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

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A SURVEY OF TIBETAN PAPER CURRENCY
(1912-1959)

-Wolfgang Bertsch

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

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

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

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

1. This article has been extracted from my manuscript entitled "A Study of Tibetan Paper
Currency" which I hope to publish as a small volume in the near future.

2. Two paper notes of the Yuan dynasty were found in 1959 in Sakya monastery and a Chinese
author takes this as evidence that Tibetan paper notes circulated in Tibet in the context of
the close financial relations which supposedly existed between China and Tibet during the
Yuan Dynasty (13th century). I believe however that this singular find is not sufficient
evidence to support this theory. Taking into account the great respect which Tibetans show
for一切 objects praised, one would expect that more than just two Yuan dynasty notes should
have survived. If these notes actually did circulate in Tibet, cf. Anonimo (Committee for
the Administration of Tibetan Cultural Relic): Xi Zhang Shi-Lu Shian De Yuan Dai Bao
Bi (The Paper Notes of the Yuan Dynasty Found in the Sakya Temple). In: Wen Wu, 1957,
pp. 12-14.

dead guardian animals is given on plate 51, an Illustration of the windhorse, surrounded by the
dead guardian animals, can be found on plate 52."
The main subjects represent on the Tibetan banknotes are religious and in this way the notes reflect Tibetan culture in an admirable way. However the designs of the face of all the banknotes are inspired by a deep nationalist feeling. The snow lion, or a pair of these animals, stand for Tibet and probably existed already as part of the design of Tibet’s national flag before they made their appearance on the banknotes, coins and post stamps of this country.

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

1. The Tam Issues

(plate I-V)

The first banknotes issued by the Tibetan Government had the denomination “tangkha” (this unit is better known as “tangka” or “tangka”; three tangkas were equal to 1 Indian Rupee in 1912), are dated T.E. (Tibetan Era) 1658 and it is now generally assumed that they were issued in the year 1912. However there are some reasons to believe that these notes were not released before January 1913. The year 1912 saw a lot of fighting and political upheaval in Lhasa while the Tibetans were trying to drive out the Chinese who found themselves in a weak position after the fall of the Manchu Dynasty. It is unlikely that the ambitious programme of introducing paper currency was initiated at this time. The Dalai Lama had left his Indian exile in mid 1912, but delayed his arrival in Lhasa to January 1913, waiting till the last Chinese troops had left the Tibetan capital on January 6th. “Reportedly the red seal of the

4. d. Brauer Martin: Heinrich Harrer Impressions aus Tibet. Innsbruck and Freiburg i.d.R. 1974, p. 112. According to Brauer the couple of snow lions as illustrated on the face of the 10 tara note represents the political and religious power of Tibet. In this case the precious objects. Since these objects are related to the perfect religious ruler, I think it more likely that the lions and the bowl mainly represent the political power (Tib. "sum"), while the religious power (Tib. "chos") is represented by the mostly buddhist motives on the backside of the notes.


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

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

gangzey ljongs bsdod rgyal khabchen boi lugs zung chak/ srid dbu kyi lo shtog srong drug rgya lha bco nga rgyad/ (or: dgyad, or other dates on the multicoloured 50 tam notes)
phun shoggs sde zhi dpal mangsbar bdei spyan nor/ chos rgyal gnyis ldan gyi rab byang bco lnga bai shog dang/ The following translation has been suggested for this legend: 1658 years from the founding of the religious-secular form of government in the great country of Tibet, the land of snows, paper money of the 15th cycle (rab byang) of the government of religion and politics (chos rgyal gnyis ldan) the universal jewel of benefit and bliss, endowed with the four types of auspiciousness8.

The date 1658 which is mentioned in the second line of the legend, was not altered on the 5 Tam notes which were issued after the year. However it was altered to 1659 on the rest 10 Tam notes some time after serial number 3600. So far the notes of 15, 25 and 50 Tam (monochrome first issue) are only known with the date 1659, but I believe that some notes of these denominations must have existed with the date T.E.1658. There is evidence that all the known 10 and 15 and most of the 25 and early 50 Tam dates dated T.E. 1659 were printed with blocks on which the original date 1658 was altered to 1559, since several notes exist, where a gap between the Tibetan word for 1659 and the final vertical stroke (Tib. “shad”) at the end of the second line of the legend remains (plate I-IV). This is due to the fact that for the Tibetan word “eight” (gyug) three spaces are necessary, while the Tibetan word “nine” (dgo) occupies only two spaces and hence there remained a gap when the pair of the block

8. Lhalung W.G.: Letter to Hugh Richardson of 19, 07, 1966, I thank Mr. Richardson for sending this letter available to us.
9. This translation has been suggested by the staff of the Museum of "Tibetan Works and Archives" in Phnom Penh. A somewhat different translation of the last two lines is given in: Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection and other Llamast Manuscripts the Newark Museum, Vol. V, Newark 1971, p. 30: “Paper money of the 13th cycle which is endowed with religious and governmental, being the crest jewel (spyi nor) of the fourfold perfection, namely power, glory, welfare and happiness.”
Bulletin of Tibetology

with the "tung" had been cut out and replaced by a small slab bearing the word "dua". Notes of 2, 6, and 10 Tam (monochrome) with higher serial number are known without this gap after the word for "nine" and were obviously printed from new block. The lowest known serial number of the 15 Tam note is 482; this note is printed with the gap after the word "nine" (plate II); this means that only very few notes of this denomination, if any at all, can have been printed with the date 1658. This rules out our assumption that the first 5 and 16, and possibly a few 14, 25 and 50 (monochrome) notes were printed towards the end of T.E. 1658 (i.e. January 1913) and that in that year there was not enough time to issue large quantities of notes with this date.

The 13th Dalai Lama certainly had opportunities during his exile in China and India to acquaint himself with paper currency and decided to introduce it into Tibet as part of his scheme for modernization of his country. During his Indian exile he was in close contact with Charles Bell who often acted as his interpreter while dealing with the British. One of his officials or the Dalai Lama himself may have approached Bell regarding the introduction of paper currency into Tibet. Bell notes in April 1922: "The Government hopes also to issue Currency notes and so to make money. I pointed out to Pulhome some of the difficulties and requirement of a note currency, and he said Shatra (Shara Lochen) was ignorant of these." Probably one of the requirements that Bell pointed out of the Tibetans was the necessity of gold backing for the paper currency. It seems, however, that measures towards such a bucking with gold were not taken until about 1925 at the instigation of Tsering Shaphe who was in charge of the mint. Supposedly from the year onwards 300 gold ingots weighting 27 shas each which had been imported from India, were stored away in the Potatala. Before that time the note currency was avoided by strictly limiting the number of notes issued. In 1925 a bank (the name "Finance Department" is probably more appropriate for this institution) was also established in Lhasa whose first manager was Phuntshog Kung and later Tsering joined as head of this establishment.

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

Tibetan silver money and banknotes from Lhasa were circulating and had driven out Chinese copper coins.16 The first series of Tibetan banknotes was issued between 1913 and 1914, the year when the notes were withdrawn from circulation. As mentioned above, the face on the new, multicoloured 50 Tum note was altered every year while the notes in the first set were printed with the date 1658 (5 Tum note) 1658 or 1659 (19 Tum note), 1659 (15, 25 and 50 Tum note) of 1658 thereafter. This means that the date has been changed from 1658 to 1659. These fixed dates are sometimes referred to as "frozen dates" in numismatic literature.

The early notes were printed by hand from woodblocks at the Mint Gria hri glog 'khrul khangs (Tib. bshi lugs khang) which had been closed temporarily by the Chinese in 1910 and was reopened by the Tibetans in 1913.17 The multicoloured 50 Tum note was the first Tibetan issue which was printed with machines from metal blocks or metal sheets mounted on wood blocks. It was printed between 1926 and 1932 in the Dho Mins which had been established in 1904 in the valley of the same name in the northwest of Sera. It is reported that some multicoloured 50 Tum notes were also printed in the Lhasa mint (Chinese transcription: mint this is known to "gebh khang" mint near the Norbu Lingka before 1931).18 From 1932 onwards they were printed in Trabshu Lchabkang (Gria hri las khang) which had been established in late 1931 as the only Tibetan Government Mint at a place north of Lhasa where a mint of this name existed already. This new institution incorporated the different mint which had existed earlier on. It is not known if the early 5, 10, 15, 25 and blue 50 Tum notes were printed after 1926. If this was the case, we can assume that they continued to be printed with woodblocks and by hand, since the surviving notes of these series do not show any evidence of a change in the printing technique.

The ink for printing the notes was imported from India. It seems that with each new batch different colour shades were produced unselectively on the notes. However, the notes with similar colours do not form blocks of serial number as one could expect. Therefore one has to take into account that the colour on the notes probably changed as well after printing due to exposure to the elements and due to long use in every day transactions.19 This may be

17. Xiao Huangzhao: Xining, Diling Huijushi (The History of Tibetan Money), Beijing 1987, Chapter 9.
19. During a stay in Lhasa in October 1995 I was told that the Mint Trabshu Lchabkang was located in a place which is now occupied by the Xinhua Printing Press, about half-way between the center of Lhasa and the Jenu Monastery. It seems that none of the old Mint building has survived.
20. Norgel, Colin (ed.): Tibetan Paper Money, in press. Different colour shades have been recorded for the 5, 10, 25 and early 50 Tum notes. Most of the known shades were recorded by Shresth, Bhupendra Narayan: Tibetan Paper Currency, St. Albans 1987, p. 25.
the case particularly with the five Tam notes which show numerous varieties of colours; there exist also some specimens on which the colour has faded almost completely, as to make it impossible to recognize the design.

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

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

21. Xia Huiran, op. cit., chapter 5. I was unable to identify Sigmor Stor on available maps.

22. Payden, Nicholas C: Tibetan forgeries made in Calcutta. The Numismatic Chronicle, 1962, p. 91. The information was given in Calcutta by the Tibetan official Ngawang Tenzin Kensing in 1922.

A document which is now living in Switzerland mentioned the plant "Aloe drawn" (Hab. Achen Gario) containing literally "multicoloured Aloe" as one of the ingredients used for the production of banknote paper. cf. Gabril, Karl: Geld aus Tibet, Wiesbaden 1890, p. 49, footnote 5.


However, at least for the multicoloured 50 Tam notes the three papers must have been pasted together before printing, since there exists a note in Shrestha’s collection which shows part of the design of the backside on the face of the note on a portion of paper which had leaked up. cf. Shrestha, op. cit., p. 23. There is no doubt that the Straq notes were pasted together before printing, since numerous 100 Straq notes exist showing what is generally called "kegsemp" i.e. the paper had creased during printing and when carefully drawn apart reveals white stripes on both sides of the note. Had the parts been glued together only after printing, then white stripes would show only on one side of the note or - more likely - not at all.

24. Rhode, N.C., loc. cit. Rhode gives the name "Currency office" for the place where banknotes were numbered.
It seems that the calligraphy of the number on the banknote is nearly perfect and not easy to copy which makes forging very difficult. The last and most important step for the production of the paper notes was the application of two seals, one on the left and one black on the right side of the obverse of the banknotes. The red seal is generally taken as the one which represents the authority of the Dalai Lama and is reported that it was - at least in the case of the early paper notes - used only in the presence of the Dalai Lama. The red seal does not show any script, it is purely ornamental and its design is called "yig man" (without script) in Tibetan. The central part of the black seal of the early notes is filled with two columns of "phugs-pa" characters whose transference is "ghung dugi khang." This can be translated as "government treasury" or "government bank" and most probably refers to the financial institution (most referred to as "tank") which according to some Chinese sources was founded already in 1913 or, as mentioned above, in 1925.

2. The Stron Issues (plates VI-VII)

After the thirteenth Dalai Lama had died in December 1913, Tibet entered a period of political instability. The first Tibetan banknotes had been issued in strictly controlled numbers and - as we have seen - to a certain extent had a gold backing. It seems that both these precautions were already largely abandoned after the opening of the Trabshi Lekhung Mint whose operation started in 1932. Banknotes were issued in ever larger numbers to cover government deficits and inflation became bigger, particularly after the 100 Stron notes were released in 1937. By 1936 the price for barley, the main Tibetan staple, was twenty times that of 1936.

While the early notes in Tam were monochrome with the exception of the second 50 Tam issue, each of the notes in "Stron" (1 Stron = 62/3 tam or tanska) was printed with more than one colour which made it necessary to use more than one block for printing of each side of the notes. Apart from the already mentioned 100 Stron note which was printed until 1959 (plate IX) the following issues were released:

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

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

The first 50,000 notes of 106,000 notes were in the denomination "tum sang" and had the same red seal printed on them as the earlier "tum" notes. Subsequent Srang notes however bore a newly created, smaller red seal, on which the Tibetan character "cha" can be seen together with other indecipherable characters (plate IX). While the black seals printed on the 5 Srang and 10 Srang notes (plates VI and VII) has the same inscription in "phags-pa" as the one found on the earlier "tum" notes, but of a smaller size, a new black seal was created for the 25 and 100 Srang notes (plates VIII and IX). Its inscription is also in phags-pa letters which read: "srid zhi dpal 'bar" which has been translated as "may every form of being increase the good." While Chinese authors, basing their view on Tibetan documents, believe that this seal refers to the mint Trabsho Lehkung, other authorities relate it to the Council of Ministers (the 'gshags). Only in 1947 it was decided to send a trade mission abroad whose main task should be the purchase of silver and gold for backing of the paper currency as requested by Tsarong Dzena, Trunyinchammo Choitang and Tgapun Shadakpa who jointly headed the trade mission at that time. In May, 1949 the trade mission of Tibet actually bought $425,000 worth of gold from the United States. We cannot be sure, however, if this gold was actually used to back Tibet's paper currency; anyhow, the amount of gold would have been insufficient to back the ever increasing numbers of notes which were issued from 1950 onwards. According to statistics of Trabsho Lehkung between 1951 and 1959 banknotes to the total value of 97,000,000 Srang were issued. Between 1955 and 1959 the total value of the banknotes issued was 71,150,000 Srang. Some or all of the gold purchases were stored in a treasury, called Langsai according to a Chinese source which reports that 30 ingots of gold and 100 silver ingots; each weighing about 1000 Chinese Liang (i.e. ca. 37 kg) were taken to India in 1959.

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

33. A copy of a letter from the Reserve Bank of India, Calcutta to L. V. Displatsboung, Tibet Government Trade Agent, Kolkata, dated 7th July 1945 mentions an import licence which allowed Tibet to import 12,044.096 fine Troy ounces of gold from the USA. In copy of this letter is preserved in the possession of the author.
during three months each year and manured by forced labour which was recruited from five large estates. The paper produced there was only used for banknotes and its sale to private persons forbidden. The monthly paper production is estimated at 3000 baius each containing between 500 and 1000 sheets of paper. Most probably this paper was produced from different raw material than the paper used for the first banknote series. In general one can observe that the paper used for the 25 Sang notes is much thicker than that used for the early 50 Sang notes and it tends to become thinner yet during the later years of issue, obviously in order to make the same amount of raw material last for larger number of banknotes.

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

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

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

35. Spencer Chapman visited Tubshi Lekhung in June 1936 or early 1957 and writes: "I had heard that owing to the fact that the paint on the paper notes will dry only during the three months of summer, the Tibetans are saved from the dangers of inflation; but this story attractive as it is, is not true." Memoirs of a Mountaineer. London 1945 (first published as "Memoirs: the Holy City", London 1938), p. 375. Chapman's informant most probably confused the banknote paper production with the printing of the notes.


39. One of the suppliers of colours to Tibet was John Duthens & Co. ltd. of Calcutta. An invoice of this company dated 11. 5. 1930 addressed to Poison Shabapha (for Shabapha who was Tibetan Government agent in Calcutta at that time) mentions the following colours: black, red, bright green, brilliant blue, prussian chrome, lemon yellow. Some of these colours were possible also used for printing post stamps which were produced in Tubsh Lekhung at the same time as the banknotes. (very thanks to Jigne Shabapha for kindly leaving me a copy of the Duthens invoice.)
At that time the Chinese silver dollar was exchanged for 1.566 Yuan Rennunmi or 3 Rupees. According to these exchange rate the value of the Rupee in paper Srang was 26.1 and the value of the Silver dollar 78.3 Srang. Twelve years earlier (in 1937) 50 Srang were worth 3.33 Mexican silver dollars in Sakyu. Taking the Mexican Dollar as being at par with the Chinese Dollar we can calculate that in 1959 the Tibetan paper Srang (in relation to the silver dollar) was 5.22 times worth less than in 1947.

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

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

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

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40. Xiao Hanxiu, op. cit., Chapter 7
42. Llewellyn Thomas: Tibet in General: Die letzte Rese nach Lhasa. (original title: Out of this World), Berlin 1953, pp. 24-27.
44. Xiao Hanxiu, op. cit., chapter 7
Plate I
48 Tana nang (red). Serial No. 17674. Date: T.I. 1659 (15th cycle)
Plate II
15 Tum note (violet). Serial Nr. 402. Date: E.E. 1659 (15th cycle)
Plate III

25 Tant (thrown) Serial No. 15383. Date: T.F. 1659 (15th cycle)
Plate IV
Sham (blue). Serial No. 25209. Date: E.E. 1659 (15th cycle)

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Plate V

So-Tam (red/yellow/blue). Serial No: 1008974. Date: T.5.1627 (1st cycle)
Plate VI
10 Srang (blue/red), Serial No. ga 020014. Date: T.E. 1693 (16th cycle)
Plate VII
Snang dدب্দ ཤི་ Serial No. la 000122. No. T.E. Date: (16th cycle)
Plate VIII
25 Srang (red/yellow/blue), Serial No. 43 035308.
Neither T.E. date nor cycle are indicated on this note.
Plate IX
108. Sechang (red/yellow/green/blue). Serial No. tha 4776
Neither T.E. date nor cycle are indicated on this note.
Plate X
Middle part of face side of unissued note of unknown date and denomination.
Late 1950ies.
CULTURAL HISTORY OF LADAKH

PART - I

-Mrs. Kamala Makkerjee

Ladakh, which is aptly known as western Tibet, is situated between 77°15' E to 75°15' E longitude and 32°15' N to 36° N latitude in the Trans-Himalayan region. It is strategically located at the junction of four or five important regions: Afghanistan-Turkestan on the North and North-West, China-Tibet on the North, Pakistan (since 1947) on the West, and India on the South. At 12000 feet, Ladakh with its capital Leh, is one of the highest inhabited plateaus in the world. Owing to its location, it served as an overland trade centre between Central Asian regions like Yarkhand, Kashgar, Khotan, Tibet as well as the Indian regions of Punjab and Naggar in bygone days. During the summer months ranging between July and October, caravans from all these regions arrived here after negotiating various mountain passes and the place would suddenly be turned into a veritable market for exchanging goods and commodities through the barter system. The lowest of the passes is Zoji-la which once comprised the boundary between Kashmir and Ladakh, and the highest ones are Naktal-la (18060 ft.) and Karakoram (18062 ft.). Besides being the only routes for transporting merchandise, these passes were veritable highways for cultural exchanges, linking people representing diverse cultural groups and thus helped in furthering mutual accommodation and assimilation of thoughts. These again were the routes through which invaders and plunderers galore made inroads into the mainland of India ever since the time of Alexander. Portuguese and Jesuit Fathers also traded their way to Central Asia, Tibet and the adjoining regions through these routes.

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

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

It has been rightly surmised that the broader dissemination of Buddhism began with the 2nd Buddhist Council which was held in 237 B.C. during the reign of emperor Ashoka.
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(Some Scholars phrase this to be the first council considering a convention held at Yashtil, under the reign of the king Kalashokha to be the second council). Priyadarshini Ashoka sent his Buddhist emissaries, scholars, and teachers to farflung countries like China, Korea etc. However, it was after the fourth council held during the reign of the Saka king Kannizka at Kashmir that the passes of Kajenog and Kuti bridging Nepal and Kashmir-as well as the old trade routes became once again active with Buddhist Pandit and Lamas traversing through them. Fa Hien, Hwan-Tsong and such other travelers from China came through these inaccessible routes. Kashmir remained as an important centre of Buddhist learning for ages long receiving zealous patronage from the kings, a fact corroborated by Kalhana's Rajastigat.

In the history of Tibet, the first great who introduced the Buddhist creed as the State religion was the accomplished ruler Songtsen Gampo who was a contemporary of King Harshavardhana Sihadiya of Kanauj, Prophet Muhammad of Mecca, Penn-Tsong and the Chinese emperor named T'ai jung. It was he who directed his minister Thonmi Sambhota to devise a script and grammar for the Tibetans language thereafter presiding over the gargantuan task of translating canonical and non-canonical works into Tibetan from their original Sanskrit and Pali.

Another great landmark in the annals of Tibet was during the reign of King Khros-rong-ldeu-bTsan when at the behest of the royal preceptor Pandit Santarakshita (Shi-ba-kTsho), the great Master of esotericism Guru Padmacchabava arrived at Tibet and firmly established the Buddhist religion after taming and overcoming the Bon-po priests and its votaries. In the year c. 196 A.D., Ral-Pa-Chen sat on the throne of Tibet. He was the younger son of King Khri-srong-ldeu-bTsan who in turn was the second son of King Khri-srong-ldeu-bTsan. Ral-Pa-Chen was a paragon of human excellence, a veritable blend of administrative skill, military valour, and devotion to the Dharmas. While his expansive ventures extended the territory of his kingdom far beyond the frontiers that he had initially inherited, he also patronised the Buddha Dharmas with such zeal that its reverberation could be felt throughout the length and breath of the kingdom. All these took sudden turn when one day, he was assassinated by his elder brother named Glang-darma who had been nurturing a deep-rooted hate for the king who had been by dint of his merit, their father's choice as the successor superseding his claims as the eldest son. The ascent of Glang-darma to the throne ushered in, an age of total anarchy. At his behest, monasteries were closed, religious ceremonies banned and monks were forced to give up their views of renunciation and celibacy and instead live life the lives of ordinary laity. His well garnered hate for the popular spread of Dharmas which he took to be the elementary factor behind his brother's successes turned to be his achilles' heel till at last, he was killed by a monk named Lha-lang-dPal-Gyi who masquerading as a dancer attired in black, in the year 841 A.D. Thus ended a saga of ruthless religious persecution. It took decades for the wounds inflicted by this apostate king to heal and much longer for the scars to disappear. Chaotic condition prevailed all over the country with the Bon precentage again returning back with vehement resurgence. The successors of Glang-darma proved to be weaklings and could not consolidate their authority over the kingdom. They lost their hold over the mighty empire thus had been built by the valiant Khri-srong-ldeu-bTsan. dPal-Khor-bTsang (975-923 A.D.) was the last king in this line who left Lhasa and migrated to western Tibet where he is famed to have brought the
three districts-Ladakh, sParang and Guge-under his suzerain control and later let his three sons rule over them. These kings and their descendants were custodians of the Buddhist faith and caused the translation of many Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. They also sent regular emissaries to Kashmir and the adjoining lands. Among these luminaries, the name of Ye-shes-hod-don-khyen known as Lha-blama shines exclusively for being instrumental in bringing the famed master Atisha Dipankar to Tibet. He relinquished his throne in favour of his nephew so that he could devote his time to religious matters. With the noble intention to introduce religious reformation in his country, this great prince invited Atisha Dipankar Srijana who hailed from the Vikramasila Vihar. Till his death in 1054 A.D., the Acharya traveled to many places and instilled discipline and faith among the monks, encouraging them to live ascetic life. He also taught many monks to dwell living more on practice and rigorous study. During the course of his journey in Tibet, he also met the great translator Rinchen-Zaspo or Ratnaprabha. The latter is believed to have been spiritually inspired by the Acharya and is famed for the establishment of 104 monasteries which was accomplished with manifold help form the royalty. Atiara Dipankar's multitudinous activities gave a fresh fillip to the dwindling spirit of the Buddhist faith in Tibet which gained universal acceptance and popularity. Based on the teachings of Asanga and Maitreya, he established a new order called Bka'-gdams-pa which received further impetus under the able stewardship of his principal disciple named Broma-sTobs-pa and other successive teachers and lineage holders. Atisha enjoined strict discipline among the monks and forbade the people from indulging in occult practices. Many siddhas and teachers flourished and fed the flame of Atisha's reformative tradition which never allowed the creed to be nullified by impurities of precept and practice. Reformers and teachers galore appeared on the horizon fired by the example set by Atisha, to purge the faith and its doctrine from vulgar dilutions. Among the teachers who belong to the earlier period of transmission, the names of Marpa and Mila-respa stand out distinctly. Marpa Lo-Tawa or Marpa the translator who was a disciple of Narpo of Magadha ushered in a new era of doctrinal dissemination based on the direct teaching of the Buddha. This new school was known as Bka'-gyud-pa and its doctrine was widely taught by his chief Mila-respa, the court-clad yogi. This school further developed into four major and eight minor schools in the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The 13th century saw the beginning of Sakya hegemony over Tibet when the high abbot of Sakya went to China on invitation by the Chinese emperor to become the latter's preceptor and returned to Tibet to be installed as the ruler of the country. The Mongol emperor or China Kublai Khan was now initiated into the Buddhist faith by Phags-pa, the Sakya hierarch who was allowed to rule Tibet as a theocracy. Thus, a new school of the Buddhist esoteric tradition called Sakya-pa was introduced whose doctrines were widely disseminated throughout Tibet. The rise of king Byang-chub-rgyal-chen in the 14th century eclipsed the power of the Sakye and ushered in a new dynasty which ruled for around three centuries till it was overthrown by the king of Tsang in 1635 A.D. The latter was in turn vanquished by the Mongol king Gojhi Khan who offered the spiritual and temporal sovereignty of Tibet to the great fifth Dalai Lama in year 1642 A.D. Meanwhile, dwelling

The three regions of western Tibet collectively known as Mnga-Ri-tsho-Kyi-Gsum consist of: (1) sDro-Rang, Marpo Yul & Zangmo-Kyi (2) Zhang Tsang, Khris-To-des-Mad (3) Yelam Mlam Li, Brn-Sha. sPal 'dul, rVod rGros Thig Me-dran-sMan-Mu
on the fourth important Buddhist school of Tibet, the great reformer Tsong-Kha-pa who was born in 1357 A.D. was much inspired by the tradition established earlier by Acaarya Atisha Dipamkara. He reorganised the monastic order and streamlined the curriculum of the monks laying great emphasis on learning based on logic, discipline and academic condition. He founded the dgon-pa monastery in the year 1409 A.D. and established the order known as dgon-pa-Chos-Phug-Pa School. The third hierarchy of this order named gsol-Nams rGya-mtsho who lived in the 15th century was conferred the title of Tale Lama by the Mongol emperor Altan Khan which in the Mongolian language meant the same as the Tibetan word rGya-mtsho or Ocean. The first hierarchy too was recognised in retrospect as the first Tale Lama and the subsequent successors were recognised as the Avars or re-incarnations of the Tale Lamas, a term which came to pronounced as Dalai Lama in the subsequent years.

The fate of Ladakh is western Tibet was more linked with Turkestan and central Asia during the early 13th century although Lhasa retained the religious pilgrimage centre and sanctuary of Buddhism. In 1207 A.D. during the reign of bka'-bral-shis-sGon, the Mongol terror Jenghiz Khan overran this region during his victory march and the king was compelled to surrender. Not much is known about the genealogy of the succession of kings following bka'-bral-shis-dGon. One of the later rulers who died in the year 1525 A.D. had his capital in Leh. He established a monastery and installed there in a huge statue of Maitreya Buddha and another of Avalokitesvara. His palace is in ruins though the monastery stands till this day. He seems to have been adept in warfare and annexed Baltistan, Gagge as well as some regions in the west. He is also reputed to have thwarted the invasion by Mirza Haider in 1549 A.D. In 1675 A.D. the next king Jamyang Nam-rGyal was captured by the Bali ruler Ali Mard and was forced to embrace the Islamic faith. Ali Mard gave his daughter in marriage to the royal caption and eventually allowed him conditional freedom. His Tibetan wife bore him a son named Serge Nyam-rGyal who shifted the capital to Bango. He was a powerful king and a patron of learning. Many Sanskrit texts were translated during his time and some books were printed in letters of silver and gold. He amassed a fortune through his conquests and even made an abortive attempt to conquer Lhasa. His son Delek too was a mighty king who quelled innumerable rebellions. The famous Tsegy monastery was built by him. He die in a disaster in the year 1645 A.D. This king died as Muslim predesty since he was forced to accept the Islamic faith after his defeat at the hands of the Mughals. He even built a mosque in Ladakh and remained the rest of his life in Kashmir. His son and successor Nyima Nam-rGyal established peace and once again paved the way for progress in various fields like art, literature and small industries like publication of manuscripts in calligraphy and even setting up a paper making factory. He also built memorials in the form of chortens or chos-lhun-men and monasteries in Zanskar, Rupsha and Nabro districts. Nyima Nam-rGyal who ascended the throne in the year 1705 A.D. died in 1734 A.D. bringing to a close three memorable decades of progress, peace and prosperity. Following his death, there were many rival claims by Muslims from Turkestan and Tibet. Ladakh lost huge tracts of pasturage and gold fields which secaraiously jeopardised as overland trade and commerce. Heavy war indemnities and taxes exacted by the conquerors further impoverished and desolated the inhabitants of Ladakh. Despite all such reverses, the Ladakhis staunchly held on to their faith by all Dharmic with fortitude and devotion. The downfall of the Mughal empire gave Ladakh some moments of
respite but the sanguinary designs of the Dogra chief Zorawar Singh for the conquest of Tibet once again blew the clouds of war over its sky. The Dogra ruler had to pay dearly with his life while clashing his sword with the Tibetan army.

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

After the partition in 1947, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union along with Jammu and Kashmir. The western part of Gilgit and Baltistan came under the domain of the Republic of Pakistan in 1944 and a portion of the eastern part of Aksai Chin was annexed by China in 1962. All these developments left their impact from the geo-political stance and enhanced the strategic importance of Ladakh which had to face the brunt of Pakistan's belligerence during the Indo-Pakistan war. Despite all such vagaries of events, the theistic faith of the people of Ladakh remained wholly intact and firm. Ladakh still remains a stronghold of the Buddhist faith. Monks as well as the laity still throng the precincts of the monasteries during festive occasions to absorb the lifting melody of the ritual symphonies, blending with the rich baritone of the chanting monks... which is proof of the fact that the Enlightened one still lives in the hearts of the people of Ladakh and His doctrine continues to pervade all the quarters of Ladakh.
GOMPAS ON THE WAY FROM SRINAGAR TO LEH

PART II

-Mrs. Kamala Mukherjee-

GOMPAS OF LADAKH

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

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

After crossing Zo-zila there is a halting place in Dras which is the second coldest place in the world. Two ruined statues known as Avalokiteswara and his companion can be seen with nearly obliterated rock carvings. North of this place reside Dards and Baltits converted now to Islam. Then comes Kargil now second city of Ladakh inhabited mainly by Muslim people of high and important position. After this comes the first Gompa 1) namely Shangole. Particularly from here the Buddhist region begins. It is a cave temple on a high hill, mainly of black stone except the front which is painted white. It means morning star (as it faces east). On the bank of Waka river built by a Tibetan lama of Drukpa sect who named it as Ma-Khang (House of the mother) now it belongs to Celingpa order or Yellow Hat Sect.

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

It was built by the famous lotasa (translator) Rin Chen bZang-Po during the reign of saint King Gyoge Ye-Shri-ful in 1054. In period climate it still exists after 1000 years, the face of the statue is fully wrought with contemplative mood.

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

After passing Naika-In (Flying Pillars) 12220' is Bodhi Kharbu with statue of Avalokiteswara now in ruins. This was once the capital of king Doden (1620-48) but defeated by the Muslim invaders. Then came Khaltse (means snowy mountain) with some
REPORT ON THE MAIN GOMPAS OF LADAKH

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

1. Lamayuru: Of all the gompas this is the oldest in Ladakh. At present this is the monastery of the Brigumpa community. The chief of this community lives in the monastery of Bhutan-teachings and appointments are done from there. It is said and written in old books too that here was a lake in the past. According to the legend, the illustrious Siddhacharya Naropa meditated in this cave during his life. The whole valley was a lake which Naropa is said to have drained by spell of mantra before founding this monastery in 990 A.D. On one side in the low land there is a loess of yellow earth indicating existence of lake in the past. By the side of Sring-car river in China such yellow sandy earth loess of this type are renowned. Sring-car is the oldest of the temples of this place, built somewhat in a style which resembles Tabo of Spiti; this again is thought to be built imitating Ajana. Below this old temple exists Yung-Dron temple of Bons (Yungdrung/ Swastika) - though the frescos are now illegible and spoilt. The sign of Swastika is well-known token of welfare among the followers of
2. Likhp: means Sarpmamandal (Kha-dkyl) or Akashbedis on way to Nycema after Saqpol (Saqpol) proceeding a little West from roads, or the north of Sindhu river near the old trade route but crossing the small river one has to climb a few steps. We followed the route for going to Khalsey from Basgo, the old route is a long round - about way. This was built at the time of La-chen Gni-Pore (1650-80 A.D.). It is learnt from the stone inscriptions that this is a gompah of the Gelugma community. The prayer hall has provision of sixty-seventy square seats. There are images and wall pictures around the walls of the room. Crossing three gateways and climbing steps at a height of 1400 ft. we were very tired. The Lamas accorded us receptions by uttering 'Jule Juley' (welcome) and showed us the hall. On one side of the altar we found a community emblem of the community of the present lama and a big board with a signature of the lama. The walls and wooden beams are full of decorative art works. All the pictures of ....... are of gods and goddesses of Mahayana Pantheon. There is statue of the first Dalai Lama Gedhun Kunzop (Gyalwa Rinpoche). The facial expressions of the lama preceptor and gods and goddesses are calm and noble. At the middle are retained 'Mendoci' or memorial memorials (Shupa) with relics of dead and famous Lamas e.g. nail, hair, teeth mixed with gold and silver. Images of gods and goddesses abound all around. A side road is some-
what dark, one has to use lamp even in day time. The manuscripts wrapped in cloth are
restrained in wooden shelves on one side apart from this there are big images of Sakyab thupa,
Maṣjuṣi along with many small images. The facial expression of them are pleasant and
compassionate. Outside are drawn pictures of Lord Buddha and Pothaka palace of Tāka
(main residential place of Dalālam amal). I was allowed to enter a small side-room, whatever I
could, I saw from outside. I learnt earlier and it also appeared to my mind that this room
probably contained weapons previously, maybe they are existing even now. In the past, if
invasion of outside enemies occurred, these weapons were preserved for defence.
Next we were taken to roof by the lamas. Snow capped Karakoram mountain ranges
were visible. The Kailash mountain sector was mentioned as 'Ti-Si' by the lamas. From
here the panorama all around is well visible. On the west lied the river Sindhu or Sengā
Khabab. The reachable and immovable property and the number of this Gompa
almost equal to that of Hemis. There is good demand of earthen pots and other objects
made of earth of this place. The sun is visible for long hours at the altitude of this place is
high.

3. Ačhi: To reach Ačhi one has to go from Saspole crossing the hanging bridge over
the river Sindhu. This was constructed about thousand years ago by the chief priest of the king
of Ladakh and famous translator Ṣhelṣe Zangpo. This is situated at seventy Kilometres
distance from Leh. The influence of Kashmir style is explicitly in its architecture. Six temples
are here. At the time of Kārga-Sen-Namgyal during 1590-1532 A.D. the temple at the middle
was renovated. We saw very costly and rare shawl with various fine needlework and
wooden objects with artwork of decorative flowers and plants. The chief temple is small
3mx3m. On the three sides walls of the room are retailed in innumerable images on the right
is a sittile of Avalokiteśvara. There are three images of three storey height made of earth in
a narrow lane. The images are painted in various hues. In 1985 A.D. the king of Ladakh
brought Kashmir artisans for wall painting or frescos. This was once a centre for study of
discipline and cultural aspects of Buddhism. Here is preserved the hand-written manuscripts.
Ladakh Chronicles' (Ladakh Gyalrab) - the history of kings of Ladakh are narrated here.
But now the condition of Ačhi is not good: the wall pictures are fading: they were getting
spoil with water of molten snow percolated form roof. Their weight is lesser and number of
lамas too is small.

4. Pe-Thub (Sπituk). The meaning is peak. This three storied Gompa is situated at five
miles distance from Leh on the southern bank of the river Sindhu near the aerodrome.
The Gompa is situated at height, it reach on it has got to use steps. Thukdul one has been renewed,
besides a new temple too has been constructed. The images are six hundreds years old and are
wrapped in cloth: the lamas unsecured them and showed to us. A large image of Mahakalā
cover by cloth is retained in the old temple, the cover is removed and shown to devotees on
festival days. Images of Tsongma, Chazarwa Kali etc. are there. Besides, there are few gift
images of Tara also. All the images are glittering - that means they are well looked after but
Sanakpa's image is the chief one. At the time of King Crag-Bumdila (1810-1840 A.D.) the
famous Sanakpa-pa sent two ambassadors. The incarnate lama of Khedak Bakula or Gelugpa
community reside here. He is the religious head of all Gelupa monasteries and temple of
Ladakh.

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

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

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

"These shown through display of play at dance and instrumental music besides, large and picturesque "Thanka" painted on silk or specially prepared paper are unwrapped and shown open every eleventh year. 1990 was one such year. On this occasion, the fair held for three-four days was attended by people from far and wide - many commodities are brought and sold. The name of Hemis is Byang-Chu Sam-ras-chin, it means 'thought of wisdom'. Seage
Nangyal (1596-1648), one of the Dunpa community Mohanta (chief) Tag-Sangra prepared it for the Chinese. Construction of this gompa started in 1002 A.D. and completed in 1642 A.D. This community followed the Druk-pa community of Bhutan. But some images of tenth and eleventh centuries from the ruins of Men or Menu gompa in Rupshu have been brought here. Hence, Menu is called "Mother of Heris".

GOMPAS AROUND LEH

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

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

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

(4) TSEMO-GOMPA - is on the top of a hillock, built in 1000 A.D. by the king Takapa Bumde. It's statue of Maitreya Buddha resembles that of statue at Markell (13.7 m) high with Manjusree on left and Avalokitesvara on right. It's built by Mahayana Buddhists.

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

There are gompas at Deskit and Tangtig in Rupshu by Celupga, Karjupa and Nyingmapa Sects also have some but most of them are only 100 years old.

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

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

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

1. SherGola
3. Avalokitesvara with 11 hands on each side of hands at Mulbek.
4. Lamayuru - the oldest gompa.
5. Phyang - Statue of Buddha
6. Likhir - Gompa
7. Spituk - (Near Airport)
8-9. Alichur - Wooden carvings of the gate and large statue of Avalokitesvara (standing) inside.
10. Way of Hemis Gompa
11. Front of Hemis
15. Gosang cave above Hemis.
17. Buddha statue in Sher Gompa.

Acknowledgement

1. Photographs 1-16: Taken by Shri Sushanta Chattopadhyay of Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.
2. 17-18: Were taken by Ms. Sunanda Banerjee.
3. 2 Decorated Covers from a newspaper.
SHER-GOLA
The 1st Buddhist Gompa of the East after Kargil.
No - 2

Towards Mulheik
Maitreya Buddha (Venturi)
Mulheik Rock carving

No - 3

Avalokiteswara
Lama-yurn
The oldest gompa
Phyang Gompa
Buddha Statue.

No - 6

(Phyang Gompa) It was later, drained by Stongpa, to build the Temple.
No. 8
Al-deh Compa
Wood carving on gate.

No. 9
Acchokiteswara in Al-Chu
Way to Hemis

Front of Hemis
No. 12

The famous Thanka - Shown every 11th year

No. 13

Figure of Heusubs
Tikse

No - 17

Shey Gompa
Buddha Status
NOTES AND TOPICS
Lama Choda was born at Namok Village to a humble farmers family. He had an interest in the Buddhist doctrine from his early childhood. When his family moved to North Sikkim he enrolled himself as a novice monk at Labrang Monastery. He spent most of his childhood as a monk learning to read and write the Buddhist Sutras. When he had mastered the basic sutras he came to Gagtok where he met the venerable Bremiok Rimpochhe and under him he spent to learn the more advanced masters and sutras. He spent a number of years under venerable Bremiok Rimpochhe and mastered most of the advanced masters and sutras. He then shifted to Ghanam and took to studying the tantras under the venerable Ugen Tenzing Rimpoche. Under Ugen Tenzing Rimpoche he learnt the secret tantric practices and got the empowerment to various tantric rituals. He also took lessons in advanced practices from venerable Khayche Thonka Rimpoche. To learn more of the advanced Zogden doctrine he went to Tibet and became the disciple of the famous tantric yogi Thoblay Sakya Siri under whom he mastered the six outer and inner Yogas. He also received empowerment to the secret tantra of Rig-dzin-strog-ge-abs-kyi-chos. After the death of Thoblay Sakya Siri he continued his studies at Cho-bu-ri under the chief disciple of Sakya Siri named Thiplay Rimpoche. He spent many years at Cho-bu-ri and mastered the Dangchen teachings. He then came to Tari and got further teachings from venerable Khayab-gzues-dupchen Rimpoche. At Tari he mas-
tered the art of generating psychic body heat which allowed him to meditate on snow covered mountain peaks naked without feeling cold. He also mastered the art of Tsul-lung which allowed him to travel hundreds of miles per day without feeling tired. He went on a pilgrimage to all the holy sites in Tibet and then returned to Sikkim. After his arrival in Gangtok he went for meditation at Lachenma for several months and then to Tsoke where he spent several years in meditation. He then went for a pilgrimage to Pathang and met venerable Chogyel Trampa Rinpoche who taught him some tantric practices. After his return from Pathang he went for pilgrimage to Tibet and also to Bhutan where he visited the holy sites of Bhumthang, Kargay and Paro. From Bhutan he went to Kham where he learnt the secret practice of Chod from the venerable Chamy Rangshye Rinpoche. After finishing his studies at Kham he returned to Sikkim and spent some time learning from the venerable Yathang Rinpoche. He again retired to meditation in a cave above Churang Lake for several months. From there he went to Yathang in Chumbi Valley and spent two years in meditation.

He then returned to Gangtok and went to Lingduam where he meditated for several months. He returned to Gangtok and spent some time receiving teachings from his Holiness Dhuj.MMrimpoche.

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

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

-N. Dorjee

The hidden valley of rice called 'sBas-yul-bBras-Mo-I-jongs' discovered by the Great saint Heruka-pa Lha-bTsun Nam-mkhan 'hjigs-med or popularly known as 'Gyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo in the early 17th century was the land blessed and graced by Mahā Guru Padmasambhava or known as the second Buddha as a Paradise on earth or a heavenly shelter for the grieved ones in the cruel world of the future is the same that we now call 'Sikkim', the youngest state of the Indian Union. 'Gyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo's entry into Himalayas from Tibet and his great discovery of Sikkim, as per the Mahā Guru Padmasambhava's prophecy, marks the beginning and spread of Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly known as 'bDyas-Unga rZogs-Chen 'byung-gna, in Sikkim and also the establishment of Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim.

rGyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo, along with two other lamas, namely mNga-'dus- ’bDag Semsa-pa Chhenpo and Kathog Rgyal ’Bzin Chhenpo, built many monasteries and lhakhangs (small shrines) in Sikkim after the consecration of the first Dharma king of Sikkim, Chogyal Phuntsek Namgyal at Yaksam, by the above three lamas in 1604. The first monasteries established by rGyalwa Lha-bTsun Chhenpo were sDrep-pa The monastery, gSangs-Ngags Chhos-glIng monastery and Padma Yangs-rTse monastery in the West Sikkim. The monasteries first built by mNga-'dus-pa and Kathog pa were bTra-Shi IDing monastery in the west and Kathog monastery in the east respectively. Further, in the course of time many more monasteries were added, including the monasteries of Karma Kagyu sect. Thus, now, one will see a monastery or a small shrine almost on every top of a hill, particularly in the western part of the state.

The present number of monasteries and lhakhangs in Sikkim exceeds 160, besides an almost equal number of mandirs and a few other religious institutions.

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

Besides, Padma Yangs-rTse monastery, the other big and important monasteries of Sikkim are bTra-Shi-I-Thing monastery in the west, Ralang monastery in the south, RumsTega monastery in the east, Pho-dang monastery and Phun-bZang monastery in the north. The present position of the above six monasteries may be described as below for the benefit of those interested:

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

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

R-tra-Shi lhing monastery is located in between the hills of Pemayangtse and Ralong.
This place is believed to be the centre of Sikkim from the religious point of view. On this heart
shaped wonderfull hill top, there are two main buildings called Choqyal lha-khang and Guru
lha-khang. Choqyal Lha-khang is the main monastery of Tashiding built originally in the 17th
century. This is the monastery in which the famous Holy Water is opened for public audience
once in year on the 15th of 1st Tibetan month, which usually corresponds to March. The
Chorten Tromwanagho, the most famous Chorten of Sikkim, renovated about three years
ago is also located at this holy place.

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

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

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

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

To sum up, the monastic establishments in Sikkim have played, and to some extent still
play, an important part in the welfare of the Sikkimese Buddhist people. Till the recent popu-
larity of modern education in Sikkim the monasteries were the only institutions imparting
education and lamas the only teachers. At present, however, the monasteries fulfill the reli-
gious and spiritual needs of the people as modern education has taken over the function of
vocational preparation. In future the monasteries in Sikkim might attract Buddhist scholars
from outside and thus acquire a new significance.
Bкра-Ши-Динг (TASHIDING)

-N. Dorjee

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

In the early 17th century, when Sikkim was formally discovered or opened for human habitation by three Lamas in association with Maha Guru Padmasambhava’s blessing and prophecy, mNagd-bdag Senpa Chhenpo, one of the three Lamas, moved to Bкра-Ши-Динг and began the propagation of his doctrine of Buddhist Dharma called mNagd-bdag-Sug-Lugs with the founding of a small Gompa (monastery), which later on served as the nucleus of the present complex.

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

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

This Monastery, with about 180 Lamas is autonomous in all respects and meets its expenses out of the monastery’s own revenue and public contributions, under the general control and supervision of the Department of Ecclesiastical Affairs of Sikkim Government. It also receives substantial aid from the Government from time to time. The main function of the year in this monastery is the ‘Bhamechhu’ ceremony which is celebrated for all practical purposes, as a ‘Mela’ on the 15th day of the first Tibetan month every year. Bumnu the super-natural sacred pot with holy water is officially sealed for safety by the Government and kept on a Golden Alter in the main hall of monastery (Choegg Lhakang). This super-natural pot is believed to have originally flowed to this place from an unknown

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

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

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