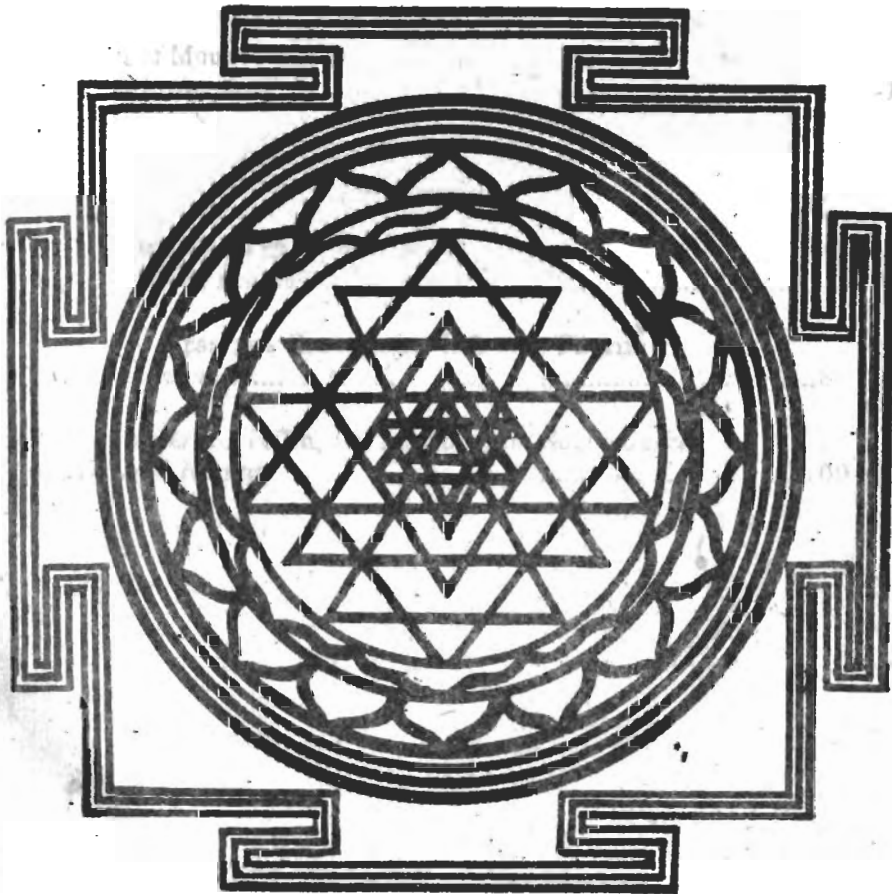


# KAILASH

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# KAILASH - A JOURNAL OF HIMALAYAN STUDIES

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**Editors**

Kamal P.Malla, Editor  
Tribhuvan University  
Kathmandu  
email: kpmalla@ccsl.com.np

Charles Ramble  
GPO Box 98  
Kathmandu  
email: ramble@mos.com.np

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# THE CULT OF MOUNT MURDO IN GYALRONG

SAMTEN G. KARMAY

*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris*

## Introduction

In August 1993, I stayed for two weeks in Gyalrong (rGyal-rong, Chinese: Jinchuan) doing some fieldwork.<sup>1</sup> It was during this stay that I was able to observe the cult of Mt Murdo (dMu-rdo).<sup>2</sup>

Gyalrong was considered as a 'hidden land' (*sbas-yul*) being an almost inaccessible place. It is associated with legends of the renowned Tibetan monk Ba-gor Vairocana of the eighth century A.D. He is believed to have been exiled to this region after being accused of having had a liaison with one of the queens of the Tibetan Emperor Khri Srong-lde-btsan (742-797).<sup>3</sup> This legend is important, as will be seen, for understanding the motives of Sangye lingpa (Sangs-rgyas gling-pa, 1705-1735)<sup>4</sup> and his journey to Gyalrong and ultimately the significance of Mt Murdo for the present-day Gyalrong people.

- <sup>1</sup> The research mission I undertook in Amdo and Kham in 1993 was under the auspices of the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, Université de Paris-X, Nanterre. Thanks are due to the Tibetological Centre in Beijing which sent one of its personnel, gDugs-dkar Tshe-ring, to assist me on my travel.
- <sup>2</sup> In Gyalrong dialects dMu-rdo is pronounced as Murto and is often written Murto. There are also other names for this mountain: gNas-chen dMu-rdo lha-gnyan, g.Yung-drung spungs-rtse and sKu-lha dBang-phyug.
- <sup>3</sup> For a short account of the life-story of this monk, see Karmay 1988: 17-37.
- <sup>4</sup> Alias Padma g.yung-drung snying po, Byang-chub rdo-rje-rtsal and bsTan-gnyis gling-pa. He is one of the four masters in the Bon tradition (Karmay 1972:185)

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Gyalrong is situated to the north of Dartsedo (Dar-rtse-mdo, Ch. Kangding). To the east it has a natural barrier, the Alashan mountain range, which cuts it off from Sichuan province proper, but is under the jurisdiction of the Sichuan government. It consists mainly of a long and very narrow valley stretching for more than 200 km, starting from the region known as Tsha-kho in the north. The valley gradually widens in its lower parts, particularly from the point where Chakzam county (lCags-zam rdzong) is situated. Traditionally this is the Sino-Tibetan frontier. There is the famous iron suspension bridge over the river. A legend has it that it was built by Thang-stong rgyal-po (b.1385). From this place the inhabitants also become more explicitly Chinese.

The basin of the valley is occupied by the great river Gyalmo Ngulchu (rGyal-mo rngul-chu) which flows from the north in a southerly direction. At the point where it reaches the Rongdrag county (Rong-brag rdzong, Ch. Dan Ba), it picks up an affluent coming from the west and then makes a sharp bend, cutting through gorges flowing on in an easterly direction. After a short distance, it meets another large tributary, the Tsanchu (bTsan-chu) which streams from the north-east and passes by the town Tsanla (bTsan-la) on the left and Mt Murdo on the right. At certain points of the main valley, the gorges are so narrow that the river occupies the whole width of the basin, about 700 metres wide. There is only one main route in the valley running along the river on its right. The other side of the river often being steep rock-faced mountains, one sees only a strip of the sky at several points. The steep side of the rock-faced mountains is often totally vertical for about 800 metres, then the valley gradually opens up allowing habitation and agriculture.

In summer, especially in August, there is heavy rain. Consequently the river now and then rises and overflows, washing away parts of the poorly-built road alongside the river bank on the right. Another cause of the damage to the road are the landslides. Sometimes an enormous rock has fallen into the middle of the road, totally blocking it. When this happens, the only way to remove it in a short time is to dynamite it. (Travellers with vehicles are asked by the roadmenders to pay for the explosive.) The road which follows the course of the river is the only main road communication in the valley for going up to Barkham ('Bar-khams) or going down to Chakzam. (If it is cut by flood or

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belonging to the trend which was the precursor of the eclectic movement (*ris-med*) in the nineteenth century. On the *ris-med* movement, see Smith 1970; Blondeau 1985: 153-57; Karmay 1988: 35-37.

landslides one risks being stuck in a place for days and this is what happened to us!)

### **The administrative set-up in present-day Gyalrong**

Although the people of Gyalrong are culturally homogenous and geographically constitute one entity, the region has been the victim of the old Chinese policy: 'divide and rule'. It is chopped up into two halves: the northern part is under the administrative unity of the Ngaba (rNga-ba, Ch. Aba) 'autonomous prefecture' whose administrative centre is in Barkham; and the southern part, which begins just after the Chuchen county (Chu-chen rdzong), comes under the jurisdiction of the Gardze (dKar-mdzes, Ch. Ganzi) 'autonomous prefecture' whose capital is now Dartsedo. This division is totally arbitrary. Indeed, it has the intended effect of cutting off one half of the population from the other and as usual there is now little communication between them. When the Gyalrong people were united they were famous for their tenacity in fighting against the Manchu army in the eighteenth century and their resistance to the communist onslaught was of epic proportions (Karmay 1990: 141-42; Mansier 1990: 128-30; Greatrex 1994). Because of these historical memories, the Chinese have made sure that they are not easily reunited. (The same policy has been applied to the other parts of the provinces of Kham and Amdo; cf. Karmay 1994b: 7).

Neither the Ngaba nor Gardze regions traditionally have anything to do with Gyalrong except that they are people of Tibetan culture. The administrative centre for the Ngaba prefecture should logically be in the Ngaba region itself, but Barkham, though it is in Tshakho and was traditionally close to Gyalrong, has been chosen since its environment and climate are congenial to the Chinese settlers. For the same reason, Dartsedo was chosen as the capital for Gardze prefecture yet Gardze town itself should logically be the capital. In both cases, the Tibetan names Ngaba and Gardze are used to designate the prefectures simply for political reasons.

The administrative centres of the counties like Rongdrag or Chuchen in Gyalrong are situated in commercially strategic places, that is, down at the riverside. They are predominantly occupied by the Chinese with their concrete buildings. In spite of their appearance of modernity, the interiors of the buildings look shabby and incredibly dirty.

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The villages in rural areas are mostly situated far away up in the mountains. They, however, seem to have been little affected, at least in appearance, by the recent social and political changes. People in the villages still live in their traditional houses which are invariably square with stone walls. The first floor is extended at the front about one metre beyond the wall itself on which it rests, allowing more space for the open-air terrace. The living quarters, comprising several bed-rooms and the kitchen, are situated on the same floor. The second floor is usually smaller, constituting one room with another small open-air terrace. In one corner on this floor there is usually a square stone tower with flagpoles. A lot of the houses have vegetable plots around them growing fruit trees - apple, pear and walnut. In August, the villagers descend to the towns in order to sell their vegetable products and fruit which they, usually women, carry in large baskets on their backs.

#### **The problem of communication**

The Gyalrong people do not possess a writing system of their own. They have various dialects which they consider as basically Tibetan (Mansier 1983: 30-34). The classical Tibetan script was used for written communication up to the 1950s, but it is now being replaced by Chinese writing. When two Gyalrong persons from different regions speak to each other, they often cannot understand one another and resort to Chinese, which has now become the common language among the younger generation in the towns. But many of the young people also remain as ardent in their religious belief as their parents in the villages. As an example, let me mention our friend in Rongdrag. A young charming woman in her twenties called Lhamo. She is married to Tsering, a scholar who works in Beijing. Both come from families of Bonpo background. Being an official she lives in a government owned flat. Her parents live in a village house up in the mountains whereas Tsering's father lives in a flat owned by the local authorities, since they are army personnel. He also has a village house and a farm up in the mountains.

Lhamo is a member of the party and the president of the local Communist Youth League. I was told that she stands a good chance of becoming the general secretary of the Party Committee. Indeed, she has a natural propensity for politics. She considers that the Marxist ideology does not contradict one's belief in religion. She does not miss any opportunity for visiting temples when occasion arises and readily accepts the silk amulet to put around her neck which the lama in a temple never fails to give to visitors.

Although she fiercely claims to be an adherent of the Bon religion, it was obvious that she and her generation knew little about it. Though her manners and ways of thinking seem to be completely Chinese after an education in Chinese schools, behind this Chinese upbringing there was no doubt a very strong Tibetan personality which, as I came to learn, was quite common among the young people of today's Gyalrong. The economic and political situation in Gyalrong, at the time of our stay, was one of the least strained in China I have ever witnessed.

### The making of a mountain as a holy site

Mt. Murdo is known to the Bon tradition through two 'textual treasure revealers' (*gter-ston*): Sangye lingpa (Sangs-rgyas gling-pa) and his disciple Kun-grol grags-pa (b.1700).<sup>5</sup> The biographies of these masters are now available in printed editions.<sup>6</sup> This is due to the efforts of our colleague Dr. Charles Ramble who first made microfilms of the manuscripts in Tibet and later helped to make the manuscripts themselves available at Kathmandu. The name of Mt Murdo occurs among the place names where religious texts were believed to have been concealed (*gter-gnas*).<sup>7</sup>

In 1727 Sangye lingpa was travelling to Central Tibet from Khyungpo in Kham. On the way news of political turmoil in Lhasa reached him.<sup>8</sup> He therefore changed his direction and took the route to Kongpo (*rDo-rje rin-chen*

<sup>5</sup> Still active in 1767. His other names are: sMon-rgyal Nam-mkha' ye-shes, Rig-'dzin g.yung-drung gling-pa, sNang-gsal 'ja'-tshon snying-po. Cf. Karmay 1972: 185.

<sup>6</sup> The cover title: *sPrul sku sangs rgyas gling pa'i rnam thar gsung pod*. Inside: *U rgyan rgyal tshab bstan gnyis gling pa'i skyes rabs rnam thar gter 'byung lo rgyus bcas rdo rje rin chen phreng ba'i rgyan* (hereafter *rDo-rje rin-chen phreng-bai rgyan*), Poti I-IV. No indication is given concerning the date and place of publication.

*Rig 'dzin kun grol 'ja' tshon snying po'i rnam thar* (hereafter *Kun-grol rnam-thar*). This 'biography' is divided into three: *Phyi'i rnam-thar* (pp.1-378), *Nang-gi rnam-thar* (pp.379-759) and *gSang-ba'i rnam-thar* (pp.661-830). It is the second part which contains some historical accounts, but it covers only upto 1737. It is this part that I shall be using and will refer to simply as *Kun-grol rnam-thar*. Neither the date nor the place of publication is given.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Legs bshad mdzod* by Shar-rdza bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan (1859-1934) (Karmay 1972: 179).

<sup>8</sup> This refers to the civil war that broke out in 1727.



*phreng-ba'i rgyan*, Vol.II, 4-5). In Kongpo he received prophetic signs which indicated that he would be able to reveal 'textual and sacred objects' in Kongpo, Tsha-ba-rong in Kham and especially from Mt Murdo in Gyalrong (Vol.II, 127). In 1728, still in Kongpo, he met a monk named Blo-ldan snying-po who was related by blood to the king bsTan-'dzin nor-bu of the kingdom dGe-shes-tsa in Gyalrong. The monk became a disciple of his. In the same year the same king sent some messengers to invite Sangye lingpa to Gyalrong (Vol.II, 260-61). In 1729 he left for Gyalrong, stopping in many places in Tsha-ba-rong (Vol.II, 323). He 'opened the door'<sup>9</sup> of the *gnas-chen* Padma 'bum-gling where he received more messengers from the king of dGe-shes-tsa with an urgent request to visit Gyalrong (Vol.II, 570, 506). After visiting various places on the way he arrived in the monastery bKra-shis smin-grol-gling in Nyag-rong where for the first time he met his two chief disciples: sMon-rgyal Nam-mkha' ye-shes, to whom he later gave the name Kun-grol grags-pa, and Ye-shes snying-po. The latter was a prince monk of the dGe-bshes-tsa royal house and Sangye lingpa gave him the name gSang-sngags grags-pa (vol.III, 225; *Rig-'dzin kun-grol 'ja'-tshon snying-po'i rnam-thar*, p.458). The influence of these two men in Gyalrong was extremely important for the venture of Sangye lingpa as we shall see. Sangye lingpa then passed through Me-nyag where on the 20th of the 8th month (1730) he was received in audience by the VIIth Dalai Lama who was then residing at 'Gar-thar (Vol.III, 376).

This account of his travels shows us what Sangye lingpa's real motivation was. He is incessantly urged in his visions to reveal 'treasures' (*gter*) from Mt Murdo and to identify the mountain as a holy site. He believed that Mt Murdo was a place visited by the Bonpo master Dran-pa nam-mkha' in the eighth century A.D., and he considered himself as a rebirth of Vairocana, a disciple of the master, whom we mentioned above. This belief in a master-disciple relation in the past with regard to Mt Murdo seems to have been the driving force behind his undertaking his arduous journey. Unlike other Tibetan wanderers in his time, he made the journey on horseback with an entourage consisting of several people and was received, as we have seen, by various people sent by the king to meet him on the way. Here is a sketch of the account concerning his adventure around Mt Murdo in Gyalrong given in the biography (*rDo-rje rin-chen phreng-ba'i rgyan*, Vol.IV):

<sup>9</sup> For the expression *gnas-sgo 'byed-pa*, see below.

He arrives in Gyalrong at the beginning of 1731 from Dartsedo. He is welcomed by the king of dGe-bshes-tsa to whom he imparts various teachings.<sup>10</sup> One month after his arrival, he sets out with five assistants for the cave Zla-ba-phug in the valley of Mu-la 'o-kha<sup>11</sup> to the south of Mt. Murdo. This is the beginning of the tracing out of the route for the circuit of the holy mountain (*skor-lam*). There he receives various prophecies in a dream. The next day, gSang-sngags grags-pa and Kun-grol grags-pa, his chief disciples, and the king of dGe-bshes-tsa and other people join him. He conducts a *tshogs-'khor* (*ganacakra*) ceremony at the cave for them (Vol.IV, 36-45). He then leaves for dMu-ra lha-steng (45).<sup>12</sup> From there he goes to the cave of g.Yu-sgra-phug<sup>13</sup> accompanied only by his assistants. In this cave he finds various *gter* objects. Some messengers from the king of bTsan-la come to meet him at the cave. Sangye lingpa remarks that this king was not well-disposed to him at first because of the influence of a bad minister (Vol.IV, 50-51).

In the fourth month, he is invited by bsTan-'dzin rdo-rje, the king of Pa-vang<sup>14</sup> for the restoration of a stupa believed to have been built by Vairocana near the town Pipiling.<sup>15</sup> After the restoration he writes a *dkar-chag* of the stupa. He presents some of the sacred objects found at the cave to the king as gifts. (Vol.IV, pp.51-54). After this he asks his disciple Kun-grol grags-pa to join him at a place called sByar-tshul where they perform an empowerment ceremony (*dbang*) for some unnamed people (Vol.IV, p.55).

- 10 Here Kun-grol grags-pa is invited by the king of dGe-bshes-tsa to join him and Sangye lingpa for tracing out the path around Mt Murdo. Kun-grol at this time was in Kham (*Kun-grol rnam-thar*, p.572).
- 11 This is probably near the place where the temple dMu-rdo lha-khang is situated and there the celebration of Mt Murdo takes place (see below). I have not been able to identify most of the placenames and names of villages or towns mentioned in the biography since so much change has occurred, particularly in the last four decades. Most of the places now have Chinese names.
- 12 This is probably the chief monastery of the Rab-brtan kingdom in Chuchen usually known as g.Yung-drung lha-steng. Cf. Kvaerne, Sperling 1993.
- 13 This cave is believed to be that of g.Yu-sgra snying-po, a disciple of Vairocana, cf. Karmay 1988.
- 14 This is written as dPa'-dbang on a modern map.
- 15 Kun-grol grags-pa states that in the prophetic texts the town is called Pipiling and in the local dialect (*yul-skad*) it is called (or it means?) Nyams-gzigs-khog (*Kun-grol rnam-thar*: 477).

Sangye lingpa then accompanied by his assistants goes to bDe-chen-thang<sup>16</sup> where another stupa is restored and also writes a *dkar-chag* of it and he performs an empowerment ceremony for more than one thousand people. This place is adjacent to the town Kumulu<sup>17</sup> to the south of Mt Murdo. During this period, a child of an unnamed queen dies and Sangye lingpa is so distressed by this event that he begins thinking of abandoning his route and returning to Kham, his home land. But in a long prophecy which he receives in a dream he is strongly encouraged to continue the work (55-67).

At Kumulu, Sangye lingpa writes a long letter to the king of bTsan-la (name not mentioned) stressing the importance of the opening of the path and requests him to provide facilities for the journey (68-74). The letter is dated second day of the 5th month (1731). He then leaves for bTsan-la, situated to the east of Mt Murdo. After having some difficulties in crossing the river bTsan-chu, he arrives at Lingling, a town where he again meets Kun-grol grags-pa and bestows on this disciple a special red hat and predicts that the latter will rediscover various 'textual treasures' (pp.74-80).

Sangye lingpa then arrives at Kalingka, a town to the north of Mt. Murdo, where he is welcomed by the king of Ke-gno (80-81). After this he arrives at Kalam (the whereabouts of this town is not indicated, but presumably it is to the west of the mountain). From this place he writes a long letter to the king of Rab-brtan in Chuchen requesting him to protect the pilgrims who would do the circumambulation in the future. This letter is supplemented by another written by Kun-grol grags-pa in order to add weight to his requests (81-96).<sup>18</sup> (Kun-grol was the *dbu-bla*, the royal preceptor of the Rab-brtan king). Sangye lingpa continues tracing out of the *skor-lam* through various places and arrives at Mu-la 'o-kha, the starting point of the route.<sup>19</sup> There he was met again by gSang-sngags grags-pa and the king of dGe-bshes-

16 In the *Kun-grol rnam-thar* (p.478) it is stated that this placename occurs in the prophetic texts and in the local dialect it is called A-zha-thang.

17 This is certainly the name of the village where the temple dMu-rdo lha-khang is, see below. The *Kun-grol rnam-thar* has Srib-nang (p.479) and on the modern map it is written as sPro-snang.

18 No mention is made in the autobiography whether Sangye lingpa meets the king of Rab-brtan, but it is clear from the *Kun-grol rnam-thar* (p.482) that he was invited to stay in the palace of the Rab-brtan king which was in Li-ver (Ch. Louwuwei, Mansier 1990:129), the capital of the Chuchen kingdom.

19 This place is in the vicinity of the Kumulu.

tsa, altogether about a hundred people. At this place he announces the completion of the tracing out of the *skor-lam* which constitutes what one calls the 'opening of the door of the holy place' (*gnas-ngo phye-ba*) (96-100).<sup>20</sup>

From this account of the venture it appears that the process of the 'opening' of a *gnas-ri* was an extremely complicated matter indeed. It required a number of appropriate conditions: prophetic signs suggesting that the time has come and the appearance of the *gter-ston*, a lama of unusual character with the ability to command the cooperation of the local tribal chiefs as well as to rally the uncouth people on the way.

In the autochthonous setting, most of the mountains in Tibetan tradition were seen as the residence of the deity of the local territory (*yul-lha*).<sup>21</sup> Many of these mountain sites were chosen as *gter-gnas* ('place of treasure') i.e. a place considered as suitable for 'concealing' mainly written religious texts as *gter* at the time of persecution of the Bon religion, or for future purposes in the case of the rNying-ma-pa school (cf. Karmay 1972: xxxi-xxxix). Both traditions maintain that these events took place in the eighth century A.D. It is the notion of the *gter*, in my opinion, that is one of the elements that inspired the establishment of sites for pilgrimage including mountains. A long list of *gter-gnas* is known to the Bon tradition and many of these are mountains of historical significance (*ibid*: 96). They are often described as being geographically suitable for hermits to dwell in. If the site is designated as *gter-gnas*, its local deity then becomes *gter-bdag* or *gter-srung*, 'the guardian of the treasury', and the place is already considered as sacred.<sup>22</sup> When a textual treasure or other sacred objects are excavated from the place it becomes even more sacred, but to obtain the status of *gnas-ri* for a mountain it must be instituted by a man of religion. The making of a mountain *gnas-ri* therefore went through different phases in time and space. Its establishment as the *gnas-ri* for pilgrimage has a specific function: it is a very effective means for renewing a cultural event by fixing the date of the circumambulation and the celebration of the closing day of the annual event. The celebration is

20 For Kun-grol grags-pa's own account of his participation in the tracing of the path, see *Kun-grol nam-thar*: 472-90.

21 For a short analysis of the function of this local deity in Tibetan secular culture, see Karmay (in press).

22 For an enlightened analysis of the conception of *gnas*, see Huber 1994: 23-31.

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shared by both clerics and laymen alike, not only local but from other parts of the country as well.

The phrase *gnas sgo 'byed pa*, 'to open the door of the holy place', thus conveys the central notion of the pilgrimage site. This action entails the following stages:

1. to trace out the foot-path around the mountain for circumambulation in the presence of the public;
2. to identify various places on the path as traces of early dwellers;
3. to designate the last day of the 'tracing out of the route' for the annual celebration;
4. to write a guide (*dkar-chag*) of the holy mountain.

The *dkar-chag* which Sangye lingpa claims to have 'revealed as textual treasure' from Mt Murdo is available from the local cultural bureau in Rongdrag dzong. The bureau has taken care to publish the Tibetan text with a Chinese 'translation'.<sup>23</sup>

Like many of the *dkar-chag* type work it is mainly concerned with the religious accounts of the holy site, making it look like a supernatural sphere and thus its descriptions of the mountain hardly correspond to the geographical reality.

### The celebration of the 'birthday' of Mt Murdo

The Gyalrong people have continued to celebrate the event every year. They call it the 'birthday of Mt. Murdo' (*dMu-rdo 'khrungs-skar* or *skyes-skar*). This appellation is curious. We will return to it below. The celebration takes place on the 10th of the 7th month, i.e. the horse month in the Tibetan

<sup>23</sup> Byang-chub rdo-rje, *rGyal mo rong gi gnas chen dmu rdo*, Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1992. The colophon title of the *dkar chag* runs: *sBas pa'i rong bzhi'i nang tshan shar phyogs rgyal mo rong gi gnas chen dmu rdo g.yung drung spungs rtse la sogs ri bo drug cu'i dkar chag* (10-37). In the colophon, the author states that he rediscovered the *shog-ser* manuscript in the cave of g.Yu-sgra-phug on the 24th of the fourth month in the iron-hog year (1731) and later 'translated it into Tibetan' (*bod-yig tu bsgyur-ba*). The title claims that the *dkar-chag* is concerned with '60 mountains', but the names of these mountains are not given in the work itself.

calendar (in 1993, it was August 27th). From the 23rd of August, pilgrims in small groups began performing the circumambulation. It takes three days of going through gorges, high mountain passes and forests. Mt Murdo is obviously the highest mountain in the region, being 4820 metres high. It is a beautifully shaped mountain with about four small peaks if one looks at it from its southern foot. It is situated to the east of the town Rongdrag at the distance of 7 km from it, to the east of the river Gyalmo ngulchu and on the right of the Tsanchu that flows past the town Tsanla.

Concerning the circumambulation, people perform it in different ways. It seems that the only way of expressing the difference between religions is to show in which direction one performs the circumambulation of a sacred place such as Mt Murdo. The terms the Gyalrong people often use to indicate their religions are *bandhe* (=Buddhist) and *bonpo* (both terms are often abbreviated as *ban-bon*), but they often simply say that 'we are the ones who go this way', with hand gestures to show in which direction they go round a sacred place, hence identifying their religion. This religious sentiment was expressed in a most spectacular way on the celebration day.

A small temple called Murdo lhakhang is found at the foot of the mountain on the southern side. The old temple was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. However, at the beginning of the 1980s, a Buddhist monk took the initiative to rebuild it. The main statue on the ground floor is that of the Murdo mountain deity as was the case in the old temple. The new temple has two storeys with Chinese styled roofs. On the first floor, there is an image of Thang-stong rgyal-po, the 15th century Tibetan engineer whose presence here is explained by the iron bridge which we mentioned above. On the second floor there are images of Tsongkhapa and his two chief disciples. (In the same place there is also an image of Indra in Chinese style, but I could not get any explanation of the presence of this statue in the temple.)

Pilgrims who went on to do the circumambulation of the mountain had made sure that they would arrive on the day of the celebration near the temple. They were joined by other people from different parts of the country who came just for the celebration, including Chinese. These Chinese have lived in the country for several generations and have adopted Lamaism. The officials, both Chinese and Tibetans from the Rongdrag county, came in their official cars to join in the celebration. (I was told that this was the first time they had come.) People came group by group streaming up along the road. The

first thing a group of people did when they arrived at the place was to make a visit to the temple in order to pay homage to the Murdo deity. However, members of a family and friends in a group often parted at the entrance of the temple in order to follow the tradition of their own religion. Those who considered that their religion was Bon performed the circumambulation in the Bonpo way (*bon-bskor* or *g.yon-bskor*), i.e. they went round the temple keeping it on the left, and those who were Buddhist went round the other way (*chos-bskor* or *g.yas-bskor*), keeping the temple on the right, but they crossed each other at the back of the temple making jokes to each other. Finally they met again at the entrance and then went together into the temple. Once inside, one could hardly see any difference in their behaviour. Old and young prostrated themselves in front of the imposing image of the divinity of Mt Murdo who looks very fearful and is mounted on a horse and carries a spear with a flag in his right hand. The whole image is literally covered with cloths of the *rlung-rta* type. Many of the people brought handfuls of burning incense as an offering so that the temple, which was very dark inside and terribly crowded, was suffocatingly filled with incense smoke. Beside the main statue, there was a large box for contributions to the upkeep of the temple. One slid money into it by a small slit near its top. A lama beside the statue gave a strip of red silk with a knot in the middle (*srung-mdud*) to each of the visitors. They put it around their necks in the belief that it protects them from evil. Some people asked for it not only for themselves but also for their people at home.

Outside the temple on the right, there was a rock about eight metres high on whose peak was a cairn (*la-btsas*) dedicated to the Mt Murdo. The visit inside the temple accomplished, pilgrims went out and performed the *sang* (*bsang*) purification ritual<sup>24</sup> by burning juniper branches on the rock just described. Many of the pilgrims who went to do the circumambulation carried a bunch of juniper branches on their back for this purpose. They performed the *bsang* ritual in front of the cairn and made prostrations and scattered the *rlung-rta* prints on paper into the air.<sup>25</sup> Having accomplished this ritual devotion, people began to have picnics in tents among the willow trees on the temple grounds and the bank of the Tsanchu which flows beside it. At the same time a lion *'cham* and folk dance were performed in another place. This was a most spectacular sight. While men wore just a simple *chuba* (*phyu-ba*)

<sup>24</sup> On this ritual, see Karmay 1995.

<sup>25</sup> On the symbol of this image, see Karmay 1993.

like men in any other part of Tibet, the women wore a typical Gyalrong woman's dress. Their head-dress was somewhat simple but impressive, having a lot of silver work in it.

The cult of Mt Murdo in Gyalrong represents the kind of popular belief in which dogmatic differences are totally ignored. For example, Tibetans normally make a distinction between a holy mountain (*gnas-ri*) and the mountain on which deities of the local territory dwell. The holy mountains are *a priori* a special site where early saints resided for their spiritual realisation. They therefore constitute a proper object for veneration (*yul khyad-pa can*). Through performing the circumambulation of these holy mountains, pilgrims believe that it helps them purify their karmic defilement accumulated in countless previous rebirths. It is in this Buddhist sense that the *gnas-ri* are considered as holy. The mountain deities that are believed to dwell on *gnas-ri* are seldom iconographically represented. One very rarely sees an iconographical representation of the *gter-bdag* of Mt Tise or Bon-ri. On the other hand, the *yul-lha*, the local mountain deities, are always iconographically described in propitiatory texts as well as depicted, mostly in the form of a warrior mounted on a horse. Furthermore, they are often considered as ancestors of the local population and as such are the object of requests for mundane affairs (Cf. Karmay 1994a: 115-20).

Although Murdo is considered purely as *gnas-ri* in the guide by Sangye lingpa, it now embodies in popular belief the notions of both *gnas-ri* and of *yul-lha* for the Gyalrong people. The only other example of this I know is Mt Amnye Machen (A-myes rMa-chen) which is worshipped in similar terms by the local people.

The use of the term 'birthday' (*'khrungs skar*) for the celebration of the mountain is unusual. It is not mentioned in the guide of Sangye lingpa. In my opinion, it is a reflection of the folktales in which people tell that such-and-such a mountain is born, married, has children and goes through other adventures and conflicts. The geographical formations near the mountain in question are often taken as representing different members of the family. These folk tales are more known among the nomads, but they also occur in written sources.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For example, Grub-dbang bsTan-'dzin rin-chen (b.1801), *'Dzam-gling gangs-rgyal ti se'i dkar chags tshangs dbyangs yid 'phrog* (hereafter *Tise dkar-chag*), MS



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In another work, Sangye lingpa, on the other hand, states that one should perform the circumambulation of Mt Murdo in the horse month (i.e. the 7th month in Tibetan calendar), and especially in the horse year, because in that year all the holy persons of the past 'gather together' on Mt Murdo.<sup>27</sup> However, no mention is made of why they meet together there in the horse month and horse year. The same year is also taken to be an important occasion for performing the circumambulation of Mt Tise.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Sangye lingpa believed that Mt Murdo was once visited by the master Dran-pa nam-mkha' as is the case with Mt Tise. Now, in the Bonpo tradition this master is believed to have been born in a horse year.<sup>29</sup> This seems to be the reason for Sangye lingpa's claim that in the horse year the saints gather together on the mountain in order to celebrate the sage's birthday. The rNying-ma-pa often celebrate their rituals on the 10th day of a month or in the monkey month and particularly the monkey year, because it is the birth year of Padmasambhava. The Gyalrong people therefore seem to have forgotten whose 'birthday' it meant. It has simply become that of their sacred mountain.

The celebration is nevertheless very significant for the Gyalrong people. Indeed, it is a unique occasion for manifesting their religious identities among themselves as well as a means of expressing their cultural difference from the Chinese.

### Concluding remarks

In spite of the communist ideological drive that has now spanned more than four decades, the religious belief of the Gyalrong people has remained very strong and has even counteracted the relentless sinification policy of their neo-imperialist master. This religious belief, given particularly lively expression through the mountain cult, embodies all the aspects of their ethnic

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preserved at the library of the Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolaji, Himachal Pradesh, India, fol.24b,4; 70b,4.

<sup>27</sup> *gNas chen dmu rdo skor ba'i phan yon*: 6-7. This text is found in the booklet containing the *dkar chag* of Sangye lingpa, pp.5-9. For other references see note 23.

<sup>28</sup> *Tise dkar-chag*, fol.58b,2.

<sup>29</sup> See Kvaerne 1971: 226 (41).

identity. The mountain cult is a characteristic trait of Tibetan secular culture. However, the Gyalrong people express it in their own way in the form of popular belief reflecting many elements of Bon and Buddhism in a most harmonious manner that is rarely found elsewhere in Tibet.

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# YAK-KEEPING IN HIGH ASIA

HERMANN KREUTZMANN  
*Berlin*

## Introduction

Discussions of environmental changes in High Asia frequently put the main emphasis on ecological aspects. Besides their ecological quality natural resources, climatic constraints and surface conditions are important frame conditions for socio-cultural adaptation and economic activities in High Asia as well.

Thus let me draw attention to the overlap of ecology, culture and economy. In high mountain research we observe such mutual fields of interest when studying mixed mountain agriculture. The utilization of natural resources is especially reflected in the sectors of water use, forest exploitation and animal husbandry. Climatic constraints and cyclic changes in vegetation cover affect the seasonal patterns of human activities. These factors gain importance with altitude and limit the available space for agricultural undertakings. This last aspect will be highlighted in the following. Talking about yak-keeping I have chosen to focus on a species of domesticated animals which have the reputation of being only adapted to high altitudes and capable of enduring these harsh conditions.

## Yak research in High Asia: concepts and topics

What is the role of yak (*Bos grunniens*) research in this context? In recent years more attention has been drawn to this sector and the majority of

research material stems from the People's Republic of China. This is quite understandable as China is the most important country with yak herds in sizeable numbers (Tab. 1). The high mountain regions and plateaus of Inner Asia are basically the major area of yak distribution as is emphasised in the recent monograph on the yak by Cai Li & Gerald Wiener (1995). This book and a number of articles listed therein give insight into breeding and

Tab. 1: Yak populations and their distribution in High Asia

Region	Yak numbers	Yak crosses	Area of distribution
Qinghai	4 500 000		Qinghai
Tibet (Xizang)	3 954 000		Tibetan Plateau
Sichuan	3 363 000		Western Plateau
Gansu	800 000		Qiliang Shan
Xinjiang	250 000		Tien Shan, Kun Lun Shan, Pamir
Yunnan	50 000		North-Western part
Inner Mongolia	2 000		Holan mountains
Mongolia	571 000	56 000	Altai, Chuwsguler Mountains, Changai
Kyrgyzstan	60 000		Alai, Tien Shan
Tajikistan	17 000		Pamir
CIS (except Tajikistan & Kyrgyzstan)	60 000		Caucasus, Altai, Tuva, Buryatia, Baikal
Afghanistan (Badakhshan-Pamir)	3 500		Hindukush, Pamir
Pakistan (Chitral)	5 000		Hindukush
Northern Areas	2 000	2 000	Karakoram
Jammu & Kashmir	13 000		Himalaya: Ladakh, Zanskar
India (Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh)	17 000		Himalaya
Nepal	19 000	41 000	High Himalaya: Solu Khumbu
Bhutan	30 200		Himalaya

Sources: BARTHEL 1990: 120; CAI LI & G. WIENER 1995: 6; HASERODT 1989: 125; KREUTZMANN 1986; 1996; Land Use Planning Project Bhutan 1995; Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics 1991; PAL 1993: 64; SARBAGISHEV ET AL. 1989; SHAHRANI 1979a

crossbreeding, production and reproduction, adaptation to different environments and further aspects related to animal science.

From a cultural geographer's perspective I would like to draw attention to some other aspects related to yak-keeping in high altitude environments. First there is the question of the "nomadic alternative". This title was used by Thomas Barfield (1993) for a survey of nomadism. The term was coined by Bruce Chatwin (1970) who introduced it in an exhibition catalogue about the archaeology of nomadic art forms, and was later taken up by Wolfgang Weissleder (1978) who edited a volume on interaction modes and models in the nomadic sector of Africa and Asia.

The term "nomadic alternative" implies that there might be an option within the process of modernization for the survival of archaic forms of animal husbandry. Fred Scholz (1995) has discussed different scenarios and presented us with case histories containing the development of nomadism under political and social change conditions for Africa and Eurasia.

The general pattern is reflected in the following hypothesis: The decrease of nomadism is a prime indicator for the process of modernization. It seems to be part of conventional wisdom as this statement governs quite a literature about the future of nomadic activities.

The same holds true for the livestock-keeping sector within mixed mountain agriculture, i.e., the share of mobile animal husbandry in relation to the crop-raising complex is supposed to diminish in favour of farmstead-based activities. Shortage of shepherds due to alternative income opportunities, out-migration and/or educational obligations are frequently mentioned reasons for social change in this field.

The questions I would like to discuss are whether the impact of yak-keeping can be an useful indicator for economic development under ecological constraints, and which factors dominate. Is there any importance linked to yak-keeping at all? Could this sector find a place in a modernisation process as well?

Second besides these more methodological and general aspects I would like to investigate the livestock sector in the periphery of peripheries. What do I mean by this statement? Quantitatively, Western High Asia contributes only a minor share (cf. Tab. 1) to the overall Inner Asian yak herds. This region has

been neglected in yak research for many reasons lying outside the fields of academic interest.

### Pastoralism in the Pamirs

I would like to present some evidence from yak-breeder communities in Western High Asia (Fig. 1). The main emphasis will be on socio-political and economic changes affecting animal husbandry in this region. Here we find yak-keeping in the eastern part of Tajikistan, in the Wakhan strip of Afghanistan, in the eastern Hindukush and northern Karakoram of Pakistan as well as in the Kun Lun Shan of Xinjiang. In this description of the area of distribution one regional term becomes prominent: Pamir. Somehow this term has remained vague up to the present day. Different interpretations and appellative locations prevail in academic disciplines as well as in topographical information.

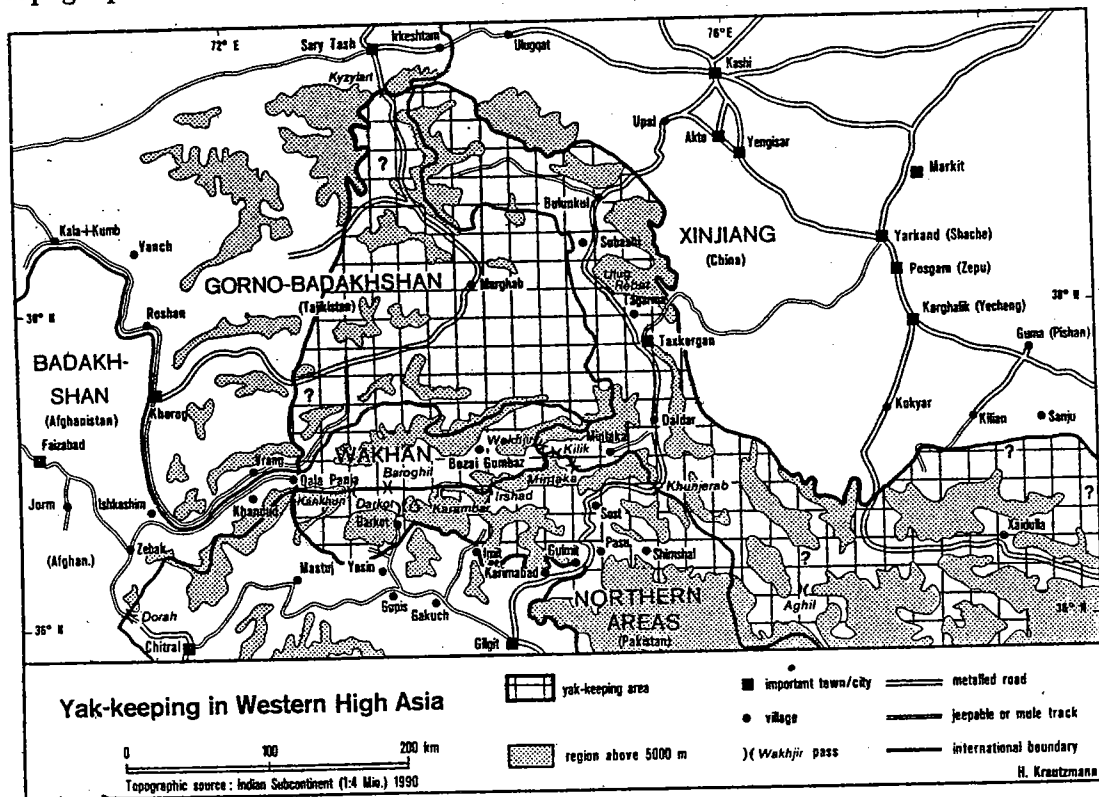


Fig. 1: Yak-keeping in Western High Asia

Some of the characteristic features of these mountain ranges are the enormous levels of glaciation at high altitudes in contrast to extremely arid valley systems. Within this gradient there are to be found extensive pasture areas in flat bottomed upper valleys. These features extend above the zone of artemisia steppe vegetation which reaches up to levels of 3800 m.

Following a local explanation, the Wakhi term *pamer* is understood as a grazing area which offers abundant fodder potential in a compact location. A *pamer* differs from an ordinary summer pasture (*hel*) in its bigger size and its flat appearance. The meaning of Pamir has been subjected to abundant speculation. According to the linguist Bailey<sup>1</sup> *pā* means 'mountain' and *mīra* 'wide plain, plateau' which resembles much of the Wakhi explanation. The co-author of the Wakhi dictionary published in St. Petersburg, I. M. Stéblin-Kamensky, doubts this linkage and consequently omitted such an entry in the volume.

Talking about the Pamir or the plural form Pamirs we can follow the elaborations of George Nathaniel Curzon (1896). In his essay 'The Pamirs and the source of the Oxus' he collected all the material available a century ago. Curzon presented a system which has become the classical background for later attempts of classification. Basically seven major Pamir regions of this description are to be distinguished (Tab. 2). In addition there are some Pamir regions of smaller size which have great local importance: Kara Kul and Sarikol in Xinjiang, Shimshal in the Northern Areas of Pakistan (Fig. 2). The latter are excluded from the system by purists who apply a size criterion in respect to length and width of a Pamir.

These vegetated areas have been of prime interest to nomads and sedentary agriculturists involved in animal husbandry as they provide an '... abundance of pasturage, affording excellent food for every variety of animal ...' (Curzon 1896: 32). The remoteness and seasonality of fodder provision has to be highlighted in these grazing areas, which are located in an altitude range between 3500 and 4300 m a.s.l. In all concerned areas the yak has never been the sole breed brought to those pastures; livestock also comprised goats and fat-tailed sheep for hair/wool and meat production, as well as horses, donkeys and camels (*Camelus bactrianus*), utilised for the transport of household utensils and products. Nevertheless the yak seems to be the best suited for

<sup>1</sup> Quoted after Dor & Naumann (1978: 24) who take up the classical discussion of the Pamir question elaborated on by Curzon (1896) and Davies (1862).



Tab. 2: The system of Pamirs

Eastern Pamir	<b>Gorno Badakhshanskaja Avtonomnaja Oblast (GBAO) Republic of Tajikistan</b>
	• Khargushi Pamir (Pamir of the hare): the basin of lake Kara Kōl (black lake)
	• Rang Kōl Pamir (Pamir of the coloured lake): the basin of the lake with the same toponym
	• Sariz Pamir (Pamir of the yellow trail): part of the Murghab valley up to the settlement of Murghab (previously named Pamirski Post)
	• Alichur Pamir: the valley of the river with the same toponym
Wakhan	<b>Wakhan Woluswali, Badakhshan Republic of Afghanistan</b>
	• Chong Pamir: Great Pamir or Pamir-e Kalan: the headwaters of the Pamir Darya and the basin of Zor Kōl (big lake)
	• Kichik Pamir: Little Pamir or Pamir-e Khurd: the headwaters of Aksu river including the lakes Chakmaktin Kōl and Besh Ōtōk Kōl
Sarikol	<b>Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County Uigur Autonomous Region Xinjiang, Peoples Republic of China</b>
	• Taghdumbash Pamir: headwaters of river with same name and Karachukur River

survival under these harsh conditions. The milk-yielding yaks fit into the pasturing cycle of sheep and goats. This period regularly does not exceed three summer months. The non-milk-yielding animals can be left in the Pamirs for much longer. Sometimes the period of grazing for "dry" yaks outside the permanent habitations has been extended up to a full-year circle with occasional control visits by the owners and/or shepherds.

#### Adaptive strategies in Western High Asia

The two major adaptive strategies of utilising the pasture potential of this region under given ecological constraints have been mountain nomadism and the livestock sector of mixed mountain agriculture.

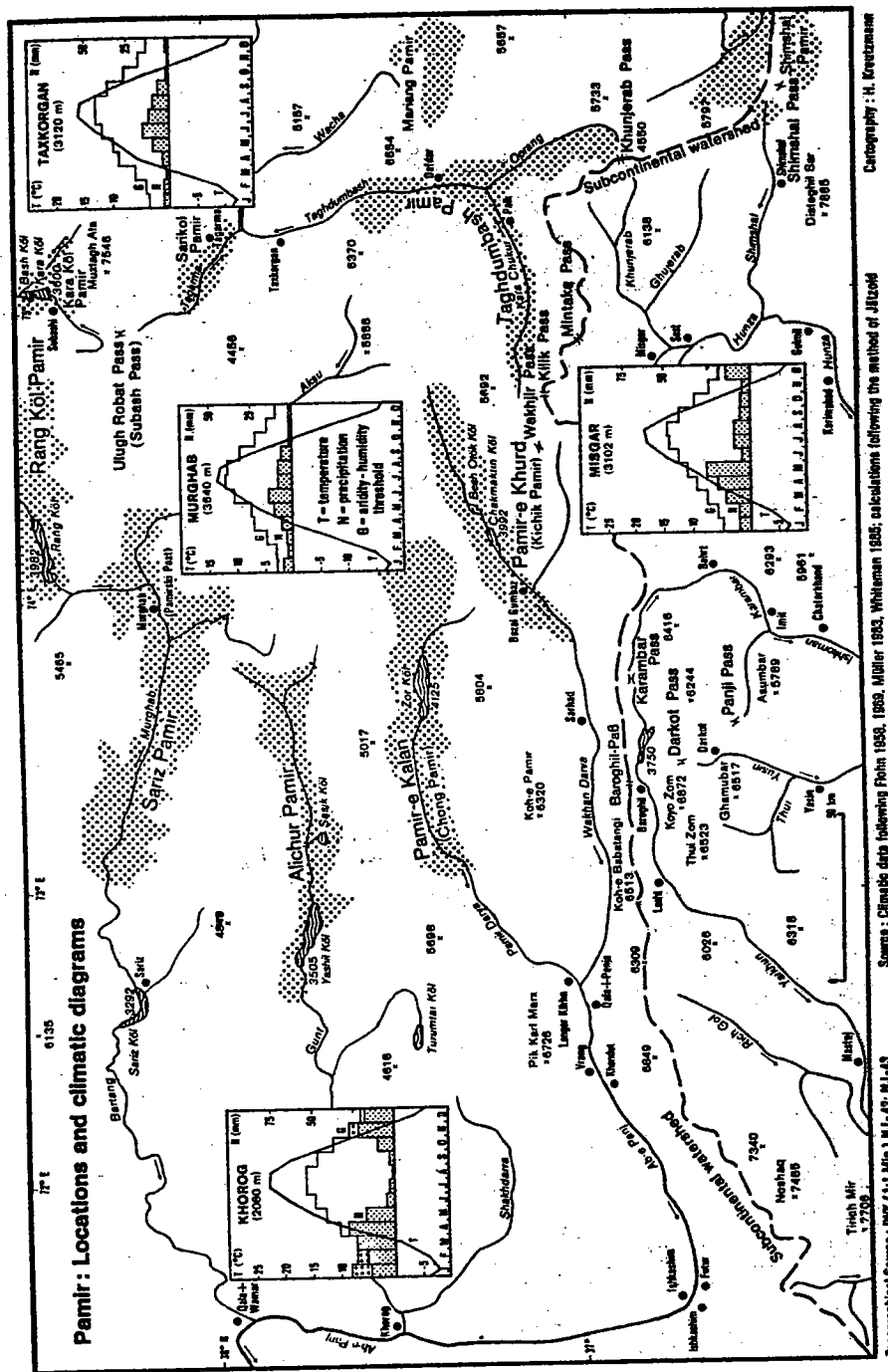


Fig. 2: Pamir: Location and climatic conditions

- Nomadism has the advantage of mobility. Traditionally nomadic groups were able to exploit natural resources at disconnected locations. Great distances of the order of several hundreds of kilometres separated economically valuable mountain pastures from winter camp sites with areas of lesser economic interest lying in between. In this region that means functional migration cycles including longer stays in high-altitude pastures during summers, and winter grazing in low-lying basins in the northern foothills or plains of the Inner Asian mountain arc. In both areas the nomads are dependent on being tolerated as a mobile group and being able to pay the grazing fees if applicable.

- Mixed mountain agriculture has the advantage of fodder production in the permanent homesteads for herds which are grazed in the high pastures during the summers. The limiting factor here is the provision of nine months' feed which has to be produced on private or common property village lands. Their permanent habitations are located at the upper levels of single-crop farming. The access to the Pamir pastures involves shorter migrations and some mobility within the summer habitations. Fodder here is comparatively plentiful but only available for a short period, feed storage and transport to the homesteads being of limited importance.

Both approaches can result in competition for natural resources in the same location and have frequently been discussed from that perspective. The ecological aspect has been expanded to the debate about conflicting economic strategies. In the discourse of modernisation and social change nomadism's place is usurped by agriculture. The extensive utilisation of marginal resources is superseded by intensification.

Let us investigate some developments in these sectors relating to transformation processes affecting economies based on pastoralism.

### **1. Stalinist sedentarisation programmes in Central Asia**

As the greater part of the Pamirs is located within the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast of the Tajikistan Republic they have been involved in the sedentarisation process of nomads during Stalinist modernisation programmes in the 1930s. At that stage nomadic production and life-style was declared backward. Since then the system of pasture utilisation has been shifted to kolchos settlement centred seasonal migration of herds (cf. Monogarova 1978). As G. F. Dachslejger (1981) and Ernst Giese

(1983) have pointed out for Kazakhstan Republic a long period of decline (1930-1960) was followed by a development which has improved the overall productivity of agriculture. Besides extension of cultivated lands fodder production has been augmented, while the variety of breeds has been increased and the health conditions of the herds improved. Permanent winter stables with adequate infrastructure, veterinary treatment and sufficient fodder contributed to this development, which resembles some aspects of the Pamirian pastoralism of present times.

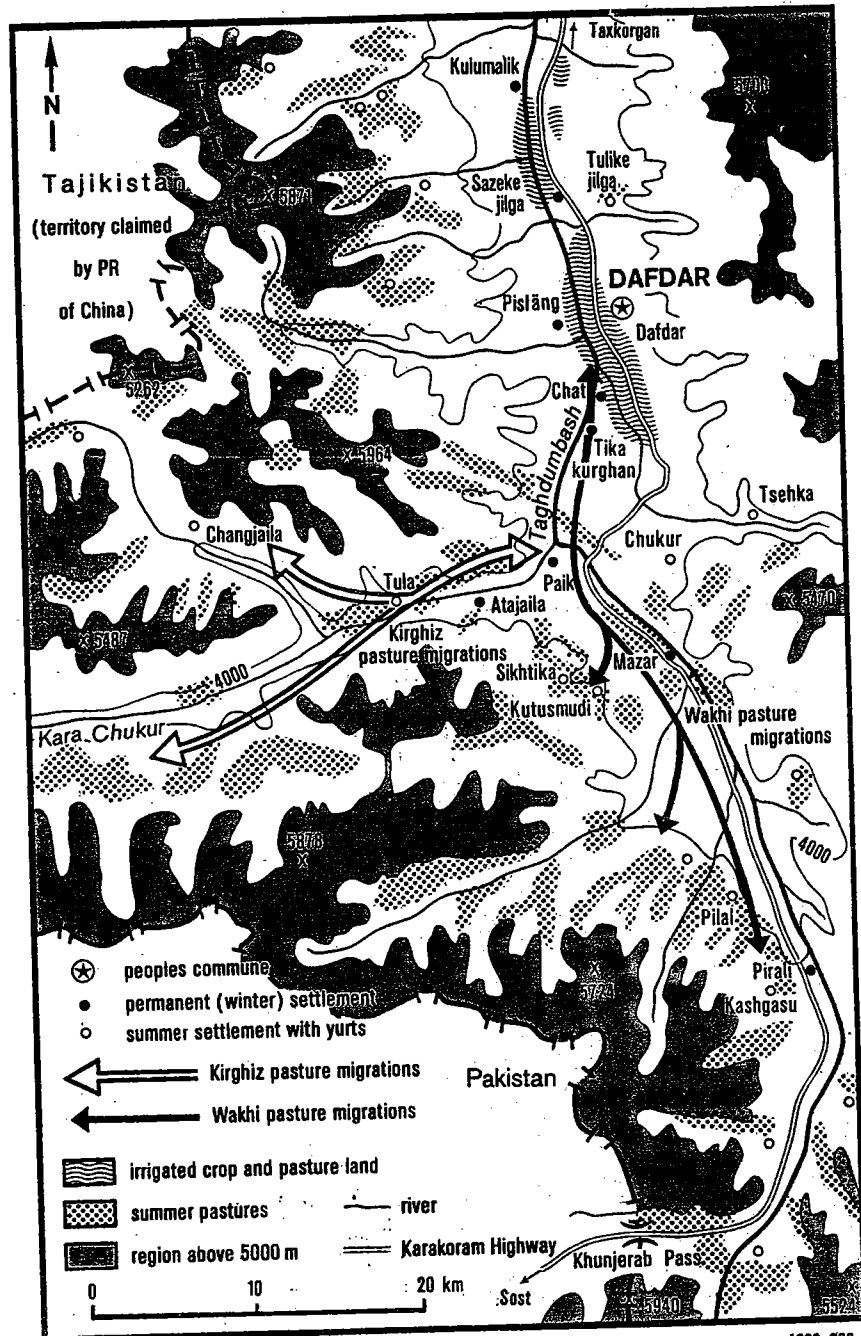
In the Eastern Pamir, part of Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan district, nowadays Kirghiz shepherds and a few Wakhi keep yak herds around traditional supply stations like Murghab (formerly Pamirski Post) from where they undertake seasonal migrations to the higher elevation summer pastures (Tab. 2). Basically nomadism has been converted into a form of mixed mountain agriculture under conditions of collective resource management.

## **2. Competition between nomads and agriculturalists in the Pamirs (Sarikol)**

The Taxkorgan or Sarikol (name of the former principality) area comprises three different ethnic groups, Sariqoli, Wakhi and Kirghiz (here less than 5 % of the population). The former two groups (81.75 % of the inhabitants) follow a mixed mountain agriculture composed of crop raising and animal husbandry with seasonal utilisation of Pamir pastures, while the Kirghiz specialise solely in livestock. All three groups traditionally move their flocks within the Taghdumbash Pamir, and were tributaries to the Mir of Hunza who exercised control on these pastures until 1937 (Kreutzmann 1996: 358-61). While Kirghiz lived in the higher elevations Sariqoli approached from the northern low-lying villages. Only the Wakhi founded their settlement of Dafdard (3400 m) in the heart of the Taghdumbash Pamir with the consent of the Chinese authorities about a century ago. All three groups compete for the fodder resources there (Fig. 3).

Since the Chinese revolution of 1949 and the formation of the Tajik Taxkorgan Autonomous County in 1954 the establishment of rural communes has been organised in the villages. The basic infrastructural assets such as school, police post, health post and barefoot doctor, commune administration and shop, mosque etc. have been provided to all communities of the Taghdumbash Pamir.

Fig. 3: Dafdar: Utilisation of natural pastures



In post-revolutionary times the number of livestock has been increased by a factor of 4.75 up to 128,800 heads in 1984. This figure covers all stocks of Bactrian camel, horses, donkeys, yaks, other cattle, sheep and goats. Natural grazing provides the overall most important local resource utilised through animal husbandry: the area covered with grasslands extends to 6.09 million *mu* of which 97.6 % belong to natural grazing while 0.13 million *mu* are irrigated meadows (1 *mu* equals 0.067 ha; cf. Tab. 3). More than two thirds of the economic turnover of Taxkorgan County derives from animal husbandry: in 1984: 2.75 million Yuan, compared to 1.18 million Yuan from crop raising (Kashgar Prefecture Chronicle 1985).

In 1960, for the first time since the Chinese Revolution self-sufficiency in food and fodder production was achieved in Taxkorgan County (Xinjiang). Since 1982 the majority of the eleven townships and former people's communes (*renmin gungshe*) have been equipped with a veterinary station supplying vaccines and extension services to the farmers. Experiments with fat-tailed sheep (*dumba, dumbash*) have been carried out and their share in the regional flocks has been increased (H. G. Schwarz 1984: 226). In the heart of the Taghdumbash Pamir a veterinary station specialising in yak-breeding was established in Mazar (south of Dafdard along the Pak-China Friendship Highway, cf. Fig. 3) by utilising the local knowledge of Tajik and Kirghiz shepherds who found employment there. About 400 persons reside in Mazar breeding farm which contains livestock of about 5,000 sheep and 500 yak

Tab. 3: Potential fodder availability of pastures in the Pamir region

Region	Total area in ha	grazing area		available grazing potential				
		in ha	total in %	to be utilized		not to be utilized		total
				in tons	in %	in tons	in %	in tons
Western Pamir	2 468 700	1 113 390	45,1	40 990	22,4	141 260	77,6	181 250
- Wakhan	249 200	146 030	58,6	2 630	17,8	12 120	82,2	14 750
Eastern Pamir	2 839 700	1 099 900	38,7	61 400	45,3	74 400	54,7	135 800
Pamir (total area)	5 308 400	2 213 290	41,7	102 390	31,9	215 660	68,1	317 050
Sarikol (Taxkorgan)	5 038 250	374 313	7,4					555 370

Source: Heinrich Walter & Siegmund-W. Breckle, "Pamir - eine ökologisch gut untersuchte Hochgebirgswüste," in Heinrich Walter & Siegmund-W. Breckle (eds.) *Ökologie der Erde*, Vol. 3, Stuttgart, New York: Gustav Fischer, 1986, p. 358 and data provided by the county administration Taxkorgan 1991

(George B. Schaller *et al.* 1987: 53-71). Much bigger herds of yaks are kept by the Wakhi and Kirghiz of the Karachukur Valley draining the westernmost part of the Taghdumbash Pamir. This side valley has become the only Kirghiz-dominated pasture region of the Taxkorgan county. The number of yaks grew from 5,909 in 1981 to 8,147 in 1990 (Fig. 4), the highest figure since 1976. The trading and export value of yaks has been limited, they are mainly utilised for local purposes: milk, butter, *qurut*, hair and meat. In addition their transport capabilities and frugality are regarded as major assets of yaks in the Chinese Pamirs.

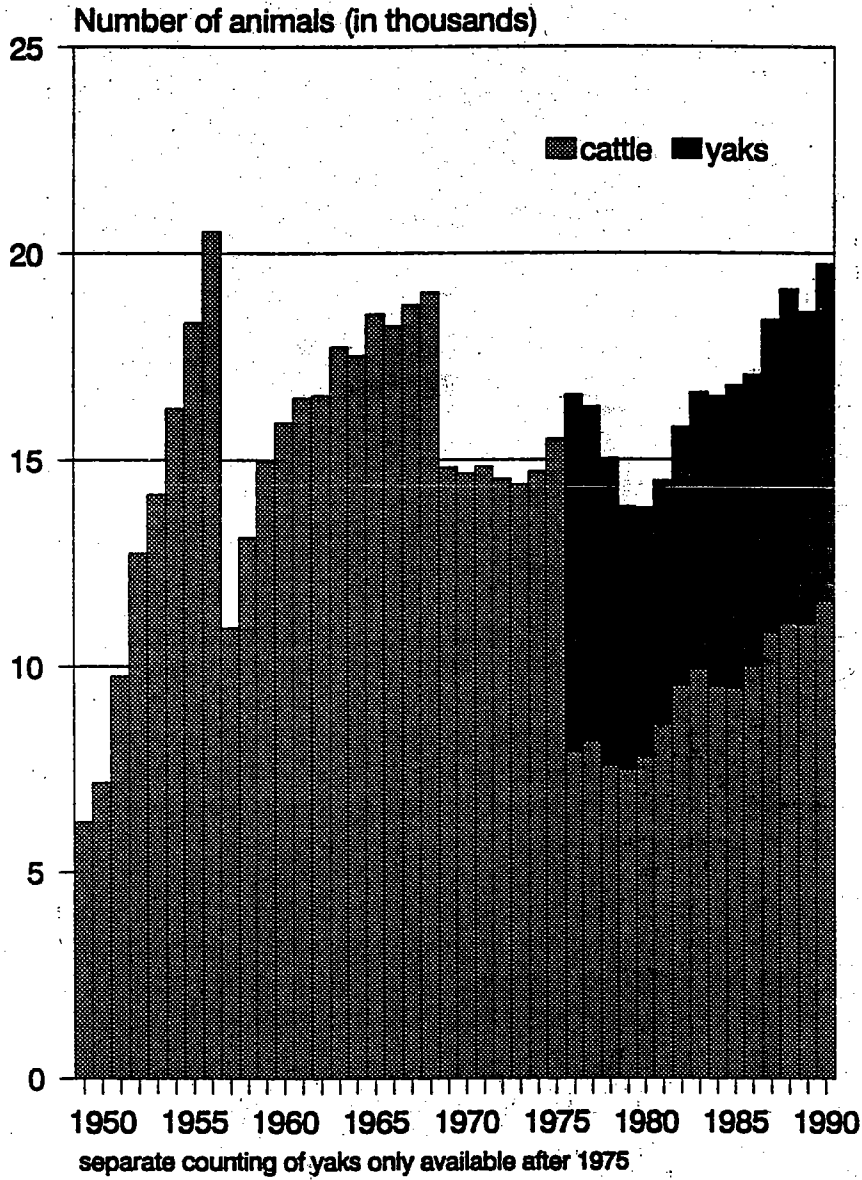
### 3. Kirghiz exodus from the Afghan Pamirs

The Great and Little Pamir within Wakhan Woluswali of Badakhshan Province (Afghanistan) have been studied extensively up to the repeated and probably last exodus of the majority of Kirghiz nomads from there to Pakistan in 1978. Their fate is one of the more prominent cases where border delineation has interrupted traditional migration patterns and where the term 'closed frontier nomadism' was coined.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See for this Kirghiz group the numerous publications by Shahrani (1978, 1979, 1980, 1984), Dor & Naumann (1978). In 1978 a group of 1300 Kirghiz (280 yurts) fled to Pakistan. Not all members of the Kirghiz group of Rahman Kul (who died in August 1990 in Turkey) joined him after four years of exile in Pakistan to Eastern Anatolia. Rahman Kul alone had to leave 16,000 sheep and goat, more than 700 yaks, 15 horses and 18 Bactrian camels behind while the whole community of the Afghan Pamirs possessed more than 40,000 animals of which only a small herd of 6000 could be taken to exile in Pakistan and none from there. Rahman Kul migrated with his group of 1132 Kirghiz in August 1982 to become the village head of the community in Ulupamir Köy (1800 m) as a member of a government resettlement scheme which provided each household with 10 sheep and goats as well as 3 cattle. Presently this community has grown up to 2000 members following a settled agriculture and animal husbandry with their herds of 7000 sheep, 1000 goats, 6000 cattle (no yaks) and 70 horses (personal communication through Gundula Salk, Berlin, and Bernard Repond, Marsens, Switzerland). A small group of 200 Kirghiz returned to the Little Pamir from Pakistan by October 1979 (Shahrani 1984: 32). Recent information reveals that more than a hundred tent communities are engaged in animal husbandry. Barter trade with entrepreneurs from Northern Pakistan is based on a regular exchange of goods. Kirghiz supply yaks and sheep as well as the hair and wool of these animals, while the Hunzukuts provide them with wheatflour, tea, clothing and other consumer goods.

### Yaks and cattle in Taxkorgan County



Source: Data provided by Taxkorgan County Authority:  
Livestock Department 1991

Design: H. Kreutzmann

Fig. 4: Yaks and cattle in Taxkorgan County 1949-1990



Again we found here competition between poor Wakhi farmers utilising the Pamirs for summer grazing and rich Kirghiz nomads controlling most of these Pamirs. Impoverished Wakhi did take up jobs as shepherds for Kirghiz herd owners and turned eventually to nomadic strategies (Kreutzmann 1996: 146-53). The share of yaks was about ten percent of the total within the community's herds of about 40,000 animals.

Any form of animal husbandry has been limited to subsistent survival strategies in recent years as traditional exchange lines have been interrupted due to war conditions. The unstable internal situation in Afghanistan has prevented any further research in this area in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

For the time being the refugee Kirghiz group has been resettled in Ulupamir Köy (Ercis District, Turkey) and are now contemplating and negotiating a resettlement programme within the Kyrgyzstan Republic.

#### **4. Kirghiz pastoralists in Kara Köl**

The Kirghiz traditionally followed a long-distance nomadic migration cycle between the summer grazing grounds in the Pamirs and the irrigated oases of the mountain forelands where they spent the winter occupied with herding and different other businesses in the towns of Kashgar and Yarkand. This pattern has been abridged within the last 50 years. Nowadays the Kirghiz nomads are confined with their herds to the Pamir regions all year round. Only for marketing purposes do they leave their mountain abodes and travel on foot with their flocks or on the back of trucks down to the Sunday markets of Kashgar and/or Yarkand. Thus, the herds cover the distance of 280 km easily and without great loss of weight.

The pasture system has been adjusted to changed frame conditions. The herds of the Kara Köl Kirghiz are mainly composed of on average 1.5 horses, 1.4 donkeys and 2.5 Bactrian camels. These animals are preferably required for transportation and travelling purposes. The additional livestock sums up

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<sup>3</sup> The latest report by Unidata (1992) on Badakhshan summarises the available information of the agriculture in Badakhshan but does not include any information of animal husbandry in Wakhan Woluswali or yak breeding in particular. Information could be collected from migrant labourers and refugees from Wakhan who live and work in Northern Pakistan. The interviewees confirmed that agriculture follows mainly a subsistence production system. The only market outlet is provided by some barter trade across the border to Pakistan.

on average to 12.2 yaks, 98.2 sheep and 40.1 goats.<sup>4</sup> In comparison: in 1976, the peoples commune of Subashi (Karakul) owned only 0.5 horses, 0.3 camels, 3.5 yaks and 74.9 sheep and goats per household. The total number of livestock ranged in this period around 10,300 animals (Myrdal 1981: 31). Besides state ownership on flocks private property rights for a limited number of animals had been assured for the nomads. The carrying capacity of accessible pastures was calculated for about 40,000 animals, by 1991 the number of heads has reached 30,000.

Relaxed attitudes of the Chinese authorities towards agricultural and livestock production since the 1960s in this area and especially since the reforms of 1978 have led to an increased market orientation and the improvement of natural pastures through irrigation and fencing of meadows. Grass is cut by scythe and winter fodder is stored to cover the long period of meagre natural pasture in the winter settlement (*kishlok*) of Subashi at an altitude of 3600 m.

Administratively the Kara K l grazing zone forms part of the Aqto division, which is one of the four sub-units of the Kizil Su Autonomous Oblast where the majority of China's 119,300 Kirghiz reside (data for 1984). The majority of the Kirghiz of Kizil Su has become sedentary agriculturists while the inhabitants of the higher Pamirs continue to follow nomadic livestock breeding exclusively. The *kishlok* of Subashi is equipped like other communes with infrastructure institutions such as school, police station, health post and barefoot doctor, commune administration and shop, mosque etc. and as well with a veterinary post controlling the quality and health status of animals. Harsh environmental conditions of survival disguise the fact that the animals raised in these productive pastures compete very well on the profitable markets in the urban oases along the southern Silk Route (Tarim Basin).

### **Role of yak-keeping in this context**

In all four cases presented here yak-keeping has played a major role as yaks are well-adapted to this high-altitude environment. The observation is that wherever animal husbandry is a persistent economic feature yaks remain an important component of the herds. The data available basically show steady figures for yaks while the remaining stock varies much more.

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<sup>4</sup> These were collected by the author during the joint German-Chinese fieldwork expedition in the summer of 1991.

An important exception has been observed in Northern Pakistan where in the Hunza region yak numbers have increased in recent years.<sup>5</sup> The permanent deficit in meat supplies on the regional market has challenged local entrepreneurs to rear yak herds in order to market them in the meat bazaars of the Northern Areas. The quality of locally raised yaks is far higher than the appalling low-quality meat of water buffaloes imported from down country Pakistan. This exceptional feature puts yaks into the picture as a marketable resource. In most cases the role of yaks is quite different. Only the extreme deficit in meat supplies has affected the dominant pattern.

From the evidence presented here it seems that yaks are primarily kept for subsistence purposes and as an investment in securities. With a comparatively low labour input substantial life meat stores are available in the appearance of yak herds. Besides there are further spin-off effects in milk and hair production etc. Thus yak-keeping complements the function which is mainly attributed to crop-farming, i.e., to safeguard survival under high mountain conditions. The higher the settlement regions the more importance lies in the combination of crop cultivation and livestock breeding. The subsistence share in this form of a feasible mixed mountain agriculture is

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<sup>5</sup> Kreutzmann 1986, 1996. Within the last decade stocks of yaks have been increased through the import of female yaks from the Taghdumbash Pamir in Xinjiang (China) across the Khunjerab Pass and the Karakoram Highway into the Northern Areas and mainly Ghujal subdivision of Hunza (Fig. 1). In 1989/90 alone more than 500 yaks were imported of which one third were retained for breeding purposes while the rest replenished the always deficient meat markets of Gilgit. Out of these 83 female yaks were bought by people of Shimshal, the owners of the Shimshal Pamir with excellent grazing and profitable animal husbandry. In addition thirty female yaks were sold to farmers of Pasu village, changing breeding habits in an important way. Previously, in 1985, there were about 436 yaks in Shimshal and 83 in Pasu (cf. Kreutzmann 1986: 102). These animals (above five years of age) fetched a price of Rs 4000 each, i.e., an average price of US \$ 200 per yak. This initial consignment affected the meat prices of Gilgit Bazaar dramatically and led to a slump: the reason was that in addition to these yaks a flock of 1500 fat-tailed sheep and goats had been imported. Nevertheless, the improvement of breeds through imports from China has become a regular practice which is encouraged by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), the most prominent development project in the area, targeting the increase of livestock production among others. Under the supervision of a veterinarian from Gilgit suitable female yaks have been selected and immediately directed towards the interested villagers' cattlesheds in the region.

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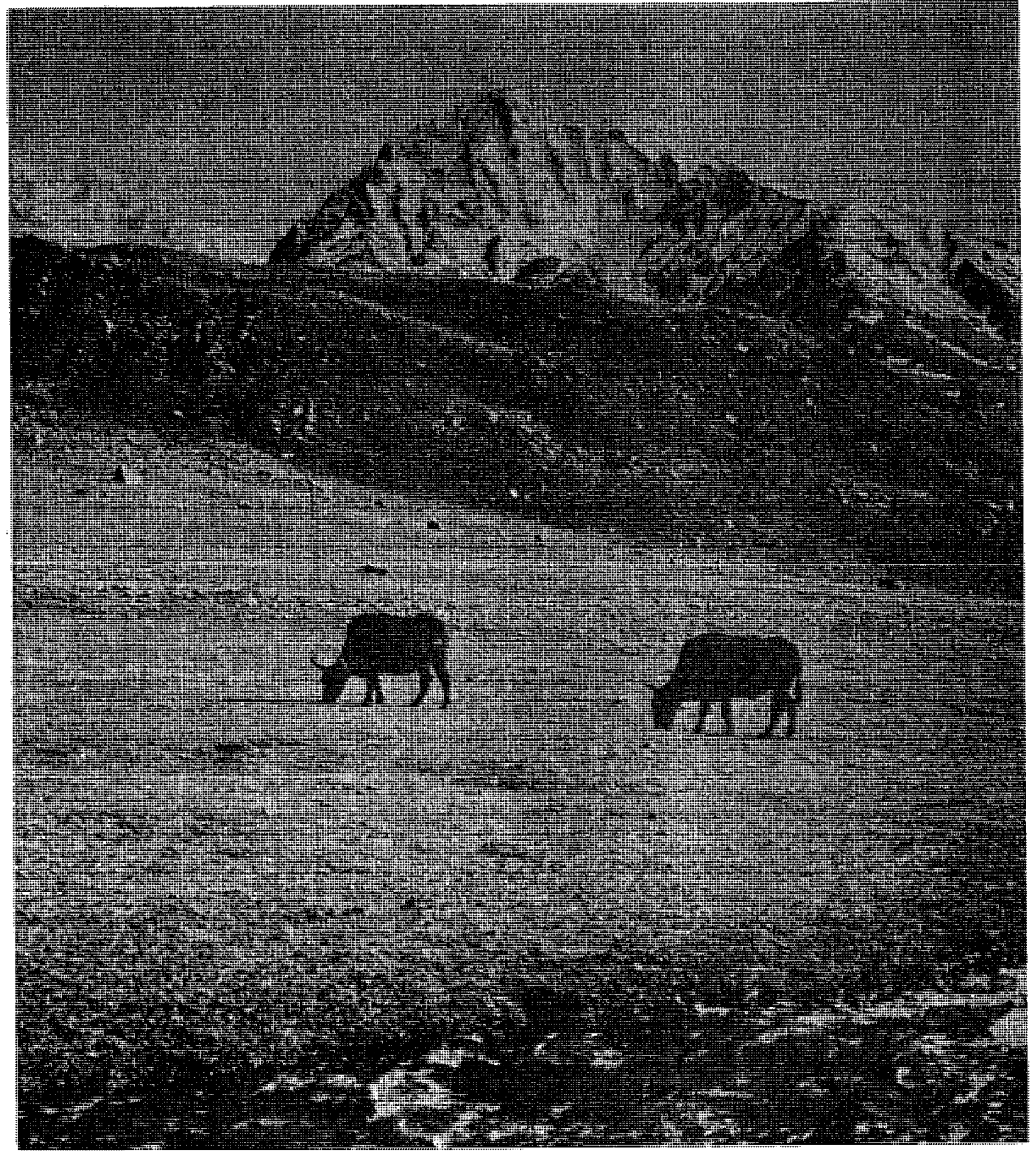
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*Yak-Keeping in High Asia / 33*



*Plate I: Wakhi yak-breeder on the Taghdumbash Pamir (Tajik Autonomous county, Xinjiang Region, China). The yak is an important species in the herd composition of Kirghiz nomads as well as Wakhi and Sariqoli farmers who utilise the natural grazing of the Pamirs (3600-4500 m) during the summer season. The nomadic space for pasturing has been reduced by the extension of permanent settlements into the rim of the Taghdumbash Pamir.*



*Plate II: Yak-keeping in the Khunjerab Pass region (4500 m) of Northern Pakistan. Non-milk-yielding yaks have been released on these pastures to remain in the grazing grounds all year long. They survive the harsh winter conditions and are fattened during summers. Only from time to time are they visited by their owners.*

characterised by the cultivation of well-adapted bread crops and an interrelated livestock component providing dung, fuel and traction power besides the consumable goods mentioned above. Yaks play a prominent role in this respect of search for security.

Other bovines as well as sheep and goats are predominantly kept for marketing purposes. Consequently their numbers have varied much more under changing socio-economic frame conditions. In the context of planned economies a shift to fat-tailed sheep and goats could be observed, a trend which has gained in momentum after the relaxation of rules and regulations. Those animal herds are basically responsible for dramatic changes in vegetation cover. In the Kara Köl Pamir their numbers have tripled since the reforms of the late 70s and fat-tailed sheep are in great demand in the urban markets at the rim of the mountain arc.

Yak-keeping seems to be a less important indicator for socio-economic change in Western High Asia. Nevertheless yaks play a vital role in the domestic economy and substantiate any attempt to create sustainability in the animal husbandry sector. Livestock-keeping has always been a risky undertaking in high mountain regions. The safety factor is served best in the animal herds when enduring yaks utilise marginal pastures in remote locations.

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# THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF KIPAT

ANN ARMBRECHT FORBES

## Introduction

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

— William Shakespeare *Richard II*

This paper examines the contradiction between the politics and poetics of a 'customary' system of tenure, *kipat*, that was in operation in Hedangna, a Yamphu Rai village in the upper Arun valley, until the cadastral survey was conducted in 1994. The 1894 Revenue Settlement in Nepal and the last revenue settlement conducted in Pathibhara VDC registered people, not land. The cadastral survey registered land not people. This shift reflects the more general transformation from Nepal as a kingdom where people were the primary resource to Nepal as a modern democratic nation where land is the primary resource. This broader shift is grounded in the micro-politics of *kipat* tenure and its meanings.

*Kipat* symbolically and legally marked the point of intersection between local and national systems of governance. As a system of land tenure with specific rights and regulations attached to it, *kipat* was the locus of considerable competition over contemporary claims to resources. As a symbol expressing the past glory of their ancestors, *kipat* was part of a narrative that links the Yamphu Rai to their past and to the lands on which that past has unfolded. While villagers in Hedangna waxed poetic about the importance of their identity as *kipatiyā*, in the next breath they said it would be good when

the *kipat* system ended once and for all, then their land claims would be more secure and there would be fewer disputes over landed resources.

This paper examines the national policies toward *kipat* and the ways these policies have been implemented in a remote region of the country. My primary source of information is the work of Mahesh Regmi (1974, 1976, 1978a, 1978b), an economic historian who has written extensively on the land tenure systems of Nepal. His points are supplemented with information from ethnographies of *kipat* among the Limbu of Pallo Kirat (cf. Caplan 1970, 1991; Sagant 1983, 1985). While the purpose of this paper is to provide a view of *kipat* from the center, at certain points in this discussion I suggest a different interpretation of these 'official' versions of *kipat* in light of information collected in Hedangna.

The discussion of *kipat* is extremely complicated. Understanding how *kipat* operated in its final years depends on understanding its meaning and practice in the past. Understanding the past depends on the material available: documents, ethnographies from other regions, and villagers' own interpretations and memories. Some government regulations have been implemented, other have not. Different villagers have adhered to these regulations in different ways at different times over the past two hundred years. Villagers themselves often emphasized different and conflicting aspects of *kipat* at different times. Information from land disputes and the actual administration of *kipat* by the *jimmawals* in Hedangna is needed to provide a more thorough understanding of this particular system of land tenure (see Forbes 1995).

After briefly discussing why the Kiranti were granted *kipat* rights, I compare *kipat* to other systems of land tenure in Nepal, particularly *raikar*. I then outline Regmi's account of how *kipat* works as a system of land tenure. While the documents used by Regmi provide a wealth of information on national policies toward *kipat* and on particular problems that reach a national level, these documents do not explain or even acknowledge local variation and particularities. Though historically an important political and economic center on the upper Arun, the Yamphu are notably absent from Regmi's account. There are a number of important differences between the ways *kipat* has been administered among the Yamphu Rai in Pathibhara and the ways it has worked in the more commonly cited case of the Limbu in Terathum and Taplejung Districts. This material provides an additional perspective on the political economy of *kipat*. It also suggests points where the

view from the center has obscured, rather than clarified, the workings of *kipat* as a system of land tenure.

**What is *Kipat*?**

The Kirats, being vigorous beef-eaters, did not readily submit to the Rajputs. — Hamilton 1819 [1971]

The Kiranti eventually settled in eastern Nepal, in the land that the Khas invaders in Kathmandu referred to as Majh (middle) Kirat and Pallo (far) Kirat.<sup>1</sup> Because Pallo Kirat fell on the border between Sikkim, Tibet and India it was an area of tremendous strategic importance for Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Gorkha leader who set out to conquer the kingdoms of the Himalaya in the late 18th century.<sup>2</sup> At the time, this region fell under the jurisdiction of the Vijayapur Kingdom that was ruled by two branches of the Sen dynasty of Makwanpur. The Kiranti had paid taxes either to Sikkim or Tibet or the Vijayapur kingdom, and were unwilling to commit their loyalty to any of these groups (Hamilton 1819 [1971]). Afraid of angering their neighbors or inciting rebellion among the inhabitants of the desired territory of Pallo Kirat, Prithvi Narayan Shah decided to strike a deal with the Kiranti rulers, to bring them under the general rule of the Gorkha dynasty rather than under the direct control of the king. He recognized the local chiefs and guaranteed the security of the rights and privilege they had enjoyed under the Sen kings; they were granted *kipat* rights to large tracts of land in Pallo and Majh Kirat (Regmi

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<sup>1</sup> These terms, Burghart explains, are from the point of view of Gorkha at the end of the 19th century. He writes, 'the area further east was inhabited by people who called themselves Khwombo and Limbu, but whom the Khas, following Sanskrit usage, called Kirant (Hodgson n.d. 254). Kirant was subdivided by the Khas (but not by the 'Kiranti') into hither, middle and further Kirant, depending upon the distance of each from Khas country' (Hodgson *ibid*, M.C. Regmi 1963-68 (1978a): 3, 27 as cited in Burghart 1984:107).

<sup>2</sup> Though most descriptions of *kipat* lands describe the Limbus of Pallo Kirat as the last remaining *kipat* holders, Hedangna and all of the communities north of the Sankhuwa River at the southern edge of Tamkhu fall into Pallo Kirat. *Kipat* continued to operate in all of these communities until the arrival of the cadastral survey in 1993/94.

1978a:539). The conditions of this incorporation were documented in a Royal Order from the king.<sup>3</sup> Burghart writes:

In sum, the king did not bring the diverse countries of his possessions into relation with one another, for they were unique; nor did he assimilate them one to the other, for they were naturally different. Instead he respected the customs of different countries and registered the fact of this difference by means of the common *kipat* category, thereby bringing diverse peoples under the proprietary authority of Gorkha (1984:109).

*Kipat* provided a framework within which the Kiranti were able to retain a degree of local autonomy that was unique in Nepal. Regmi writes:

The Gorkhali rulers did not achieve political unification solely through military conquest, and often political compromises with various communal groups, as well as with the rulers of different principalities. The *kipat* system in the eastern hill region provides the most conspicuous example of political compromise with a communal group (1984:28).

It follows, then, that if granting *kipat* was the most striking example of a deal struck between the central government and local autonomy, the end of *kipat* is one of the most notable examples of state intrusion on a local level.

Even after the initial Royal Decree, Pallo Kirat continued to pose problems for the government in Kathmandu. Regmi describes how during the Nepal-Tibet war of 1791-93, 'Chinese and Tibetans visited Sikkim and Pallo Kirat to clandestinely finance the Limbus and Lepchas and incite them to revolt (1978a fn p. 540). The revolt, which was suppressed with great

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<sup>3</sup> Regmi cites the official version: 'All of you who fled to foreign territory during the disturbances of yesterday are hereby pardoned... for your crimes... your kinsmen who are living here have been confirmed ... on their lands and homesteads... according to the privileges granted by the Makwani Kings. Return [to Pallo-kirat], all of you, and we hereby guarantee the same privileges for you. [This order is quoted in *Order Regarding Restoration of Kipat Lands in Pallo-kirat, Poush Sudi 8, 1945 (December 1888)* and cited in Regmi 1978a:541].

severity, emphasized for the Gorkhas the need to develop good relations with the Limbus (*ibid.*:540).<sup>4</sup>

### Land tenure in Nepal: A view from the center

The land tenure scheme was the framework within which communities were incorporated into the political structure of the Nepalese kingdom. Stiller (1975) explains that the primary principle underlying the land tenure system in Hindu-dominated areas of Nepal during the pre-Gorkhali period (pre-1769) and throughout the country in post-Gorkhali Nepal was that all land was understood to be the property of the king. All the land that fell under the sovereign authority of the crown was considered *raikar*.<sup>5</sup> At his discretion, the king could in turn give grants of *raikar* lands as *birta*, *jagir*, and *guthi*,<sup>6</sup> the other land tenure systems<sup>7</sup> that existed until Land Reform in the 1960s.

<sup>4</sup> Regmi also refers to an order from the government much later, in 1883, that stated that 'Pallo Kirat is a border area which has been administered since early times through a conciliatory policy.... If the customs and traditions of the Limbus are violated, they will leave the country and the government will lose thereby' (In *Order Regarding Tare Subbas in Pallo Kirat*, Aswin 1940 (September 1883) as cited in Regmi 1978a:577).

<sup>5</sup> Regmi defines *raikar* as 'lands on which taxes are collected from individual landowners, traditionally regarded as state-owned' (1976:235).

<sup>6</sup> The king did not have any authority over *kipat* land, thus he could not give these lands away for military (*jagir*), political rewards (*birta*), or to set up institutions (*guthi*).

<sup>7</sup> Though it is not stated how this data was obtained, Zaman (1974) provides an estimation of the agrarian structure prior to and post 1950:

Tenure	Pre-1950		Post-1950	
	Area (ha)	Percent	Area (ha)	Percent
1. <i>Raikar</i>	963,700	50	2,083,000	95
2. <i>Birta</i>	700,000	36.3	abolished	
3. <i>Rajya, Jagir, Rakam</i> and others	146,000	7.7	abolished	
4. <i>Kipat</i>	77,000	4	77,000	3
5. <i>Guthi</i>	40,000	2	40,000	2

Zaman writes: 'Heterogeneity of tenure, a good part of which was exempt from payments of land revenue, was the prominent feature prior to 1950. The

Because these lands also fell under the control of the king, they are subsumed under the general category of *raikar*. *Kipat*, on the other hand, was land that falls outside the sovereign authority of the crown and was thus described by Regmi as the other main system of land tenure. In describing *raikar* and its offshoots in 19th and early 20th century Nepal, Burghart says:

the tenurial scheme was applied exhaustively and exclusively to the land, not to the subjects of the king. The subjects were not exclusively classified in tenurial schemes, for any subject could have multiple tenurial statuses, and therefore different rights and duties vis-a-vis the king with reference to different tracts of land (1984:103).

This was not the case with *kipat* tenure. As a classificatory system reproduced by the government, *kipat* organizes people into relationships with each other and the government. Under *kipat*, people, not land, are registered and people, not land, are taxed. *Kipat* specifically refers to regions of the country over which the government had no control, land the government could not touch. More specifically, Regmi explains that 'the government had no power to impose taxes and rents on *kipat* lands; it only exercised its sovereign power of taxation of individual *kipat* owners' (1978a:34).

In Hedangna, all land unless designated otherwise is *kipat* land. The entire area included in the Royal Order granted in 1774 that has not subsequently been made into *raikar* (either by being given to a non-*kipatiyā* or surveyed) is considered to be owned by some *kipat* holder (waste lands etc. are held by the *jimmāwāls*). From Regmi's perspective in Kathmandu, on the other hand, all land other than what the king or subsequent Rana rulers gave away is *raikar*. In Hedangna, *kipat* is the backdrop; in Kathmandu, the backdrop is *raikar*. The more land that is in *kipat* tenure, the greater the power held by the Kiranti. The greater the area of *raikar*, the greater the authority of the central government. At different points in time each side has

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conversion of *birta*, *rajya*, *jagir* and *rakam* tenures into revenue-paying *raikar* land and the extension of agriculture, mostly in the Terai region (which accounts for the increase in area) are the major post-1950 developments. The other developments are the liability of *kipat* land-owners to pay land revenue at the rate applicable to *raikar* land, and the provision for registration of the transactions in *kipat* land' (*Report to the Government of Nepal on Land Reform and Land Administration* based on the work of M.A. Zaman, Land Reform and Land Administration Adviser. FAO, Rome 1974, pp. 3).

alienated its absolute hold on the land, trading in one kind of power - possessing land - in exchange for another kind of power--political support and/or tax revenues. In the long run, as symbolized by the recent cadastral survey, the central government got control over both: the people and the land.

Though, as Burghart says, *raikar* and its offshoots were systems for categorizing and classifying land, like *kipat*, these land tenure systems were first and foremost political systems and they were responsible for shaping the agrarian relations of rural Nepal until the land reforms of the 1960s. Regmi writes:

Although *raikar* was a reflection of the unlimited prerogative of an absolute government which identified landownership with sovereignty, its secondary forms were basically a response to the need to adapt the land system to different economic, political, social, religious, and administrative requirements. The *birta* system thus helped to create a feudalistic class that gave social and political support to the rulers; the *guthi* system contributed to the satisfaction of religious propensities of both the rulers and the common people; and the *jagir* and *rakam* systems enabled the government to support an administrative structure without the use of much cash in a situation where an exchange economy had not yet fully developed (1976:20).

*Kipat*, and *raikar* and its offshoots, mark the intersection of local and national systems of governance. With *kipat*, ties with the central government are the loosest and it allowed for the greatest amount of local variation and autonomy. I want to look at the gradual tightening of this connection, a tightening that has taken place through the extension of government control over *kipat* lands.

#### **Land Tenure in Nepal: *Raikar***

Before going into the particular features of *kipat* outlined by Regmi, it is important to see with what Regmi is contrasting *kipat*. Regmi classifies *raikar* as a statutory system of land tenure, by which he means that the basis of one's claim to a particular plot of land is a grant from the state. *Kipat* is described, in contrast, as a customary system, by which he means the history of land use and the identity of the land users are the basis of *kipat* rights. Regmi elaborates on this distinction:



The *Birta*, *Jagir*, and *Guthi* systems... emerged from grants made by the state. Landownership rights under these tenure forms stemmed from the statutory authority and were based on documentary evidence. They had no reference to the ethnic or communal origin of the landowner, nor to the location of the land in any particular geographical area. They reverted to the state if the owner died without leaving an heir, or relinquished his lands for any reason. In the *kipat* form of landownership, on the other hand, the communal authority superseded any claim the state might extend on grounds of internal sovereignty or state landlordism. Rights under *kipat* tenure emerged not because of a royal grant, but because the owner, as a member of a particular ethnic community, was in customary occupation of lands situated in a particular geographical area (1976:87).

Rights to *raikar* lands were granted by the state and were secured by documents designating this grant. The right to farm the land (*raikar* rights only included the right to the 'use and fruits' of the land) was made regardless of the cultivators' origin or ethnicity (*ibid.*:17). Though Regmi also notes that in the central hill regions, grants of *raikar* land were generally made to those already living on (and, one would presume, using) those lands, Regmi's point is that the source of a cultivator's rights to that land was the state, not any preexisting use of the land. 'Use and fruits' of the land meant that they had the right to cultivate the land and a right to a share of the produce but that they did not have the right to sell or alienate the land in any way, including mortgaging the land.<sup>8</sup> A cultivator retained his rights to cultivation only as long as he occupied the land and paid the necessary taxes on it. Regmi writes, 'rights on *raikar* land are limited to occupancy rights vis-a-vis the state.... The rights of the cultivator are secure only as long as he pays the taxes regularly' (1978a:19). At the early part of the 19th century, cultivators were giving as much as half of their produce as taxes<sup>9</sup> to landlords (who kept the tax as part

<sup>8</sup> Land claims that exceeded a particular ceiling based on the number of family members could be redistributed to other cultivators by the state at any time, and the state was under no obligation to compensate the original cultivators. This regulation, called *raibandi*, was originally established on *raikar* lands. Later *raibandi* was extended *guthi*, *kipat*, and *jāgir* lands, but I never heard of it actually being implemented in Hedangna (Regmi 1978a:200).

<sup>9</sup> Regmi explains how taxes worked under these systems: 'The nature and level of taxes on *khet* lands were governed mainly by the tenurial policy of the government. During the nineteenth century, agricultural lands in the

of a grant of *birta* or *jagir* from the king) or to tax collectors who then distributed it directly to the state. Taxes on *raikar* lands are assessed according to the quantity and grade of the land held. A claim to *raikar* land could not be retained simply by meeting one's fiscal obligations; continuous occupation was equally important. A cultivator forfeited these rights if he left the plot or if he defaulted in his payments. On this latter point, Regmi writes,

This [restriction] precluded individual control over lands that could not be kept under cultivation. *Raikar* land was therefore used primarily for subsistence, not as a field for monetary investment. Rent-receiving landownership was not permitted under the *raikar* system (1976:172).

Finally, the government, at its own discretion, could make *birta* or *jagir* grants of *raikar* land to anyone it chose. These grants usually had little direct impact on the actual cultivator who continued to hold use rights to the land, however. They simply paid the taxes sealing their claim to someone else. Stiller writes,

In itself the conquest of new lands and the assignment of these lands ... have no direct effect on the peasants' right of tenure on these lands. It was not the object of the Gorkhali conquest to deprive the simple people of the land, their livelihood, or the means to achieve it. It was the *revenue* of the land that was at stake. The peasant had inevitably to surrender half of his crop in taxes, regardless of the government that actually ruled the land. What the Gorkhali conquest gave to the government in Kathmandu was the right to appropriate the revenue or to assign it either to the army, to an official of the state, or to a citizen in reward for services he had rendered to the state (1975:278, emphasis in original).

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midlands rarely contributed revenue to the public exchequer, but consisted for the most part of *Birtā*, *Jāgir*, or *Guthi* grants. Accordingly, the form and amount of payments that the peasant was obligated to make depended primarily on the consumption requirements of *Birtā* owners, *Jāgirdārs*, and *Guthiyās*. In the central and eastern midlands, including the Kathmandu Valley, taxes on *khet* lands were usually collected under the *adhiyā* system, under which the cultivator paid half of the paddy crop as tax, retaining the balance for himself. This system helped the government to avoid complicated methods of tax assessment and remission and eliminated the need to measure the land' (1976:127).

This brief summary of *raikar* makes it seem like a fairly clear and straightforward system of land tenure. In practice, it is nothing of the sort. The permutations of this system across various regions of the country and under different rulers, however, are beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>10</sup> The main point to draw from this is that all of the the land tenure systems of Nepal are perhaps most significant for how unsystematic and outdated they are. Regmi cites a report from Doti District:

The records maintained by *Mal* [Tax] offices and *Tālukdārs* [headmen] are all jumbled up. It is difficult to identify any holding. Land is registered in the name of one person but is being utilized by several others, who have often no documentary evidence entitling them to such possession. Litigation is the invariable result (Government of Nepal, *Report of the Land Reform Commission*, p. 57 as cited in 1978a:159).

As Stiller points out in his comment on taxation, this disorder is because, from the government's point of view, land revenues were what was at stake, not the security, or insecurity, of tenure. Stiller suggests that the government did not intend 'to deprive simple people of their livelihood' (1975:76). But the reason the government did not want to deprive people of their land was not necessarily concern over their well-being. Rather, the government was worried that if the cultivators lost their land they would migrate to India (cf. English 1985; Regmi 1978b; Stiller 1976) which would mean that the government would lose the source of revenues.<sup>11</sup> The land tenure systems, then, were not at all intended to safeguard the rights of landholders; they were simply to enable the government to extract as much revenue from the cultivators as possible without forcing them off their lands. From the perspective of the government, as long as it got some revenues there was no real motivation for making the investments needed to ensure that land rights were secure and that land tenure records were not antiquated and outdated.

Given the objectives of the Gorkha kings and, particularly, the Rana prime ministers, the lack of attention applied to organizing these systems is

<sup>10</sup> For those interested, see Regmi (1978a).

<sup>11</sup> Regmi writes that 'even the desire to avoid hardships to the people was motivated not by a sense of accountability for their welfare, but by the realization that it might be difficult to collect taxes from a dissatisfied peasantry' (1978b:26).

understandable. It is only with the transformation of the government's purpose from extraction to development that more systematic land tenure policies and practices have become necessary. As Regmi points out in his discussion of the failure of these policies, particularly the cadastral survey, previous practices are thus far proving to be too deeply entrenched to bring the practice of administering land closer in line with the reforms that have been legislated.

### ***Kipat* as a system of rights to the land**

With *kipat*, like *raikar*, there has been tremendous local variation in how it has been implemented and interpreted. The primary distinction is between the administration of *kipat* in Majh Kirat and in Pallo Kirat.<sup>12</sup> Even so, there are certain distinctions between *kipat* and *raikar*. I will outline these differences as they are described by Regmi, but then at certain points suggest a different interpretation or a clarification in light of information collected in Hedangna.

Though both *raikar* and *kipat* are based on grants from the state, the rationale for this grant differs. *Raikar* is given at the prerogative of the state. *Kipat*, on the other hand, is an official recognition of a claim to a large tract of land that existed before the Gorkha State. The 1774 Royal Decree gave the Kiranti of Pallo Kirat rights to an area defined loosely as the land that had been cultivated by their ancestors. According to Regmi, the granting of *kipat* rights to these lands depended on two factors: the ethnic identity of the landholders and the customary occupation of the land. *Raikar* simply meant government land and could be allocated to anyone living anywhere. The other main difference between *kipat* and *raikar* is that from 1883 to 1968, it was prohibited to alienate *kipat* lands (i.e. what was included in the original tract of land) outside the community of *kipatiya*. I will examine both of these points in some detail.

### **Ethnic identity as a basis of land rights**

*Kipat* rights depended on the 'customary' occupation of the land that was designated by Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 1773 Royal Order. *Kipatiyās*

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<sup>12</sup> Most likely drawing on the work of Caplan, Regmi attributes this variation in large part to the degree of Indo-Aryan political and economic control in a particular *kipat* owning community (1976:88).

could not claim land as *kipat* if that land had not originally been included within the boundaries of the lands designated in the Royal Decree as being 'under this form of landownership during the time of the Sen kings (pre-Gorkhas, pre-1174)' (Regmi 1976:89). The original grant proclaimed that *kipatiya* needed to have held the land continuously 'from the time of [their] ancestors' (Rajvamshi, Puratattwa-Patrasangraha, II, 38 cited in *ibid.*:89) in order for their claim to be legitimate in the eyes of the state. No *new kpat* can be created outside of this original tract of land. Though there are exceptions, *kipatiyā* from one village cannot move into a new area and hold land as *kipat* (cf. Caplan 1970:49; Gaenszle 1995, n.d.). In Hedangna, only those with a *tsawa* (sacred water spring, a term that also denotes clans), only those who are the direct or the adopted descendents of the original ancestors in Hedangna, have *kipat* rights to the lands of Hedangna. While few other Rai groups have moved into Hedangna itself, Waling Rai from Majh Kirat moved to Mangsima, a village to the east of Hedangna, across the Arun. They settled on Hedangna's *kipat* land but, because they are outsiders (*dhākre*), they hold the land as *raikar*.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, if *kipatiyā* from Hedangna move into other *kipat*-holding communities, they would also be considered outsiders and could not claim land as *kipat*.

The 1774 Royal Decree sanctioned and legitimized an 'original' claim to the land that is expressed in the *tsawa*. Unlike *raikar*, only people with a particular ethnic and geographic identity can hold *kipat* rights to the land. *Kipat*, as an official category within the national government, politicized cultural and geographic ties. The web of cultural, political, economic and geographic relations expressed and re-enacted in *kipat* reinforces a conception of the Yamphu identity that is different from that of *raikar*. I will return to this point after briefly considering the implications of this distinction between *kipat* and *raikar*.

<sup>13</sup> Gaenszle (n.d.) describes a different situation in Majh Kirat in the western Arun Valley. The original settlers, the Mewahang, hold *kipat* rights to their land (this land, he says, was originally their ancestral territory, *ca:ri (M)*, and was later held as *kipat*). Seven or eight generations ago, the Khambuhang, mainly Kulunge Rai, have migrated into the Mewahang *kipat*. The Khambuhang got rights to the land from the Mewahang *kipatiyā*, but they were never *kipatiyā*. Even though *kipat* was abolished in Majh Kirat in 1940 and the Khambuhang were able to register their land in their own names as *raikar*, the difference in land ownership and political dynamics created inequities between the two Rai groups that continue into the present.

Regmi explains that the requirement of 'customary' occupation is one of the main differences between *kipat* and *raikar*, not the traditional occupation of the *raikar* land holders. Though the basis of *raikar* claims was the state, these lands were generally allotted to those who already lived in the village or area where the fields were located (1976:54). The impact of *raikar* and *kipat* grants on who farms the land were likely the same: whoever was farming the land at the time Prithvi conquered the nation got rights to that land. The important difference is the source of the right to continue farming that land. With *kipat*, those rights were granted because a particular ethnic community was using the land. The royal decree seals this claim. Individuals get grants of *raikar* because the state decides to grant them; the fact that they were already cultivating this land simply makes it easier for the state to decide to whom to give them.

This distinction is important because it affects the security of continued claims to *kipat* or *raikar* lands. If the state was responsible for granting rights to the land, it could withdraw those rights with little explanation. If customary occupation was the basis of these rights then withdrawing those rights would force the state to engage in a debate over the meaning of those customs and to make a case for why those customs were no longer recognized by the state. Until the 1960s, the government was unwilling, or incapable, of entering into such a debate with the Kiranti of Pallo Kirat. As a result, *raikar* claims, which lacked the weight of custom, were far more tenuous and insecure than were *kipat* claims. The state could, and according to Regmi and others, often did, change the landlords of *raikar* lands whenever it chose to do so. Though this change might not immediately displace the cultivators, they were now dependent on the arbitrary power of another absentee landlord for their continued right to farm the land (Regmi 1978a, 1978b; Stiller 1976). The economic insecurity of *raikar* in turn generated a tremendous degree of political insecurity. Most *kipatiyā raiti* have a *jimmāwāl* who is a descendent of the *jimmāwāl* of their grandfather or great-grandfather. Though this continuity has not necessarily provided any greater degree of equity, the relative predictability in local politics of Hedangna has had consequences to be explored in later chapters.

As in all of rural Nepal the most important link is between an individual and the land from which he produces grains to feed his family. Land is the basis of economic and, increasingly, political security. In the 1800s, when land was plentiful and people, as a source of taxes, as laborers, and as allies, were scarce, people were the primary source of political power. The importance of

people is expressed in the registration system of *kipat*. Under the *kipat* system, a household tax (*dhuri*) was paid, not a land tax. The Revenue Settlements of *kipat* land in 1869, 1881, and 1894 listed individual households of *kipatiyā* and their *jimmāwāl*. Until the Land Reforms<sup>14</sup> in the 1960s, when land is first mentioned in government registrations, *kipatiya raiti* paid a household tax to the *jimmawal* each spring. They paid the same tax, regardless of how much land they held. Once the tax had been set in the revenue settlement (see next section), the *jimmāwāl* had to pay that amount to the tax office each year. Even if his *kipatiyā raiti* moved away, which they did, the *jimmāwāl* was responsible for the tax. Thus, both to meet their tax payments and to enhance their position in the village, *jimmāwāls* were constantly looking for new *raiti*, *kipatiyā* and non-*kipatiyā* alike, to settle on abandoned or unclaimed land. An individual's claim to the land was almost entirely dependent on his relationship with a particular *jimmāwāl*. This dependency is the most important dimension of *kipat* as it unfolded in the particular context of Hedangna.

#### **Inalienability of *kipat* lands**

The other main difference with *raikar* is the inalienability of *kipat* outside of the community. Regmi explains:

The exclusive character of *kipat* landownership in relation to specific ethnic groups was manifested in practical form in the nonsalability of land to members of other groups. In other words, *kipat* land generally could not be sold outside the community (1976:89).

I would add to this description, that *kipat* could not be alienated *and* still be considered *kipat* land. This caveat alters the understanding and meaning of *kipat* tenure and is worth looking at more closely. In this quotation (and throughout his discussion), Regmi's description of *kipat* land

<sup>14</sup> The Lands Act and the rules framed under it has been considered to be the first piece of agrarian legislation in Nepal (FAO 1966:5). This report concludes that these reforms are 'primarily a tenancy reform and undertaken to give a fair deal to the tenants so that they may be willing and capable to take farming as a business rather than a mere means of survival' (1966:17). In other words, though the reforms were political in that they set out to create more secure rights for landholders and tenants, they were objective, to generate a profit from the primary resource in the kingdom of Nepal.

implies that particular plots of land carried the label of *kipat*. Though, as just mentioned, land is the important link and though all villagers know which lands are *kipat* and which are not, it is more useful and accurate to think of *kipat* as a collection of rights that can be drawn on by *kipatiyā*, by individuals bearing a particular identity, rather than as an object to be possessed in a particular way. *Kipat* categorizes people, not land. Land becomes divided in the process, but that is a consequence of the prior categorization, not the cause. This point and its significance for understanding *kipat* will become clearer by examining the ways in which land has been alienated from the original tract of land and registered as *raikar*.

Before the restrictions introduced in 1883 restricting the alienation of *kipat* lands, Hedangna *jimmāwāls* granted rights to *kipat* lands to non-*kipatiyā* who moved into Pathibhara (these grants were made as *soranna patta*, a transaction that will be examined in greater detail in chapter 6). Land in Uwa, across the river in Mangsima, and an area of land in the Hedangna Gadi were given to Chetris and Gurungs during this period. Land granted to non-*kipatiyā raiti* (*dhākre*) was immediately surveyed and registered as *raikar* with the tax office. Though boundaries on particular *kipat* lands themselves were not officially documented, these land grants created physical boundaries on *kipat* by designating which lands were not *kipat*. These boundaries marked the ethnic and political boundaries between Yamphu *kipatiyā* and non-*kipatiyā*.

Within the community of Yamphu *kipatiya*, lands were also alienated and turned into *raikar*. *Kipatiyā raiti* and *jimmāwāls* chose to turn their *kipat* into *raikar* for a number of reasons. In the first place, a land claim that was surveyed and registered was more secure than one that was not (this will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters), so individuals who were particularly suspicious of their relatives' intentions occasionally chose to survey their lands. Land that had been acquired in a not entirely fair way was also registered as *raikar* to make the claim stronger. Finally, when an aspiring *kipatiyā raiti* decided to break off from his *jimmāwāl* and create a new *jimmāwāl*, he had to 'show' thirty *muri* of khet to the government, which meant surveying and registering the land *raikar*.

There are various explanations for why restrictions were introduced on the alienation of *kipat*. During the period before there were restrictions on alienating *kipat*, large areas of land were alienated by Limbu *kipatiyā* to Hindu settlers that moved into the southern regions of Pallo Kirat, in what is



now Terathum and Taplejung Districts (cf. Caplan 1970, 1991; Sagant 1983, 1985).<sup>15</sup> Because they were losing all of their land, Limbus<sup>16</sup> in southern Pallo Kirat are said to have pressured the government to introduce regulations restricting the permanent alienation of *kipat* lands and requiring that all alienation made in the past be regarded as mortgages (Caplan 1970; Regmi 1978a:549). Dhondhoj, a *jimmāwāl* in Uwa, gave a rather different explanation for this legislation.<sup>17</sup> Before the restriction was introduced, he told me, people were selling their land and leaving for Assam because they could not afford to pay the taxes. When *kipatiyā raiti* sold their land and left the community, the *jimmāwāls* were still responsible for the set amount of tax owed the government (see subsequent discussion of *thekkā thiti*). The *jimmāwāls* were unable to make these payments, and so they submitted an application to prohibit the alienation (*rājināma*) of *kipat* land. Finally, a Gurung living to the north of Hedangna explained that after requesting the restriction on alienating *kipat* lands, the headmen realized that they were no longer able to sell any land. 'They lost their business,' this Gurung said. So the *jimmāwāls* submitted another application to the government asking for the right to alienate non-irrigated lands. The government agreed and introduced an addition to the restriction on selling *kipat* lands. The government vacillated over introducing the legislation, what type of lands should be included, and whether it was to be retroactive or not.<sup>18</sup> Once, when

<sup>15</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, migration patterns were different in the Rai areas of Pallo Kirat. Though, as the previous discussion illustrated, *kipat* lands in Hedangna have been alienated to non-*kipatiya*, the effects of this alienation did not create the level of indebtedness among the Yamphu that Caplan describes among the Limbu.

<sup>16</sup> I follow Caplan and Regmi in referring only to the Limbus here because the number of Hindus moving into the Rai communities of the upper Arun is insignificant compared with the Limbu communities to the southeast (see also Gaenszle 1995).

<sup>17</sup> It isn't clear why Dhondhoj has this different explanation. It may have been that there were different reasons why the Kiranti requested this legislation, and this is the one that was relevant in Pathibhara. Or it may simply be that, because they were not losing their *kipat* to Hindu settlers, the *jimmawals* in Hedangna had to come up with an explanation that fit their circumstances.

<sup>18</sup> Regmi describes the shifts in policy in greater detail. He writes: 'The Limbus resented the growing encroachment on their traditional *kipat* landownership rights, and at the same time non-Limbus felt that their rights over the lands they controlled were insecure. In this struggle for land, the government

discussing these regulations on *rājīnāma*, Mardhan Rai, an older man in Hedangna, sighed and said, 'Who can understand the laws of this country? It's like children playing. They make one law and change it and then change it back again.' Regardless of the particular chain of events that led to the regulations or their inconsistency, Rai communities in Pallo Kirat also benefited from a restriction that has been instrumental in defining the way land in Hedangna is obtained and transferred.<sup>19</sup>

Land that is held by a *kipatiyā raiti* is considered *kipat*. If the same land is held by a non-*kipatiyā raiti*, it must be surveyed and registered as *raikar*. Though everyone clearly knows who owns which *kipat* lands, legally, the link between an individual and his land is much looser than the tie between a *jimmāwāl* and his *kipatiyā raiti*. People would tell me that they should not alienate their *kipat* land to members outside of their lineage. But, in the course of these conversations, it became clear that though in theory *kipat* land should not be alienated, if it were advantageous to do so, land could and would be alienated. The connection between the *jimmawal* and his

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generally sided with the non-Limbus. In May 1886, legislation was enacted prescribing that all *kipat* lands that had been or might be sold or otherwise transferred to non-Limbus would be converted into *raikar*. The Limbus therefore remained in control of only such *kipat* lands and homesteads as they were actually using at the time' (1976:9).

There was confusion over this regulation and lands continued to be alienated and turned into *raikar*. On August 1901 (*Shrawan Sudi 9*, 1958), another order was issued that prohibiting the alienation of *kipat* land and its conversion into *raikar* (1978a:550). Regmi writes, 'two years later, in 1903, orders were issued to permit the alienation of *kipat* waste of non-cultivated (*pākho*) lands to non-Limbu settlers, on condition that they reclaimed or converted them into paddy fields utilizing artificial irrigation facilities' (*ibid.*:550). Regmi goes on to say: 'The new policy was intended to counteract the tendency toward land hoarding under the *kipat* system, under which the Limbu owners did not cultivate large areas themselves nor allow others to cultivate it' (*ibid.*:550).

Regmi attributes the inconsistencies in the *kipat* system during this period to changes in the prime ministership in Kathmandu at the time.

<sup>19</sup> Gaenzle suggests that even though Regmi cites 1883 as the date when the inalienability of the land was enforced: 'inalienability was always an integral part of the *kipat* system, even if the rule was not always strictly adhered to' (1995:51).

raiti which is officially documented and stored in the dusty volume in the tax office in Khandbari, is one that cannot be easily severed.

Since the restrictions on alienating *kipat* land were lifted in 1968, *kipatiyā* have begun to alienate their land (though this does not mean it is turned into *raikar*). Even so, there is still a lingering sense that an individual should not sell *kipat* lands outside of one's immediate lineage. Even this interpretation, though, depended on the context and on the speaker. Some actors emphasized the symbolic aspects of *kipat*, while others focused on the political and economic. Dhanbar Rai, one of the most politically active *jimmāwāls* in Hedangna, a tiny old man who was said to have been involved in more land disputes than anyone else, rarely emphasized the symbolic connection between an individual and the land.<sup>20</sup> Mohansing's mother, on the other hand, bitterly told me about how her sister-in-law had sold her *kipat* land to a member of the Prithyadengsa clan, alienating it from the Yungsaba clan (and from Mohansing's mother's family). 'You shouldn't do this,' she said, and she called the sister-in-law a witch.

Rather than creating an anchor securing an individual to a particular plot of land, *kipat* is a fluid web of relationships in which individual *kipatiyā* are linked to each other and to a story, a historical and cultural rationale for why the web is shaped the way it is. Land that fit into this constellation is considered *kipat*. Land that is not embedded in this political and symbolic web is *raikar*.<sup>21</sup> The shift from seeing *kipat* as an identity to be enacted rather than an object to be possessed may be subtle but it is not inconsequential. It underscores the importance of agency in defining the meaning and practice of *kipat* and thus shifts attention to the processes of administering rights of *kipat*. Among other things, this distinction allows for a more nuanced understanding of how particular *kipatiyā* negotiate the gap between the political and the poetic meanings of *kipat*.

Until 1921 there were similar restrictions on the permanent alienation of *raikar* lands. Officially, cultivators of *raikar* could not sell or even mortgage their lands (Regmi 1976:176). Regmi points out that regardless of this legislation, people did alienate their land. Because the government still got

<sup>20</sup> Though he did emphasize the symbolic importance of *kipat* as a marker of their glorious past.

<sup>21</sup> I will continue to speak of *kipat* lands in order to refer to those lands that are enmeshed in this web of relationships.

taxes for this, it did not try to enforce this legislation. The government's main concern was that cultivators did not sell their land, move to India and leave their taxes unpaid. In 1868 legislation was introduced allowing for the alienation of *raikar* land through tenancy or mortgage only if 'the registered landholder continued to reside in the same district' (*ibid.*:176).

With both *raikar* and *kipat*, those who wanted to get around these regulations were able to and the existence of this restriction is itself not that significant of a difference between the two. The reason for the regulations on alienating *kipat* lands, namely to prevent lands from being alienated outside the Kiranti community and the fact that the regulation was introduced at the request of the Kiranti themselves, is different from the regulations on *raikar*. Sales on *raikar* land were restricted not as a way of protecting the cultivator, but as a way of circumscribing the rights of tenants over their land and of ensuring that the government always had a steady income from land tax revenues and a population to pay those taxes. The effects of this legislation were equally significant. With *raikar*, these restrictions accomplished what they were intended for, namely to limit the rights of the cultivator over his land. With *kipat*, on the other hand, these regulations provided a buffer between going into debt and becoming landless. In order to understand this point, it is necessary to say something about mortgaging *kipat* land.

### Indebtedness

*Kipatiya* in Hedangna often went into debt paying taxes, borrowing rice to feed their family, paying for weddings and funerals, or playing cards. From 1883 to 1968 when it was prohibited to alienate *kipat* lands, those who went into debt would pledge their land, move to Assam or Sikkim to earn money, and return a generation or two later to return the loan and get their land back. This practice of usufructory mortgage is referred to as *bhog bandhaki*.<sup>22</sup> As long as the loan on this mortgaged land has not been repaid, the creditor is entitled to all of the produce from the field.<sup>23</sup> A loan guaranteed by usufructory

<sup>22</sup> Any pledge that is taken on a piece of land is designated by the word *bandhak*. In one group, rights of usufruct to the land are not assigned, and these are called *drsti bandhak*. The others, which are most common in Hedangna, are usufructory and are called *bhog bandhak* (Sagant 1983:183).

<sup>23</sup> Sagant distinguishes between two types of mortgages operating in Limbuan, one from 1883 until 1948, and the other from 1948 until 1960-1970. The former placed the debtor under the obligation of a very long-term mortgage. He writes:

mortgage is fixed in a contract, called a *tamsuk*. No interest is specified in the contract; the creditor instead gets the right to the produce from the land.<sup>24</sup> As long as the debtor continues to pay yearly taxes on the land, he retains the right to return the loan whenever he wishes. At that time the creditor is obligated to relinquish the land. Until that time, the debtor has the right to obtain new loans on the same mortgage. If the creditor agrees to loan additional money, the contract is updated, and the debtor simply has to pay back the entire sum when he decides to reclaim the land. When the creditor or debtor dies, the obligations of the usufructory mortgage form part of the estate and are divided equally among the heirs (Sagant 1983:185).

In Limbu communities, Limbu *kipatiyā* commonly went into debt to Indo-Nepalese castes immigrating into the region (cf. Caplan 1970; Forbes 1995; Sagant 1983). This debt is cited as the reason for the breakdown of their 'ancient tribal structure' and their transformation from 'tribe to ethnic minority and from Tibet-Burman to Nepalese citizen' (Sagant 1983:180). Sagant continues,

[The moneylender] alone is the explanation of how the Indo-Nepalese castes were able to establish themselves in the heart of Limbu territory. Although two-thirds of the Indo-Nepalese are just as poor as the Limbu poor and there are but a handful of moneylenders in the whole valley capable of challenging the *subbās* (Limbu headmen), it is nonetheless true to say that usury is the motive force behind the rise of the castes and the fall of the Limbu (*ibid.*:219).

In Hedangna, Yamphu in the lower village have recently begun to go into debt to Chetri shopkeepers, but this is because they have taken financial

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'Only after a period of a hundred years, or in some regions a hundred and twenty-five years, could the debtor regain his rights of usufruct in the fields... if a man mortgaged his land, he knew that he was doing so for life. The fight to buy it back would belong to his heirs, on condition that they had not failed to pay the taxes on it' (1983:183). I never heard of a mortgage that was set by any fixed time frame outside the wishes of the interested parties in Hedangna.

<sup>24</sup> The produce from the land is often quite advantageous, and, as Sagant notes, 'it often happens that in the long run usufruct in a field is, indirectly, a more profitable source of income than any form of interest' (1983:184). See Sagant for a thorough discussion of these types of usufructory mortgages on *kipat* lands in Limbuan.

loans, not because they have mortgaged their lands. Far fewer members of Indo-Nepalese castes have immigrated into Pathibhara. When Yamphu *kipatiyā* go into debt, they usually go into debt with relatives or their *jimmāwāl*.

The patterns of indebtedness have had different political effects in Limbu and Yamphu communities. Among the Limbu, mortgaging practices created a conflicting basis of power between the Limbu headmen and the Indo-Nepalese moneylenders (*ibid.*). In Hedangna, economic indebtedness was to other *kipatiyā*, usually *jimmāwāls*, rather than to another caste, and mortgaging practices simply reinforced the political power of the *jimmāwāls*. Whereas Sagant and Caplan cite the immigration of outsiders into Limbu territory as the reason for the Limbu's political integration into the Gorkha state, among the Yamphu,<sup>25</sup> economic and political inequities *within* the community of *kipatiyā* have had a far greater effect in undermining the strength of the community of *kipat* than have any processes of Hinduization. While an important economic strategy in Hedangna with significant political effects, usufructory mortgages have *not* been responsible for the Yamphu's political integration into the Gorkha state.

The removal of restrictions on alienating *kipat* land in the land reforms of the 1960s has complicated land rights and has altered lending strategies in the village. Yamphu *kipatiyā* are increasingly only willing to give usufructory mortgages to relatives and neighbors whom they can trust, and whom they are sure will return the land when the money is returned. Moreover, since *kipat* lands can now be purchased outright, it is much more difficult for those in need of money to find creditors willing to provide usufructory mortgages; people who want land, want to buy it outright. Those who have land and need money are increasingly forced to sell all rights to their land.

#### ***Kipat* as a source of taxes**

Land, as a source of tax revenue and political loyalty, has been the primary resource for the government since the unification of Nepal in the late eighteenth century. The entire land tenure system described so carefully by Regmi is largely a complicated apparatus for ensuring that the government

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<sup>25</sup> Sagant writes, 'One thing seems to be clear: the member of a tribe who gets into debt soon becomes a Hindu, but he rarely becomes a high caste Hindu' (1983:223).

maximized the political and financial benefits of this resource. Collecting taxes was the primary rationale for administering rural areas in the first place, and tax regulations, at least initially, were the means by which this administration was carried out. An understanding of how *kipat* was administered depends on understanding how taxes were assessed and collected in Pallo Kirat.

Villagers in Hedangna point to the tax policies applying to *kipat* holders as the most significant differences between *kipat* and *raikar* lands, and they say that these differences in tax policies, regardless of actual monetary differences which they were usually unsure about, are the primary practical advantage to retaining the *kipat* system. For *raikar* lands, tax rates are assessed according to the quality and the amount of land used by the cultivator.<sup>26</sup> *Raikar* holders pay their taxes directly to the tax office or, in the case of non-*kipatiyā raikar* holders in Pathibhara who originally acquired rights to the land from the *jimmāwāls*, pay the tax to a *tharei*, who in turn pays the *jimmāwāls*. Taxes are set and claims are secured in a transaction between the *raikar* landholder and the tax officials; the relationship between a non-*kipatiyā raikar* holder in Pathibhara and his land is not mediated by the *jimmāwāls*.

Because the government had never asserted its sovereign authority over *kipat* land, however, it had no right to tax that land and could only extend its taxation regulations over people. Regmi says that the government had 'no power to impose taxes and rents on *kipat* lands; it only exercised its sovereign power of taxation of individual *kipat* owners' (1978b:34). As mentioned previously, individual *kipatiyā* paid a household tax (*dhuri*) instead of a land tax. Fields were completely tax exempt.

On a village level, taxes were collected according to a system, called *thekka thiti*, that was based on a settlement between the government and the community as a whole, as represented by the *jimmāwāl*, to collect the revenue for a particular period of time. 'The entire village was treated as one unit for purposes of taxation, leaving it to the headman to apportion individual shares of the total revenue assessment' (1978b:74). Any shortfalls in revenue were to be borne by the entire community as represented by the *jimmāwāl*. This was

<sup>26</sup> *Raikar* land is divided into four categories: *awal*, *doyam*, *sim* and *chahar* and tax rates are set accordingly.

one of the only ways the government could impose a taxation system on Pallo Kirat without directly conflicting with the terms of their incorporation in the Nepalese kingdom, terms that Regmi summarizes in the term 'communal'. He explains:

Under the *kipat* system of communal land tenure, a regular land tax system based on a cadastre of land ownership and direct relations between the taxpayer and the State would have dealt a virtual deathblow to the communal authority. The government sought to avoid this by vesting the Talukdar with contractual obligations for revenue collection in his capacity of leader of the community (1978a:562).

This system of collecting taxes based on a fixed contract (*thekka* means contract) is not unique to *kipat* and was practiced in other parts of Nepal. The circumstances for administering taxes in this way and the identity of those who paid taxes according to this contract is what differs. In Pallo Kirat, the government allowed the *jimmawals* to mediate land/people/tax relations because this enabled the government to achieve its two-fold political objectives on *kipat* lands. These objectives were to avoid angering the Kiranti of Pallo Kirat and simultaneously to bring them more closely under government control. Regmi writes:

As elsewhere, the imposition of the Thekka Thiti system in Pallo kirat may also have been prompted by the administrative problems involved in the collection of taxes in a remote and turbulent area. By making collections an individual responsibility on the part of the Limbu *talukdar* while at the same time vesting him with power and privilege in the community, the government strengthened its overall administrative authority in the area (*ibid.*:563).

Though tax collection in Hedangna was never specifically described as *thekka thiti*, villagers always introduced the first two *jimmawals*, Jaborsting and Saiputta (this was six generations ago), as a seven hundred and a five hundred *jimma*. Villagers were vague when I asked what these numbers meant; they suggested that these amounts referred either to the amount of tax collected, to the number of households included within their jurisdiction, or to the area of land. Most likely, as Regmi explains, the numbers specified the



amount of revenue agreed upon between the headmen and the government.<sup>27</sup> Once this amount was fixed in the Revenue Settlements (the last one was in 1894), the *jimmāwāl*, as contract holder, was under an obligation with the government to pay that amount of money each year. Only when the revenue settlements were revised could the *jimmāwāl* have this fixed amount adjusted to account for a decrease in his *kipatiyā raiti* and thus in his tax liability. As long as a *jimmāwāl* paid the taxes (the specifics of this will be discussed in the next chapter), he cannot be alienated from this contract. His position in the village can be undermined if he loses *raiti*, if, as described in chapter 6, his *raiti* choose to break off from his power and create a new *jimmāwāl*, but there is nothing the *kipatiyā* or non-*kipatiyā raiti* can do to remove a *jimmāwāl* from power.

Another important distinction between taxes on *kipat* and *raikar* lands concerned the delinquency of tax payments. If a *raikar* cultivator defaults on his tax payment, the state has the right of foreclosure. With *kipat*, this was not the case. Regmi explains:

a number of safeguards were provided to insure that the rights of the community were not violated through individual delinquency. It was only when the community failed to protect these rights by assuming liability for the arrears that the state exercised its right of foreclosure (1976:91).<sup>28</sup>

Villagers in Hedangna pointed this out as well. If they were to default on their taxes, they are given a number of notices for repayment. Finally, if they fail to pay, the *jimmawāl* allows anyone who will pay the tax (which would be the household tax that gives anyone the right to farm the land) to

<sup>27</sup> As the next chapter outlines, the government at this time, the late eighteenth century, was the 'go-ba in Saksila, a day walk north along the Arun. The *jimmawāls* negotiated the tax rates with the 'go-ba, their 'district' government of the time, rather than with the king in Kathmandu.

<sup>28</sup> Regmi writes: 'The process [of] tax collection under the *kipat* system in Pallo Kirat is thus essentially the same as under the *raikar* system, with the sole difference that necessary safeguards have been imposed to prevent the alienation of *kipat* land to non-Limbu communities. At the same time, it is clear that the government retains the ultimate right to convert any *kipat* holding into *raikar* in the event of tax delinquency, if the community itself fails to undertake the liabilities of the delinquent' (1978a:564).

assume title of the land. Moreover, as long as *kipat* holders continue to pay their taxes, they can still claim their land. This claim is not dependent on whether or not they are actually using the land. If a lineage was without heirs, the land reverted to the *jimmāwāl* of the household who had died. The *jimmāwāl* in turn allocated these lands to someone else. With *raikar*, if the cultivator leaves, the land reverts immediately to the state (or to the *birtā* owner or *jāgirdār* to whom the state had already granted rights to the land).<sup>29</sup>

### The keepers of *kipat*

Though the existence of a buffer between holding land and becoming landless is an important distinction between *kipat* and *raikar*, it reveals nothing about the politics of administering *kipat*. Another impact of the *thekkā thiti* tax system, Regmi points out, was the emergence of the *jimmawal* as 'a pivot of the local administrative set up,' and as an intermediary between local and national systems of governance (1978a:564; 1978b:74). The role of these headmen, more than whatever buffer might have existed, has shaped the form that *kipat* has taken in Hedangna.

Regmi writes that under the customary practice of *kipat*, 'communal authority supersedes any claim that the state extends over the land.' He continues to describe *kipat* as a communal system throughout his discussions of land tenure in Nepal. He defines communal by drawing on a definition by W. Lewis which says that in communal land ownership 'each person has a right to exclusive use of a particular piece of land, but... his rights to dispose of the land are restricted on the theory that the land belongs to the chief or to the tribe'.<sup>30</sup> While this definition as it stands could apply to *kipat* in Hedangna, Regmi uses communal in a more specific way. He explains:

<sup>29</sup> Though this may well be the regulation, it is extremely unlikely that anyone in Hedangna would simply leave his land for several years without giving it out as *adhiyā* (sharecropping) or *bandhaki* (possessory mortgage). This transaction would be documented and witnessed. Even when (or perhaps, especially when) such transactions occur between brothers or close relatives, villagers are suspicious that people farming will use these use rights as a basis for claiming fuller rights to the land.

<sup>30</sup> W. Arthur Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963, p.121, cited in Regmi 1976:87.

... if any member of the *kipat*-owning community ceased to exercise his right to own and cultivate his ancestral plot of land, the right to determine the nature and extent of its use by others was enjoyed not by him, nor by the state as on *raikar* lands, but by the community. Such vacant lands were then reallocated to a suitable applicant within the community by the headman in his capacity as representative of the community. Village headmen exercise a similar right with respect also to vacant *raikar* holdings, but in such cases the ethnic status of the applicant is not a factor that governs reallocation (*ibid.*:90).

In this description Regmi does not explain what this community meant in practice nor does he describe the ways in which the headmen represented the community. Without an explanation, one is led to assume that *kipat*-owning villages must have had some mechanisms for reaching decisions on a communal level and that the village headmen were considered, by themselves and/or by the *kipatiyā raiti*, to be representatives of that community.

Regmi implies that just because the *jimmāwāls* represented and made decisions in the eyes of the state, they also represented and made these decisions in the eyes of the *kipatiyā raiti*. This assumption leads him to certain conclusions about the administration of *kipat* rights that are not borne out in practice. His comments about the division of particular claims to the land illustrate this discrepancy. Although he does not have specific documents describing how unclaimed land was divided among *kipatiya*, Regmi offers some suggestions, based on the system for collecting taxes. He says that because *kipat* rights included claims to wastelands and forests as well as cultivated lands, they 'emerged not as a result of reclamation by voluntary individual effort, but of apportionment of the existing area on a communal basis' (1978a:535). This conclusion follows from Regmi's depiction of *kipat* as a communal system of land tenure, a usage which leads him to find 'communal' decision making processes in administering this system. No one in Hedangna mentioned any kind of 'communal' distribution of the land, now or in the past. An individual's *kipat* consists of land that was cleared and claimed by an ancestor. After clearing the land, the individual would go to a *jimmāwāl* to have the land registered in his own name. It is unlikely that anything as contentious as dividing up land claims could be decided and agreed upon in any communal way in Hedangna.

Later, in *Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces*, a work that focuses on the agrarian relations implicit in the different types of land tenure, Regmi points out that this idea of community needs a bit more examination. He writes:

Earlier studies on the *kipat* system have mainly stressed its communal aspect, and described its customary characteristics vis-a-vis the statutory forms of tenure such as *raikar* and *birta*. From the viewpoint of the local agrarian community, however, it appears necessary to lay equal emphasis on the intra-communal aspects of *kipat* tenure, that is to say, the relationship between the headman, in whose name royal orders confirming the customary occupation of lands under *kipat* tenure were usually issued during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the ordinary members of the *kipat*-owning community who subsisted on allotments of *kipat* lands made by the headman (1978b:110).

This statement seems to be made more as a caveat since in the same book he still describes *kipat* as a form of 'communal landownership'. From the perspective of the government documents, Regmi sees *kipatiya* as a community over which the central government had no authority. At one point, Regmi compares *kipat*-owners with resident *birtā*-owners, describing them both as 'islands of autonomy,' i.e. as pockets where local authority more or less ruled beyond the reach of government officials or the absentee landowning elite (*ibid.*:110). As long as the representatives of this community fulfilled their obligations to the government, what happened on these 'islands' was of little concern to the government. And so, on one level, from the government's point of view, the description of local politics as communal is not necessarily inaccurate. Perhaps the confusion has arisen because other commentators draw on Regmi's use of the term communal and assume that it refers to political relations in *kipat*-holding communities.

In fact, those intra-communal aspects of *kipat* tenure referred to but not explored by Regmi have undermined the very safeguards that were created to protect *kipat* holders. As much as the government regulations cited by Regmi, *jimmāwāls* have shaped *kipat* in Hedangna and, in turn, the politics of the *jimmāwāls* has contributed as much to the downfall of *kipat* as has government legislation. Overlooking local politics greatly distorts the practice of *kipat* in Pathibhara and, I would suggest, all of Pallo Kirat. The activities of the *jimmāwāls* in Hedangna leveled out many of the advantages of *kipat* referred to earlier. In some senses, life for *kipatiyā* was more secure than it was for peasants in other parts of the middle hills of Nepal. The community of

*kipatiyā* did provide a buffer that was sanctioned by the government and that protected them from losing their land and thus from starving. However, the administration of rights within this community ensured that, for the *kipatiyā raiti* at least, their ability to survive, politically and economically, was always at risk.

*Jimmāwāls* in Hedangna had responsibilities that are shared by many village landlords in rural Nepal, regardless of the land tenure system being administered. The village landlords' (they have a variety of names) primary responsibility was to collect taxes. In exchange for this work, they had the right to claim up to five days of free labor per year from each tax-paying household (*beti beghar*) and had judicial authority over all disputes except murders and caste violations (cf. Caplan 1975:150; Regmi 1978b). In western Nepal, Caplan explains that rights of headman were initially granted by the Gorkhas as a way of winning the support of Thakuri royal families who had established petty kingdoms throughout western Nepal.

In these ways, the role and history of the *jimmāwāls* in Hedangna is not different. The significant difference, a distinction that underlies what is unique about the administration of *kipat* tenure, is the ethnicity of these headmen. In most communities in rural Nepal, village landlords or headmen were often government appointees or members of higher castes, such as Chetris, Thakuris, and Brahman. In Pallo Kirat, on the other hand, all of the *jimmāwāls* and *subbās* (Limbu headmen) of *kipat* lands are members of the same ethnic group as their *kipatiyā raiti*. *Kipatiyā raiti* and *jimmāwāls* in Pathbhara are all Yamphu. They all have a *tsawa*, they intermarry, some are members of the same clan, they worship the same ancestors and they worship them together, and they share the same *mindhum* (oral traditions). *Kipatiyā-raiti* and *jimmawāls* alike--are embedded in a web of social, economic, cultural and political relations. Some of these connections join them as a community; others undermine that community.

The *jimmāwāls* of Pathibhara were members of the same ethnic, economic, and social community; they shared the same moral community as the *kipatiyā raiti* whom they governed (cf. Peters 1994; Scott 1976, 1985 among others). In addition to their administrative responsibilities, *jimmāwāls* in Hedangna played a role in the community that was like that played by many village landlords in the Middle Hills. Regmi explains:

Although village landlords were usually able to accumulate resources in excess of their actual consumption needs, available evidence suggests that they used this surplus primarily for moneylending, acquisition of lands, often through the foreclosure of mortgages, financing of land reclamation and irrigation projects, and trade in agricultural produce. Village landlords were thus an important source of credit supply and capital investment in the village. They comprised a part of the local community whose needs and problems colored their relations with the outside world in substantial measure. In contradistinction, the interest of the non-resident landowning elites was confined to the amount of income they could collect from the lands granted to them by the state (1978b:39).

The *jimmāwāls* in Hedangna similarly took advantage of the system in similar ways to landlords across the country. Regmi, again, outlines some of these abuses:

Revenue regulations provide insights into the various questionable practices adopted by *Jimidārs* to increase their landholdings and augment their income. A common practice was to refuse to accept payment of taxes, or to withhold receipts, with the apparent intention of penalizing landowners for default. The regulations prohibit the exaction of fees while recording land transfers, thereby implying the existence of such a practice. There were also complaint that *Jimidārs* often exacted extra amounts when receiving land-tax payments from landowners. Moreover, as tax collector, the *Jimidār* was responsible for the maintenance of land records and the registration of land transfers. A frequent complaint was that the records were so confused that it was not possible to identify individual holdings. The confusion was apparently deliberate, for *Jimidārs* often took advantage of it to claim lands as their own and force the cultivators to pay rents to them in the capacity of tenants (1976:117).

This does not surprise Regmi. He concludes the above description with the observation that 'in resorting to such malpractices and underhand methods to augment his income, the *Jimidār* was only following in the footsteps of the government' (*ibid.*:118). The exploitative and underhanded behavior of local landlords, behavior that was repeated all the way up the hierarchy to the prime minister himself, is considered to be the main cause of the economic and political stagnation of Nepal (cf. Regmi 1978b; Stiller 1975

among others). The land tenure systems provided the conditions that furthered the malpractices characteristic of Nepal's government. This behavior fed into and shaped these land tenure systems. Though outside some of the rules of *raikar*, *kipat* was not an exception. Because these abuses and the systems that allowed them to occur were seen as part of the overall exploitation of Nepalese subjects by the Rana government, when King Tribuvan was finally returned to power in 1951, it was only a matter of time before these land tenure systems were abolished. Though *kipat* proved to be more resilient than the other systems, it too is finally on its way out.

### **The demise of *kipat***

In a Royal Edict of 1774, Prithvi Narayan Shah swore that 'in case we confiscate your lands, may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom' (Royal Order to the Limbus of Pallo Kirat 1774, Regmi 1976:93). This oath was restated during each regime following that of Prithvi Narayan Shah. This was done, Regmi says, 'even though the specific privileges and obligations attached to *kipat* landownership underwent divergent interpretations and recurrent vicissitudes' (*ibid.*:93). Every new king promised to maintain *kipat* rights, but they never specifically stated what exactly these *kipat* rights meant at any given point in time. This distinction between the promise of perpetual rights to the land and modifications of that promise touches on the central tension in the meaning of *kipat*: namely the tension between *kipat* as a narrative linking the Kiranti with each other, their lands and their past, and *kipat* as a system of land tenure that attaches specific rights to people and the land. As mentioned earlier, for much of the past two hundred years, the cultural meanings of *kipat* have been at odds with the politics of *kipat*. Administratively, the *kipat* system of today bears little resemblance to the system originally granted by Prithvi Narayan Shah.<sup>31</sup> Even so, villagers continue to describe *kipat* in terms of the promises made over two hundred years ago. Each new regime affirmed the symbolic significance of *kipat* in the Royal Orders, even as national policies simultaneously undermined the meaning of the very promises that were being made. I will now look, again

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<sup>31</sup> Regmi writes that, due to these changes 'the *kipat* system in Pallo Kirat, on the eve of the downfall of the Rana regime, bore little resemblance to the traditional customs and privileges of the Limbu community as originally guaranteed in 1774. A taxation system, accompanied by practices designed to bring about the progressive reduction of the area under *kipat* tenure, had been built into the structure of the traditional *kipat* system in the region' (1976:94).

from Regmi's point of view, at the administrative dismantling of *kipat* as a system of land tenure.

Even in the beginning government policies toward Pallo Kirat and *kipat* were ambivalent. Prithvi Narayan Shah wanted to extend control over eastern Nepal but the region was located at a strategic juncture between Nepal, Tibet and Sikkim, and was inhabited by the Limbus, 'a turbulent community that long remained unreconciled to Gorkhali occupation and rule' (Regmi 1976:93). Some compromise had to be made to ensure the support of the Limbus while also keeping them under control. From the government's perspective, *kipat* was never a very satisfactory compromise. Areas under *kipat* tenure were outside the direct administrative control of the government and large tracts of land were lost as a source either of revenues or as a basis of political support through allocations of *birtā* and *jāgir* (*ibid.*:92). Almost immediately from the time *kipat* rights were recognized, the government sought, indirectly, to reclaim control of these lands.

Regmi elaborates on the problems of *kipat*, criticizing it from the point of view of a government seeking to establish social cohesion, create a sound national financial base, and develop its economy. *Kipat*, he argues, undermined all of these goals: it split Pallo Kirat into two social segments, Limbus and non-Limbu,<sup>32</sup> it reduced revenues from the land,<sup>33</sup> and it prevented the full utilization of landed resources. He claims that *kipat* tenure was 'precarious' for non-Limbu creditors because Limbu *kipat* owners could redeem their mortgages whenever they wanted to. He only considers the precariousness of *kipat* from the perspective of non-*kipatīyā*, however. And he even states that this precariousness 'has had disastrous results on the productivity of land and the conservation of soil and forest resources in Pallo Kirat' and 'discourages efforts to improve the land and raise its productivity' (1976:102). Regmi does not discuss the land-use information on which he bases this conclusion nor does he consider whether there have been different impacts on the productivity of land and the conservation of resources on *kipat* and on *raikar* land in Pallo Kirat. Instead, he simply assumes that, as a 'communal' system of land tenure, *kipat* tenure necessarily undermined the

<sup>32</sup> Regmi makes no mention of any Rai groups in Pallo Kirat.

<sup>33</sup> To illustrate this point, Regmi cites Caplan who noted that in 1964-65 39% of land in Ilam district was in *kipat* tenure, but *kipat* owners contributed only 10.6% of the total land revenue from the district (Caplan 1970 as cited in 1976:101).



productivity of the land. Most importantly, he overlooks the fact that for *kipatiyā*, rights to hold some land were extremely secure.

In general, Regmi concludes that it is an anachronism to pay attention to the traditional rights of one portion of the country at the expense of the interests of the nation as a whole. 'Communal privilege, regressive taxation, and tenurial insecurity, which were characteristic features of this system,' he writes, 'conflicted with the need for social and economic change' (1976:102). As the objectives of progress and development have become priorities of the government, Regmi explains that it has been necessary to remove those systems that obstruct this modernization. *Kipat* was finally legally abolished in Pallo Kirat in October 1968 when legislation was implemented removing all restrictions on alienating *kipat* lands.<sup>34</sup> These changes would only take effect upon the completion of the cadastral surveys and the compilation of land tax assessment records (*ibid.*:103), a process that is taking far longer than anticipated. Because of these delays, the cadastral survey only reached Hedangna in 1994.

According to Regmi, the end of restrictions on alienating *kipat* and the government's increasing emphasis on documents to legitimize *kipat* claims were the main processes undermining the *kipat* system. He explains that 'statutory confirmation of *kipat* tenurial rights should therefore be regarded as an adjustment between the customary rights of the community and the state authority' (1978a:546). Between 1854 and 1868 there were revisions of revenue settlements throughout the kingdom in order to compile fresh records of individual rights in land. These records were considered to be the 'ultimate evidence of land-holding rights, superseding all other claims' (1976:174). During this period, the government went back and forth in determining whether documents would be necessary as a basis of *kipat* claims. In 1870, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur decreed that *kipat* lands held as *kipat* 'from former times' and with documentary evidence would be confirmed as *kipat*. If documents only referred to a portion of the land, land outside this area would not be *kipat*, 'since this would be a clear case of encroachment upon *raikar* land.' Later, legislation was introduced stating that if there were no documents to support a claim to land as *kipat*, the land should be regarded as 'equal to *raikar*' (Regmi 1978a:546). Regmi then refers to court records from Ilam, in Pallo Kirat, stating that:

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<sup>34</sup> With this change, Regmi writes, 'all tenurial distinctions between *kipat* and *raikar* have thus been obliterated' (1976:103).

In their present form... *Kipat* landownership rights are based exclusively on documentary evidence within carefully demarcated boundaries. There have been innumerable cases where the absence of such evidence has resulted in the loss of *kipat* rights on the concerned land on the basis of information supplied by local landowners belonging to non-*kipat* communities.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, the need for documentary evidence and the demarcation of boundaries were not as easy to implement in Hedangna as the previous quotation suggests. Boundaries and documents were and continue to be highly contentious matters in Hedangna and throughout Pallo Kirat, even in areas where the survey is complete (cf. Forbes 1995). Regardless of whether these divisions are strictly adhered to, marked boundaries express a rational, systematic and centralized government that has the authority at least to assert its lines across the land. Clear mapped borders reflect a strong nation state. Unmarked boundaries, on the other hand, symbolize personal relationships and ambiguous, overlapping ties. According to villagers, the basis of their *kipat* rights is a personal relationship with the king: they are not citizens, like everyone else--they are the younger brothers of the king. The lack of systematic maps expresses this relationship, a relationship that is characteristic of feudal states and monarchies across the world. The struggle between surveying and not surveying *kipat* lands is a very physical manifestation of the larger struggle between local and national political control over the lands of Pallo Kirat and the Kiranti's struggle to hold on to a place in the historical and contemporary landscape of Nepal. Because of the political significance of mapping the land, it is useful briefly to review the history of surveys in Pallo Kirat.

#### **Revenue settlements in Pathibhara**

In the early nineteenth century, the government sent out an order for an annual revision of revenue settlements in order to assess new *kipat* holdings. Because of complaints by Limbus this order was subsequently revised in January 1834. The new order stated that tax records in Pallo Kirat should be adjusted on a decennial basis. Limbus, as Regmi writes, (though Rais of Pallo Kirat were also included) benefited from this arrangement because revenue settlements were done so rarely that new *kipat* holdings went

<sup>35</sup> Ilam Regional Court Records, *Dilli Ram Upadhyaya vs. Mahavarna Limbu*, Marga 11, 1970, November 26, 1913, as quoted *ibid.*:613).

unregistered for long periods of time. This is not unusual; surveys were rarely updated in most regions of the country. Regmi even goes so far as to say that 'the most conspicuous feature of the system of land survey and assessment records in Nepal is its outmoded character' (1978a:160).<sup>36</sup>

The most widely known survey in Pallo Kirat was in 1938 when the government is said to have planned to survey *kipat* lands in order to turn them into *raikar*.<sup>37</sup> According to villagers in Hedangna, there was resistance to the survey in the village even before the land surveyors, headed by a government civil servant known as Bibya Bikram Shah, arrived.<sup>38</sup> Once they arrived, Bibya and his assistants began to survey the land, measuring the area with the distance from the surveyor's elbow to the tips of his fingers. After half the survey had been completed, Bibya was called back by government officials because of accusations by villagers of bribery.<sup>39</sup> Bibya eventually arrived in Dankuta, where he came before Bahadur Samsar (son of Juddha Samsar, the Prime Minister) to explain the problems with the survey. The government official is said to have reprimanded the head of the survey for giving 'the *raiti* trouble' and to have fined him one rupees as punishment. That night Bibya went to his tent where he slept surrounded by guards. The following morning he was found dead. A man in Hedangna who told me this story suggested that such a small fine, only one rupee, was an embarrassment

<sup>36</sup> Regmi writes: 'The existing assessment records do not constitute a reliable index either of the total area under cultivation or the total land revenues that should accrue to the state, or even of the total number of taxpayers. Because of the long intervals between surveys in some districts, it is likely that a considerable amount of cultivated land has remained outside the ambit of land taxation' (1978a:160).

<sup>37</sup> Dik Bahadur said that at this time the king also sent out an order for all Royal Decrees to be submitted to the government.

<sup>38</sup> On hearing that the lands were going to be surveyed, Danser Rai, the most powerful *jimmāwāl* in the lower village, sent a letter to a *jimmāwāl* in Walung stating that because they were Kiranti their *kipat* lands should not be surveyed. The messenger delivering this letter was intercepted by government employees who gave the letter to Bibya Bikram Shah. On arriving in Hedangna, they immediately arrested Danser. Danser was taken to Num but when Bibya was accused of bribery, Danser was released.

<sup>39</sup> If a villagers gave Bibya a large amount of money, he is said to have agreed to write down that they had to pay a small tax; villagers who gave him no money, ended up being registered for a larger tax.

for such a rich man, and so he killed himself rather than bear the humiliation. This villager dismissed Bibya's death, 'He was a useless man,' they say. 'He had been given the responsibility of collecting taxes according to the Royal Decree, but he didn't do good work, he took too high a tax.' Others suggest that Bibya was killed by the subjects whose money he had tried to steal. In any case, they told me, his body was cremated and, more importantly for Hedangna's history, the survey was canceled.

Regmi presents a rather different interpretation of this survey. He mentions that initially there was opposition to the survey, though he does not mention Hedangna. In light of this opposition, the government sent a letter to reassure the Kiranti of Pallo Kirat, promising that:

The present survey of *kipat* land is not intended to abolish the *kipat* system and impose taxes on *kipat* land.... It is being held in order to ascertain the extent of increase or decrease in the area of *kipat* khet land and to compile accurate records of *kipat* lands... Such a survey is not inconsistent with the *kipat* system... and, in fact, existing laws and regulations provide that *kipat* lands be surveyed [quoted from 'Government of Nepal, Law Ministry Records, *Order Regarding Survey of Kipat Lands in Pallo Kirat*, Magh 17, 1995 (January 30, 1939) as cited in 1978a:560].

Eventually the survey was canceled, though Regmi suggests this was not, as villagers told me, because the Prime Minister was concerned over the exploitation of his subjects. Rather, it was withdrawn in yet another attempt to appease the Limbus:

Although surveys were finally completed in both Chhathum and Terathum, the opposition from the Limbus grew to such proportions that the government was finally compelled to reject the survey reports. Probably as a face-saving device, it ascribed its action to allegations of corruption among the survey officials and deputed high-ranking officers to investigate the matter. Eventually the survey was revised in Chhathum, but abandoned in Terathum, with the result that the 1893 settlement continues to apply to the latter area.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Quoted from Government of Nepal, Law Ministry Records. *Order Regarding Cancellation of Land Survey Operations in Chhathum and Terathum*, Baisakh 3, 1996 (April 15, 1939) as cited in *ibid.*:560.

Whatever the actual reason, since this time, the late 1930s, there has been no full-scale government survey of the lands in the upper Arun Valley. As a result, the 1894 registration continues to be the basis of all claims to the land in Hedangna.

#### Land Reforms

At this time, the 1930s, there was enough organized opposition to the surveying of *kipat* lands, opposition that the government heard and was concerned about, that Regmi can suggest that the government changed its policies to avoid trouble.<sup>41</sup> The political concerns that led Prithvi Narayan Shah to grant *kipat* rights in the first place were still salient enough for the government to abide by some of the administrative promises it had made. More recently, these concerns have been less relevant, and the government has made less of an effort to cover up the fact that it is reinforcing an oath while simultaneously legislating changes that undermine the very meaning of that oath.

One hot summer afternoon, Dhondhoj, a distinguished looking *jimmawal* in Uwa, brought out a batch of documents which he thought depicted the political history of the Yamphu Rai of Pathibhara. Dhondhoj explained that each time a new King was crowned, a group of Kiranti headmen from Pallo Kirat (mostly Limbu, but some Rai too) would go to Kathmandu to submit an application reminding the king of his promise. They would say, 'In the original Royal Decree you said that we could eat our own land, be our own king, keep doing whatever it was we were doing before. These rights you gave our ancestors, please also give them to us.' Chakra showed me copies of each of new Royal Decree that he kept wrapped in a neat little bundle. He also showed me an application submitted in 1965 by sixteen Limbu and Rai *jimmawāls* and *subbāngis* (Chakra was the only Yamphu to go) to King Mahendra to remind the new king of the promises in the original Decree. The Kiranti were concerned about the Land Acts proposed in 1964 by the new government which involved, among other things, a cadastral survey of all the lands in the kingdom. The Kiranti objected to the survey, saying that since Prithvi Narayan Shah's time, the king had sworn that the government would not survey their lands. They submitted an application and, at the time of Tihar, they had a brief audience with the King Mahendra. King Mahendra said, 'I am your Royal Decree (*Timiharuko Lālmohar ma chu*). Don't worry.

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<sup>41</sup> The last survey conducted in Illam was in 1936 (Caplan 1970).

Although the survey is coming, I won't snatch your rights.<sup>42</sup> The King referred to the oath taken by Prithvi Narayan Shah and convinced the Kiranti that he would uphold the promise. Dhondhoj said, 'We believed him. We said thank you, thank you. Our time was finished and we just left, without getting anything written down, no stamp no seal or anything.' Dhondhoj paused. 'And then Mahendra died.' He laughed. 'We left, without getting a signature. All we got was the king's sanction. We thought that would be okay. But, what to do? *Ke garne?* The king died and now the government is surveying the land and the *kipat* system is about to end.'

Under the new governments established during the 1960s and 1970s, a series of reforms aimed at creating a uniform system of governance and land tenure were instituted for the entire country. Under item number seven (referred to as the *satnam* form) of the Land Acts, everyone had to list the lands he held on a form stored in the Land Reform Office in Khandbari (*Bhumisudhār*). At the same time restrictions on alienating *kipat* lands were lifted.

In the beginning few villagers in Hedangna bothered to register the names of their fields in the office as required under item number seven. They soon discovered that they were unable to sell their lands (*rājināmā*) unless those fields had previously been listed in their names in the Land Reform office. Consequently, almost everyone in Hedangna provided their *jimmāwāl* with the necessary information. This action was as important symbolically as it was administratively. With the listing of the field names the government was extending its authority more completely across the lands of Pallo Kirat.

The Land Acts also removed most of the power of the *jimmāwāls*. Disputes settled by the *jimmāwāl* were no longer considered legal, and disputes and land transactions which had previously been settled in the villages had to be taken thereafter to government offices in Chainpur and Khandbari. *Raiti* no longer had to provide five days of labor for the *jimmawāl* nor did they have to bring them the hind leg of whatever meat they hunted. Once the kings of the village, the *jimmāwāls* became nothing more than tax collectors.

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<sup>42</sup> Mahendra said he wouldn't do anything to disturb their position as *badho* (pledge).

The Land Reforms have fallen short of their stated objectives. Of the cadastral survey, Zamen (1974) reported that by 1974 the survey had been completed in twenty-three out of seventy-five districts but that 203,000 complaints had been filed against the records of the survey, based on disagreement over area, ownership or classification of land. '[The survey's] shaky foundation, slow disposal of cases and issue of an insignificant number of permanent tenancy certificates have earned the department a poor reputation amongst the households in the sample area' (Zamen 1974:6). Regmi similarly comments on the ineffectiveness of the survey:

Although the cadastral survey has been completed for over a million acres, particulars of land rights have been recorded only in respect to... roughly one third of the total area survey.... In addition, even when such particulars have been compiled, no attempt has been made to make adjustments on account of land mutations during the pendency of the survey. As a result, [the survey] is considerably outdated by the time it is completed (1978a:163).

Regardless of its flaws, the survey is significant in Hedangna as much for what it undoes as for what it does. Understanding the significance of the survey, however, depends on a clearer understanding of the community of *kipatiya*, the boundaries and significance of which, with the end of *kipat*, will no longer be officially sanctioned by the central government.

### Stories about *kipat*

For the Yamphu, *kipat* can be called communal, in that it provides a narrative within which they have a shared view of the past and their role in that past. This past is important and it is important in large part because it embeds them in a cultural and political geography. Equally important, *kipat* provided *jimmāwāls* with a loose structure that enabled them to exploit the *raiti*, politically and economically, in ways that continually divided that community. Regmi's discussion fails to capture these dynamics, largely because of his definition of property and his conception of how the concepts - 'communal' and 'customary' - fit into this definition. I will first consider the question of what can be said to be communal about *kipat*.

As suggested earlier, *kipat* is first and foremost an identity. This identity consists of a matrix of geographical, historical and social ties; an individual assuming the identity of *kipatiyā* is by definition enmeshed in this

web of relationships--to the past, to the places where that past took place, and to the descendants of the ancestors who were part of that past. Symbolically, *kipat* links this constellation of identity, history, and place to the lands of Pallo Kirat. Caplan in particular has emphasized the cultural dimension of *kipat*. In 1970, after his initial field work, he described the Limbus' struggle to retain *kipat*, saying that 'what is in essence a confrontation over land comes to be seen as a battle for the survival of a way of life' (1970:188). In their struggle to prevent their lands from being surveyed, he writes that what is seen to be at stake is not only a politico-economic interest-- in, the Limbu case, *kipat* land--but the very survival of the community as a cultural entity' (*ibid.*:195). Even Regmi, who in general emphasizes the political economy of land tenure, points out that the Limbus probably resisted dissolution of the *kipat* system, even when it became a tax liability 'because they were aware that this would be the first step towards a fusion of the Limbu way of life into the mainstream of Nepali national life.' In turn the Limbu have resisted the gradual Hinduization that most other ethnic groups in Nepal have undergone. 'All this has given them an ethnic and cultural unity which has resisted, with a considerable degree of success, the withering away of their traditional customs and institutions, including the *kipat* system' (1978a:547).

Similarly, speaking generally of *kipat*, Gaenszle (1995) writes:

In spite of such feudal structures one may say that the *kipat* system brought decisive benefits to the Kiranti in east Nepal. The fundamental inalienability of *kipat* land and the strong position of the village headmen provided the *kipatiyā* an advantage over immigrants and protected them against unrestricted encroachment on their land. Thanks to the *kipat* system the autochthonous Kiranti preserved their cultural and to a certain extent also their political autonomy (n.d.:54).

He notes that 'even if, as Regmi says, the struggle to preserve the *kipat* system was instigated principally by the headmen, who feared for their privileges, it nevertheless had a broad base of support and doubtless strengthened Limbu ethnicity.' And he then discusses why these points do not exactly pertain to the Rai communities of Pallo Kirat where the struggle to preserve *kipat* did not 'lead to an all embracing solidarity on the part of the entire group (*ibid.*:56).' He attributes the lack of mobilization among Rai groups to the fact that they were never one ethnic unit in the way the Limbu were. He also suggests that intra-Rai tensions between *kipatiyā* and non-*kipatiyā* (between Kulunge and Mewahang in the area where he conducted his



research) undermined any sense of solidarity. This second point was not so decisive in Hedangna where instead inter-Yamphu tensions between *kipatiyā raiti* and *jimmāwāls* undermined any strong sense of solidarity.

The various taxation policies and other regulations reinforce *kipat* as a marker of relationships. With *raikar*, on the other hand, the claim of an individual to the land does not in any way depend on his ethnic or geographical identity. This is not to say that cultivators of *raikar* land do not have an historical and cultural relationship to their land. The point is that this connection is not embedded in the particular system of land tenure, and thereby is not sanctioned by the central government.

The significance of the symbolic dimension of *kipat* is hard to assess. It is difficult to measure what impact it had in the past, and it is even harder to suggest what its absence might mean in the future. After a follow-up trip to east Nepal, Caplan (1991) describes *kipat* as a 'form of 'inalienable wealth', a possession which serves 'to define who one is in an historical sense'. It stood for their way of life, and thus symbolized the cultural vitality and continuity of the community' (Weiner 1985:210 as cited in Caplan 1991:312). Caplan suggests that with the loss of *kipat*, the cultural vitality of the community has somehow been undermined. Do the Yamphu Rai speak of it in these terms? When they do speak of it in this way is it simply nostalgia for a remembered past that is now lost to them? When they do not speak of it in this way is it that they don't have the language to express such changes, or because the changes do not matter? The fact that *kipat* is more than a system of land tenure, that it is important culturally, says something about why the Kiranti have struggled to retain it for so long. It says nothing, though, about why in Hedangna, they are now willing to let *kipat* die.

The government's struggle to gain control of *kipat* land has shaped the political economic history of the village. From the perspective of *jimmāwāls* in Hedangna the end of *kipat* is about the end of their political autonomy. This end is expressed in who divides the land. Within the category of *kipat*, the government had no authority over boundaries. With the cadastral survey, government officials are the ones mapping the lands. The significance of this shift is not lost on the Yamphu. In discussing the number seven regulation requiring that *kipatiyā* list their fields at the tax office in Khāndbāri, Dhondhoj, the *jimmāwāl* from Uwa, said that these lists were not necessary. 'All of the people already had their land,' he said. '*Kipat* lands were already divided. We knew which fields belonged to whom, there was no need to make

another list. But then the government made these lists. They had to prepare these documents, simply so that they were the ones to say that this is your land.' The point is not how or whether the land is divided and used. What matters is who does the dividing.

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## STAG-TSHANG RAS-PA'S EXCEPTIONAL LIFE AS A PILGRIM

PETER SCHWIEGER  
*Bonn*

### Introduction

Like society in mediaeval Europe, society in old Tibet showed a considerable degree of horizontal mobility. This is astonishing enough for Europe in the Middle Ages when we see the inconvenient, wearisome and dangerous ways of travelling. But it is even more surprising to find a similar mobility in the inhospitable region of Transhimalaya.

The sources do not tell us a lot about the journeys of the craftsmen, especially the artisans from Nepal and traders, who were often travelling at the orders of a monastery, as well as ordinary pilgrims. For the most part we get to know of them when their activities are mentioned in passing in the biography of an important lama.

By contrast, we find much more about the journeys of the clergy which were undertaken for the purpose of studying or of pilgrimage and religious exercise. In the life of important ecclesiastical dignitaries there might also have been occasional long journeys with a religious-political function, for example to the court of the Chinese emperor. Over centuries most of the journeys of the Tibetan clergy took place within the same geographical frame which was fixed by tradition. But this frame had an enormous extension. Mostly there were journeys from the periphery of the Tibetan civilised region to the holy places and centres of Buddhist learning in central Tibet as well as pilgrimages to

mount Kailash and lake Manasarova in Western Tibet. Although these routes were more or less the same over the course of many centuries they were nevertheless full of dangers. We read about robbers, regional warlike riots, diseases and various natural hazards. It could even happen on a well known traditional route that a traveller lost his way during a heavy snowstorm. To reduce the dangers travellers often looked for company.

The situation was different regarding the journeys of secular or ecclesiastical dignities. Because they were always accompanied by a large entourage travelling was much safer for them. But on the other hand it took far more time to organise and to carry out the travel of a great party.

Such journeys very much furthered the union of the civilised region of Tibet and the development of common features. Pilgrimages within the traditional frame were so much part of the Tibetan life that their value was never seriously doubted.

While most of the pilgrimages were taken from the periphery to the centre we sometimes read in the sources as exceptional cases about journeys from the centre to the periphery and even further into areas of different language and culture. The present article is devoted to precisely such an exceptional case: the mobile life of an ecclesiastic which was unusual in its intensity even for the Tibetan society of his time. It is only to be expected that such journeys, which went beyond the traditional routes of pilgrimages, were subject to the criticism of contemporaries.

O-gyan Ngag-dbang rgya-mtsho, better known under his name sTag-tshang ras-pa, is together with Rin-chen bzang-po the most popular Buddhist ecclesiastic in the history of Ladakh. In the view of the present Ladakhi people he has a great significance; children learn at school which monasteries were founded by him. And even for totally uninformed tourists it is hard not to become aware of this outstanding figure in the history of the country because his appearance in paintings and sculptures differs very much from the usual way in which important ecclesiastics are shown in the Ladakhi monasteries - especially his beard, which is unusual for Tibetans, and his white turban-like hat.

That sTag-tshang ras-pa's significance for the history of Ladakh is so much present not only within the monastic communities of Hemis and the other 'Brug-pa monasteries but also in the view of the common people is to a

great extent the result of the studies of Ladakhi history written in Tibetan by Gergan (1976) and in more recent times by Tashi Rabgias (1984).

But even the Western literature drew attention early on to the singular position of sTag-tshang ras-pa. In his article 'Travels of Tibetan pilgrims in the Swat Valley', which was published in 1940, Tucci summarised sTag-tshang ras-pa's report on his pilgrimage to Uddiyāna, the present-day Swat Valley in Pakistan. For his fundamental book *The Kingdom of Ladakh* Petech took a great part of the biography of the lama to pieces for use as a quarry of relevant historical facts. Petech's prime source was the chronicle of Ladakh. After having introduced this source in the beginning of his book he continues:

The only other literary source from Ladakh is the biography of sTag-tshan-ras-pa, compiled in 1663. It is on the pattern of the traditional *rnam-thar*, but with a heavier emphasis than usual on secular matters, which renders it particularly useful (Petech 1977: 3).

In the light of these studies, what is still left to be done? I have looked once more through the biography of this lama. What I found neglected until now is on the one hand half a life, that is to say sTag-tshang ras-pa's life prior to his arrival in Ladakh, and on the other hand what might be called the glue we need to put together again the individual facets which might constitute something approaching a portrait of this outstanding person. Here I want to confine myself to the unknown side of sTag-tshang ras-pa's life. In this way we become aware of the antecedents which explain the particularity of this personality in the history of Ladakh. Tibetan biographies by their nature don't allow a profound psychological analysis. Nevertheless they can help us to gain insight into the career of a person as well as into the tasks this person had to perform during his life and whether he was equal to them or not. Reading the biographies of Tibetan ecclesiastics I find that the careers of the personalities who stand at the beginning of an incarnation line are often more individual than those of later incarnations. The lives of the latter often tend to follow a traced-out pattern.

The biography of sTag-tshang ras-pa was composed 1663, that is twelve years after his death, by a bKa'-brgyud-pa monk with the long name Ngag-dbang kun-dga' lhun-grub thub-bstan dge-legs 'byung-gnas bsod-nams rgyal-mtshan dpal bzang-po. It is printed in a block-print of 57 folios. The blocks are still preserved in Hemis monastery, and were still used for making prints up to very recent times.

**Descent, birth, childhood and youth**

sTag-tshang ras-pa belonged to the clan of 'Khon, the noble family from which the Sa-skyia hierarchs came. The 'Khon lineage split into different sublineages. The one from which our lama descended had already split off the main lineage before the foundation of Sa-skyia in the year 1073. It goes back to 'Khon mThu-bo che, a brother of Yon-tan 'byung-gnas from whom dKon-mchog rgyal-po, the founder of Sa-skyia, was descended. mThu-bo che settled in Myang-stod in the place where later, in 1365, 'Phags-pa dpal-bzang erected the fortress of rGyal-rtse (Gyangtse) as the centre of administration and government for his principality after his appointment as *nang-chen* (chief attendant) by the emperor Togan Temür (Tucci 1949: 664). sTag-tshang ras-pa's father, mGon-po tshe-ring, lived with his family close to the fortress where he served as an official (*drung-'khor*) of the governor Blo bde-ba. By that time rGyal-rtse had ceased to exist as an independent principality. According to Shakabpa it was conquered by the Rin-spungs-pa in 1488 after a period of administration by a sNe'u-gdong minister (Shakabpa 1984: 88). When sTag-tshang ras-pa was born Rin-spungs itself was probably already under the supremacy of the gTsang-pa, the ruler of gTsang. Ahmed states that this was definitely the case at least for 1575, one year after sTag-tshang ras-pa's birth (Ahmed 1970: 94). But rGyal-rtse was totally subsumed under the rule of the gTsang-pa only in 1612 (Tucci 1949: 654; Ahmed 1970: 101).

sTag-tshang ras-pa was born in the year 1574. At his birth he received the name Tshe-dbang lhun-grub. Not much is known about his early childhood. From the seventh year of his life he was able to read and to write. His biography mentions as a special event the visit of Padma dkar-po, the fourth 'Brug-chen rin-po che (1527-1592), to Myang on the invitation of the governor Blo bde-ba. This must have occurred between 1580 and 1583. It is said that Padma dkar-po so impressed the young boy that he at once wished to enter a monastery. But his parents didn't agree. The description of this episode obviously merely aims to attest an early inclination to the school of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa.

In the tenth year of sTag-tshang ras-pa's life, in 1583, his father mGon-po tshe-ring died. Before his death he looked back at his life. He had served as an official of the powerful governor and had held a respected position in life. But although he was descended from the famous family whose name is firmly connected to the glorious story of the Sa-skyia-pa he hadn't practised the religion, and resolved to make up for this deficiency. Because fearful dream

signs had already been a source of concern to him, he had promised the Sa-skyia monastery his son at the recommendation of the abbot. He left this promise to his son as his last will.

The fulfillment of this last will was postponed at first. The mother possibly also didn't want to do without the help of her young son after the death of her husband. But when he fell ill of smallpox in his fourteenth year, this was considered as a clear sign that it would be appropriate for him to enter the monastery. However he apparently didn't want to accept the wish of his father that he should go to Sa-skyia. The story goes that a fearful woman appeared to him in a dream and warned him again and again: 'Don't stay! Go to the east!' As is well known, seen from rGyal-rtse Sa-skyia is located exactly in the opposite direction, to the west. But as this episode indicates, there was in the life of the boy a will higher than that of the father to take into account. This higher will justifies the disdain of the paternal will and sTag-tshang ras-pa's later decision to turn to the school of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa. As usual in such a case of grave illness, divination and oracles were also consulted. Inevitably, the indications were that the boy should enter a monastic community. Otherwise he would be unlikely to enjoy a long life. The boy was ready to become a monk, but he didn't want to give way to the pressure of his relatives who thought that he should go to Sa-skyia according to the will of his father. Obviously he had his own mind. He asked his mother to accompany him up to lake gNam-mtsho. 'Then I will practise the religion at an adequate place,' he told her. The monasteries located immediately east of gTsang, in dBus, were certainly not in his mind as places of learning, or why would he have had the intention to travel to lake gNam-mtsho? It seems that he thought of travelling to Eastern Tibet by the northern route, though such an intention is most unusual. Generally one only reads about monks who go in the opposite direction from Eastern Tibet to Central Tibet for studies. Apparently he was still not thinking very seriously about entering a monastery. He rather wanted to escape the pressure which his relatives were exerting on him. However he didn't depart at all. It was later revealed to him that his smallpox was a manifestation of his tutelary deity and therefore had no long-term consequences.

In the meantime the old governor Blo bde-ba had died. Under his successor there arose internal disputes that are not explained in detail, primarily between the governor and his secretary. In connection with this it is clear that in the meantime sTag-tshang ras-pa had followed his father and entered into the service of the governor. Apparently he served not as an official



but as a soldier. In these internal disputes he behaved loyally to his lord, and in battle he distinguished himself by his bravery, showing little concern for his life. It is said that he was considered as unconquerable in the whole area. Regarding this development his mother and his relatives of course took a different view: they were annoyed at his wild way of life, fearing that in the end he would be killed. But we are told that he did still cherish the desire to turn to religion. When the fears of his relatives coincided with this wish, he took his first real steps in this direction.

### Turning to religion

The first religious instructions and initiations he received were from the rNying-ma tradition. On the occasion of the visit of a lama from the East Tibetan monastery Kah-thog he was initiated into the cult of the bKa'-brgyad bde-gshegs 'dus-pa and received instructions about the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the *Bar-do thos-grol*. The teacher Zab-phu mkhan-po granted him teachings belonging to the tradition of the northern *gter-ma* of rGod-kyi ldem 'phru-can. These first steps still didn't mean that he took vows and entered the monastic life. They obviously also left no lasting impression, as a special relationship with the tradition of the rNying-ma-pa did not arise from them.

It was in 1593, in his twentieth year of life, that he definitely decided to leave his home and turn completely to religion. This is rather late for entering a monastic community. We may take this as a hint that the step really took place from his own decision. We don't know whether any other events at that time promoted the decision. The biography has it that it was the special reputation of a spiritual teacher which attracted him. This teacher was the 'Brug-pa ecclesiastic lHa-rtse-ba Ngag-dbang bzang-po (1546-1615). lHa-rtse-ba was at that time 47 years old. He enjoyed a high reputation in whole Tibet at that time, not only in dBus and gTsang, but also in Khams in the east. For example, at approximately the same time Karma bstan-'phel, the first Khams-sprul rin-po che, was also attracted by the reputation of this teacher. His biography<sup>1</sup> shows two interesting parallels: on the one hand he too deviated from a spiritual career that had been indicated in early life. On the other hand he also would become a *dbu-bla*, the chief spiritual teacher of a

<sup>1</sup> Karma-bstan-'phel, *dPal-ldan bla-ma dam-pa karma bstan-'phel-gyi rnam-par thar-pa grub-pa'i rol-rtsed*. In a forthcoming article I shall introduce this biography in more detail as a source for the history of Eastern Tibet.

king. The two of them met, and there was even a point in sTag-tshang ras-pa's life when he could just as well have gone to the east instead of to the west to start the career which his dharma brother Karma bstan-'phel later followed. As it happens, he turned down this invitation. A prophecy of lHa-rtse-ba, to the effect that there was already a karmic relationship between sTag-tshang ras-pa and the area of mNga'-ris, is mentioned as a reason for the refusal. But I anticipate. At that time lHa-rtse-ba held a decisive position within the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa. After the death of Padma dkar-po one year earlier, in 1592, lHa-rtse-ba was the most outstanding figure among the 'Brug-pa. He had a decisive say in the internal discussions that were shortly to begin within this religious order.

When he left home he told his mother that he wanted to pay a visit to the shrines in lHa-sa. Apparently he had merely given the impression that he would go on an ordinary pilgrimage. He did in fact first go to dBus, where he paid a visit to the two famous Buddha statues in the Jo-khang and the Ramo-che in lHa-sa. He met many other pilgrims and travellers in lHa-sa, among them many Khams-pas. He also got to know a *dge-slong* of the Karma-pa, who of course recommended to him the Ninth Karma-pa dBang-phyug rdo-rje (1554-1603) as the most respected teacher - which at that time was probably true. Anyway his decision was already certain, although he hadn't yet met lHa-rtse-ba, his future teacher. sTag-tshang ras-pa continued his journey. Reading in the biography that the roads weren't comfortable at that time one has to smile - they still aren't today. However the dangers at that time were different. Not only in the wild east of Tibet, but also in central Tibet robbers lay in wait for travellers. So it was natural that travellers combined forces for their protection. sTag-tshang ras-pa was especially lucky: he happened on the party of the governor Yar-rgyab-pa who had come from gTsang and was on his way to the residence of the Phag-mo-gru princes of sNe-gdong rtse which was located close to rTse-thang, at the entrance of the Yar-klungs valley. In his entourage were about 200 people. At that time lHa-rtse-ba stayed in 'Phyongs-rgyas. So they could travel quite a great part of the journey together. After sTag-tshang ras-pa had left his fellow travellers in gNe-gdong rtse, he first paid a visit to the temple of Khra-'brug (see Ferrari 1958: 50, 124 n. 23), which goes back to the time of Srong-btsan sgam-po (620-49). He didn't proceed immediately to 'Phyongs-rgyas, but instead followed the Yar-klungs river upwards to Yar-stod Khrom-sa thang, where at that time the Karma-pa was staying. He paid him a visit and received his blessing. He made another stop at E-vam monastery before he finally arrived in 'Phyongs-rgyas.

lHa-rtse-ba was at that time staying with his disciples in sTag-rtse sgang,<sup>2</sup> the castle immediately above 'Phyongs-rgyas which was later to be the birthplace of the Fifth Dalai Lama. But now, in the year 1593, there was born in the same noble family of 'Phyongs-rgyas, the Za-hor family, in accordance with the vision of lHa-rtse-ba, the Fifth 'Brug-chen rin-po che dPag-bsam dbang-po (1593-1641).<sup>3</sup> As is well known, bsTan-pa'i nyi-ma, son of the prince abbot of Rva-lung, which at that time was the leading 'Brug-pa monastery, refused to recognise him as the true reincarnation of Padma dkar-po (who had died in 1592) and instead favoured his own son Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal, the later founder of the Bhutanese hierarchy. Nevertheless lHa-rtse-ba was able to gain the support of the g'Tsang sde-srid for his candidate (see Aris 1980: 205 ff., 223, 235). So it was the powerful position of lHa-rtse-ba which contributed decisively to the splitting of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa. These events aren't mentioned in the biography of sTag-tshang ras-pa at all. What is clear is that for sTag-tshang ras-pa dPag-bsam dbang-po alone was always the omniscient one.

When sTag-tshang ras-pa arrived in 'Phyongs-rgyas, the lama was staying in the castle in seclusion. Acting as patron, the noble family had apparently invited him and his monks for the performance of religious ceremonies. Five days later sTag-tshang ras-pa met the lama for the first time. He asked the teacher to care for him so that he could attain buddhahood in just one life. lHa-rtse-ba accepted him as his pupil and he entered the community of the monks. lHa-rtse-ba spoke to him: 'Because you are a *shar-chen-pa*' - an already grown up man (Das 1983: 1232) - 'I shall call you Shar-kha ras-pa'. Ras-pa, 'the one who only wears cotton clothing', is a typical name for the successors of Mi-la-ras-pa. However the real monk name which was given to him was Ngag-dbang rgya-mtsho. From this time on it is under this name that he is mentioned in his biography .

<sup>2</sup> Identical with 'Phying-ba sTag-rtse (see Ferrari 1958: 52, 130 n. 292; Wylie 1962: 170 n. 510).

<sup>3</sup> See Khetsun Sangpo 1981, vol. viii: 534 ff. dPag-bsam dbang-po in general is regarded as the Fifth and not the Fourth 'Brug-chen rin-po che, as stated by Petech 1977: 35 and Schuh 1983: 3. Prior to him were g'Tsang-pa rGya-ras-pa (1161-1211), rJe Kun-dga' dpal-'byor (1428-76), 'Jam-dbyangs chos-kyi grags-pa (1478-1523) and Padma dkar-po (1527-1592).

sTag-tshang ras-pa studied at first more than three years in the monastery rNam-rgyal lhun-po in Gong-dkar.<sup>4</sup> He also accompanied his teacher together with other monk pupils when he was invited by patrons of high standing to perform religious ceremonies.<sup>5</sup> He also received instructions from the tradition of the bKa'-brgyud-pa in sTag-lung. lHa-rtse-ba had sent him to this monastery to ask dBon rin-po che Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal (1571-1626) especially for the six yogas of Nāropa (*chos-drug*) as well as for instructions from the tradition of the bKa'-gdams-pa. From there he paid a visit to 'Bri-khung thil. In this context the biography tells us an interesting episode. It illustrates the extreme tantric methods which were performed at that time by some Tibetan yogins. At the cemetery of 'Bri-khung sTag-tshang ras-pa met a yogin who practised there, living in a thatched hut. Cemeteries were always popular places of meditation where the yogins primarily tried hard, by meditating on the fearful divinities, to recognise all phenomena as empty and as mere creations of the mind (see for instance Tucci and Heissig 1970: 108). Part of the exercise was to change unclean substances into pure substances in the imagination, with the resulting experience that the true reality is neither 'good' nor 'bad', neither 'beautiful' nor 'nasty' and so on but free of all qualities. The man on the cemetery of 'Bri-khung carried this exercise to extremes. sTag-tshang ras-pa saw many little pieces of meat lying around which had been dried in the air. 'What is this?' sTag-tshang ras-pa asked suspiciously. 'This is human flesh,' was the answer. 'Why are you doing this?' sTag-tshang ras-pa wanted to know. 'For food!' the yogin replied. sTag-tshang ras-pa wanted to find out what profit the strange way of life of this man had produced and he showered him with questions regarding his basic philosophical opinion (*lta-ba*): 'Are these phenomena mind or not? What is better, relative or absolute truth? Do you claim that all phenomena exist in truth or do you claim that they don't exist?' 'I claim that they exist,' was the answer. sTag-tshang ras-pa then taught him with reference to Mi-la-ras-pa and the Buddha, that from the point of view of the relative truth all phenomena exist, but that this is disproved from the point of view of the absolute truth, in other words, that sticking exclusively to one of the two points of view is just half of the truth. And then - as it is said - he explained in detail the right view with the help of

<sup>4</sup> I assume that rNam-rgyal lhun-po is the precursor of the monastery bDe-chen chos-'khor in the proximity of Gong-dkar. lHa-rtse-ba is regarded as the first in the line of the *yongs-'dzin* incarnations of bDe-chen chos-'khor (Petech 1977: 35). Regarding the later *yongs-'dzin*, see Khetsun Sangpo 1981, vol. viii: 445 ff. lHa-rtse-ba Ngag-dbang bzang-po died in 1615.

<sup>5</sup> Among those mentioned are sDe-pa Lum-pa-ba and sDe-pa lHa-yul-ba.

the sutras and tantras. These expositions must have had a shattering effect on this yogin. 'Since I have been here, about thirty years have passed. Never has anyone come who told me something like that,' he confessed. sTag-tshang ras-pa replied,

Well, because no one gave a crazy man anything to eat, there is nothing in his urine to examine. Till now for about thirty years you have cut off the roots of a life led for liberation. You have sat there beating your own head. Wouldn't it be suitable to turn away from this and follow a good teacher?

sTag-tshang ras-pa's criticism doesn't point against eating human flesh as such. Primarily it points out that this exercise, however extreme it may be, does not lead to the right view as long as guidance by a good spiritual teacher is absent. Later sTag-tshang ras-pa told his teacher the story. He was very interested to hear about the details. 'What kind of practice did he have?' he wanted to know. 'This exactly was his practice. There wasn't much there,' sTag-tshang ras-pa said to him. Thereupon lHa-rtse-ba gave the following explanation:

Although it is said that at the time of the yoga practice, of special necessity one eats the five kinds of meat as the five kinds of nectar,<sup>6</sup> by eating human flesh without having a reliable view one creates a flesh-eating demon. [In so doing] one is a thief who only shows the outer appearance of someone who has such an understanding [of emptiness].

### **The first journey**

Without the correct view all practice is in vain. But after the teacher has conveyed the right view to the pupil, practising meditation is for the bKa'-brgyud-pa the most important thing to do. This school therefore is also described by followers as sGrub-brgyud or sGrub-pa nyams-len-gyi brgyud-pa, the tradition of meditation practice. Accordingly for sTag-tshang ras-pa practice became now a matter of priority. The bKa'-brgyud-pa train themselves principally in areas and at places which are particularly connected with their tradition. These places have attained their power of blessing because

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the five kinds of meat and the five kinds of nectar see for example Beyer 1973: 158.

important yogins from the history of the bKa'-brgyud order already practised there before, for example the famous Tibetan yogin Mi-la-ras-pa. These outstanding yogins have prepared the way for their successors by having conquered local spirits and demons. They have removed the obstacles for successful meditative practice at these places. These events are not confined to a particularly glorious age, but happened continuously throughout Tibetan history. We learn also in the biography of sTag-tshang ras-pa how such a location was established as a meditation place with particularly favourable qualities for later generations. Traditionally these preferred meditation places of the bKa'-brgyud-pa are located in Tsa-ri, La-phyi - the meditation place of Mi-la-ras-pa - and at mount Ti-se, alias Kailash. Phag-mo-gru-pa (1110-70) had already received the instruction from his teacher sGam-po-pa (1079-1153) to meditate at these sacred places, and he passed this word on to his pupils (compare Filibeck 1990: 1; Petech 1978: 315).

sTag-tshang ras-pa made his first journey, which was completely within the traditional frame, apparently from own decision. He went to his teacher and informed him that he intended to meditate at the sacred places in sTod, in the west. If he did not die, he would come back later to present to his teacher as a gift the insights he had gained through his practice. This sounds rather arbitrary, but it obviously corresponded completely to the expectations of the teacher. Without his formal permission such a step would have been unthinkable. Starting from Gong-dkar his route at first led via Yar-gzigs at the north-western edge of the lake Yar-'brog mtsho and via sGo-bzhi to Brag-gdong not far from rGyal-rtse. Travelling merchants whom he met on the road were astonished at his long day's marches. In a place called Brag-gdong he met for the first time since his departure from home some of those who had been close to him earlier. He told them that there was no reason to cry for him. He told them about his teacher and the new life which he led now. Especially he talked about the fact that he has given up worldly activities and now practised meditation in hermitages. In an allusion to his earlier life he added: 'These are the characteristics of the *pho-rgod*. Therefore you don't need to cry.' It was as a *pho-rgod* that he was earlier known in rGyal-rtse. A *pho-rgod* is a courageous man, but also one who is wild and untamed. His relatives asked him to remain since he had nothing but his clothes. But he replied that he had always received meals and clothing. In other words, what was given to him on his way satisfied him wholly.

He went on to rGyal-rtse. When he came to his parental home, he was immediately recognised by his younger brother. All his family members wanted

to see him and embraced him warmly. His mother of course claimed to have known already that he would come back as a monk. All of them were glad about his new way of life. But he also told them unequivocally that he was no longer tied to worldly duties. He now totally applied himself to following the instructions of his spiritual teacher. As is to be seen later, this was not always easy for his relatives. Family relationships also had a high value in Tibet.

sTag-tshang ras-pa then retired for nine months to a cemetery in rTse-chen, a place lying opposite to rGyal-rtse on the other side of the Nyang-chu. Here he practised guruyoga. Afterwards he didn't travel straight towards the west, but visited many holy places away from the road. All of them were in some way connected to the bKa'-brgyud tradition. Therefore he met many monks of the different branches of the bKa'-brgyud-pa: Karma-pa, 'Brug-pa, 'Bri-khung-pa and sTag-lung-pa. On special days they performed religious ceremonies together. Anyway for mediation everyone retired again in solitude. In this way sTag-tshang ras-pa passed the year 1597.

Finally in the first half of the summer of 1598, together with other yogins he travelled to mount Kailash. On the shore of Lake Manasarovar they met about forty robbers who had come from Mon. Mon describes the neighbouring regions on the southern side of the Himalayan ridge. For sTag-tshang ras-pa this was the opportunity to demonstrate the warlike skills acquired in his youth. He seized the leader of the robbers and forced him to swear that they would not do any harm to the travellers, then let him off again. After they had looked after their cost of living in sPu-rangs, which at that time was still the residence of a king (Petech 1977: 32), they started clockwise with the traditional circumambulation of mount Kailash and the holy lakes Rakas and Manasarovar.

While most companions returned to Gong-dkar, sTag-tshang ras-pa remained in the company of a monk, who had fallen ill so seriously that he was in danger of his life. After a month he recovered and both could start their journey home. This time they visited places of pilgrimage in sKyid-grong, but especially they went to see the famous statue of 'Phags-pa va-ti (Wylie 1962: 64; Tucci 1949: 70 ff.). During the winter they stayed in Chu-bar, the famous hermitage of Mi-la-ras-pa in La-phyi (Wylie 1962: 115 fn. 12), on the eastern side of Mount Everest.

In spring - it must have been the year 1599 - the two pilgrims returned to dBus-gtsang. In the meantime in rGyal-rtse sTag-tshang ras-pa's mother

had died. The bride of the elder brother was overcome by a serious illness. Urgently the brother asked sTag-tshang ras-pa to stay as long as the patient's life remained in the balance. 'I am in a hurry. I don't have any time to stay,' sTag-tshang ras-pa said. An interesting discussion developed between the brothers. The older spoke reproachfully to the younger: 'If for us normal people adverse circumstances arise, then we hope that all of you ecclesiastics help us. For what else are you of service?' sTag-tshang ras-pa replied: 'I haven't practised the religion with the thought in mind that I might keep off the adverse circumstances of the diverse karma which you have collected. If one fritters away the free leisure and the rich possibilities [of a life which grants favourable circumstances for the practise of religion], one has deceived oneself. Therefore one is beneficial for living beings by pulling out the circulation of births by the root. It is with this in mind that I have practised the religion. At present my sole aim is to follow the instruction of the spiritual teacher. The command of the king, the word of the queen, the delays for relatives and love and hatred of laymen - these are things that I have not taken into account in the past, nor shall take into account in the future. This is exactly [my behaviour].' These were harsh words among brothers. They demonstrate a glaring discrepancy regarding the attitude towards religious life and religious tasks between laymen and ecclesiastics. The laymen just try to improve their destiny within the cycle of births while the ecclesiastics consider this as more or less wasted cosmetic repairs which do not change the fact of basic evil at all. They want to extirpate basic evil, that is to say to destroy illusion and ignorance which imprison living beings on the wheel of lives.

But normally these two attitudes are not that much in contrast. One mustn't forget the simple fact that it has always been an essential source of income for the ecclesiastics to perform rituals with diverse profane aims by order of a patron. This contributed to securing the economic basis of a monastic community. In the case of sTag-tshang ras-pa the situation differs in that he as pupil had to stick firmly to the commands of his teacher. High-handed behaviour wasn't permitted to him. After all he at least performed the ceremonies on the occasion of the death of his mother: production of *tsha-tsha* from her bones together with a ritual for the elimination of the danger of falling into inferior existences. He then wandered further. "Via Gong-dkār" he slowly reached 'Phyong-rgyas sTag-rtse, where at that time his teacher was staying. 'It is good that you have come after making progress in meditation in mountain hermitages and sacred places,' lHa-rtse-ba welcomed him. 'As far as your mother is concerned I have taken her to heaven (i.e. into the sphere of the gods). Stay a couple of days!'



### Second journey

He didn't remain for a long time. Soon his teacher sent him to She-la in Kong-po. There lived a man called Lo-chen Ratnabhadra. He had asked lHa-rtse-ba to send him an entire convention (*bsgrub-sde*). For sTag-tshang ras-pa this was the first opportunity to assume more responsibility. lHa-rtse-ba intended him for precentor (*dbu-mdzad*). 'Remain three years. After this you can do what you want,' lHa-rtse-ba said, before he sent the monks away.

On this journey too the monks ran into a band of some twenty robbers. This time however the event is not reported to us to describe the purely physical strength of sTag-tshang ras-pa, but to demonstrate his magic skills as proof of his advanced spiritual development. His companions had run off. He sat down alone in meditation and started to sing a religious song. Suddenly an intense hailstorm burst. This intimidated the robbers so much that they gave him back the patched gown and *kapāla* which they had stolen from him, and they swore an oath to do no more evil from then on.

The monks didn't follow the valley of the gTsang-po, but chose a more southward route via Tsa-ri and from there north to She-la in Kong-po. There they were greeted by Lo-chen sprul-sku Ratnabhadra. The situation in She-la soon became unpleasant. Quarrels among the monks arose. Ratnabhadra bluntly and brusquely invited them to leave: 'If you mendicants quarrel, scam!' The monks for their part said, 'If this is so, we shall return.' But sTag-tshang ras-pa was stable. By no means did he want to act contrary to the instruction of his teacher, even - as he said - if a lake would appear under his feet. So Lo-chen paid sTag-tshang ras-pa alone for his religious services.

It would be a rash verdict to judge sTag-tshang ras-pa's mission as a great failure. As becomes clear from the further description of the episode, the mission had an - as it were - magical purpose. By ritual and meditative exercises, restrictive divinities and demons should be conquered in order to achieve successful religious practice. These divinities and demons were also held responsible for the disputes among the monks. For nine months sTag-tshang ras-pa retired to a house without light in strict seclusion. Meanwhile he had visions of a *klu* causing him harm. This serpent-spirit had already worried him earlier on his first journey. Of course sTag-tshang ras-pa succeeded in subjugating the *klu* and obliging him to obedience by swearing an oath.

One doesn't conquer demons by the strength of the body but by the strength of the mind - to put it more exactly: by the strength of the imagination. The yogin evokes himself as a powerful deity placed over the demons. In this way he is able to put them in their proper place and even to destroy them if necessary.

After the three years stipulated by lHa-rtse-ba had passed, fifteen monks arrived to fetch sTag-tshang ras-pa. But then he received a letter from his teacher in which he told him, 'You still have to stay three more years acting as *dbu-mdzad*.' This clearly contradicted the promise given before, that sTag-tshang ras-pa at the end of the three years could do what he wished. An essential feature of the teacher-pupil connection becomes clear here: however arbitrary and contradictory the decisions of the teacher, it is his will alone that is important. The disciple, on the other hand, should abandon his own deceitful self and - especially by the exercise of the guruyoga - completely identify himself with his teacher who is the living Buddha for him.

sTag-tshang ras-pa finally stayed for another four years before returning to his teacher. This must have been in 1606 if I have understood the chronology of the events correctly.<sup>7</sup>

### The third journey

sTag-tshang ras-pa asked lHa-rtse-ba for permission to travel once again to sTod. But instead the teacher sent him to the area of Tsa-ri, saying that he should stay in seclusion for one year in a place called sTag-tshang. As already mentioned above, since the time of Phag-mo-gru-pa (1110-70) Tsa-ri had been a special destination for bKa'-brgyud-pa monks. However since the time of gTsang-pa rGya-ras-pa (1161-1211) the hermits of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa prevailed among them (Filibeck 1990: 1; compare the biography, fol. 21a). When sTag-tshang ras-pa stayed in sTag-tshang rong, one of the four big valleys in Tsa-ri (Filibeck 1990: 3), he initially perceived numerous fearful phenomena, for example earthquakes, fire and disembodied hands. The hands reached out for him and their fingers were strewn with mouths and eyes. He knew that these perceptions were mere deceptions and did his best to evoke a magical protection circle. Then he had visions in which he was invited by many

<sup>7</sup> Exact information about years is given only in the subsequent parts of the *Biography*.

people to come to an elevated throne. In particular, a man who had the face of a lion talked to him: 'I am the owner of this place.' He was speaking of the place which appeared in the dream. 'Using the vajra in your hand' - that is to say, acting as a teacher of the Vajrayāna - 'you have to care for all these people here!' He granted him the initiation of gSang-ba'i bdag-po and the five Garudas and fastened a sword amulet to his body. Then he flew up to the sky.

As will be noticed by experts of Ladakhi history, the representation of this visionary experience has a clear function. It interprets sTag-tshang ras-pa's later position as spiritual head teacher of the Ladakhi king, whose name starts with the Tibetan word for lion, as predestined for the welfare of living beings. Although sTag-tshang ras-pa's biography shows comparatively few features of the usual stereotyped fashion of Tibetan hagiographies, it is also nevertheless a construct based on ideology. It serves to legitimate the special relationship of priest and patron which later developed between sTag-tshang ras-pa and king Seng-ge rnam-rgyal, the relationship of the tiger and the lion as the Ladakhis use to say (Tashi Rabgias 1984: 192; Thub-bstan-dpal-ldan 1988: 99).

From now on all difficulties for practising spiritual exercises in sTag-tshang were overcome. The obstacles were removed and the harmful demons were subjugated. For more than a year he remained in seclusion. Then he went to further places of pilgrimage in Tsa-ri. At that time he met Zhva-dmar-pa Chos-kyi dbang-phyug, who also visited the holy places of Tsa-ri. Zhva-dmar-pa spoke to him: 'In general this Tsa-ri is more powerful than other holy places. But above all until now there has hardly been anyone who has finally stayed a whole year here in sTag-tshang. It is good that now there are no more obstacles left.' Gladly he added that they would meet again in dBus.

So it was sTag-tshang ras-pa who through his stay and his meditative exercises first and foremost established sTag-tshang as a sacred place for promising religious practice. It was for this reason that he received the epithet of sTag-tshang ras-pa.

Soon after he twice received letters from his teacher to let him know that he had remained long enough in Tsa-ri. Even if a prolonged stay should yield a profit it was time to come back. On his way back, among other places of pilgrimage he also visited the monastery gSang-sngags chos-gling to see dPag-bsam dbang-po, the Fifth 'Brug-chen rin-po che. Afterwards he went to lHa-

rtse-ba who was staying in the palace of Gong-dkar and listened to numerous instructions from the bKa'-brgyud tradition.

#### **Fourth journey**

sTag-tshang ras-pa's fourth journey was to be his first long-distance journey. As evident from one of his songs this journey took place in 1610 (*Biography* fol. 21b). lHa-rtse-ba gave him the order to travel for the establishing of a karmic relationship (*las-'brel*) to Mount Glang-chen 'gying-ri in China. Such a karmic relationship is regarded as having efficacy during different existences. This motive raises the journey beyond ordinary pilgrimages and shows it to be part of a very long-term strategy to spread the teachings of the tradition in question.

Mount Glang-chen 'gying-ri is identical with Emei Shan in Szechwan (Zhang Yisun 1985: 420). The mountain, which has an altitude of 3099 metres, is known as a place of pilgrimage for Chinese Buddhists. Why lHa-rtse-ba selected this destination in China and not the much better-known Wu-t'ai Shan we do not learn from the biography.

lHa-rtse-ba instructed his pupil to stay no longer than one month at one place and to return at the end. This strict injunction to sTag-tshang ras-pa was intended not only to protect him from being held backed somewhere for a long time but also to prevent him from settling down for the duration at a pleasant place. Here the correspondence between the outer pilgrimage and the inner mental development is evident. The aim of the development is to overcome every attachment to the objects of the mind and to let the stream of phenomena pass by like clouds in the sky which leave no trace behind.

sTag-tshang ras-pa must have felt that this journey would be quite different from his previous ones, which all led him into areas well known by a continuous stream of pilgrims. Therefore he asked his teacher to pray for a successful journey. Moreover, he didn't set off right away towards the east but first visited lHa-sa to pray for success in front of the two Buddha statues in the Jo-khang and the Ra-mo-che. At that time he also met Zhva-dmar-pa again, an encounter which inspired him to compose a prayer and auspicious verses.

From this time on his journey was not just a matter of walking. He constantly looked for places and opportunities to practise meditation. We

mustn't forget that this was the essential purpose of his journey. We therefore learn a little about the spiritual exercises and the visions that appeared to him during his journey. About the outer course of the journey however we learn hardly more than a couple of place-names - a fact that disappointed Tucci when he read sTag-tshang ras-pa's *O-rgyan-gyi lam-yig*.

sTag-tshang ras-pa travelled slowly via Kong-po and Tsha-ba sgang to 'Ba' or 'Ba'-thang. A mother who provided him with meals there also worried about his cost of living in China: 'No one will come to give you anything in China. You must buy the meals yourself. Therefore take some money from here!' With these words she gave him the money which he would need on his way.

The further course of the journey seems - as far as reconstructed from the scanty details - a little confused. Anyway via Mi-nyag he finally reached Dartse-mdo. From there he still had about five days to walk to Emei Shan. On the mountain he stayed a couple of days in a monastery.

Petech writes that sTag-tshang ras-pa also visited Wu-t'ai Shan.<sup>8</sup> However, I am inclined to question this. In the biography it is merely written that, in a dream, sTag-tshang ras-pa had a vision of Wu-t'ai Shan during his stay on Emei Shan. As is well known, such visionary journeys are merely another manner of travelling for Tibetan yogins. In Tibetan biographies it is often hard to distinguish whether the protagonist actually made the journey or whether it merely took place in his imagination. The author of sTag-tshang ras-pa's biography therefore also formulates it very carefully. He writes that it isn't sure whether sTag-tshang ras-pa has really seen Wu-t'ai Shan apart from in his vision.

sTag-tshang ras-pa went to a couple of other places in China, probably all of them in the area of Szechwan. On his way home he made a pilgrimage through the area of Tsa-ri for four months. He found it so pleasant there that he would have enjoyed remaining for ever in this area. Anyway the instruction of his teacher was stronger than the temptation to stay, and he eventually returned to him. This is likely to have happened towards the end of the year

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<sup>8</sup> Petech 1977: 35. Tashi Rabgias does not mention sTag-tshang ras-pa's journey to Emei Shan. According to him sTag-tshang ras-pa wished to visit Wu-t'ai Shan, but some signs induced him to postpone this journey (Tashi Rabgias 1984: 187).

1611, but the dates in this section of the biography are scanty and inaccurate. In the source the chronology of the events is arranged as if sTag-tshang ras-pa was sent on his next journey, which started at the beginning of the year 1613, after just a short break, so there is also reason to believe that he returned from China only in the fall of the year 1612.

### **Fifth journey**

In lHa-rtse-ba's opinion sTag-tshang ras-pa had practised in Tsa-ri long enough:

If one remains for a long time it will come out that one also becomes like the ordinary people of Tsa-ri. Your feet are swift and your intellectual faculty also isn't small. Therefore go now to the great places of pilgrimage in the area of sTod, especially to the crown of the twenty-four [holy] regions, Jālandhar, Kha-che Khri-brtan and Puspā-ha-ri, which are the meditation places of the venerable lord Nāropa, and [which are the places] where Tilopa granted Mar-pa prophecies, verbal traditions and so forth as if one fully pours a bottle, and where the blessing of the tradition began, because [Mar-pa] was appointed the representative for Tibet. Go by turning your thoughts exclusively towards Uddiyāna! Don't consider whether you will arrive this year or not. You may walk calmly.

And he further gave him the advice to follow the trace of O-rgyan-pa Rin-chen dpal (1230-1293) who had made this journey before.

O-rgyan-pa Rin-chen dpal's scanty description of his journey was known, but it dated back more than three hundred years earlier (Tucci 1971). There were no reports from more recent times. Uddiyāna was still a popular destination, but only within the imagination of Tibetan yogins, so it was a journey into the uncertain. As followed from lHa-rtse-ba's words, it was for him a journey to the roots of the bKa'-bgyud school and further to the roots of Tibetan Buddhism in general. Unlike the journey to China, the motive for this voyage was a backward-looking one. It is therefore difficult to recognise the order which Petech proposes, namely to spread the tradition of the 'Brug-pa in Western Tibet (Petech 1977: 35). This mission - or strictly speaking, the efforts for a refreshment of the 'Brug-pa tradition already existing in the west - were to be an incidental result of the journey. An early request in this direction which was put forward by the king of Ladakh during an interruption of sTag-

tshang ras-pa's voyage in Zangs-dkar even clashed with the real aim of the journey and was therefore brusquely refused by sTag-tshang ras-pa, as Petech himself has noted.

lHa-rtse-ba must really have been very convinced of sTag-tshang ras-pa's physical and mental strength, because we know of no other pupil whom he would have sent on such a long and dangerous journey. sTag-tshang ras-pa realised the risk of such an enterprise. 'Whether I come through or not - I go whilst death sets the limit. If I should reach Uddiyāna, there is no need to go on or to return; I'll stay there. Therefore look upon me in this existence and within all lives with the love for a son!' he said to his teacher. Indeed he would see him again only in his visions.

sTag-tshang ras-pa's conviction that, in the event of his arriving safely, he would stay for ever in this country glorified by Tibetan Buddhists, certainly arose on the one hand as a result of the information, taken from Rin-chen dpal's report, that Buddhism in some form had still been alive in the Swat valley at that time (Tucci 1971: 375, 390, 391). On the other hand this conviction was also presumably based on the image of the country which was transfigured into the paradise described in numerous reports of mystical experiences. At all events this conviction demonstrates a lack of concrete knowledge about the prevailing conditions in the Swat valley, which was part of the Moghul empire ruled at that time by Jahāngīr, the son of Akbar.

Before his departure he had conversations with his teacher and his friends and received initiations regarded as important for the journey. Even the Four-Armed mGon-po personally appeared in his dream and granted him three of the four required initiations into the cult of bDe-mchog 'khor-lo. The fourth one he received later during a vision in Uddiyāna. Characteristically this is the only way he received an initiation in Uddiyāna. There were no Buddhist teachers left who could have transmitted him their tradition.

Finally he took leave of his teacher. This was in the year 1613. First he revisited the particularly sacred places of central Tibet, namely lHa-sa and bSam-yas, as well as mKhar-chu and Gro-bo lung in lHo-brag. Then he went on to Myang-stod, his native country. This time too he was confronted with the expectations of his relatives. If one believes that there is an expert on certain problems within one's family, it is only too natural to ask him for help. The reticence which sTag-tshang ras-pa had demonstrated and explained before obviously hadn't left any lasting impression. On the contrary this time the

expectations even went further. Would he please stay a whole year to perform religious ceremonies? At present there was a demon threatening the elder brother. sTag-tshang ras-pa thought up a meager alternative solution. He set up a *gtor-ma* for dPal-ldan lha-mo and charged the deity to perform the required actions. 'This is the same as if I would stay here myself. We shall meet again later!' Then he hurried on.

He travelled from one place of pilgrimage to the next. Some of the highlights of his journey in Tibet were dPal-'khor-sde-chen, the big monastery in rGyal-rtse, Sa-skya, La-phyi Chu-bar, sKyid-rong rDzong-dkar, Glo-bo,<sup>9</sup> the area of Gro-shod at the upper course of the gTsang-po in mNga'-ris (Wylie 1962: 124 fn. 83 and map), lake Manasarovar and Mt Kailash as well as the area of Gu-ge.

With the help of sTag-tshang ras-pa's guide to Uddiyana Tucci has gone over the route. Although he hasn't succeeded in identifying all place-names, the way sTag-tshang ras-pa had chosen is for the most part comprehensible anyway. There is no need to repeat Tucci's presentations in detail. Transferred to today's geographical and political conditions the course of the journey can be summarised as follows.

Following the Sulej he reached Kinnaur and the area around today's Shimla. He traveled on to Jalandhar and from there to Shrīnagar. Because three of his Tibetan travel companions who had joined him in Jalandhar fell ill he turned from Kashmir to Zangs-dkar. Two of them died on the road. He visited Lahul where he stayed one year. According to the biography he set off again at the first calendar day of the eighth month in the wood hare year. This corresponds to August 25, 1615 of our calendar. Together with a companion he travelled once more to Shrīnagar. After they had crossed the river Jhelum, information about the difficult way to Uddiyāna discouraged the companion so much that he turned around and sTag-tshang ras-pa had to go on by himself. His onward journey proceeded adventurously. He fell among robbers, and was even sold as slave, but on the other hand he again and again met people who saved him from difficult situations and helped him to find his way. In the company of a foreign yogin he finally went to the sacred places, or rather what was still left of them, in Swat. Apparently he didn't penetrate further north into the valley than Mingora. Without staying very long, he returned via

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<sup>9</sup> In the *Biography* written as Blo-bo.



Kashmir to Zangs-dkar. From there he visited Ladakh for the first time. According to Petech it was presumably towards the end of the year 1616.

### Effects of the journeys

Reading sTag-tshang ras-pa's description of his journey to Uddiyāna Tucci was disappointed about the lack of historically interesting facts (Tucci 1971: 418). As the most remarkable fact Tucci noticed that sTag-tshang ras-pa found a population in the former Uddiyāna which still wasn't completely Islamic; remains of Buddhism and Hinduism had survived.

At the end of this paper I want to address another matter than that of the historical information contained the account of his journey to Uddiyāna, namely the question of the effects that his journeys - and above all his journey to Swat - had on his environment, himself, and his further career. To answer this we must look briefly at his return to Tibet.

sTag-tshang ras-pa travelled little by little from Ladakh to Gong-dkar. On his way he not only visited monasteries but was also invited by governors. So his travel experiences quickly came to be known. He came also to Rva-lung. He spent some months in Gong-dkar rNam-rgyal lhun-po, the residence of his deceased teacher lHa-rtse-ba. Meanwhile the news about his return from Uddiyāna spread in dBus. Throughout dBus he soon was known under the epithet O-rgyan-pa, the one from Uddiyāna. Among those who interestedly asked about the conditions especially in India and sTod was the g'Tsang sde-srid Karma phun-tshogs. He met sTag-tshang ras-pa on the occasion of his visit in Yar-klungs, and pressed him to come to g'Tsang. After being received respectfully in 'Phyongs-rgyas, sTag-tshang ras-pa paid his visit to 'Brug-chen dPag-bsam dbang-po in Byams-pa chos gling. The copious gifts brought from Ladakh alone already raised his prestige. He recounted his experiences in China, India and mNga'-ris and dPag-bsam dbang-po asked him to compose the guide to Uddiyāna.

After the death of lHa-rtse-ba his pupil Mi-pham blo-gros functioned as regent (*rgyal-tshab*) in Gong-dkar rNam-rgyal lhun-po.<sup>10</sup> He called sTag-tshang

<sup>10</sup> In sTag-tshang ras-pa's biography rNam-rgyal lhun-po is always the residence of lHa-rtse-ba. The name bDe-chen chos-'khor is mentioned for the first time in 1628 (fol. 32b). Petech (1977: 53) points to the autobiography of the second

ras-pa back to Gong-dkar. Apparently he was looking for support to construct a new temple in the residence of the deceased teacher. However after consideration Mi-pham blo-gros came to the conclusion that sTag-tshang ras-pa's future task lay in mNga'-ris, and advised him to go to the west again. The 'Brug-chen too gave him the order to return to Ladakh.

Since the rest of the story is more or less known thanks to Petech's study of the kingdom of Ladakh, we can stop here and try to present some conclusions. First we notice that sTag-tshang ras-pa's journey was not imitated. sTag-tshang ras-pa had traveled far and his knowledge and experience were widely known, and he was therefore an interesting interlocutor both for worldly as well as for spiritual persons of rank. His reports produced much interest and curiosity but obviously no stirring enthusiasm. The great dangers of his journey were probably partly responsible for this. More important, however, was the fact that the journey had not turned up any new sources of living Buddhist tradition and learning. The sources were dried up and what was still left amounted to a couple of isolated pools. As a country where the Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished Uddiyāna seemed lost and was therefore moved beyond the horizon. This perspective was already clearly expressed by king 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal, who had tried in vain to invite sTag-tshang ras-pa to Ladakh during his first stay in Zangs-dkar. sTag-tshang ras-pa had rejected the invitation with reference to the order of his teacher lHa-rtse-ba. However the king didn't appreciate this. He emphasised that he was a patron of the 'Brug-pa.<sup>11</sup> Therefore a visit to Ladakh would also be a way to consider the welfare of the doctrine. And he added: 'Why must you learned ones go on pilgrimages to remote areas?' The king didn't make sTag-tshang ras-pa change his mind, but sTag-tshang ras-pa had to promise to visit Ladakh on his way back.

From this resulted the tie with the royal family of Ladakh. Undoubtedly this was the most important effect of sTag-tshang ras-pa's journey to Uddiyāna. However, as emphasised above, the relationship wasn't the result of a strategy prepared beforehand, but happened by chance. The same applies

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*yongs-'dzin* (born 1617) according to which a delegation was sent to bDe-chen chos-'khor in 1624. It is possible that bDe-chen chos-'khor was only founded after the death of lHa-rtse-ba as the residence of his reincarnations.

<sup>11</sup> 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal was a patron of the 'Brug-pa monastery Rva-lung. This is evident from a document which Schuh has published and translated (Schuh 1983: 22-24; compare *ibid.*: 9).

to the communication with the monastery 'Bar-gdan and the lama bDe-ba rgya-mtsho there, which by the way happened in 1614,<sup>12</sup> that is to say four years earlier than the foundation of the monastery as proposed by Gergan and Petech, and also two years earlier than the flight of the *zhabs-drung* to Bhutan. Therefore we cannot classify this lama at that time as a member of the Bhutanese branch of the 'Brug-pa order.<sup>13</sup> sTag-tshang ras-pa hadn't planned at all to visit Zangs-dkar where the first communication took place. He made this excursion only because of the illness of his travelling companions; he had already been beyond Zangs-dkar. Furthermore: lHa-rtse-ba had particularly emphasised that he should follow the traces of O-rgyan-pa Rin-chen dpal. Even if sTag-tshang ras-pa didn't always succeed in this, he at least tried to do so. Rin-chen dpal however never visited Zangs-dkar and Ladakh. There were only two hints of sTag-tshang ras-pa's later determination in Ladakh - both rather early during his career: one was his vision in sTag-tshang; the other was the abovementioned vague prophecy of his teacher lHa-rtse-ba that he would possess a karmic relationship for the benefit of living beings in the area of mNga'-ris. Both hints appear as pious constructions to legitimate the outstanding position of this person in Ladakhi history as determined for the benefit of country.

sTag-tshang ras-pa's invitation didn't entail a conversion of the royal family of Ladakh to the Rva-lung branch of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-pa: due to his loyalty towards dPag-bsam dbang-po, sTag-tshang ras-pa didn't belong to this party, a fact that has already been pointed out by Schuh (1983). Generally he points to the fact that this invitation may not be seen against the background of the splitting of the 'Brug-pa order. Therefore it is certainly correct to see the firmly expressed interest of the rulers of Ladakh in inviting sTag-tshang ras-pa in the light of existing links between the 'Brug-pa order and the Ladakhi royal family (Schuh 1983: 4). As is obvious from the reaction, described above, of king 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal upon sTag-tshang ras-pa's demurrer, it was simply a matter of course for the king that, as a patron of the 'Brug-pa, he had to invite sTag-tshang ras-pa for the benefit of this tradition in Ladakh; and that from his point of view sTag-tshang ras-pa had to accept it for the same reason.

<sup>12</sup> This is to be concluded from the chronology of the events: after he had visited 'Bra-gdan sTag-tshang ras-pa went to Lahul, where he stayed one year. As mentioned above he left Lahul on August 25 1615 (*Biography* fols. 25a-25b). 'Bar-gdan was founded around 1570. Regarding this date see Schuh 1983: 31ff.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the discussion in Schuh 1983: 6.

However there is still another aspect to the invitation of sTag-tshang ras-pa to Ladakh. Janet Rizvi mentions this aspect in her book (1983: 48ff.): the apparent efforts of 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal and Seng-ge rnam-rgyal to strengthen Buddhism in view of an increasing spread of Islam. 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal's defeat by Ali Mir, the ruler of Skardo, around the year 1600 as well as his following captivity must have served as a drastic demonstration of this threat.

An interesting fact worth mentioning in this context is that the first Ladakhi connections not only to the monastery of Rva-lung but - contrary to what Petech had emphasised - also to Lama lHa-rtse-ba, the first *yongs-'dzin* of bDe-chen chos-'khor, didn't result from sTag-tshang ras-pa's first visit to Ladakh on his way back from Uddiyāna probably towards the end of 1616. Connections to lHa-rtse-ba existed already before that time. sTag-tshang ras-pa spent some time in rGya, in Upper Ladakh, during his first visit at the insistence of rGya'i drung-pa Shes-rab bzang-po, a personal pupil of lHa-rtse-ba (*Biography* fol. 26b). This allows the following two conclusions: first, lHa-rtse-ba's connections to Ladakh had earlier origins. Secondly, these connections existed with the chiefs of rGya. Therefore it is not surprising that in Ladakh sTag-tshang ras-pa at first visited rGya and that he later regarded the *jo-bo* of rGya as his first patron. The chiefs of rGya already had relations, through Drung-pa bDe-ba, with Padma dkar-po, the Fourth 'Brug-chen rin-po che (*Biography* fols. 26a, 30b; Petech 1977: 38). After his death, lHa-rtse-ba was at first the most prominent 'Brug-pa ecclesiastic, and it is therefore obvious that he continued to cultivate connections with the house of rGya.

But after the death of lHa-rtse-ba in the year 1615 sTag-tshang ras-pa intensified the communication with Ladakh. When he left the country in 1620 at the end of his first visit, he took about twenty pupils to central Tibet. From that time on pupils and gifts were sent on a regular basis (see the list in Petech 1977: 53), the former especially to Khro-phu, which is located on the southern side of the gTsang-po and west of gZhis-ka rtse (Ferrari 1958: 67ff., 157 fn. 579 and map; Wylie 1962: 68, 135 fnn. 180, 181). Earlier lHa-rtse-ba had taken special care of the monastic community of Khro-phu, and sTag-tshang ras-pa therefore also felt a particular obligation to do so (*Biography* fol. 27a).

What effects did the journeys have on sTag-tshang ras-pa himself? He has left us no personal statement on the subject. We only can say what is obvious: he demonstrated his persistence and steadiness. While these were

qualities he might already have possessed in the beginning, they were brought to light by his teacher and the journeys. From childhood on he had such a strong will that he even opposed his father's last wish. Later he submitted only to his teacher and the religion. His confidence in his teacher seems unshakeable. He did not, however, submit to the will of the mighty. It was only when it was certain to him and the religious authorities of his milieu that the connection with the royal family of Ladakh was his choice, that he entered into it permanently. His pure confidence in the teacher and the conviction to follow his instructions alone made him go his way unwaveringly. The self-discipline he developed, his rich experiences and the consciousness that he had mastered so many difficulties, gave him self-assurance and confidence in his own abilities. It is no surprise that sTag-tshang ras-pa has proved to be such a major figure in the history of Ladakh.

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## REVIEW

Gérard Toffin, *Les tambours de Kathmandou*. Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1996. ISBN 2-228-89030-8; 316 pages.

Gérard Toffin, a senior social anthropologist at the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) in Paris, has been working on the Newars, the indigenous people of Kathmandu Valley, since 1971. He has spent more than a total of six years in the field studying various Newar communities. This has resulted in numerous publications which deal comprehensively with various aspects of Newar society and culture. They have brought Toffin the deserved fame of being one of the foremost authorities on things Newar.

The present book, with the evocative title 'The Drums of Kathmandu' is not an academic summary of Toffin's past research, but a roughly chronologically arranged account of his experiences in Nepal, and notably 'in the field'. To start with, Toffin relates how in 1970 he first came to Nepal by chance (instead of being drafted into the army he had the good fortune to be posted as acting cultural attaché at the French Embassy in Kathmandu!), and then became so enchanted by the place that he decided to stay on and make the Newars the object of his ethnographic quest (ch. 1). He then proceeds to describe in graphic detail the numerous difficulties he had to face when he started out in the small village of Pyangau, some 12 kilometres south of Kathmandu (ch. 2). In the next two chapters Toffin deals with his field work in Panauti, a small town at the eastern confines of the Kathmandu Valley. He describes the enviable conditions under which he was working and living there in 1976 (and during two subsequent stays in the following years); in the process the reader is introduced in some detail to Panauti and its inhabitants (chs. 3 and 4). Not without humour, Toffin recapitulates next his dreadful experience as an academic advisor for the French production of a film on the

Kumari of Patan (ch. 5). Then he turns to his research on the farmer castes of Jyapus (and Gathas) and to the festivals observed by them (and also by other Newar castes). First, he recounts his studies of the archaic Nava Durga dance of Thecho (a village just north of the aforementioned Pyangau) and relates it to the Nava Durga dance of Bhaktapur (ch. 6). Then he turns to the town of Kathmandu and its Jyapus (ch. 7 and 8). He draws an intimate picture of the old town and then deals with the Jyapus, showing (among other things) how their musical and ritual traditions reflect the old segmentation of the town into 32 quarters. The remaining part of the book is more reflective and less descriptive. Thus, in the ninth chapter, Toffin deals in a more general way with the Newars, their festivals, their history, the character of their society and their place in present-day Nepal. Finally, in the tenth and last chapter, he dwells upon the dramatic changes which have come about during the last 25 years (explosion of traffic, uncontrolled urbanisation, disastrous pollution, rise of consumerism, exposure to Western ideas and values) and how they threaten the cultural integrity of the Newars. The book is rounded off by an epilogue in which Toffin looks back at the Newars and his study of them.

Toffin relates his encounter with the Newars in a clear and simple, almost colloquial style, which is devoid of academic jargon. He describes the Newars he met and worked with; he describes their families, their work, their personal concerns and ambitions, their houses, the feasts they celebrate, the customs they observe, the streets and bazaars, the villages and towns, the countryside they inhabit. These descriptions are vivid and full of acutely observed details; they make for captivating reading in a way which at times is reminiscent of V.S. Naipaul's celebrated portrayal of India in the late eighties (*India, a Million Mutinies Now*). Despite the vividness of these descriptions, it might, in view of a wider readership, have been a good idea to supplement them with photos. There is only the cover picture of a Jyapu smoking a hookah (rather than playing a drum!).

It is not only the narrative part which makes Toffin's book worthwhile reading, but also what he has to say in more general terms on the field of inquiry, i.e. the Newars, and on the process of studying and the effects this process has on the researcher. Thus, he shares with the reader his basic understanding of Newar society and culture (settlement structure, caste system etc.) and deals with certain particular aspects more specifically. Festivals are, for instance, interpreted in some detail as re-enacting the socio-political conditions of the Malla period. By harkening back in this way to a



time prior to the conquest of the valley by the Gorkhas, they function as an assertion of Newar identity, which is the reason — so Toffin claims — why they subsist to the present day (p. 244). (This claim is not unproblematic. Long before the advent of Prithvi Narayan Shah, at a time when there was no apparent need to assert their cultural identity, the Newars had been diligently observing their feasts and customs year after year. So the survival of Newar feasts to the present day may have more to do with the extraordinary tenacity with which Newars are wont to cling to their traditions, and less to do with the conquest by the Gorkhas and the subsequent need to preserve their cultural identity.)

As for the process of studying, Toffin makes (among others) two important methodological points which are not only relevant for anthropologists working in Nepal. Firstly, he insists that in the case of a society with a literary heritage such as that of the Newars the anthropologist should make use of the written sources and documents in order to supplement the findings of his field work. Secondly, Toffin emphasises the need to re-visit the field as much as possible in order to become ever more intimately acquainted with it and hence to understand it better (pp. 291-93). (The other side of the coin, namely the exclusive reliance of the anthropologist upon one field, is not discussed.)

Beyond such methodological questions, Toffin also dwells on his own particular experiences, on the traumatic aspects of fieldwork and its initiatory character, on the insurmountable gap he ultimately feels between himself and the Newars regardless of all his passion for them, and on feelings of estrangement from his own culture. It is this estrangement resulting from the intensive occupation with a completely different culture which allows for a more distanced and in a certain sense more objective perspective when viewing one's own culture — a theme carefully developed by Toffin when pondering upon French culture and society in general and his own background in particular. Despite the personal character of these deliberations, they are of general interest and not self-indulgent, as they might well have become in a book of this kind.

The freedom from the restraints of academic discourse allows Toffin to draw an intimate and lively picture of Newar society and culture. It is the picture drawn by someone deeply moved by this culture, someone rejoicing in its richness and vibrancy, while, by the same token, grieving over the adverse

effects of the conquest of the Gorkhas and, more to the point, of the onslaught of modern Western mass culture. Not surprisingly, this passionate picture is not always devoid of partiality. The conquest by the Gorkhas is depicted in gruesome colour (p. 242), and no explicit mention is made of the disastrous inability of the last three Malla kings, notably of Jayaprakash Malla from Kathmandu, to overcome their differences in the face of a common enemy. (There is only an indirect allusion to this inability when referring to Prithvi Narayan Shah's successful fomenting of dissension among these kings — a formulation which veils the main reason for this dissension, namely centuries of chronic quarrelling between the kings of Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu.) Similarly, feminism, democracy, increased literacy, the disintegration of the caste system etc. are viewed as a threat to the cultural integrity of the Newars (which of course they are) without taking into consideration that they also offer an opportunity for the Newars, most notably the underprivileged among them, to uplift their lot. Toffin's all too understandable anger and indignation at the onslaught of Western culture is also problematic, entailing as it does a certain inconsistency on his part. Toffin's research is driven by the urge to explore Newar society into its innermost recesses, including those which are deemed taboo for outsiders (cf. pp. 293f). This urge is clearly related to the penetration (so much lamented by Toffin) of modern Western culture into even the remotest corners of the globe. In other words, Toffin's own ethnographic quest cannot be divorced from the globalisation of Western culture; rather it is an aspect of it, a fact on which Toffin himself reflects.

Despite their personal character, Toffin's recollections are never idiosyncratic. By contrast, they reveal a very critical mind which ponders in an intelligent and interesting way not only upon the Newars but also upon the experience of studying them. The picture which Toffin draws in the process will introduce a wide audience beyond the confines of academia, in a very readable manner, to the fascinating world of the Newars. One would hope that this book, and for that matter many of the other as yet untranslated publications by Toffin, will one day be translated into English, not least because thus they would also become accessible to the (English-speaking) Nepalis.

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