;

- one of the skins is considered masculine and the other is considered feminine; this opposition is expressed in diverse ways: "Lors des grands rituels publics ou privés, chacune des faces est décorée. Sur la face masculine, il y a un trident (*trisul*) entre soleil et lune; sur la face féminine, une étoile est peinte dominant les cimes des montagnes. Lorsque la *ngiami* ou le *poembo* est en transe, il frappe son tambour en s'adressant tantôt à la face féminine, tantôt à la face masculine, selon le sexe de l'esprit avec lequel il dialogue." (Fournier, 1977). Within a Tamang context, Höfer speaks of "beating the violent side" (*thowai lajo rappa*) which he contrasts with "beating the mild or peaceful side" (*syiwai lajo rappa*), evoking the Tibetan opposition of "violent music" (*drag-rol* / "peaceful music" (*zhi-rol*).

- with regard to the manner of striking the *dhyāṅgro*, it has been established that a more or less sinusoidal drumstick is used; the form may resemble a serpent.

There is nothing in current research, to my knowledge, which can explain the broad diffusion of this type of drum--from the Kali Gandaki to Darjeeling and to Sikkim--nor, is there any concrete evidence that it is an adaptation of the Tibetan *mga*.

#### **One-membraned frame drum with two sticks diametrically crossed, struck with a rectilinear stick**

The diffusion of this type of drum is much less broad than that of the *dhyāṅgro* and appears limited to areas in proximity to the Annapurna range. The terminology by which it is designated varies according to the user groups:

*nah* among the Gurung, *mga* among the Thakali  
*rē* among the Kham Magar and *ring* among the Chepang  
*dhyāṅgro* among the Bhujel

Among the Gurung, it is used by *pucu* priests, and according to Pignède whose research concerned the Southern Gurung, reveals the following characteristics:

"*nah* : tambour de cinquante à quatre-vingt centimètres de diamètre. Cadre de bois de 6 à 9 cm d'épaisseur. Peau de chèvre tendue sur un côté. De l'autre une baguette diamétrale permet de saisir l'instrument. Le prêtre tient

généralement dans la main gauche son *nah* et le frappe de la droite avec une baguette de bois enveloppée de petites bandes de tissu dans sa partie supérieure pour protéger la peau du tambour et obtenir le son désiré." (Pignède, 1966: 295) ". . . le *pucu* utilise un tambour d'un diamètre un peu supérieur." (*ibid.* p. 298)<sup>2</sup>.

The Gurung drum in the Musée de l'Homme (971-58-1) is smaller with the following characteristics: *d.* 32.5 cm, *h.* 8.5 cm, 1 laced skin in an X form, 2 wooden crossed sticks attached to the frame, used as a handle.

Pignède mentions the existence of a *pe* recounting the drum's origin and its power, recited during funeral ceremonies, or to ward off an illness (*ibid.* p. 326).

Strickland attributes the fabrication of the *nga* to the so-called Rangupwe: "Rangupwe makes tools to cut wood for a *nga* drum, but is frightened by demons near the tree; a rat deceives him into promising all the grain to the rodent; Rangupwe stifles his fear and makes a drum with the wood obtained." (*rangupwemai pé*) : 170 lines. Macfarlane MSS, from Strickland, 1982: 298).

- Among the **Kham Magar**, the *rē* drum has been described in great detail by Oppitz and by A. de Sales. Their descriptions include methods of making the *rē* and mythological texts with which the drum is associated (cf. Oppitz, 1980, 1981). Specific songs designated by the term "songs for attaching the skin to the drum" (*dhagori murine kheti*) relate the search for the appropriate material with the best way of treating it (de Sales, 1991:281-286). The following points should be kept in mind:

The *rē* drum is made of diverse elements named and fabricated with material prescribed by mythology:

- a frame (*rēgor*) made from a slat cut from oak (*gui* or *guipâl*), from whence the term *guipâl rēgor* is derived; this frame can be circular, oval or heart-shaped; the diameter is variable, generally from 30 to 50 cm;
- a few nails (*killi*) and small iron plates (*tās*), in vertical rows to nail the two elements cut from the wooden slat;
- a membrane (*syelo*) made from wild Himalayan goat skin (*ghoral*);

<sup>2</sup>Messerschmidt's photographs taken in the region of Ghaisu, show that the *khepre* use this type of drum when they officiate at death rituals (Messerschmidt, 1976, p. 78).

- diverse leather thongs to lace the membrane;
- a certain number of holes pierced with fire (*dulo*) on the open circumference of the frame; the thongs to which the membrane is attached are laced through them;
- a hoop made from elastic tendon (*yel*) encircling the frame on the side where the membrane is fixed in order to prevent the thongs from moving;
- two bamboo sticks crossed in the form of an X, suspended from small iron chains attached to the frame's interior and serving to hold the instrument in the hand;
- four small iron chains (*sāngal*) with two or three links which attach the bamboo handles to the frame;
- a stick (*gājā*) in *māke* wood; because of the material used, it is also called wooden *māke* spoon (*māke dabli*) in mythology (Oppitz, 1990, p. 80).

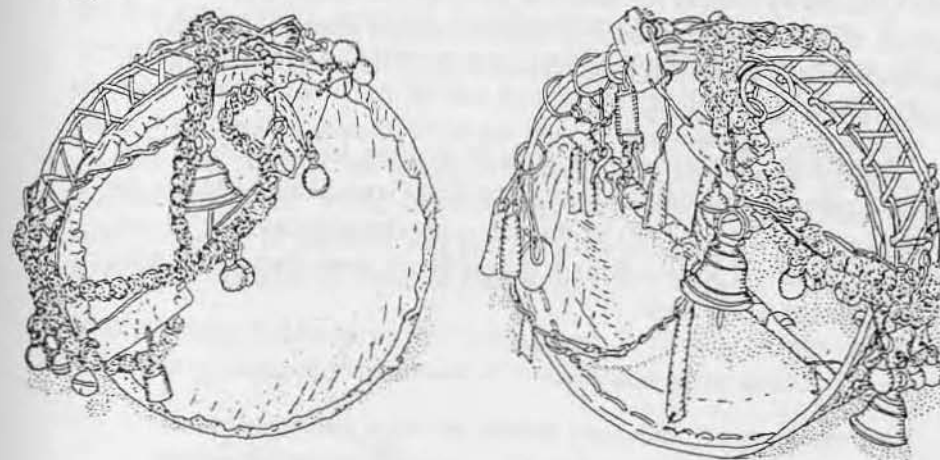


Fig.2. The two sides of the *rē* drum, (after a photography by M. Oppitz).

The *rē* drum is made in several stages: looking for the tree and making the frame, nailing the frame and fixing the diametral handles, attaching the skin, consecrating it. White paint, associated with particularly rich symbolism, is added to the skin at the time of the rituals (Oppitz, 1992).

The *rē* drum is used by a specialist often designated by the Nepali term *jhānkri*<sup>3</sup>; his role is to accompany mythical songs and the dance of the *jjhānkri* to communicate with the spirits and to organise divination activities.

Among the Chepang the *rēring* drum is also used. The example in the Musée de l'Homme (992-49-1) is a circular frame drum with a glued skin; it has the following characteristics: *d.* 45 cm, *h.* 15.5 cm, rattan bands, two diametrical cross pieces in wood and rattan, a sinusoidal cane stick.

Among the Bhujel, in the region of Dhaulagiri, a similar drum is called by the Nepali term *dhyāngro*, although it is a frame drum with a single skin: "The drum (*dhyāngro*) is one-sided and is held by crossed sticks fastened by rings to the inside of the rim - on which a bell may be fastened. The drum head is made of wild Himalayan goat skin (*ghoral*) ... The handle of the slender straight drumstick (*gājā*) is carved." (Hitchcock, 1976, p. 174 + photograph p. 166).

Among the Thakali, the same kind of drum is called *rnga*. The example collected by Comeille Jest in the Kali Gandaki area (Musée de l'Homme collection, 68-20-4) has the following characteristics: *d.* 34 cm, *h.* 6.5 cm, glued and pegged skin). It is used by the *drom* (Jest, 1974: 303-306) and beaten with a stick.

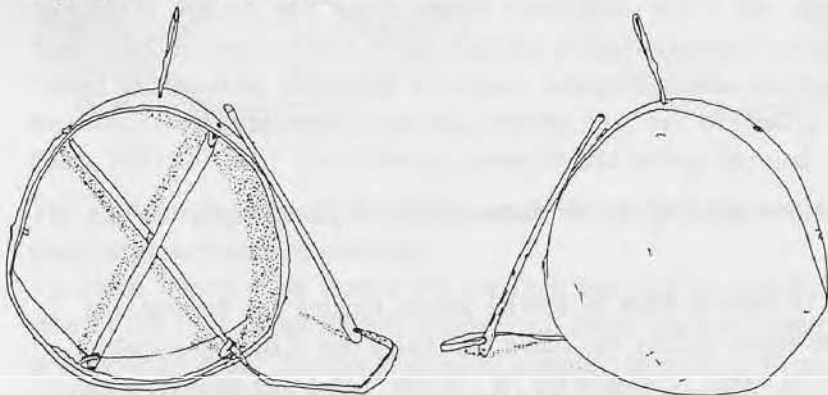


Fig.3. The Thakali *rnga* (after a picture of Musée de l'Homme)

<sup>3</sup> Rammā Purān. Can is the name used by the Kham Magar for the first shaman.

### Frame drum with pegged skin (and without diametrical stick), beaten with the bare hands

This drum, the Tamang *damphu*, has a particular organological form. The two examples in the Musée de l'Homme have the following characteristics:

- 65-102-72 : *d.* 30 cm, *h.* 7 cm, 32 regularly spaced wooden pegs, widely surpassing the frame.

- 69-74-2 (Valeix-Jest mission) : *d.* 30 cm, *h.* 8.5 cm, sheepskin glued and stretched with 46 long pegs inserted in the frame.

In the presentation of the contents of the *Tamba kaiten*, published in 1959 in Darjeeling by Santabir Lama, Macdonald discloses that one of the first songs (*hvāi*) describes the fabrication of the *damphu* drum: "It is not specifically stated whether it is a Tambā's drum. However it may be, the song tells us that when he was hunting in the Himalaya, Pengdorje killed a wild goat (*ghoral*). With the skin of this animal he apparently covered one head of his drum. The frame of which was made of ambursing (*koirālo*) wood. Bamboo pegs were used for stretching the skin. The sound of the drum was like the voice of Sarasvati (Macdonald, 1975:135, original text : *Tamba kaiten*, p. 20-21<sup>4</sup>).

After extensive fieldwork in the Tamang area, B. Steinmann was able to verify that the *damphu* is the essential characteristic of the *tamba*:

"Le *tamba* possède aussi des attributs particuliers. Son costume est le vêtement ordinaire des Tamang... Quoiqu'il en soit, c'est son tambour (Nep. *damphu*, Tib. *dampa*) à une seule face qui le distingue. Lui aussi a une origine mythique. Recouvert d'une peau de chèvre, il est cerclé du bois de *koirālo*. Le *tamba* frappe avec les deux mains alternativement sur cette peau qu'il dit être la peau même du demiurge Mathu Kaitap (ou Visnu)." (Steinmann, 1987:161).

Steinmann further stated:

<sup>4</sup> In the original text of verse 16, published with a translation in Nepali, it is specified that bamboo from the plains is used to make 32 nails which protrude from the interior like thorns and produce a sound *plākshwai*.



"[...]Le *tamba* possède un instrument distinctif, son tambour à une seule peau, le *dampfu* ou *dampa*, tambour sans manche, de facture assez simple. Il est constitué d'un cercle de bois de *koirālo*, sur lequel est tendue une peau de chèvre fixée par des tiges de bambou fichées à l'intérieur du cerclage et formant un cercle de 32 pointes. Le bois est verni et durci. Le *tamba* ne se sert de son *dampfu* que pour les mariages, les cérémonies en l'honneur des dieux du clan, devant un arbre du renouveau, le jour de l'initiation des filles (*pāsni*) et des garçons (*chewar*). Parfois, il peut jouer aussi lors des danses exécutées par les *mārūni* au mois de novembre-décembre, et pour les fêtes de Dasai." (*ibid.* p. 181 colour photo 16 and black and white photo 16). In other ways, the response to an enigma suggested in the same context recalls some accounts concerning the origin of the Tibetan *rnga* drum (Helffer, 1983 and 1994). "Quant au *dampa*, sa peau qu'est ce que c'est? Le tour qu'est-ce que c'est? La langue, à qui est-elle? [...] A l'origine, le cercle du *dampa* est fait de la côte de Mathu Kaitap, [la peau] c'est une peau de chèvre. Le son obtenu par le battement des doigts sur le *dampa*, c'est le bruit de la langue de Mathu Kaitap (T. *tep tep tilla le* que je suggèrerais de traduire par : dont la langue claque en faisant *tep-tep*)." (Steinmann, 1987, p. 199).

Despite elements alluding to the Tibetan world, an organological relationship between the Tamang *dampfu* and Islamic frame drums, called *duff* / *daff*, cannot be excluded.

### Conclusion

The ambiguous terminology for various types of drums used by mediums is outlined in the following table.

As has been discussed and as the table shows, the Nepali term *dhyāngro*, usually designates a frame drum with two laced heads, a handle in the form of a *phur-pa*, but among the Bhujel it designates a simple frame drum with a diametrical stick.

The Tibetan term *rnga*, as we know, is a generic term among Buddhists, designating a frame drum with two laced heads, provided with a handle or suspended from a wooden support. For the Gurung, it can mean either a drum with two heads used by the *klihbri/ghyābre*; or the one-skinned drum of the *pucu/paju*, and the Thakali use the term to designate a frame drum with one skin used by their *drom*.

The Drums of Nepalese Mediums

Population	Drum name	Organological characteristics	Wood used for the frame	Type of skin	User
1. Indo-Nepalese et al.	<i>dhyāngro</i>	frame drum with 2 skins and a handle shaped like a <i>phur-pa</i> , beaten with a sinusoidal <i>gajo</i>	<i>sinaro</i>	deer / monkey	<i>jhākri</i> [Macdonald, Miller...]
Limbu Sunwar	" "	" "	<i>koiralo</i> <i>tsegi</i>	<i>mirga</i> <i>kiarshe</i> (goat) or <i>rokoshie</i> (deer)	<i>yuma</i> [Sagant] <i>puimbo / ngiami</i> [Fourmier]
Tamang Gurung	<i>rnga</i> <i>rnga</i>	" "	<i>sing-sing</i> ?	<i>ghoral</i> (wild goat) ?	<i>bombo</i> [Höfer] <i>ghyabre</i> [Mumford] / <i>klihbri</i> [Pignède]
2. Gurung	<i>nah</i>	frame drum [1 skin] held with diametrical sticks inserted in the frame, beaten with a carved, wooden rectilinear stick	<i>kega</i>	?	<i>pucu Pignède</i> / <i>paju</i> [Mumford]
Northern Magar	<i>rē</i>	1-sided, held by crossed sticks attached with rings to the rim's interior	<i>gūi / guipal</i>	<i>ghoral</i>	<i>jhākri</i> [Oppitz, de Sales] ?
Chepang Bhujel / Chautel	<i>rē / ring</i> <i>dhyāngro</i>	frame drum	?	?	<i>jhākri</i> [Hitchcock]
Thakali	<i>rnga</i>	frame drum with pegged skin	?	?	<i>drom</i> [Jest]
3. Tamang	<i>dampfu</i>	frame drum with 2 skins	<i>koiralo / ambursing</i> ?	<i>ghoral</i>	<i>tamba</i> [Macdonald, Steinmann] Buddhist lamas
Tibetan	<i>rnga</i>	frame drum	?	?	<i>bon-po</i> [Nebesky-Wojkowitz]
"	<i>phyed-rnga</i> (= half <i>rnga</i> )	frame drum	?	?	

Whether the drum has one or two heads is generally considered as the result of a competition for power: Competition between Mahādeo and a bhoṭiya lama to reach the sun: Mahādeo is thwarted; he decides to make a drum. The most widespread explanation refers to the competition between Milarepa and a Bonpo over the conquest of Kailaś: In the written version in Milarepa's *Mgur-'bum* ("The miracle contest on Ti-se snow mountain" in Gama C.C. Chang, 1970:100-109), the bonpo, Naro bon chung, is defeated; the drum on which he rides comes tumbling down, but there is nothing more precise about the drum's number of skins. According to the version Mumford collected in Gurung country, mediums are identified with ancient Bonpos:

"Sometimes they refer to the local *Paju* shaman, a virtuoso sacrificer, as a "black" Bon (*bon nag*). The Ghyabre shaman views himself as becoming a "white" Bon . . . [the lamas] think of the Ghyabre and Paju as descendents of the unreformed Bonpos. . . ." (Mumford, 1990:32). [..]"The Ghyabre and Paju shamans unhesitatingly identify themselves with the Tibetan Bonpo (practioners of the Bon religion) who "lost the contest" to Milarepa. They and the Tibetan lamas agree on the main kernel of the story, which I summarize here from taped interviews: Milarepa went with his disciples to Mount Tise. He met a Bonpo who challenged him to a contest of magical power to see which of them should control the mountain. After a few preliminary contests of flying over the lake in which they were both equal, they decided to see who could reach the top of Mount Tise first on the morning of the next day. Early in the morning the Bonpo, riding his drum, flew up the slope of the mountain. Milarepa's disciple awoke his master and pointed to the Bonpo nearing the top. At the moment a ray of sunlight broke over the top of the mountain and beamed down into the window of the hut. Milrepa instantly rode the sunbeam to the top of Mount Tise, arriving ahead of the Bonpo. Defeated, the Bonpo fell back, dropping his drum which rolled down the mountain slope and split in half. To this day, the drum of the Bonpo has only one side, while the drum of the lama still has two sides". (*ibid.* p. 52). "After the Bonpo was defeated on Mount Tise and dropped his drum, the version given by the Paju shaman adds the following: The Paju [Bonpo] was angry that he had lost the contest. In despair the Paju took all his written texts and threw them into a fire, where they burned to ashes. Then he heard the voice of a god above: "Although you have destroyed your books you must do your rituals by remembering the knowledge that your books contained." The Paju

ate the ashes of the burned texts and thus swallowed the knowledge. To this day the lama has to read his texts, but the Paju chants his learning from memory" (*ibid.* p. 52-53). "According to another informant, a Paju from the village of Rangu: "Originally the lama, the Ghyabre, and the Paju were all equal brothers. Having the same mother and father, they all had texts. After the contest on Mount Tise, however, they decided to have different specializations. The lama chose to perform rites of fortune expansion [*ghang khug*]. The Ghyabre chose to do the death rite and deliver the soul to the land of the dead. The Paju decided to recall the wandering soul of the living and to expel demons, dealing with rites concerned with the earth and the underworld." (*ibid.* p. 54).

This agrees with the version recounted by Das at the end of the nineteenth century. He wrote that a long time ago, a lama, a *zhagri*, a *klihbri* and a Brahman were competing to determine who was the most powerful. The losers would have to pierce their drums and burn their books. The winner had to reach Lake Manasarovar at sunrise. The lama and the Brahman spent the night meditating, while the *zhagri* and the *klihbri* flew away on their drums. The two priests reached the lake later than their competitors. Having lost, they burned their books and pierced their drums, which is why the the *nah* drum has a skin only on one side and the lama's drum has two skins.

Nebesky-Wojkowitz, without citing his sources, considered the drum with one skin to be typically Bonpo. He calls it a half-drum (*phyed-mga*), implying that the true drum, used by the dominant Buddhists, has two skins. "Sorcerers of the "black Bon" (*Bon nag*) use in their ceremonies a tambourine, about twenty inches in diameter [50 cm], held by means of a short wooden handle. Over the broad wooden frame is stretched the skin of the Saiga antelope (*rGya ra*), held in position by strings drawn cross-wise over the frame. Contrary to the drums described above the tambourine has only one drum-skin, and it is called therefore *phyed mga*, "half drum", also, *Bon gyi mga*, "drum of the Bon". It is being beaten by means of a curved wooden stick in a peculiar way: the tambourine, held with the left hand, is brought close to the face of the sorcerer, with the skin facing downward. The right hand has then to lead the stick upward, in order to hit the drum-skin. The Tibetan Buddhists claim that this peculiar technique became customary among the Bonpos



after *Na ro bon chung*, a famous representative of the "black Bon", had been defeated by the Buddhist sage *Mi la ras pa*. The Bon sorcerers are ashamed of the defeat which one of them had suffered, and they try therefore to hide their faces in the tambourine." (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975:399-400)<sup>5</sup>.

Can this interpretation, which would tend to underscore Buddhist superiority with respect to the Bonpos, be accepted without discussion, when today, in Bonpo communities the drum used always has two skins and does not therefore correspond to the previous description? Only more in-depth studies can elucidate under what analogous circumstances and for which actions, whose purpose is not apparently dissimilar, do some people use a drum with one skin, while others use a drum with two.

#### References

Béguin, G., ed.

1977, *Dieux et Démons de l'Himalaya*, Art du bouddhisme tibétain, Paris, Editions des Musées Nationaux.

Bouillier V. & Toffin, G., eds.

1989, *Prêtrise, Pouvoirs et Autorité en Himalaya*, Paris, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales [coll. Purusārtha n°12]

Chang, G.C.

1970, *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, (abridged edition), London, Harper Colophon Books.

Das, S.C.

1881, "Dispute between a Buddhist and a Bon-po Priest for the Possession of Mount Kailasa and the Lake of Manasa", *JASB*, vol. 50, pp.206-211.

Fournier, A.

1976, "A Preliminary Report on the Puimbo and the Ngiami - The Sunuwar Shamans of Sabra", in Hitchcock J.T. & Jones, R.L., eds., *Spirit*

<sup>5</sup> The manner of holding the drum does not differ from Macdonald's description of the *jhānkri*: "The *jhānkri* holds the drum handle in his left hand, one side of the drum held at face level. He beats the exterior side of the drum by bringing towards his face the *gajo* he holds in his right hand. When he is officiating, the *jhānkri* speaks directly to one side of the drum while he plays on the other side (Macdonald, 1976: 329, note 14). Father Miller also made the same observation: ". . . three-sided and pointed handle of the drum in his left hand so that the broad face of the drum faces him and beating the outer face with a snake-curved *gajo*. . ." (Miller, 1979, p. 12).

*Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, pp.100-123, Warminster, Aris and Phillips.

Gianattasio, F.

1988, "I rapporti tra musica e transe nello sciamanismo nepalese", in Mastromattei R. *La terra reale; Dèi, spiriti, uomini in Nepal*, pp.183-226, Roma, Valerio Levi Editore.

Helffer, M.

1983, "Observations concernant le *mga* : symbolisme, usage et notation", *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, vol. IV, pp. 62-97.

1994, "Traditions tibétaines relatives à l'origine du tambour", in *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies* [Fagernes 1992], vol. 1, pp. 318-334, Oslo, The Institute for Comparative Research in Tibetan Culture.

1995, Mchod-rol. *Les instruments de la Musique tibétaine*, Paris, CNRS Editions-Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

Helffer M. & Gaborieau M.

1974, "A propos d'un tambour du Kumaon et de l'ouest du Népal : remarques sur l'utilisation des tambours-sabliers dans le monde indien, le Népal et le Tibet", in *Studia instrumentorum musicae popularis III*, Festschrift to Ernst Emsheimer on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday, pp. 75-80 and pp. 268-272, Stockholm, Nordiska Musikförlaget.

Hitchcock, J.T.

1976, "Aspects of Bhujel Shamanism", in Hitchcock J.T. & Jones, R.L., eds., *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, p. 165-196, Warminster, Aris and Phillips.

Hitchcock J.T. & Jones, R.L., eds.

1976, *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, Warminster, Aris and Phillips.

Höfer, A.

1974, "Is the *bombo* an Ecstatic ? Some Ritual Techniques of Tamang Shamanism", in von Fürer-Haimendorf, Ch., ed., *Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal*, pp.168-182, Warminster, Aris and Phillips.

1994, *A Recitation of the Tamang Shaman in Nepal*, Bonn, VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.

1997, "Notes on the Nepalese Drum *dhyāngro* as Used by Tamang Shaman (*jhākri/bombo*)" in Karmay S.G. & Sagant P., eds., *Les habitants*

*du Toit du Monde. Etudes recueillies en hommage à A.W. Macdonald*, Nanterre, Société d'Ethnologie (in press).

**Huntington, J.C.**

1975, *The phur-pa, Tibetan Ritual Daggers*, Ascona, Artibus Asiae Publishers, [Artibus Asiae Supplementum 33].

**Jest, C.**

1974, "Fête du pa-la à Chim, Kâlî Gandaki", *Objets et Mondes*, XIV/4, pp. 303-306

**Macdonald, A.W.**

1962 [Engl. transl. 1976] "Notes préliminaires sur quelques *Jhākri* du Muglân", *Journal Asiatique*, 250 (1), pp.107-139. English Translation in Hitchcock J.T. & Jones R.L., 1976 *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, p.309-341.

1966, "Les Tamangs vus par l'un d'eux", *L'Homme* VI/1, pp.27-58. English Translation in A.W. Macdonald ed., 1975, pp.129-167.

1975, *Essays on the Ethnology of Nepal and South Asia*, Kathmandu, Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

**Messerschmidt, D.A.**

1976, *The Gurungs of Nepal. Conflict and Change in a Village Society*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips.

**Miller, C.J.**

1979, *Faith-healers in the Himalayas*, Kirtipur, Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University.

**Mumford, S.R.**

1990, *Himalayan Dialogue. Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal*, Kathmandu, Tiwari's Pilgrims Book House

**Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. de**

1974 [1956], *Oracles and Demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*, Graz, Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt.

**Oppitz, M.**

1980, *Shamanen in Blinden Land*, film 16 mm (colour, length 224 mn), WDR-WSK-Produktion (RFA TV).

1981, *Shamanen in Blinden Land*, Frankfurt, Syndikat.

1990, "Le tambour rē et son pouvoir", in *Cahiers de Musiques traditionnelles* 3 : Musique et Pouvoir, pp.79-95.

1992, "Drawings on shamanic drums : Nepal" in *Res* 22, pp.62-81).

**Pignède, B.**

1966, *Les Gurungs, une population himalayennne du Népal*. Paris-La Haye, Mouton & Co, [Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 6ème Section : Sciences Economiques et Sociales, coll. Le Monde d'Outre-Mer Passé et Présent, Troisième Série, Etudes XXI].

**Rouget, G.**

1980, *La Musique et la Transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession*, Paris, NRF Editions Gallimard, [Collection Bibliothèque des Sciences Humaines] ; 1990, Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée, Paris, Tel-Gallimard ; English Translation : *Music and Trance. A theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, 1985, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press.

**Sagant, P.**

1976, "Becoming a Limbu Priest : Ethnographic Notes", in Hitchcock, J.T. and Jones, R.L. eds., *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, Warminster, Aris and Phillips., pp. 56-99.

**de Sales, A.**

1989, "Gendres des esprits : les chamanes Kham-Magar", in Bouillier, V. & Toffin G. eds., *Prêtrise, Pouvoirs et Autorité en Himalaya*, pp.101-125, Paris, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales [coll. Purusārtha N°12].

1991, *Je suis né de vos jeux de tambours. La religion chamanique des Magar du nord*, Paris, Société d'Ethnologie.

**Stein, R.**

1977, "La gueule du makara : un trait inexpliqué de certains objets rituels", in Macdonald, A. ed., *Essais sur l'Art du Tibet*, pp.52-62, Paris, Jean Maisonneuve.

1978, "A propos de documents anciens relatifs au Phur-bu (kīla)", in Ligeti, L., ed. *Proceedings of the Csoma de Korös Symposium*, pp.427-444, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiado.

**Steinmann, B.**

1987, *Les Tamang du Népal, Usages et Religion, Religion de l'usage*, Paris, Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations.

1989, "Les pouvoirs du Tamba Tamang : comment l'usage a trouvé son prêtre", in Bouillier, V. & Toffin G. eds., *Prêtrise, Pouvoirs et Autorité en Himalaya*, pp.127-146.