BOOK REVIEW


*Grounding Knowledge/Walking Land* is an archaeological research dealing with ethno-historical identity of Central Nepal. This monograph published by McDonald Institute is authored by Christopher Evans with Judith Pettigrew, Yarjung Kromchay Tamu and Mark Turin. The monograph also includes the contributions of Dorothy Allard, Eleni Asouti, Paul Craddock, Dorian Fuller, David Gibson, Alan Macfarlane and Exra Zubrow and illustrations by Craine Begg and Andrew Hall.

This work deals with a high mountain archaeology carried out by the international efforts of multidisciplinary and scientific investigation of ancestral ethno-cultural crib of Tamu’s (Gurung) community in Kohla around the lap of Annapurna range. This joint endeavour of intercontinental alliance with local community for high mountain archaeology was implemented with common effect on interfacing from the ground of ethno-cultural investigation.

This co-operative feat was conscientiously shared with proficient effort but amid of futile effect. Those consequences were pedestal on legends and fantasies for exploring now and then, for their quarries were conscientious on cultural yarns and local beliefs. Thus, their impetus was motivated by interrogative explorations. This schedule is apparent from authors’ citation:

The theme of this book does not relate to the ‘deep-archaeology’ in conscience for ethnographic presence alone, but of ‘communities realized in time’. Beyond these, two other themes run all the way through the structural segment of this text. One relates to ‘walking land’. This is appropriately focusing upon its journeys, not only for the narration of Tamu-mai, but also for the trail-based archaeology, in which this project’s treks was involved (p.3).

The second rationale for this venture was underlying on threading of different local voices like ‘knowledge’ for exploring the other side of shamanic, anthropological and archaeological standpoints as sources. This field work...
was transpired by this team as the backdrop of the Annapurnas, among the highest and most celebrated mountains in the world. Their peaks provided the sense of framework both to the region’s history and their researches at altitudes. The project team asserts that this work certainly involved in altitude working, but this volume does not celebrate mountaineering expeditions rather loll at its core, that is, ‘collective walking with a purpose’. Thus, this hardback is named accordingly. Although this Kohla project seems certain regarding the rationale of the study because:

The formal methodologies (science), lay ahead with shamanic knowledge, but these do not always simply dovetailed with issues of interpretative authority and are not necessarily avoided for merely providing ‘many voices’.

This approach to the text was not adopted as any kind of knowingly ironic or post-structuralized strategy, as confessed by the authors even though, this joint venture seem ambitious to arbitrate the primitive evolution of the tribal consequence. The problem of the case study was based on the evaluation of stories, largely a matter of king lists, but some come to intermesh with local ethnic and a clan histories i.e., the oral tradition. Thus, the author envisages the problem with so judging history is its own judgment. In the long term, all the proponents have variously been colonized and colonizers. By whatever means, the Tamu-mai did arrive the region and the land was surely then not entirely ‘empty’, just as the original impetus for the region’s later Hindu(ized) overlords was their own displacement due to Muslim incursions into northwestern India. The Himalayas have been like a still hub, around and through which, overtime, the great religious cultures of the world have flowed. Therefore, in order to frame the project’s researches, the relevant ‘axes of history’ were outlined in this volume. With in the sweep of history, theses axes have all pushed towards the ‘centre’. From this background, three main dating horizons are mentioned as the particular relevance for the study area:

1. The influence of Tibetan Buddhism and culture in Mustang from the tenth century;
2. The establishment of Hindu (ized) principalities during the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries;
3. The conquest of the region and unification of Nepal by the forces of Gorkha during the alter eighteenth century.
They studied Kohla was clearly a village (with associated hamlets) and, Yangjakot, is a settlement of comparable density—a village. The epistemological term of ‘the village’ has been persuasive variously by epitomizing communities and ‘folk types.’ (e.g. Maine 1871; Gomme 1890; Dewey 1972). Yet, from archaeological perspective, ‘villages’ can be viewed within a more fluid spectrum of settlement types, ranging, on the one hand, from camps to hamlets and, on the other, to towns and cities. Author deemed, Kohla has attributes that fly in the face of such easy ‘village-as-type’ identification, particularly the fact that it hosted ‘kings’. (P.12). Thus, social hierarchy was explored with the relevant cases of the Ghale Raja (in Tamu, Klye Mru) —kingly lineage coming down from the north—as they reflect upon the idea of ‘out-side’ or ‘stranger kings’ (Cf. Helms 1988). The complex social matrix of villages and contemporary politics, were noticed here a deeper resonance as also apparent. As understood, villages have their poorer—usually in Nepal the Blacksmith and Tailor castes— as well as wealthier households. What has clearly occurred in the case of the recent Maoist movement is a particular understanding of the village economy/community; one opposed to the urbanism of Pokhara and Kathmandu (p.13). The difference lie is the extent that the impact of ‘nature’ tells of closer relations to land in Nepal. This equally reflects the degree to which the village is a hub of social (and emotional) life and, with it, the relative importance of face-to-face relations. Consequently, working as in this project, one cannot but reflect on archaeological interpretation, making things seem far more real and less distantly academic (p.13).

This volume on mountain archaeology is connected with ethnographic-chronological survey for standing on flight for Tamu’s (Gurung) olden ‘tribal’ (clan?) cradle in the central and adjoining zones of mid-Nepal. It comprises with ‘first’ and ‘thick content’ as the footage on almost a decade long investigation of Annapurna moorland in Nepal. This joint expedition has piloted for bringing mainly with a report of Christopher Evans and other international experts affiliated with the exploration of 1995. This speculation had predicted with archaeological chattels under the ethnographic scrutiny. This was made by outfitting with social anthropologists, educationists, health scientists including local experts for exploring those olden structural premises of Tamu’s Kohibo by employing special observation (walking, writing and seeing). Basically, this pack of study was linked with anthropological and shamanistic reflections which were entwined with rudimentary inquisitions rewarded by stopping over at the local sites for audition and authentication. This appraisal was made for recording those
bygone sites of forts and settlements from the onset of project’s itinerary. This trail was striving to extort with those astonishing ruins of Kohla-Sombre – Kohla, the ancestral settlement of ‘The Three Villages’ – of the Tami-mai (Gurung) community, serving as a host of this project. Previously, they were demanding with stirring at investigation on their legendary ancestry for scientific validation. Their luridly contented spirits were reflected within the text. Tamu’s ethno-cultural sacraments were primly set by this communal speculation. For which, this jaunt was initiated by praying of ‘pye’, optimistically promising for good wishes and anticipating fine results during the expedition. This yearning rite was made for obtaining the upbeat fortuity in walking route and for the detection of place-names as the preliminary check up. This exploring team had begun to lineup for Yangjakot village from the early point of Pokhara.

It set up with the home ground efforts on reviewing the couch of ‘Kot’ implicating as ‘guard-room, prison, station.’ Perhaps, a ‘court’ was relevant to Ceremonial Square in cultural and religious practices. The term Kot (ancient court or square) is viewed in cultural practice. This survey is occupied within the archaeological axis of the past, ethnographic grounding of village communities, which is taking back to the olden ‘tribe’ of Tamu. But their edifying correlation was examined through the unfilled locale settings and the remaining architectures. Accordingly, this team has splurged these regions by congregating the locals. Their interrogation went on deep with Pachyu Shamans of Warchowk and Bachowk from April of 1995 making the inquiry about Kohla, the ancestral committal of Tamu. They began to learn with the edifices of settlements and space for evaluating the Tamu-mai domiciles and communities were further assorted with local potteries and residuals of worked out stones with the upland settlement systems. This team had also explored with greatly set multidisciplinary experts tolerant to accept the virtual help from locals during the execution of Kohla in April 2000. This venture was the fifth endeavor on this archaeological appraisal for excavation categorized by six phases (p.3):

I. 1992: TPLS trek outlined major Hindu pilgrimage routes up to Muktinath in the northwest as mentioned in chapter 2;
II. 1994: Survey of Kohla and other sites at Karapu and above as mentioned in chapter 3;
III. 1995: In the months of March /April, the survey of sites in the immediate hinterland above the villages of Yangjakot and Warchowk, with ethno-archaeological study at the latter as mentioned in chapter 3;
IV. 1995: In September made with reconnoitering trek into Mustang and Manang is mentioned in the chapter 4;

V. 2000: In April the work of excavation was carried out at Kohla as mentioned in chapter 5;

VI. 2002: In December, Shamans’ meeting was held in Pokhara as mentioned in chapter 5.

Mid-Nepal’s high-mountain archaeology is conscientious with ambitious excavation for tracking with the primeval cultural string, in this perspective. This project is admitting with experts and experienced locals from different fields’ viz., archaeologists, shamans, porters, pastoralists etc. They were aptly engaged with apposite construal for landscaping with this joint effort, virtually sharing with traction for digging. This task was succeeded by upbringing of specific methodologies for liberating from abrupt connection. Christopher Evans has provided explanation about it in this hardback. A minor proviso emerges in reader’s mind while evaluating this text, which is persistent from the writer’s phrase as well:

Questionably, if this allows archaeologists to ‘go off’ on their own, although, there was noticeably latent with interpretative discrepancy, on the Kohla’s excavations cut short by political events, this never transpired within this project. While a benefit, in that it allows for greater coherence of approach, it in effect means that insufficient archaeology was undertaken to significantly challenge ‘the present’. Yet enough was done to disturb and there is no easy fit between the past/present ‘stories’ (p.125).

Nevertheless, this work is well elucidating on the ladder of excavation in Kohla 2000; with horizontal trenches. This implementation has edified as the original work of this kind in the field of Himalayan archaeology of Nepal, leaving behind with the ample scope and risk for complexity of the depth and indefinite stratum. Therefore, as mentioned by C. Evans, they had ‘no wish to open large areas, instead, concerted upon section-controlled sondage exposures’. At least, through this excavation, a case of Tamu settlement was tested with one of the structures of twenty-seven buildings of simple square-planning that were taken for excavation in the opposed quadrant method. Beyond this, in order to seize with the dynamic evidence of the settlement’s terraced hill-side lay out, trenches were extended along both of the north-south and east-west slopes from the structure’s central axes. The building,
however, is slightly interlinked with its two instant ‘neighbors’ (structures 15 & 28, trenches IV-VI). The north-south trench-line was found more widespread (trenches I-III, VII-IX). Eventually, this endured more than 60 meters and covered 8 cubic meters sloping down from the crest of northern hill to the southern central courtyard located as a plaza. This hilly incline was also consistent with structures of 23 and 25 but the interiors of which cutting were not trenched; only their peripheral hedges and foundation were uncovered in order to avoid redundant disturbances emerge to their floor stratum. Finally, a small sondage was cut at the foundation of the large standing stone within the southern central courtyard, to prove whether it was embedded from obsolete phase in this case. In this fieldwork about 121 contexts were excavated with detection of forty-eight recorded structural features. This sub-soils consist of heavy tan/brown clays and not bedrock somewhat inconsistently. Some distinct layers were recovered, which proved to be quite trivial in order, with no more than 0.75 meter of stratum encountered in this field. This locale is largely covered with acidic topsoil that has clearly impacted on bone survival. Aside from animal teeth and burnt bone, the few faunal remains recovered were only very small and decayed.

Some chapters of this book are wannabe with geophysical scheme as the setting of this issue. This work is impressive with the diary style of archaeological record in general perspective. In this regard, Christopher Evans and his team scholars have reported somewhat beyond to the ‘just’ recounting of the field work setting (in ch. III, p.61). This volume displays the linguistic archaeology of Tamu culture. Obviously, interviews were implemented in 2001 with ninety shamans from the vicinity of the area explored by this team. The opinion poll of five hundred and nine queries in Tamu idiom is predictable for the routine rituals of Tamu (Pailaba) prying local pye (pp.45 to 59) in Kohla. This liturgical rite deals with the story of Lemato performed as the last episode with appropriate chant of pye by a local ritual specialist.

Judith Pettigrew introduces the Kohla project (p.59) referring to as initiated with impulse of brain storming with a local Mr. Hom Bahadur Tamu. They considered this project as the successful example of multi-disciplinary collaboration between community activists, foreign and Nepali archaeologists, social and linguistic anthropologists. Multi agencies and professionals were activated for realistic collaborations with their relatively rare lines of investigation, which has not taken place in such scale, previously, in Nepal. The Kohla project has opened up with the ways of working for local communities, archaeologists and anthropologists. They
were plotted to exhibit potential route for ethnic communities to collaborate with government archaeologist in this field of study (p.59).

The second chapter deals with expedition to Kohla, recollecting substance of Pye, on foot route and place names. This reviewer relates his acquaintance with archaeology by recording the dairy of shaman mulling over with socio-cultural connection of Tamu communities i.e., findings, technical links with tales of ‘the two sisters’, and ‘on the origin of Klye (Ghale) tribe’. This project is unique for the detection of ethno-cultural investigation particularly by defining archeological cradle of Tamu under the basis of oral tradition.

The third chapter is jointly written by C. Evans assorting the contributions of Dorothy Allard and David Gibson. It deals with ‘A Trailside Archaeology-Survey Results’ of this project by verifying comprehensively with the descriptions of trekking route to Kohla. It discusses the environs of the area under survey for dynamic scaling of landscapes, villages, forts, uplands with sporadic interviews of Pachyu shamans including Tamu-mai houses for assessing with their potteries and worked stones.

The fourth chapter “Approaching Kohla” is prepared by C. Evans with Elene Asouti, Paul Craddock, Doran Fuller, David Gibson, Alan Macfarlane and Ezra Zubrow. This section is exclusive for explaining the excavation procedures, findings, worked stones, pottery, archaeo-botanical evidences, dating, interviews, hunter’s perspective, with insets of pastoralist activities and shelters, followed by reports on discussions and layout sequences. This chapter reveals the ‘old’ economy, attribution, abandonment and resourcing by leaving Kohla-some thoughts for fieldworks on populating highland-cultural demography with shamans. This consequence is elaborated with sections of trekking route through Manang and Mustang further towards the north with specimens of the Kak Nyingba petroglyphs as rock art, as portion of which was recorded by the Nepal –German surveying team that involved more than 770 individual motifs and included 48 anthropomorphic figures riders on horse/yak back, weapons, cup-marks and various pre-Buddhist and Buddhist symbols.

The concluding but fifth chapter deals with landscape, histories and narrative trails solely by C. Evans under the contexts of kinship mulling over the setting and recollecting (and forgetting) with inset of shamanic equipment-fighting sets, provenance, serialization of landscape for detecting historicity of those settlements of the past, present and new orthodoxies (p.199).

It would be worthwhile highlighting the outcomes of the book in the following points:
1. Kui choh ruins of a small fort are associated with settlement and Karapu, of Nadr-Pa above Warchowk as a palace with two impressive two-celled building with a circular hermit (p.81).

2. Nadr-Pa ruins indicates the disturbed site in extent caused by pastoralist activity, which as Karapu, where Tamu-mai oral ‘texts’ state substantial villages existed, but only a few traces of them remain with a Chuni-holden set into end of main village-site wall and significant with the central cup marked boulders.

3. The upland sites of Tapron or Taprang–Tapro Mhijya of the Yarjun’s Pye (ch. 2, Line 176) are formally named as Kohla’s ruins that have been so-identified by other Tamu-mai sources (p.87).

4. The planning of Khoido, might have been a separate hamlet identified by the ruins of contemporary Khuindo with standing stone centre and the box-shrine at the footing of meadows.

5. Chromo and Michu survey plans reveal the ‘toll station’ by the elevation of Chikre structure of Chikre-toh at the cliff-edge location (p.94).

6. Kohla (28°22.757'/84°11.111';3350m. a.s.l.) consisting of 55 buildings, the ruin extending over 6.5 ha, is identified with the site’s name, Kohla sopre/ sopreye – ‘Kohla, the Three Villages’ distinct as ‘quarters’ considered as ‘hamlet like’ in scale. Thus, those sites were excavated in three different sections i.e., the central I, extending over 1.3 ha, evidenced with putative King’s house along with large square with erected stone were explored by this team. Kohla West II, with six building structures at western side was explored with architectural details of Ghale Raja’s palace from the structures of no. 1 to no. 6. Kohla East is the III site exposed from the structures of 49 and 50, taken as sub-site located on the c.5-10 m-high scrap-edge above the main settlement, as hamlet. They are relatively dispersed with the two southernmost buildings structures 47 and 48 lying at somewhat of a remove on a lower terrace, some 5 m below the rest (p.101).

7. Excavation of Kohla, work was concentrated on 27 structures. A simple square building was dug in opposed quadrants scheme, in order to comprehend the dynamics setting. This was evidently the settlements of terraced hill-side lay-out, where trenches were extended along both north-south and east-west slopes from the central axes. The sub-soil consists of heavy tan/brown clays and not bedrock. This was discrete from stratigraphic horizons recovered with no more than 0.75 m. of strata encountered with acidic top-soils having visible impact of
bone survival. Some animal teeth and burnt bone, the few faunal remains recovered were only very small decayed.

8. The structure no 27 was dug out with doorway threshold, within a quadrant trench IV that stretched further to the east face of structure 15; C. It continued with raised F. 2 bench set along base of the northern wall right and hearth F. 28 that lean against western wall; D, trenches V and VI. These are illustrated and revealed by the archaeological setting of this site. The F. 3 circular (0.3 m. dia.), 0.2 - 0.3 m. deep, posthole excavation of trench III were filled with dark grey loam with charcoal. Apart from these four grouping of postholes numbers F. 3, F. 4, F. 5 and F. 6 and three other definite postholes were exposed but not excavated (F 56-F58).

9. Amongst major findingsof the excavation the sheer quantity of the pottery recovered were outlined by Gibson as range of decorative styles and frameworks, of wheeled and handmade methods, are suggested from the settlement, which had extensive trade/exchange links (p.139). Some fragments of the latter were fortunately present in environment samples returned to Britain were able to have analyzed.

10. Some illustrated small findings are enlisted with:
Bronze (a) bowl fragment (<14>[066].Tr.IX), (b) object with flattened circular end with round shaft; miniature spatula (<6>[029].Tr.VII), Silver (c) ribbed earring or bracelet fragment (<37>[099], tr. VII), Beads (d) hexagonal drilled stone (?coral;<17>[005]A..Str.27), (e) Coral (<2>[004], tr.II), (f) Turquoise (<4>[009], tr.III), (g) Coral (<15>[002]A.Str.27), (i) Turquoise (<13>[066], tr. IX ), (j) Clay/Ceramic fired, either gaming piece of metalworking related (<25>[080], tr.VI), (k) Perforated pottery disc (<1 6>[095], tr.III; F.36), Stone (l) whetstone (<34> [095], tr.III; F.36), (m) counter/gaming token (<32>[095]. Tr.III; F.36), (n) Worked rock crystal blade (<29>[095], tr.III; F.36).

11. Worked stone, it consists of a rick-crystal blade and chert flake (scraper?) attesting at the pre-medieval activity; a rectangular piece of blue quartz may somehow utilize (or curate). Otherwise, apart from a whetstone, majority of these findings consist of various kinds of rubber/grinding stones, though one slab-like piece may have been from a quern. Two longer pieces appeared implement-like; one being akin to a pick, and the rounded end of the other could suggest a mortar-pounding function. Two rather adze-suggestive pieces,
smoothed on all side, could also indicate mortar-related pounding or grinding.

12. Pottery Kohla 2000 excavation season number 1275, is attributable to post-depositional factors as mentioned by David Gibson (p.141). The pottery from the excavation revealed five further fabric types in addition to those identified in the preceding survey seasons.

I. Pale buff/orange/brown with a smooth feel; slightly greyer core, with occasional mica inclusions up to 1mm.
II. Pale buff/orange with a smooth feel; dark grey core and grayish margins, with grog tempering with frequent burnt - or leached-out inclusions.
III. Pale orange/buff with a rough feel; large mica inclusions up to 0.7 mm. and occasional organics.
IV. Mid-grey with a hard feel; occasional small inclusions including mica and identified grey material.
V. Brick-red with a hard smooth feel; well-fired with frequent grey inclusions (no mica) and occasional leached or burnt-out organics (p.141).
VI. The result of the excavation complemented the results of the survey. Fabrics B, F and G were not found at Kohla, being identified only at lower-altitude sites (p.143).

13. Archaeo-botanical evidence of this excavation 2000 is specified by Eleni Asouti & Dorian Q. Fuller (p.144). This site is located in the transitional zone, between the upper mountain forests of western Nepal, characterized by rhododendrons, yew, fir, and hemlock and the remaining of wood charcoal data from the site is congruent with the environment at the period of occupation. Five bulk samples from charcoal-rich contexts were collected during the 2000 excavation. The volume and weights of the samples were recorded and they were sieved into standard size classes to aid analysis (>4 mm. 1-2 mm. 0.5-1 mm. <0.5 mm.). All fractions of greater than 1 mm. were sorted under an incident light microscope, with identification between 6X and 40X for the separation of seed. Finding of seed samples are tabulated in the over hall weight and volume of samples, and also the weight of the >4mm. was targeted for microscopic analysis and identification of wood charcoal from the morphological features. The Charcoal material was sub-sampled by counting from >4 mm. fractions to be examined a total of 100 fragments. The dry-sieved fractions of the archaeo-botanical samples were examined for tracing with the rare taxa in the
assemblage. Charcoal fragments were fractured by hand and/or pressure (with carbon steel razor blade), in all three anatomical planes (Transverse, radial Longitudinal, Tangential Longitudinal), and these were examined under a high-power Olympus BHMJ microscope at magnifications of X50, X100, X 200, and X 500 (p.144). This is provided with a sound basis for attempting identification of the examined charcoal specimens to the genus and/or family level. This was followed by selected specimens from toxin examination under the SEM (Scanning Electron Microscope), in order to verify with the botanical identification.

14. Food, seeds and flowers and other non-wood finds were extremely small in number, they included a range of grain crops and a couple of recognizable fruits from Kohla 2000 plant remains (p.145) viz., (a) Triticum grains from tr.VI [080], (b) rice husk from Str. 27 [003], (c) Hordeum vulgare from Str.27[005], (d) Setaria Italica from Str. 27[005],(e) Fagopyrum from Str. 27[003], (f) Avena Sativa from Str. 27[003], (g) Prunus persica endcarp from tr.VI [080]; (h) Corbus type pit from tr.VI [080]. (i) flower from F. 28 [094].

In conclusion, we can tell that this book is instructive under the technological consequence of implementing with high mountain archaeology in Nepal. It serves with the latest information about the significant artifacts extracted from respective sites. Although they were not corresponding to the prehistoric layers of cultural sequence, it definitely produced with the significant historic remaining of ethnographic setting from the high mountain region of mid-Nepal. Thus, this book is useful for the libraries, students, researchers and teachers of Nepalese ethnology, archaeology, social and cultural anthropology, geography and of course, useful for the cultural tourism.

– Milan Ratna Shakya