

THE FOUNDING OF A TIBETAN VILLAGE : THE POPULAR TRANSFORMATION OF HISTORY.

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Introduction : the problem of the great and little traditions

Students of Tibetan society have tended to polarise around one of two points of departure for the treatment of their subject. At one extreme is the ethnographer who uses the methodological tools forged among preliterate tribal communities; this causes him to ignore the documentary material and historical context which relates his small field to the vast matrix of the Tibetan tradition. True, it is a myopia which arises from working in the penumbra of societies with an obscure history and no literature, but, to quote one of its greatest critics, 'it would be strange to make a virtue of this sad necessity'.¹ On the other hand, the same ethnographer may be justly critical of the scholar who works solely from texts and ignores the living traditions far away on the same spectrum of sophistication. (An eminent translator once asked me, 'Why do you want to go all the way up to the mountains? Tibetan culture is dead. It exists only in their books'.)

But although examples can be found of both these positions (and they are quite valid as long as the exponents acknowledge their limitations) we should recognise that they are essentially extremes. It would be too easy to set up two straw figures which the present article would demolish while claiming to be the perfect offspring of their improbable marriage. The middle way has already been blazed, and although it is often not much more than a trail through the territory of Tibetan studies, it is marked enough in other areas to raise problems about the principles of its construction. The existence of two distinct traditions in a single society was first made explicit by Redfield, who maintained that 'The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities'.² The model has been opposed on many grounds; one author accepts it in principle, but suggests that it is both too narrow,

¹ Snellgrove, D., 1966, 'For a sociology of Tibetan-speaking regions', in *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. XI; p.203.

² Redfield, R., 1956, *Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago; p.41.

because it fails to consider the asymmetrical participation in the little tradition by the exponents of the great (though Redfield does propose that 'the two traditions are interdependent'), and too broad, because it does not recognise stratification within the popular culture.³ The latter fault in particular has given rise to confusion about the identification of two cultural levels. Marriott, for example, distinguishes between societies in which local communities have no tradition apart from that of the larger context in which they are situated ('to study Jonesville is to study America . . .'), and primitive communities which are 'too remote and distinct from any greater civilisation for them to be able to contribute much to the understanding of its particulars'.⁴

Some communities, however, exhibit facets of both a great and a little tradition, and Marriott demonstrates how the Indian village of Kishan Garhi ('for in India we are on middle ground') conforms to this pattern. Yet the features which he cites as binding Kishan Garhi to the great community include kinship relations with neighbouring villages, trading networks and the fragmented practice of local religion—hardly aspects of a tradition which is 'cultivated in schools or temples', but quite evidently of one which 'works itself out . . . in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities'.

The problem is one of definition. Marriott's distinction is valid as long as we understand that his great tradition is principally a geographical construct, and it is enough to say that this is not how the opposition will be phrased in the present article. But if the little tradition is geographically as pervasive as the great, in spite of its misleading heterogeneity, on what grounds are we to distinguish the two? This question leads us in turn to ask if it is possible to produce a definition that is valid for all cultures, including those which have been secularised to the extent that even the religion, at one time a force of spiritual and temporal hegemony, is likely to become a cult perpetuated by scattered social misfits. Is it acceptable to refer to the ubiquitous influence of a secular state as a 'great tradition'? We can give an instinctive and unempirical description of a little tradition's characteristics—non-literate, local, old, indigenous and so forth—but exceptions can be found to all these generalities; the existence of folk literature, the fact that many popular traditions may be extremely widespread, recent, imported, etc., while great traditions themselves are often indigenous.

The present article will not hazard a definitive discussion of great and little traditions, but will consider one dimension of the putative opposition; the literary.

³ Burke, P., 1978 *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, London: p. 24 ff.

⁴ Marriott, M., 1955, 'Little communities in an indigenous civilization', in M. Marriott, (ed.), *Village India*, Chicago: p. 172.

and oral preservation of history. It will focus on the typical preoccupations of scholars and non—or semi-literate villagers (as the representatives of the two traditions), examining the stress that they place on different aspects of the same story in accordance with their own interests. However, in an attempt to contribute to the study of the great and little traditions outside the context of a specific cultural environment, I shall compare the processes of the oral tradition to those of a society which, on the face of it, could not be further removed from Tibet—Europe before the industrial revolution.

The essay will begin with a straight forward account of events leading up to the founding of Lubra (Klu-brag), a Tibetan village located in the Upper Kali Gandaki region of Nepal. Since the principal literary sources are in the form of Tibetan biographies, the account is picaresque insofar as the events are incidental to the character and qualities of the protagonists. It is not certain when any of the accounts were written, but it is likely that many of the episodes were not original creations of the authors but already existed in oral form. Following this description, I shall present a version of the history that forms part of the oral folklore of Lubra. There is no intention that the oral history should be portrayed as the erroneous version of the 'correct' written account; instead, I hope to show that it has developed over the years in ways that are characteristic of the evolution of unwritten folklore in culturally unrelated societies. It is, of course, pointless to speculate whether the written versions were the direct source of the oral account or *vice versa*. Even if the details of the two ran parallel for a time, the processes of change to which the oral tradition is prone has inevitably caused them to bifurcate and diverge. Thus the two versions of the story are between them a perfect subject for a synthetic study, combining both the approaches described above: from the texts we learn something about certain lineages (agnatic and spiritual) and the historical events surrounding them, while the oral account tells us a great deal about the people who changed and sustained it.

Among folklorists of European culture, one school of thought maintained that it is individuals who compose stories and ballads, while a more extreme and somewhat tenuous position (exemplified by the Grimm's dogma, 'das Volk dichtet') holds that composition is a communal business. Burke summarises what is probably the truth of the matter.

'The individual may inven , but in an oral culture, as Cecil Sharp emphasised, 'the community selects'. ...Thus successive audiences exercise a 'preventive censorship' and decide whether a given song or story will survive, and in what form it will survive. It is in this sense...that the people participate in the creation and transformation of popular culture, just as

they participate in the creation and transformation of their native language' (1978: 115).

The Literary Sources

The following three texts are the principal historical sources on which the literary account is based.

1. The first text is entitled: 'The voice, so-called, of Brahma, the lineage history of the clan of the Yang-ngal priests which is like sight, the foremost of all the senses'. I was kindly permitted to photograph and copy this document by the present heir of the Yang-ngal inheritance in Lubra. It contains fifty-four folios written in Tibetan cursive (*dbu-med*) script. The lineage history occupies approximately one half of the text, while the first part deals with the broader issues of 'the manner in which the buddhas of the thousand ages came and the sentient beings of the three worlds were released'. The document was written in a Water Snake year by one Yang-sgom Mi-'gyur rgyal-mtshan. The second section at least is probably the same as the text referred to in Snellgrove's *Nine ways of Bon* (London 1967:4-5), entitled 'Genealogy of the religious line of the noble priests of the Yañ-ñal', and described as the 'genealogy of the lamas of Samling'. Our author also gives Samling as the place where he composed the work, but Samling, as we shall see, may refer to a monastery either in Dolpo or in Lubra. The work will be abbreviated as YDR (*Yang-ngal gdung rabs*)

2. The second source is entitled *Dong mang gur gsum gyi rnam thar*. This is a short piece containing brief biographies of several lamas from the Yang-ngal clan, principally Sherab Gyaltzen and his two sons, Dampa Bumje and Trashī Gyaltzen. It is contained in Tenzin Namdak (ed.), *Sources for a History of Bon* (Dolanji, 1972) and will be abbreviated as SHB.

3. The third work, entitled *rDzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan rgyud kyi brgyud pa'i bla ma'i rnam thar*, gives brief biographies of over a hundred lamas of the Bon-po *Dzogs-chen Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud* tradition. Since it is published in Lokesh Chandra and Tenzin Namdak (eds.), *History and Doctrine of Bon-po Nispanna-Yoga* (Delhi, 1968), it will be abbreviated as BNY, and page numbers will refer to this version.

Several of the episodes contained in this work are curtailed and polished versions of these occurring in SHB, and the fact that many sections are repeated *verbatim* suggests either that the author obtained his information from SHB or that the two were derived from a common, earlier source.

The following account will not comprise a detailed discussion of the texts, but will summarise the main historical (or legendary) events, and simply outline the

lives of the principal figures. While the period covered in YDR begins with the divine origin of the Yang-ngal lineage at the time of Nyatri Tsenpo, the first king of Tibet (for whom the eponymous Yang-ngal was a household priest), and the list of descendants runs for seventeen generations from the heads of three main branches (the three Gu-rib, who lived in the early eleventh century), the oral account spans the lives of only two of its members. The biographies also contain a great deal of information concerning education of the protagonists, listing the famous scholars under whom they studied, and the particular teachings which they received from each. It is tempting to include such information both in order to heighten the contrast between the written and oral versions and out of historical interest, but for reasons of space it must suffice just to mention this aspect of the texts. Excessive detail that is extraneous to the oral version would only obscure the finer variations, while the main historical points have been summarised in David Jackson's excellent article on the history of Serib.⁵

The story begins in the life of Sherab Gyaltzen (Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan), who was born in 1077⁶ in the village of Tagtse Jiri (in Upper Tsang), which had long been a stronghold of the Yang-ngal clan. His father was Sungrabkyab (gSung-rab-skyabs), who was the son of Khepa Menpa (mKhas-pa sman-pa), one of the three lineage heads. According to BNY,

He had four different names: since he was born thirteen days after the death of his father he was known as Tshab-ma-grags ['the One Called the Replacement']; his clan was Yang-ngal, and so he was known as Yangston chen-po ['the Great Yang-ngal Teacher']; according to a prophesy he was [an incarnation of] Pang la nam-gshen⁷, and his actual [i.e. given] name was Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (60–61).

During his youth he devoted himself to scholarly pursuits, and Buddhist monks who ought vainly to defeat him in debate called him the 'sharp-tongued Bonpo'.

⁵ D. Jackson, 1978, 'Notes on the history of Serib and nearby places in the Upper Kali Gandaki', in *Kailash*, Vol. VI. pp. 195–224. Another source on which Jackson draws for information about Lubra and its founder is dPal-Idan tshul-khrims's *Sangs rgyas g. yung drung bon gyi bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa'i legs bshad bskad pa bzang po'i mgrin rgyan* (Dolanji 1972); unfortunately, this is not available to me at the present time.

I am grateful to Dr. Michael Aris and Dr. Samten Karmay for their considerable help with obscure points in the three main texts.

⁶ For points of chronology the reader is referred to D. Jackson, 1978; *passim*, and to Snellgrove, 1967:4–5.

⁷ For more on sPang-la nam-gshen see Karmay, S., 1972, *A Treasury of Good Sayings* London; p.23.

Then followed a spell of asceticism in the mountains, during which 'everyone said he had gone mad' because he would sit for long periods gazing into space (61) (SHB describes an episode which is omitted in BNY: while he was meditating, a 'beautiful young woman' came to him and asked him if he was going to visit his teacher. On his inquiring where his teacher was to be found, the woman replied that he was in the upper part of the same valley. Here he found a cave containing a woven nest of silken thread. In this nest was a tiny creature like a monkey which offered him a bronze bowl and told him to drink from it. He did so, and 'received teachings that descended of their own accord; the bonds of his doubt were severed and knowledge was released to him in a wave' (461). On returning to the scholastic life, he held discussion with one Sebon Trogyal on certain matters of philosophy. So impressed was he by the latter's knowledge that he determined to study under his teacher, Orgom Kundul ('Or-sgom kun-'dul). Presenting himself before the lama, he said, 'I pray you, whose thirst as much [wisdom] as an ocean could not satisfy, to quench mine, which is as little as the eye of a fish' (SHB, 61).

After Orgom Kundul had bestowed on his disciple the lower transmission (the *Nyams-brgyud*) of the *Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*, he instructed him to go to Upper Ngari, where he would have two sons (for in spite of two marriages he was childless) and would receive many disciples. Now around this time there lived in the village of Bonkhor in Upper Lo a lama named Rong Togme Shigpo (Rong rTog-med zhing-po), who had apparently gone there to fight in a war. He was wounded in action, but the local villagers 'recognised him as an outstanding Bonpo, and took care of him to the extent of providing him with patrons (YDR, fol. 34a). His biography is given in BNY (59-60), but it is specifically his relationship with Sherab Gyaltzen that concerns us. The story of their meeting is related in BNY (62-63): on his way to Upper Ngari, Sherab Gyaltzen encountered a group of dice-players who asked him to stay for a while and give them his blessing:

As he sat there, one of the dice-calls (*chol-sngags*) ran, 'Rong Togme Shigpo who sees neither the sun nor the moon'. He asked where such a person was. 'The adept of the *rDzogs-chen Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*, the great sage in the monastery high up there in the mountains is the one called Rong Togme Shigpo, who sees neither the sun nor the moon'. On hearing this, boundless reverence and faith arose in him and he determined to meet the lama. The account continues:

The same evening, in the early part of the night, a woman came to Rong Togme Shigpo in a dream. 'The incarnation of Pangla Namshen is coming as your student. Give him an audience and instruct him thoroughly in the Bon of *Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*, 'came her command. In the second half of

the night, a man came for an audience carrying the paraphernalia of a Bonpo tantrist... .

There then follows a description of his appearance which may be omitted.

The next morning, an attendant said, 'A Bonpo who has come from the village of Dongkya, over there, is asking for an audience'. On asking what he looked like, [Rong Togme Shigpo] was told that his dress and tantric effects were such and such, and he said, 'The one who appeared in my dream last night is here.

BNY, and YDR agree that Sherab Gyaltzen received from Rong Togme Shigpo the upper transmission of the *Zhang-zhungs Nyan-brgyud*, but BNY adds the detail that he did not receive it in its entirety. The upper transmission consists of four sections, the *bKa'-brgyud skor-bzhi*, and it may be transmitted by a teacher to only one student (*gcig-rgyud*). Now Rong Togme Shigpo had already passed on the section, the *Phyi-eta-be spyi-gcod*, to a disciple named Lungom (Lung-sgom), and it was from him that Sherab Gyaltzen was obliged to receive it.

It is worth interrupting the narrative at this point to note that in spite of the differences in the texts, they are at least structurally similar in many respects. SHB makes no mention of Rong Togme Shigpo, but it does have Sherab Gyaltzen visiting a cave in which he receives knowledge of a special kind. The 'beautiful young woman' who advises Sherab Gyaltzen in SHB appears in BNY to inform Rong Togme Shigpo that his student is the incarnation of Pangla Namshen. Here, too, the means by which he learns the whereabouts of his lama has something of the *deus ex machina* about it, for the information is contained in the cryptic utterance of a dice-player whom he meets by chance.

Although I shall give more detailed consideration below to the 'popular selective censorship' that determines the evolution of a story, it would be interesting to examine the transformation of the account at the hands of an individual. Like the amorphous 'folk', this later author, Shardza Trashi Gyaltzen, has filtered out much of the historical material that lies outside the confines of his interest. After discussing the perseverance exhibited by many notable scholars in trying to find their lamas, he praises them for adhering to their quest 'without giving a thought to hardship of suffering':

For example, we should emulate the manner of the Great Yangton's search for Rong Togme Shigpo. As to how it happened, that lama, the Great Yangton, was thoroughly versed in the Bon doctrines of the 'Transmitted Explanations' (*bshad-gyud*), and on one occasion a woman appeared to him saying, 'To what extent are you learned?'

'I am utterly learned,' he replied, whereupon the woman began weep-

ing and departed unhappily. The lama thought to himself, 'When I told her I was learned she became unhappy. If she appears tomorrow I must tell her I know nothing,' and he waited.

The following day the woman came and addressed him as before. 'I know nothing at all,' he replied, 'have you any sort of knowledge you might teach me?' The woman laughed with delight.

'If you want to learn some knowledge, there is one Rongom [sic; Ronggom] Togme Shigpo who appears to be living among crags infested by serpent-gods and demons, seeing neither the sun nor the moon. Go to him, and you will have some great knowledge to study,' she said, and departed. Just to hear this the great Yangton's heart was so filled with joy that he forgot to ask where the lama was. Thinking that the woman would come again on the following day too he waited, but she did not appear. After a week had elapsed, he thought to himself that it would be best to go off now in search of the lama. He travelled down to Dokham [Eastern Tibet] and sought him for three years without finding him. Then he went up and searched for three years in the middle of Tibet, in U and Tsang, but he did not find him. He then looked in To Ngari for three years, but did not find him there either.

By now the Great Yangton was utterly dispirited and proceeded to return. When he reached the capital of Lo Monthang he met two men who were playing dice. One of the dice-calls ran: 'The one who sees neither the sun nor the moon, Rongom Togme Shigpo, knows.' On hearing this the Great Yangton began to tremble. 'Now I can meet my lama,' he thought, and laughed with joy, but then thought, 'Although I have looked for three years without finding him I may not find him now,' and he wept. He asked where that lama known as Rongom Togme Shigpo lived, and the two men replied, 'Below here, towards Lo Monthang, among the crags infested by serpent-gods and demons in the upper part of the valley of Lubra-there he lives seeing neither the sun nor the moon.'

Proceeding thither he met the lama, and after relating to him the foregoing account he requested spiritual instruction.⁸

It is possible that the author derived his information from a source that was genealogically unconnected with the account presented here, but it is difficult to believe

⁸ Tenzin Namdak (ed.), 1972 *An Introduction to the A-khrid Practices of Bono Realisation*, being the text of *Man ngag rin po che a khrid thun mtshams bco nga pa'i sngon 'gro'i khrid rim bka' lung rgya mtsho* of Shar-rdza bkra-shis rgyal-mtshan, Dolanji: pp. 39-40.

that he would have related the story in this form had he intended to discuss, for example the transmission of the *Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*. The actual teaching that he received from Rong Togme Shigpo is irrelevant here (except insofar as it is 'some great knowledge'), and all the emphasis is placed on the unflagging zeal with which Sherab Gyaltzen seeks his master. The episode with the mysterious woman is protracted to inflate the initial pride and naivety which the disciple must replace with humility, and all other teachers are omitted from the account to emphasise the importance of the 'root lama'. It is interesting too that the author names Lubra as Rong Togme Shigpo's location; it was, of course, not founded until the next generation, but if Shardza Trashi Gyaltzen knew this his inclusion of it is presumably a kind of artistic licence, on the grounds that Lubra is somehow connected with the Great Yangton.

The three principal accounts concur in the cause of Sherab Gyaltzen's death—'he did not fulfil the behests of this lama during his lifetime'. It appears that he failed to teach the secret Bon doctrine to a certain widow (a widower in SHB) but instead revealed it to her (or him) in writing. In any event he quickly fell ill, and died at the age of sixty three.⁹

Sherab Gyaltzen had two sons and a daughter by his third marriage. The elder son, Dampa Bumje O, was a remarkable figure by all accounts, but is nevertheless of no interest to the present essay. It is with his younger brother, Trashi Gyaltzen, that we are concerned. The latter was educated by many outstanding figures of his day,¹⁰ but 'in particular he received from his elder brother Bumje O instruction in the *rDzogs-pa chen-po Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*' (BNY 86). Trashi Gyaltzen is generally referred to by the epithet "*Gro-mgon Klu-brag-pa* (the Protector of Living Beings, the Man of Lubra), because he is credited with the founding of that village. YDR gives an entertaining description of the event that is not mentioned in either SHB or BNY :

Trashi Gyaltzen went riding on a mare which had a foal. His patrons in Kag (near Lubra) saw him off on the plateau. 'But you cannot go further, they said, for it was an area of demons and goblins.

'My service to living beings lies here,' he replied. The genius of the place hid the foal inside a rock, and then its mother galloped and kicked the rock; the foal kicked from inside, and the sundered rock split into three

⁹ Sixty four in BNY, Sixty five in YDR. It should be noted that in the Tibetan system of reckoning age a person is one year old at birth.

¹⁰ The principal figures are listed in D. Jackson, 1978:204-5. It was the Dru Lama Nyima Gyaltzen who gave him the name Trashi Gyaltzen.

pieces, and the foal emerged. The hoof-prints of the mare and the foal are still there, and the lama left the imprint of his penis.

Trashigyaltsen had a further encounter with the same goblin, Kyerang Dragme, who appeared with his consort a few days later in the form of a pair of poisonous snakes. He defeated them and made them swear oaths that they would become protectors of the doctrine.

Then he put two small needles into the earth to determine whether or not he should found a village. He put an inverted basket over them, and when he looked after seven days the basket was full and had been raised so that it did not touch the ground (YDR, fols. 38a-39a).

What had filled the basket was, in fact, a young walnut tree which sprouted from the needles. This gigantic tree still stands above the entrance to the village, and small pieces of wood are occasionally taken from it to make receptacles for sacred relics. Describing the area in which he founded the village, BNY describes it as 'that fearsome valley to the right of Dhaulagiri, the village of the malicious gods and serpent deities known as the wilderness of Lubra' (87), but adds that it was blessed by various saintly individuals. Trashigyaltsen himself apparently thought highly of the inherent spiritual qualities of Lubra, for 'although he had meditated for years or months in other places, he said that in this place, by meditating only for days or for (the duration of) meals, he could come nearer to perfecting his practice' (BNY, 87). He died at the age of eighty-five (ninety-five in YDR), unlike his father, 'without suffering any illness or pain'.

The oral tradition.

Ideally, it would be possible to present the oral account *verbatim*, as a transcript of the tape-recording on which it was collected. Unfortunately, the matter is not as simple as that. The principal source of the story was one Meme ('Grandfather') Tshering, the oldest man in Lubra, who was most generous and helpful but often less than cogent as a raconteur. He was fond of his *chang* and *a-rag*, a fact which (while admittedly making him very willing to talk) caused him to omit sections of the story. Sometimes a listener would insert these for him, or else he himself would remember them later on. Although the account was remarkably consistent on the various occasions when I asked him to relate it, he would talk at great length on tangential matters, to the extent that the assistant who helped me to transcribe the recordings once complained in exasperation that this was real 'headache-including work' (*mgo na-mkhan las-ka*)! Thus the following story is in the nature of a distillation from several interviews with Meme Tshering and with other villagers who were less well-acquainted with the tale. The account is in many respects more similar to Shardza

Trashi Gyaltzen's presentation of the tenacious disciple than to the other sources. Whatever the order of their emergence, the oral version is manifestly more 'popular' in its emphases and omissions.

The story begins in the childhood of Sherab Gyaltzen, a native of Gyarong in Eastern Tibet (it will be remembered that the historical figure was born in Tagtse, in Central Tibet), where he is nearing the end of a nine-year retreat. This is a notable achievement made prodigious by the fact that he was only three years old when he embarked on it. It was during his term as an anchorite that he received a visit from a woman who is here not only explicitly divine but identified specifically as the goddess Hripe Gyalmo.¹¹ She asked him what he knew. 'I know everything,' was the confident reply, at which Hripe Gyalmo began to weep copiously and vanished. The following day, at the same time, the goddess returned and asked the same question. Remembering her response to his boast of the previous day, Sherab Gyaltzen replied that he knew nothing, at which Hripe Gyalmo burst out laughing and disappeared. Convinced by this response that he was basically at fault somewhere, he humbly asked his visitor when she appeared the next day, 'Pray tell *me* what I know and do not know,' and the goddess obliged by counselling him about his future. 'It was because you said you knew everything, and then that you knew nothing, that I wept and laughed. Now there is one thing which, if you know it, will reveal all.' He immediately asked of whom he might discover this key item of knowledge. 'Rongom Togme Lama,'¹² was the reply, at which Hripe Gyalmo disappeared, leaving Sherab Gyaltzen no opportunity to ask where he might find the lama. He waited one day and then another for the goddess to reappear, and tried for a full month to regenerate the vision before he gave up and left his retreat to search for Rong Togme Shigpo in the flesh. He scoured Eastern Tibet for three years until he was convinced that his lama was not to be found there. Then he sought him in Central Tibet for three years, but without success. A further three years of fruitless searching in Western Tibet brought him to the vicinity of Lo, despairing of ever succeeding in his quest. He sat down to rest and absently watched three traders playing dice. The first trader prepared to cast his dice and called out, 'Shag-shong shag-shong . . . it is as

¹¹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz identifies Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo as the mistress of the *Dus-drug sprul-pa'i ma-mo*, a category of guardian goddesses who comprise one of thirty different classes of supernatural beings (1956, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, The Hague: pp. 267, 323, 339). The significance of the goddess in the Bonpo pantheon is given in S. Karmay 1972:xxi. My anglicised spelling 'Hripe Gyalmo' approximates to the Western Tibetan pronunciation of the same.

¹² Although the name displays numerous variants in the different accounts, except when quoting directly from a source I shall present it in the usual form Rong Togme Shigpo (Rong rTog-med zhig-po).

if he were in the middle of the fat in a fat-bowl'. The second player took his turn and exclaimed :

'Shari shari... the habitations of De and Tang in the Eastern Mountains are villages of the Bonpos,' and the last player cried:

'Thorro thorro... Rongom Togme Lama, who sees neither the sun by day nor the moon by night—praise to Rongom Togme Lama!' On hearing the name, Sherab Gyaltzen fell down in a dead faint.¹³

By making inquiries in the villages of Lo, Sherab Gyaltzen was guided to the cavern where his lama lived with a large entourage of disciples. Rong Togme Shigpo, meanwhile, had a dream about a tantrist (*sngags-pa*) who came to visit him. The visitor was distinguished by a ritual dagger (*phur-pa*) which was thrust through his belt. (This is in fact one of the features amongst the 'tantric paraphernalia' listed in SHB and BNY.)

Rong Togme Lama imparted to Sherab Gyaltzen certain unspecified instructions, and told him to go south, to Southern Lo, for the sake of all living beings. The ageing Rong Togme Lama then performed the ritual called '*pho-ba grong-'jug*, which is defined succinctly by Das as 'the translation of the soul by the efficacy of *gdam-ngag* (sacred formulae) or charms from one body to another just vacated by death'.¹⁴ It is not clear how Sherab Gyaltzen benefited from the lama's instructions, because Rong Togme Shigpo's body was apparently too old to support life, his own or his disciple's. Thus while the master's soul transmigrated into the body of Sherab Gyaltzen, the latter simply departed from mortal life. The other inhabitants of the cave knew nothing of the mystical transference that had taken place. As far as they were concerned, both their master and his new disciple were dead. Thus it was with some consternation that they watched the body of Sherab Gyaltzen come to life and, convinced that they were witnessing the phenomenon of a *ro-longs* (zombie), they drove him from the cave with stones.

The new man formed by the combination of Rong Togme Shigpo's spirit in the body of Sherab Gyaltzen took the name Trashig Gyaltzen (bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan), but he is commonly referred to as Yangton Lama (Yang-ston *bla-ma*), the title which properly belongs to Sherab Gyaltzen alone.

¹³ The dice-calls are: 1. *Zhag-gzhong zhag-gzhong | zhag-gyi dkyil-la 'dra*; 'Shari shari' / *Shar-ri sde-tang, gnas-tshang bon-po'i yul yin*; 3. 'Thorro thorro' / *rong-sgom rtog-med bla-ma nyin nyi-ma ma-mthong mtshan zla-ba ma-mthong rong-sgom rtog-med bla-ma la gsol-ba 'debs*. (Only transliterations of Tibetan terms are presented here in italics; anglicised or phonetic spellings are not.)

¹⁴ Das, S.C., 1970, *A Tibetan English Dictionary*, Delhi: p.849.

When Trashi Gyaltzen reached the village of Kag he was requested by some of its inhabitants to perform household ceremonies for them. Now Kag (bKag), which was at that time located about a mile south of the present village was being plagued by a pair of demons (*srin-po*), who would capture and devour its inhabitants at every opportunity. The fact that the village was abandoned is attributed to their voracity. Client-priests (*mchod-gnas* or *bla-mchod*) such as Trashi Gyaltzen are paid for their services with small gifts of money as well as all the food, beer and spirits they can consume during the course of the ritual. Following one such performance, when Trashi Gyaltzen was lying in a drunken stupor, the foal accompanying the mare which he had been riding was captured by the male demon, Kyerang Dragme, and hidden inside a rock on the plateau called Pe Thangka which rises between Kag and Lubra. When the lama awoke, he discovered that his foal was missing and set out to do battle with the demon. While negotiating the mare up the steep slope to the plateau, Trashi Gyaltzen, who appears to have been suffering from the effects of his patrons' hospitality, fell from his mount and left the imprint of his knee in a rock. When (as related in YDR) the mare later rushed at the boulder in which its foal was imprisoned, Trashi Gyaltzen was again thrown from the saddle; he must have landed awkwardly, because it is this fall to which the oral account attributes the imprint of his penis. While the hoof-prints of the mare and the foal are still to be seen on the rock, the section bearing the lama's mark is said to have sunk into the ground over the centuries. Devout villagers occasionally daub auspicious red clay on the hoof-prints, and a small cairn has been raised nearby to commemorate the miraculous happening.

When the thwarted demon later renewed his attack on Trashi Gyaltzen, the lama rendered him helpless with his magical powers, and made him and his consort promise to become protectors of Lubra and the Bon religion. Finally, he sealed each of them under a cairn on the plateau. The cairn for the she-goblin now stands in a distant corner of the plateau, where it has been allowed to go to ruin. Meme Tshering recalls that many years ago, when it first collapsed and villagers were salvaging rocks from it, their uneasiness at the desecration was sharpened by the discovery of a snake's skeleton coiled amongs its ruins. The cairn to the male occupies a prominent position at the point where the path from Lubra levels out onto the plateau. It is reconsecrated every year when the men of Lubra ride to Muktinath to celebrate the harvest festival (*dByar-ston*). Green birch branches decorated with coloured flags are set in the top of the cairn, and prayers are said by the assembled company. Moreover, when two new headmen (*rol-po*) of Lubra embark on their annual term of office, they must swear an oath of honesty which calls to witness the various powers of the village. Included in this list are the goddess Hripe Gyalmo,

and 'the genius of the place (*yul-sa*), the local deity (*gzhi-bdag*) Kyerang Dragme'. The people of Lubra invariably refer to him by the title *Xul-sa*, and in many temple ceremonies he is represented by a dough-and butter effigy on the altar, standing amongst the other guardians (*srung-ma*) of the doctrine.

The next part of the story is much the same as that related in YDR. Where Trashi Gyaltzen planted the two needles that grew into a walnut tree, and decided on this basis that the location was remarkable enough for his purposes. He then spent nine years in retreat, living in a small cave about the present site of the village and for each of these years a ridge formed spontaneously in the rock wall beside him. The temple that was later constructed on the site is called *Gom-phug dgon-pa*, the Temple of the Meditation-cave. He himself established the main temple in Lubra in the floor of the valley, before (as the oral tradition has it) embarking on the second part of his mission for the sake of sentient beings.

Motifs and formulae in the oral account

Before continuing the story, it would be useful to discuss the significant points of divergence between the written and oral accounts in order to see how these features are developed later on. Since one of the main intentions of this essay is to compare the processes that take place in the little traditions of two entirely different societies, I shall consider how the treatment of the history conforms to the patterns of popular culture in Europe.

Writing of Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Peter Burke states that 'the ballad is gradually stripped down to its essentials', adding that 'this elliptical style is the result not so much of individual decisions as of the wear and tear of oral transmission, a negative form of communal creation' (1978:146). The same process of reduction is evident in the story of Yangton Lama. The biographies of three lamas of the *Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud* tradition have been wittled down into a unified story. The details about doctrine, about unknown (to the people of Lubra) historical figures and obscure centres of learning which (fortunately for the historian) abound in the written records have been completely excised and only the bare narrative is retained.

But the tendency to reduce is just one aspect of what is essentially a creative art. Burke informs us that European singers of popular ballads used to 'learn how to "amplify" or "ornament" the basic structure' (141). While reducing their subject matter to a historical skeleton, as it were, they cover it with flesh of a different ilk. Anyone who has witnessed a myth or legend being related in the presence of an audience that has heard the story scores of times before will have seen this kind of creation taking place. The storyteller passes routinely through the humdrum narrative

while the audience listens with casual interest or mild boredom. The enthusiasm of both parties mounts in anticipation of a spectacular scene, and when it is reached there are murmurs of approval and satisfaction from all around. The storyteller himself dwells on the scene, and some of the listeners repeat it in their own words to make sure that the anthropologist has grasped it.

Before discussing these 'peaks' in the present story, it should be stated that not all orally-preserved accounts are subject to such variation. This is particularly so when the myth is sacred, in which case steps are usually taken to ensure that it remains unchanged. Examples of such deliberate preservation may be found practically anywhere in the world, and Southern Lo is no exception. In the twelfth month, after the agrarian New Year, the people of Tetang (a day's walk north of Lubra) hold a festival called simply the Lama Guru, which commemorates the arrival of an eminent lama from Tibet. On the first night all the young men and women go into the temple and recite a myth.¹⁵ They are supervised by an older villager who ensures that the recitation is word-perfect, and if anyone makes a mistake, the myth must be repeated from the beginning. It is usually morning before the group leaves the temple.

Although the story of Yangton Lama contains several miraculous episodes, the account itself is not sacred in the sense that it must be related *verbatim* or on special occasions only.

Burke points out that 'folksongs and folktales . . . all need to be seen as combinations of elementary forms, permutations of elements which are more or less ready-made'; the scale of these elements may vary from formulatic expressions to serial events, for 'whole scenes or episodes may wander or float no less than phrases or lines' (128). A common motif of this larger variety in Tibetan folklore and literature is seen in the disciple's arduous quest for his master. Historically speaking, Rong Togme Shigpo was important to Sherab Gyaltzen only insofar as he bestowed on him three quarters of the upper transmission of the *Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*. YDR seems to regard him as less important than Orgom Kundul, while SHB does not mention him at all. In BNY, however, Rong Togme Shigpo is more significant from a dramatic point of view, because here it is he (not Orgom Kundul, as in SHB) who receives the spectacular vision about the imminent arrival of Sherab Gyaltzen. But in none of these works is there a suggestion that Sherab Gyaltzen encountered any difficulty in locating the lama. Like BNY, the oral account favours Rong Togme Shigpo as the (artistically) more significant figure, and their association forms the

¹⁵ Since my information about this festival is second-hand and fragmentary, I can only guess that the myth concerns the celebrated lama and the founding of Tetang.

basis for the development of the 'disciple's quest' motif. This motif itself contains a number of smaller formulae—the recurrence of the number three, for example: Sherab Gyaltzen undertakes a retreat at the age of three (the nine-year confinement is actually a continuous series of three terms each lasting three years, three months and three days). The goddess Hripe Gyalmo appears to him three times, and in searching for his lama he spends three years in each of the three sections of Tibet. There are three people playing dice and therefore three dice-calls. The tripartite division of Tibet is itself actually a stock formula.¹⁶

The dice-calls (*sho-skad* in the colloquial language, *chol-sngags* in the texts) are a particularly interesting device and deserve closer examination. It is customary among Tibetans to call out the desired numbers for the dice they are about to throw, using a numbering system that is a convention of the game. This practice is not confined to Tibetans, and Basham informs us that 'like the European gamester the Indian employed a special terminology for the throws at dice: *krta* (cater, four), *treta* (trey), *dvāpara* (deuce), and *kali* (ace)'.¹⁷ The Tibetan system is a complicated one which has terms for all possible combinations of three dice, with variations on certain numbers. When the player calls out the desired number, he makes a sentence by punning on the words. For example if a player wished to obtain a five ('kha'; usually *lnga*) and a four ('tsitsi'; usually *bzhi*) he might call out; 'kha-tsi kha-tsi . . . *kha-sing bya-rgod dkar-po red | da-lta bya-rgod nag-po red*'. By changing 'kha-tsi' to *kha-sing* he achieves the sentence, 'The other day the vulture was white, now it is black'.

Whereas neither YDR nor SHB mentions the episode with the dice-players, BNY is content with a single dice-call which beings '*Nyi-zla mig-gis ma' mthong . . .*' ('The one who sees neither sun or moon . . .'). While 'Nyi-da' (as *nyi-zla* is pronounced) is not a dice-call that is known in the Mustang district, it may have been current in the author's native region. 'Nyi', in any case, is the usual word for two (*gnyis*). The oral version develops the subject of the dice-calls, but presents us with its own difficulties. The first call beings with the syllables 'shag-shong'; *zhag-gzhong* means a bowl of fat, but none of my informants was able to identify a numerical value for the homophones. The second call, 'shari', represents eight and seven ('ri') according to the convention, and is used in the context to mean 'Eastern Mountains' (*shar-ri*), referring to an area of Lo. The third speaker begins with the call 'Thorro thorro', which signifies eleven (usually *bcu-gcig*), but I can think of no other meaning it might

¹⁶ *sMad mDo-khams gang-drug; bar dBus gtsang ru-bzhi; stod mNgā'-ris skor-qsum, etc.*

¹⁷ Basham, A.L., 1981, *The Wonder that was India*, Calcutta: p.209 (First published 1954).

have to relate it to the rest of the sentence.¹⁸ The further development and refinement of this episode will be discussed below.

There a number of other motifs in the story which may be mentioned briefly. The night before he meets Sherab Gyaltzen, Rong Togme Shigpo dreams that he is about to receive a visit from a great incarnation. This incident is reminiscent of the dream which Marpa has shortly before he is approached by Milarepa, whom he sees in the dream as a priceless *rdo-rje* from which he must remove the tarnish. Trashigyaltsen's vanquishing of local demons and binding them with oaths to become 'protectors of the doctrine', as well as his very mission for the sake of living beings (*gro-ba'i don . . .*) are stock themes that recur in Tibetan biographies. They also serve as a reminder that the boundary between great and little tradition is a relatively indistinct one, since literature of a semi-popular genre is largely constituted from its own preferred formulaic elements.

The 'folktale ecotype' : Yangton Lama's journey to Dolpo

It has been noted earlier that the oral accounts attribute the abandonment of Old Kag to the ravages of the demon Kyerang Dragme and his consort. This is just one of many instances where we see the story acquiring a local colour and growing into the spaces of a specific environment. It was the folklorist Carl von Sydow who first applied the botanical term 'ecotype' to local traditions, proposing that a song or story will 'undergo a process of unification within its own area through the mutual control and reciprocal influence of its bearers' (Quoted in Burke, 1978:52). The development of the ecotype, here distinguished by a spurt of 'new growth', is particularly evident after the founding of Lubra. A brief sequel to the story describes the journey of Yangton Lama to Dolpo, where he establishes the monastery of Samling. The incidents on the journey comprise an etymological charter for certain place-names, but although they are in current use among the inhabitants of Dolpo I was unable to locate most of them on existing maps. The following fragment of the oral tradition was written down for me by a Lama of Lubra.

Yangton Lama went to Dolpo. To show him the way as he was travelling, two deer, a hind and a fawn, went ahead and he followed. It is said that this road was then named *Sha-rong-'phrang* (the Ravine Road of the Deer). Again, on the road, a deer sniffed at the lama's body, and this place came to be known as *Dri-shad-la* (? the Sniffing Pass).

¹⁸ The word 'thorro' is often repeated loudly at the beginning of certain rituals as the casting of auspicious paper 'wind horses' (*rlung-tra*) into the air. It may be an expression of ceremonial salutation.

Then he arrived at Tsarka, and passed beyond it. Further on, not knowing the way, he performed a divination, and the location was later named *Mo-la* (Divination Pass). He travelled further along the road and, not knowing which way to go, he sat down. A male vulture flew past in the sky, and he continued on his way, following its shadow. The place was called *Bya-rgod-la* (the Vulture Pass).

After spending some time in the village of Pungmo, Yangton Lama again found himself at a loss about where he should go, so:

Saying a prayer, he fired an arrow and said, 'Wherever this arrow makes its mark, on that site I shall build a village'. The place (from which he had fired the arrow) was named *Sa-mda'* (place Arrow). This arrow imbedded itself in a bicher tree, and he established a large village at his place. He named this village Bicher. Yangton Lama sat pondering at the top of a hill. He established a monastery here and named it *bSam-(gtan—)gling* (the Contemplation Place).

It hardly needs to be said that this short story must be a comparatively late development which retrospectively links the magical prowess of Yangton Lama with existing place names. I mention this not out of some mean iconoclasm but to point out that the actual etymology of at least one of the names is recognisably different from that suggested here. Thus the same *Sa-mda'* may refer to the village of Sangdak (*gSang-dag*: Pure and Clean),¹⁹ if we overlook the trivial fact that it is an impossible bowshot from Bicher. However, if there is a village of *Sa-mda'* in Dolpo (although it does not appear on any maps) the name would be far more likely to mean 'Lower Ridge' or 'Valley Floor', since *mda'* does have this meaning apart from 'arrow'. On the other hand, the village of Bicher (which appears on most maps in the Nepali form *Phijor*) may well take its name from the bicher tree. Various pronounced 'bitshera', 'bejera' etc., it is a thorn bush (*tsher* means thorn) of which the green shoots are highly valued as cattle-feed. *Be* or *bi* in the local dialect means cat, and the branches of this shrub are considered to resemble cats'tails.

The stereotype

Although the protagonists in our story are historical figures, there is little doubt that their characteristics have been evolved to accord with existing stereotypes. Sherab Gyaltsen as the earnest disciple desperate to find his master, to achieve enlightenment and to help all sentient beings is not remarkably different from better-known figures such as Milarepa; Rong Togme Shigpo as the inaccessible master is the equivalent

¹⁹ For the etymology of this and other place-names in Lo and Dolpo, see Snellgrove, D., 1981, *Himalayan Pilgrimage*, Boulder : *passim*, but esp. pp.279-284.

of Marpa the Translator (except that Marpa became even more inaccessible after Milarepa had found him). European popular culture too has its own stereotypes and prototypes; the wise ruler (Solomon), the just outlaw (Robin Hood), the ascetic monk (St. Anthony Abbot) and the jolly friar (Friar Tuck) are just a few examples (Burke 1978:150 ff.). In discussing the matter of stereotypes, Burke suggests that historians look too closely at an individual's characteristics in attempting to explain why he should have become a folk hero, while folklorists 'stress the fact that the same stories are told of many different heroes, that a well-known stereotype "crystallises" around a particular individual, without asking why that individual was selected' (1978:169). He suggests that certain individuals are preserved and enlarged in oral tradition because they are 'seen as conforming in certain respects to a hero-stereotype' and that gradually 'their lives and deeds are assimilated to the stereotype in other respects as well as the original ones' (170). Sherab Gyaltsen's application to Rong Togme Shigpo for religious instruction is the historical basis for the development, in the oral account, of a classic master-disciple relationship with all its attendant circumstances.

An even more interesting feature of stereotypes is that they are often a conflation of two or more historical figures, who are similar in name or in the type of activities for which they are known. Thus 'Frederick the Great inherited something from the traditional "Emperor Frederick", a figure which was itself the product of the assimilation of Frederick II to Frederick I' (Burke 1978:170). The most obvious example of such conflation in our story is that between Sherab Gyaltsen and Trashi Gyaltsen, who are merged into the single figure of Yangton Lama. In fact Yangton chen-po (the Great Yang-ngal Teacher) is the usual epithet of Sherab Gyaltsen, just as 'Gro-mgon Klu-brag-pa (the Protector of Living Beings, the Man of Lubra) is that of Trashi Gyaltsen, and it is acknowledged (almost reluctantly, we feel) that they are somehow distinct. But there is an apparent wish to establish the continuity of the two characters by giving them the same title and the same body. Moreover, Rong Togme Shigpo's instructions to carry the doctrine south contradict the fact that, as a result of the '*pho-ba grong-'jug*' rite, it is the master's spirit which occupies the disciple's body.

But the conflation does not stop at these two characters. While the sequel to the main story informs us that 'Yangton Lama' travelled to Dolpo and founded Samling monastery, YDR records that 'Lama Ngagpa (the elder son of Trashi Gyaltsen) went to Bicher in Dolpo'; and, as if to refute a popular misconception, a note in the margin stresses that 'The one who first went to Dolpo was Lama Ngagpa' (fol. 28a). Samling monastery was actually founded by Gyaltsen Rinchen, a member of a separate lineage in the Yang-ngal clan whom Lama Ngagpa brought to

Dolpo from Tagtse in Tsang. Thus there are at least four historical personalities constituting the popular figure of Yangton Lama, a blend that has doubtless been facilitated by the fact that they all have Yang-ston or Yang-ngal as their clan name.

This spurious link between Yangton Lama and Dolpo apparently became consolidated over the years. A historical text from the Thak Khola, relating to the old Kingdom of Sum Garabdzong to which Lubra originally belonged records that :

Previously, the village of Lubra did not exist. The Bonpo lama Yangton came from Dolpo and asked the headman of Sum Garabdzong, Meme Tshering, to give him some land. The headman Tshering and the headman Lhatardrup gave him the land of Lubra, and the Bonpo lama remained there.²⁰

It is just possible that Rong Togme Shigpo is himself a composite of two figures, incorporating Orgom Kundul who has disappeared in the oral tradition. BNY specified that Togme Shigpo's clan was Rong-po, and calls him simply Rong Togme Shigpo. YDR too omits the 'gom' (*sgom*) from his clan name, except in one instance where it occurs in the garbled form Tong-sgom zhig-pa. But Shardza Trashi Gyaltzen and the oral account render the first part of his name Rongom (Rong-sgom), which may suggest the absorption of Orgom ('Or-sgom) Kundul. The evidence is only scanty, and Rong-sgom may be an intentional epithet meaning the 'meditator of Rong', but the disagreement between the sources as to their attribution of certain statements (instructions to Trashi Gyaltzen to go south) and events (the dream) may be grounds for considering the possibility of conflation.

There remains the problem of the oral account's location of Gyarong as the birthplace of Sherab Gyaltzen. It may be a logical extension of the formulaic construct which involves him beginning his nine-year search in Kham, but a more plausible explanation which will be presented in the next section considers the possibility of yet another historical figure in the Yangton Lama mélange.

The commission of oral tradition to writing

It would be misleading to suggest that culture travels only in a downward direction. Indeed, as Marriott points out, an indigenous great tradition evolves as 'a carrying-forward of cultural material, norms, and values that were already contained in local little traditions. ...An indigenous great tradition remains in constant

²⁰ This document was photographed by Michael Vinding in the Thakali village of Cimang. I am most grateful to Mr. Vinding for his generosity in permitting me to use and quote from this and other texts. See also D. Jackson, 1978: 208, n.53, where another version of this text is cited.

communication with its own little traditions...'.²¹ There are also instances of the sporadic ascent of elements from the little tradition to a position of respectability in the great. One European example is Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, a compilation of street songs and folk-tunes (English, Scottish and French) of the early eighteenth century, and another is the wealtz, a peasant dance (condemned because of its suggestive tactility) which was taken up by the German nobility of the same period (Burke 1978:61,118). People who act as vectors of popular culture to the fastidious exponents of the great tradition often modify their source material in order not to offend the sensibilities of the reader. In 1797, a committee was set up to investigate James Macpherson's translations of poems reputedly by the third-century Gaelic bard Ossian; it concluded that Macpherson

Was in use to supply chasms, and to give connection, by inserting passages which he did not find, and to add what he conceived to be dignity and delicacy to the original incidents, by refining the language... (Quoted in Burke 1978:17).

In 1981, the abbot Trashi Tenzin of Drakar monastery in Lo visited Lubra and committed the story of Yangton Lama to writing. He gave one copy of his short history to the National Archives in Kathmandu as a sort of official record, and kindly let me make a copy of the draft which he kept for himself. Since the basic plot is much the same as that of the oral account, I shall not reproduce his version here. Instead, a few examples will suffice to show how Trashi Tenzin, like James Macpherson, has sought to add 'dignity and delicacy to the original composition'.

Trashi Tenzin may not have had a certain readership in mind when he padded his account, but the influence of the classical tradition on him is apparent in many of his formulae and interpretations. Thus when Hripe Gyalmo departs for the last time, she disappears in the ubiquitous 'bright rainbow' that usually accompanies the death of accomplished lamas. As we might expect, the author has omitted certain details that have arisen in the oral tradition and which he evidently considers too unseemly in a literary account. There is no mention of the newly-created Trashi Gyaltzen being mistaken for a zombie, no suggestion that the lama may have been inebriated before his encounter with the demon, and no description (ironically, because it appears in YDR) of the rock bearing the imprint of his penis.

The dice-calls, too, have been subjected to a certain 'improvement'. The first call remains the same, beginning with the expression 'shari' (eight and seven). The second call ('shagshong') apparently puzzled him, because he renders it as *Ri ding-ri ding/ding-ri gzhong-nas blltas-na / smon-thang 'di zhag-gi gzhong-la 'dra | zhag-gzhong 'di'i*

²¹ Marriott, 1955:181.

zhag-gi dkyil-la 'dug'; 'If you look out from the valley of Dingri the plain of Mon looks like a bowl of fat. He is in the middle of the fat in this fat-bowl'. *Ri* which begins the phrase, means seven in the gamesters' jargon. The final dice call (which involved an unaesthetic *non-sequitur* in the oral version) has been changed to: *Chu-drug chu-drug/chu-drug lung pa'i phug-tu bzhugs/'grong-dgon* (i.e. *Rong-sgom*) *rtogs-medb la-ma-la sgol-ba 'debs'*. 'Chu' and 'drug' mean ten and six, and are actually very similar to the useful numbers, *bcu* and *drug*. The term *chu-drug* also means 'six rivers', so that the sentence translates as 'He sits in a cave in the valley of the six rivers; praise to Rong Togme Lama'.

The account is quite unambiguous as to the precise location of Rong Togme Shigpo in Lo. The author provides the name and location of each of these six rivers. But his directions presuppose a familiarity with quite minor topographical features of the area. The only sizeable landmark named is the village of Tsarang, and some of the so-called 'rivers' carry water only at certain times of the year when the winter snow melts on the high peaks. A further directional note adds that 'In Samdzong, from Shamo to the plain of Tsagmar in front of Labrang Gyamtsel, on the peak of the White-soil Mountain, there is a fierce crag shaped like a goat. Here are a hundred caves, all sharing a single entrance, and the cave (complex) is called Rawang Phug (the Mighty Goat Cave)'. It was here, according to Trashi Tenzin, that Rong Togme Shigpo was immured seeing neither the sun nor the moon.

In, short, Trashi Tenzin has polished the coarse-grained oral account by bringing it into line with the structure of existing religious biographies, by excising instances of dubious respectability and by generally attempting to tie up loose ends. But his logical approach to the story often causes him to compound the existing confusion. The '*pho-ba grong—'jug* rite that is performed means that the personality animating the body of Sherab Gyaltsen is Rong Togme Shigpo; while Trashi Tenzin agrees that the resulting composite is called Trashi Gyaltsen, he continues to designate him by the name Rong Togme Lama. In fact his rendering of the name is inconsistent, ranging from *Grong-don togs pa'i* to *Gro-mgon rtog-med* without ever happening on the correct form. But the transformation from *Rong-sgom* (which, as we have seen may be a misnomer) to *Gro-mgon* is itself suggestive; the title '*gro-mgon*, which means 'protector of living beings', is a prefix added to the name of certain lamas, but more significantly it forms part of Trashi Gyaltsen's usual title ('*Gro-mgon Klu-brag-pa*). This may add another link whereby Rong Togme Shigpo is gradually assimilated to Yangton Lama.

Strangely enough, it is this written account that helps us to explain why *Gyarong* is given (both here and in the oral version) as the unlikely birthplace of Sherab Gyaltsen. Trashi Tenzin's work is entitled 'A History of Phuntsholing, the Bonpo

temple of Lubra', and the account precedes an extensive description of the temple's interior and contents. But the earliest tax-accounts and documents relating to the financing of rituals in Lubra make no mention of Phuntsholing temple, and refer only to one named Samling (*bsam-gtan-gling*). This is presumably the original Lubra temple which was built by Trashi Gyaltzen, and which is no longer standing. Phuntsholing temple was built in the second half of the last century by one Karu Druwang Tenzin Rinchen (*dKar-ru Grub-dbang bsTan-'dzin rin-chen*) who, like 'Yangton Lama', spent many years in Lo and Serib, and who also promulgated a new doctrinal system.²² Although he was born in Western Tibet, near Mt. Kailash, he travelled extensively in the East, and a document which he sent from there to one of his disciples in Lubra states that, among other accomplishments, he was 'a former official of the eighteen kingdoms of Gyarong'. While Tenzin Rinchen is recognised as an individual with a distinct identity, it is possible that the structural similarities between his own career and those of his missionary predecessors have caused aspects of his life to be grafted onto the ever-waxing Yangton-Lama.

Epilogue

Due to the limitations of space, the present article has dealt with only one chapter of the oral tradition preserved in Lubra and neighbouring villages. Although the raw material is historical, the presentation of it has been determined less by a desire to prize facts from the setting of their popular accretions than to examine the processes behind the formation of this extraneous material. For this reason it has been necessary to give less than deserved attention to the many avenues of inquiry opened by previous students of the Upper Kali Gandaki, such as Jackson and Vinding.²³ While it hardly needs to be said that the events and people covered here form a rich basis for properly historical research, the present account is no more exhaustive from the anthropological point of view.

Although the Yang-ngal clan has died out in Lubra, a parallel lineage of the family continues to thrive in Dolpo as 'a Bonpo succession that has extended like an unbroken bridge up to the present day' (YDR:fol. 30b). The last member of the clan in Lubra was a nun named Chonzom Butri (ironically perhaps; Butri (*bu-khrigs*) means 'sons in abundance'), and she was under pressure from her mother's kin in nearby Dzong to bequeath the estate to them. As it happened, she hated her

²² This system is the *dMar-khrid dug-lnga rang-grol*.

²³ See especially D. Jackson, 1978 (*op. cit.*), and M. Vinding, 1978, 'The local oral about the kingdom of Thin Garab Dzong', in *Kailash*, Vol. VI, No. 3.

relatives with a vengeance, and snubbed them by nominating as her heir an illegitimate boy, Pema Samdrup, who had been born in Lubra into the house of the Jarangkhang clan. It is said that she expressed her wish in the following words:

Even if my relatives in Dzong give me bread made from a flour of ground turquoises, gold and silver as filial service, I shall not accept them. Even if the boy Pema Samdrup gives me bread made from a flour of ground barley-husks, he shall be my heir.

Chonzom Butri died at the age of one hundred and eight, and the Yang-ngal inheritance accordingly passed into the hands of Pema Samdrup. His great-great-grandson Tshultrim is now the heir of an estate which includes two houses and the largest landholding in Lubra, as well as patrons (*sbyin-bdag*) in many neighbouring villages.

But what of Yulsa, the demon Kyerang Dragme? It must be admitted that he fared badly at the hands of the Yang-ngal family. Many years after he and his consort had been imprisoned under cairns and bound with oaths, a grandson of Trashigyaltsen first enslaved him and his retinue and then caused him to disappear altogether. (We must assume that the disappearance was only temporary, because he is mentioned later in the same text.) Three generations after this second humiliation another member of the clan added insult to injury when he 'bound the retinue of that protector of the doctrine, the goblin Kyerang, with an oath' (YDR:fol. 43b). But this lord of the soil is still a force to be reckoned with in Lubra, and the villagers are hesitant to carry out any major excavations for fear of incurring his wrath. Thus the Panda Khola, a small tributary of the Kali Gandaki that runs below Lubra is steadily eroding the arable land of the village, although it could quite easily be delivered along another course.²⁴ When Trashigyaltsen established Samling, the first Bonpo monastery in serib, he did so in the floor of the Lubra valley, well below the central location of the new Phuntsholing temple. He had apparently underestimated the power that Kyerang Dragme, whom he thought he had thoroughly subdued, would continue to exert over the minds of the villagers, because the Panda Khola was long ago allowed to wash away the last traces of his monastery. Readers with an irreverent sense of justice may feel that the demon has succeeded obliquely in exacting his revenge on Yangton Lama.

²⁴ Sangye Tenzin, the abbot of sMan-ri Monastery in Himachal Pradesh, has told me of his efforts to persuade the Lubragpas to ignore Yulsa and to save their fields.