

## ETHNO-HISTORICAL NOTES ON NUBRA IN LADAKH

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Little information is available on the Nubra area, which forms the largest part of Ladakh, from researchers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century whose works have contributed so much to our ethno-historical knowledge of Ladakh.<sup>2</sup>

As far as the geo-physical data is concerned we are well equipped with it. Groundwork in this regard was done by Cunningham whose work on Ladakh<sup>3</sup> is still a valuable source. Nubra, which means western (tib. *nub*; lad. *nup*: West) area differentiates itself from the rest of Ladakh by its wide open valleys and the grand magnitude of the mountain ranges.<sup>4</sup> In the north Nubra is separated from the sandy deserts of the Tarim Basin by the Mustagh-Karakoram ranges. Across the Karakoram Pass (5,577 meters) led once the trade route to Yarkand. An alternative to this route, was via Aksai Chin. Sir Aurel Stein, among other travelers, traveled via this latter route, of which W.H Johnson (1864-65) had first drawn a map.<sup>5</sup> The north-eastern part of Nubra extends into the Ligzi-thang and Aksai Chin areas. In the south the Ladakh range divides the Shyok valley from the Indus river valley.

**The Shyok river**, which flows for the greater part through this region, has its source in the Remo Glacier. Flowing southwards it is joined by the Chip-Chap and the Chang-Chenmo rivers. After this the Shyok curves and continues its flow in a north-westerly direction. This change also marks the beginning of the major settled area of Nubra. At Diskit (bDes-kyid), where the civil headquarters are located, the Yarma river (better known under the name Nubra river) joins the Shyok. The Shyok, after leaving the Chorbat area, enters Baltistan where it joins with the river Indus.

The vegetation is lush along the Shyok where the river bed is relatively wide. The higher regions however present similar irrigation difficulties as in the rest of Ladakh so that cultivation and vegetation is only possible where water is made available through canalizations. Precipitation is very low and therefore all the water sources are from melted snow. During the summer barley and wheat as well as vegetables are grown. The altitude of the cultivated area is lower than other regions of Ladakh thus making double cropping possible.<sup>6</sup> Apricot, apple and walnut are the fruit trees that are found in this area. In the settled area one finds poplar and willow while juniper grows even above the tree line zone.

Despite territorial extensiveness of Nubra the population is a meagre 10,771 out of an approximate total of 140,000 (132,299 according to 1981 census) in the whole of Ladakh. The majority of the population constitutes of Ladakhi buddhists. After 1971 a number of Muslim villages were added to the Chorbat area. The Muslim population, mainly restricted to the Chorbat area, is approximately 2,800 and belongs to the Balti ethnic stock.

### EARLY HISTORICAL PHASE

Due to the lack of scientific historical evidence for the period prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century one has to rely upon mythic lore and other oral traditions. Evidence such as rock carvings and ruins of castles or fortifications provide further indication as to

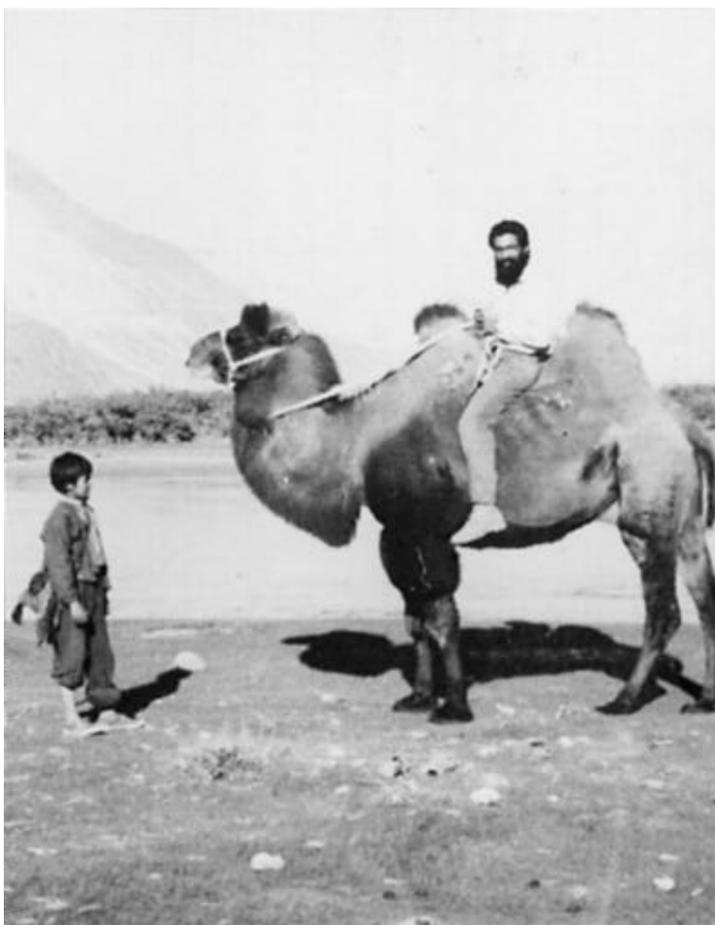


Photo 1: The author seated on a Yarkandi camel of Nubra (Hundar village).

socio-religious and political conditions in the past. A scientific dating of the above is at the present state of our knowledge not possible. A preliminary discussion of the above material has been attempted in recent publications.<sup>7</sup> The mythic lore of Cho Bong-skang from Charasa (ITsag-ra-sa) village<sup>8</sup> is strikingly similar to the oral traditions available from the Dards of Gilgit and the neighboring area about the ruler Shri Badat.<sup>9</sup> Further evidence for the early period is available from the Chorbat area where the oral traditions about the former inhabitants, the *drokpa* ('*brog-pa*) Dards, is interesting for the insight it provides on the ethno-historicity of region.<sup>10</sup> These *drokpa* ('*brog-pa*) Dards were driven away by the subsequent migrants from the west (Gilgit, Gupis and/or Bargout were among the places mentioned) and forced across the Ladakh range to the villages of the Buddhist *drokpa* ('*brog-pa*) Dards.<sup>11</sup> In fact the hymns of the Bonona festival recorded at Da (mDa') provide evidence of migratory movements of the

Dards into the Nubra area.<sup>12</sup>

**Early traces of Buddhism** are available from the images of Maitreya Buddha (Chamba; Byams-pa) carved or engraved into rock. The bas-relief image of Meme rGyal-mo (Photo 2) lies above the village Hunder, near the monastery, along the banks of the stream. There was a second image of Meme Thuba on the opposite bank and the two were seen as a pair. This latter image was destroyed a few years ago, as it stood in the way of the construction of a canal. This image of Meme Gyal-mo (Mes-mes rGyal-mo), though badly eroded due to the soft rock structure, belongs to the group of Chamba (Byams-pa) images of Maulbeck (Mul-beg), Kartse (dKartse)<sup>13</sup> and the one found by me in the chiefdom of Sod (Sod) in Purik (photo 3). The skill and artistic proficiency necessary for carving the measure proportions of these images would date them to the late Gupta period.

The image of Chamba Gangskyal (Byams-pa Gan-'gyel; photo 4) found by me engraved on a large rock lies just outside the village Tirche (gTir-rtse) along the left bank of the Shyok. It measures approximately ten and a half feet high and four feet wide along the chest. Earlier the rock was upright so that the image was seen standing. During a Sog-po (Dzungar) invasion from the north, the leader of the army, having failed to capture the fort lying above the present road on a hill, had in his anger, the rock knocked down so that the image now lies on its back and can only be seen when one stands on the rock. To a somewhat later period one must date the coming of Tibetan Buddhist influences. The 8 Gonbos (mGon-po) of Nubra attest to the existence of the *kargyutpa* (*bKa'-brgyud-pa*) sect. Francke mentions the names of these Gonbos about which he was first informed by the missionary Redslab.<sup>14</sup> The most interesting is the settlement of monks at Yarma Gonbo (Yar-ma mGon-bo) about which I noted an interesting oral tradition. It lies near the source of the Nubra river at Siachen glacier. This small settlement of *kargyupa* (*bKa'-brgyud-pa*) monks, living a married life, is one of the only remnants amidst the preponderating influence of the *Gelukpa* (*dGe-lugs-pa*) sect today.

**The coming of Islam in the Chorbat area** is attested to by local traditions. The Balti informants from the villages' Turtuk (Tur-tug) and Tyakshi (Tag-shi) were of the opinion that the saint Sayed Amir Kabir Hamdani first converted them to Islam.

During his missionary travels he reached Keyris (Ke-ris) where he was informed of the powerful Buddhist Lama at Tyakshi. At this time the inhabitants from Khapalu (Kha-palu), Keyris, Turtuk and Tyakshi were Buddhists. Amir Kabir could only hope for success of his mission if he was able to defeat the Tyakshi Lama. Amir Kabir traveled to Tyakshi where he encountered the Lama and to ascertain as to who was more powerful they decided upon a contest. The next morning as all gathered to witness the contest the lama turned himself into a pigeon and flew to the top of the hill across the Shyok River. Sayed Amir Kabir saw this and with his power sent his sandals flying to the top of the hill where they beat up the Lama. Upon this miraculous happening the people converted to Islam. The Lama then migrated to Purang (sPu-rang). The descendants of Amir Kabir settled at Bogdang village and one of them is the Sayed Ibrahim Peer.

It is also related that later Sayed Nur Baksh came to the area

and converted many to his sect. At present the Shias and Nur Bakshis live together, though in certain villages like Bogdang there is a overwhelming majority of Nur Bakshis. Hashmatullah Khan, who, during the early decades of this century, was an administrator in the area, is of the opinion that Sayed Amir Kabir Hamdani possibly never came to this area. According to his informative work the local traditions about Amir Kabir's personal conversion of the people to Islam are fiction. The conversion to Islam, according to his data, could have taken place around the 14<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

#### DOCUMENTARY AND EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

The historical evidence collected constitutes of 13 stone and temple inscriptions as well as the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery manuscript titled *Nub-ra bde-dgon gyi chags-rab sngon-byung rin-po-che'i phreng-ba*.<sup>16</sup> In this document names of four rulers are provided who were native to Nubra and whose rule extended between the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> All these rulers carry the title *chogyal chenpo* (*chos-rgyal chen-po*) except for the first one, Bha-ga-ram-mir, who has the title *Mi wang chen-po* (*Mi-dbang chen-po*) and this distinction indicates that he possibly ruled prior to the propagation of Buddhism by the *Gelukpa* (*dGe-lugs-pa*) sect.

1. Bagaramir (Bha-ga-ram-mir)
2. Nyima Traks (Nyi-ma Grags)
3. Namgyal Tashi (rNam-rgyal bKra-shis)
4. Tsewang Tanpa (Tshe-dbang brTan-pa)

Photo 2: Meme ryal-mo at Hunder in Nubra



In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Lama Stod Sherab Zangpo (Stod Shes-rab bZang-po), a pupil of Tsongkhapa (Tsong-kha-pa), came to Nubra and founded the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery. The Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery manuscript mentions the name of the local ruler Nyima Traks (Nyi-ma Grags) who received him and cooperated with him in the propagation of the *Gelukpa* (*dGe-lugs-pa*) sect of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>18</sup> Stod Shes-rab bZang-po later went to Zanskar where he founded several monasteries and passed away at Phuktal (Phug-tal).

Similarly the subsequent rulers of Nubra, about whom epigraphic evidence has been found, are often found mentioned in the Diskit (bDes-kyid) manuscript as being contemporary to the abbots who presided at the monastery. These abbots were all recruited from among the learned men (*khen-rgyut*) of Thikse (Khrig-se) monastery. Stod Shes-rab bZang-po was followed by Pan-chen Nub-ra Lha-btsun bLo-bzang (better known as Panchen Nubrapa) who was born in Utmaru (Ud-ma-ru) village along the right bank of the Shyok river. He went for education to Tashi Lhunpo (bKra-shis Lhun-po) and later became the abbot there. His contemporary was the ruler Namgyal Tashi (rNam-rgyal bKra-shis), according to the Diskit (bDes-kyid) manuscript who is also found mentioned in Temple inscriptions (Nuti 10 and 11). Nuti 10 mentions the construction of Lhakhang marpo (Lha-khang dmar-po) during his reign while Nuti 11 commemorates the paintings done in the *lhakhang* for the salvation of the royal family. Panchen Nubrapa's death is described as a miraculous happening and most likely indicates his death at the hands of an invading Sog-po army — following him came the abbot Chos-rJe dpon dPal-jor from Thikse (Khrig-se) and at that time the local ruler was Tsewang Tampa (Tshe-dbang brTan-pa). According to the Diskit (bDes-kyid) manuscript his wife was Tunru, whereas the inscription (NuVTI 2) mentions rGyal-mo rNam-rgyal sKyid as his wife. This could be a reference to two different wives that the king had.

**The first Ladakhi ruler** to be mentioned is **Deldan Namgyal** (bDe-ldan rNam-rgyal 1642-1694)<sup>19</sup> we also find that from this period onwards there is no more evidence of local rulers as these are replaced by the names of Ladakhi kings. This possibly represents the end of nominal suzerainty over Nubra and the latter's integration into the kingdom of Ladakh.

The history of Ladakh from 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards is militarily involved in regular campaigns against the Balti chiefs. Baltistan was embroiled in constant war and intrigues of the ruler of Skardu and other petty chiefs. The ruler of Skardu threatened the independence of Khapalu. This forced a close alliance between the Ladakhi rGyal-po and the chiefs and Khapalu. The alliance was often further strengthened through marital ties between the ruling house.

**Nyima Namgyal** (Nyi-ma rNam-rgyal 1694-1729) is mentioned in votive tablet (NuVTI 5) along with *kalthon* (*bka'-blon*) bSod-nams Lhum-grub who, along with Tsultim Dorje (Tshul-krim rDo-rje), assisted the chief of Khapalu militarily.<sup>20</sup> About the next Ladakhi ruler, **Deskyong Namgyal** (bDe-skyong rNam-rgyal 1729-1739), we find no mention in the documents available although we know that the married a girl from Diskit (bDes-kyid) and a son, **Phuntsok Namgyal** (Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal), was born to them.<sup>21</sup> Phun-tshogs rNam-rgyal (1739-1753) is mentioned with his wife Mu-khri rGyal-mo (NuVTI 16), whom we find mentioned in no other

source. There is further the mention of *kalthon* Kunga Phuntsok (*bka'-blon* Kun-dga' Phun-tshogs) who acted as prime minister for some time, along with Tshul-khrims rDo-rje. **Tsewang Namgyal** (Tshe-dbang rNam-rgyal 1753-782) is mentioned in a temple inscription (NuTI 13) as being the ruler at the time of the construction of Chamba monastery at Hundar (Hun-'dir). The monastery lies above the village next to the road newly constructed for vehicular traffic. Tshe-dbang rNam-rgyal had from his second wife a son called 'Jigs-med rNam-rgyal who took to religious life. He is mentioned in the Diskit (bDes-kyid) manuscript as coming to Nubra to become the abbot at the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery.

With the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ends the accounts of the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery manuscript. There are, however, inscriptions providing mention of Kaga Lobsang Standzin (Ka-ga bLo-bzang bsTan-dzin) and his son, Sonam Standzin (bSod-nams bsTan-dzin), who played an active part in the local and Ladakhi politics under the ruler of Tsepal Dondup Namgyal (Tshe-dpal Don-grub rNam-rgyal 1802-1837; 1839-1840). The epigraphic evidence brings us to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with marked the coming of Dogra rule to Ladakh.

**Ethnographic data** gathered from Balti and Ladakhi informants on festivals, rites de passage, pollution taboos, kinship terminology's, and songs have not been fully worked out and the results will be presented later.

#### **Some observation on *pha(z)lha* (*pha-lha*)**

In the context of research work done on the institution of *phaspun* (*pha-spun*) I was able to gather the names of several *pha(z)lha* (*pha-lha*). These are the names of pre-Buddhist details which have survived in their social system. Most of these *pha(z)lha* (*pha-lha*) are exclusive to Nubra but their existence is not limited to the villages mentioned below.1 **Gyalmo Stermik** (rGyal-mo Ster-mig also Yul-sa Stermik) – found all over Nubra. When after a marriage ceremony the bride is taken to the bridegroom's house and this happens to take place during the day then homage has to be offered along with juniper (*shukpa*; *shug-pa*) and prayer flag at the *lhatho* (*lha-tho*). If the bride is taken during the night then no such ceremony is necessary.

**2 Lhamo Chenmo (Lha-mo Chen-mo)** – found in Tirth'e (Ter-rtse) and Hundar (Hun-'dir) villages.

**3 Trakmar Gya-po ('Brag-dmar rGyal-po)** – found in Tirth'e (Ter-rtse) Village.

**4 Zangnam Gyapo (bZang-nam rGyal-po)** – found all over Ladakh. In Nubra the *lhatho* is located at Changlung (ITsang-lung) which lies ahead of the villages Sasoma (Sasoma) and Khimi (Khi-mi).

**5 Kergot Gyapo (Ker-got rGyal-po; bKar'-brgyat mgon-po)** – found in Utmaru (Ud-ma-ru).

**6 Thanglha Gyapo (Thang-lha rGyal-po)** – found in Panamik (Pa-na-mig) and Kobet (Ku-'bhet) as well as in other parts of Ladakh including Leh.<sup>22</sup>



Photo 3: Chamba of Sod in Purig.

**7 Kangju (Gangs-bzhu)** – found in Panamik (Pa-na-mig), Hundar (Hun-'dir), Kobet (Ku-'bhet), Diskit (bDes-kyid) and Charasa (lTsag-ra-sa).

**8 Rangj Shel (Rang-gi-sha)** – found in Hundar (Hun-'dir).

**9 Gyapo Gurlha (rGyal-po mGur-lha)** – found in Hundar (Hun-'dir).

**10 Skayot (Skya-'od or Pha-lha Skya-'od)** – found in Kobet (Ku-'bhet), and Diskit (bDes-kyid).

**11 Choshar (Cho-shar)** – found in Kobet (Ku-'bhet)

**12 Paldan-Lhamo (dPal-ldan Lha-mo)** – found all over Ladakh.

**13 Magzurma (dMag-gzor-ma)** – found in Diskit (bDes-kyid)

**14 Masang (Ma-bsang** also called **Masang Spun; Ma-bsang spun**) – found in Utmaru (Ud-ma-ru), Panamik (Pa-na-mig), Digar (Gri-gar), Charasa (lTsag-ra-sa), and Tirtsha (Ti-ri-sha). They are 7 brothers or *spun* and are supposed to exercise control over water. Once near Bogdang a lake had formed due to water being dammed. This blocked water was released with the power of Masang Pun. Masang Spun-rdun are the 7 green *shukpa* (*shug-pa* juniper) trees. These trees are worshipped and represent the 7 brothers. These number of trees never increase or decrease.

**15 Durlak Gyapo (rDor-legs rGyal-po)** – seen riding on a goat with a hammer in on hand and a Bhut in the other, Dur-lak is the *lha* of all blacksmith (*gara; mgar-ba*).

**16 Skurgyal (Sku-rgyal)** – found in Tirtsha (Ti-ri-sha).

**17 Lha Cho Murup (Lha-jo dNgos-rub)**<sup>23</sup> – found in Digar (Gri-gar).

**18 Tsering Chormgan (Tshe-ring Chos-rgyan)** – found in Digar (Gri-gar).

**19 Shughla (Shug-lha)** – found in Charasa (lTsag-ra-sa).

**20 Lama Hathi (bLa-ma Ha-ti)** – found is Sumur (gSum-yur).

**21 Cho Pari Gon Lha-mo (Jo Pa-ri dGon Lha-mo)** – found in Sumur (gSum-yur).

**22 Tragmar rGyapo ('Brag-dmar rGyal-po)** – found at Sumur (gSum-yur). The *lhatho* exists at Khardung.

**23 Stagalchen (Stag-ral-chen)** - found in Kyagar (sKya-dkar)

**24 Koyak (Ko-yag)** – the *lhatho* is at Tirit (Ti-rit)

**25 Tsanggyamati (bTsang-rgya-ma-ti)** – found is Diskit (bDes-kyid). Tsanggyamati has control over water and is responsible for the construction of the irrigation canals.

There is an ordered seating arrangement observed around the hearth (*thap; thab*). When looking from the door the men sit on the right of the hearth and the women on the left. The little children who have not reached the age of puberty and the old men and women who are thought to be sexually neutral sit in the middle between the hearth and the central pillar (*ka*) of

the room. The blacksmith (*gara; mgar-ba*) and minstrels (*mon*) are seated at the back near the door (*go; sgo*).

This seating arrangement around the hearth is observed in order to prevent pollution from coming from outside and causing the *pha(z)lha (pha-lha)* annoyance. The very strict separation of the male and the female sphere must not be abused and the crossing of the threshold of either can cause a dangerous situation to arise. These observances arise from their fear of annoying the *pha(z)lha (pha-lha)* who when annoyed can cause ill-luck to afflict the household. Infertile women are supposed to have aroused the displeasure of their *pha(z)lha (pha-lha)*.

There are several households who worship a common *pha(z)lha (pha-lha)* and these are grouped into a one *phaspun*. *Phaspun (pha-spun)* is a social institution which binds the member households to reciprocal assistance during the critical phases (e.g., rites de passage) of the life cycle. There are cases where *pha(z)lha (pha-lha)* are also *yullha (yul-lha)* and are therefore worshipped by the entire village. This is done, in particular, during the new year (*losar; losgar*) festival when the *lhardag (lha-bdag)* changes the juniper (*shukpa; shug-pa*) branches at the village *lhatho (lha-tho)* and sacrifices a kid. The insides of the kid are roasted and offered to the village deity at the *lhatho (lha-tho)*. The rest of the meat is then distributed among the gathered villagers. This latter practice has been discontinued in the recent past.

#### NOTES

1 The paper is the result of a field trip conducted in Autumn 1983 for approximately one month. The material presented constitutes preliminary impressions and need to be researched upon further. The objectives of the field work are mentioned in a former publication (Vohra, 1985).

2 Francke during the journey through Nubra in 1914 observes that he saw the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery founding document. Francke, 1921, p. 129; this most likely refers to the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery manuscript which is used here but Francke fails to give any information of its contents. The only historical information we get from Francke are the two inscriptions noted for Hundar (Hun-'dir) F 40 and F 41 which are the same as the NuVTI 2 et 1 respectively. See Vohra, 1985a and footnote 37.

3 Cunningham. A., *Ladâk*, 1854.

4 Rizvi J., 1983, p. 20. The highest mountain in Ladakh is Sasar Kangri (7,680 meters), on an outlying spur of the range between the upper reaches of the Shyok and Nubra river.

5 Mirsky J., p. 307. For the details of all the various routes across the Karakoram-Kuen-lun mountains see Ramsay, 1890, pp. 185-188.

6 On further information on cultivation see Rizvi, J., pp. 93-94

7 Vohra, 1985; 1985a,

8 Vohra, 1985a.

9 Jettmar, 1975, pp. 200-244

10 Vohra, 1985a.

11 The Buddhist '*Brog-pa* Dards refers to the inhabitants of Da-Hanu-Garkun located along the river Indus in the north-western corner of Ladakh.

12 Vohra, 1984, Hymn on pp. 53-60.

13 Snellgrove, 1977, pp. 6-8; 1980, pp. 9-11; Francke already commented on the similarity on the stone relief at Hundar (Hun-'dir) comparing it with that of Mulbec, Francke, 1921, p. 127.

14 Francke, 1921, pp. 124-126 and footnote 1.

15 Hashmatullah Khan, 1939, pp. 663-673.

16 Published as Facsimile Edition, Vohra, 1985. For a preliminary analysis of the documentary evidence see Vohra, 1985a.

17 A more precise dating is expected after the pending research work to be done in Nubra.

18 Hashmatullah Khan mentions Stod Shes-rab bZang-po as the founder of Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery. Hashmatullah Khan, 1939, p. 242; D. Schuh photographed a copy made from the Diskit (bDes-kyid) monastery mss. In 1976 and mentions Nyi-ma Grags of Nubra.. About Stod Shes-rab bZang-po, see Schuh, p. 33.

19 Evidence of an earlier contact is also available. According to local tradition,

Photo 4: Chamba Gang-Skyal on the left bank of Shyok



Gyal Khatun, after the death of Jamyang Namgyal ('Jam-dbyangs rNam-rgyal), came and resided at the castle bDe-chen rTse-mo in Hundar (Hun-'dir). She had two large mane walls constructed for the peace of her husband's soul and these were still intact during my visit to Hundar (Hun-'dir) in 1983. Her grave, according to Hashmatullah Khan, was destroyed during a landslide in 1929. See Hashmatullah Kahn 1939, pp. 286ff et 640.

20 Petech, 1977, pp. 81-82, 91-94

21 Petech, 1977, p. 99.

22 Peter, prince of Greece and Denmark, pp. 138-146, provides names of several *phazlha* (*pha-lha*) from Leh, including Thanglha Gyapo.

23 There are 18 stories, according to oral tradition, about Cho Murup. A manuscript of these is said to exist in Kobet (Ku-'bhet) village.

**RESUMÉ :** L'importance ethnohistorique de la Nubra tient dans son rôle de zone-tampon entre le Ladakh et le khanat de Kashgar et Yarkand. La piste caravanière à travers la Nubra forme comme une bretelle sud à la branche sud de la route de la soie qui traversait les oasis du Taklamakan.

La Nubra est la partie la plus vaste du Ladakh et, en même temps, celle sur laquelle nous avons le moins de connaissances d'ordre ethno-historique. En 1983 j'ai trouvé 13 inscriptions qui s'ajoutent aux deux déjà publiées par Francke ainsi qu'un manuscrit au monastère de Diskit qui nous permettent d'améliorer notre connaissance de l'histoire après le XV<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Pour la période avant nous avons les traditions populaires, des ruines de forts et des bas-reliefs rupestres. Il en résulte que le bouddhisme vint de l'ouest, et qu'il dominait avant sa renaissance au Tibet. De l'existence de ces bas-reliefs il résulte que la Nubra était en relation non seulement avec le reste du Ladakh, mais avec Gilgit et Punyal. Après le XV<sup>ème</sup> siècle, grâce aux documents *gelukpa* (*dge-lugs-pa*) nous sommes beaucoup mieux documentés : les noms des souverains locaux nous montrent que la suzeraineté ladakhi n'était que nominale. Ce n'est qu'après la seconde moitié du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle que les noms de chefs locaux sont remplacés par ceux des rois du Ladakh.

La Nubra est habitée par les Ladakhi, mais il faut compter avec 25 % de Balti. Cependant l'héritage culturel de ces deux groupes se partage avec celui des Dardes, ce qui montre bien qu'une ancienne strate darde, venant de Gilgit, a aussi laissé des traces.

**SUMMARY:** The ethno-historical importance of Nubra lies in the role played by it as a buffer zone between Ladakh and the Khanat of Kashgar and Yarkand, lying along the southern silk route. The caravan route through Nubra formed a southern artery to the trade carried along the oasis of the Taklamakan desert.

Nubra is the largest part of Ladakh and is also the region about which we have the least ethno-historical knowledge. There were only two historical inscriptions from Hundar which were published by Francke. In 1983 I was able to collect 13 stone and temple inscriptions as well as photograph the Diskit monastery manuscript. These help to broaden our horizon as far as the historicity of the region during post-15th century period is concerned. In reconstructing the history prior to this period assistance is taken of mythic traditions, ruins of fortifications and rock bas-reliefs. The above evidence shows that Buddhism came from the west and was prevalent prior to its revival via Tibet. The Existence of certain rock bas-reliefs shows that this region was connected not only to the rest of Ladakh but also with Gilgit and Punyal. Scientific historical evidence is available from the post 15th century when it begins to be documented under the aus-

pices of the *dGe-lugs-pa* sect. For this period we have the names of local rulers which goes to show that if Ladakhi suzerainty was recognised then it was nominal. Only after the latter half of the 17th century do we come across the names of Ladakhi rulers and the absence of local rulers.

Ethnically Nubra is populated by Ladakhis but also has Balti population (over 25%) of considerable size. There is much in the cultural heritage of both ethnic groups which is Dardic and makes us believe that not only Tibetan but an earlier stratum of Dard influences from the region around Gilgit played a part.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG:** Die ethnohistorische Bedeutung Nubras liegt in seiner Funktion als Pufferzone zwischen Ladakh und dem am südlichen Zweig der Seidenstraße liegenden Khanat von Kashgar und Yarkand. Der Weg der Karawanen durch Nubra bildete die südliche Lebensader des Handels entlang den Oasen der Taklamakanwüste. Über diese Region, die den größten Teil von Ladakh umfaßt, verfügen wir die wenigsten ethnohistorischen Informationen. Bis jetzt waren nur die beiden von Francke veröffentlichten Inschriften aus Hundar bekannt. Im Jahre 1983 entdeckte ich neun in Steinplatten gemeißelten Inschriften und vier gemalte Tempelinschriften, und es war mir auch möglich, einen Text des Klosters von Diskit zu fotografieren. Diese vertiefen unser historisches Wissen für die Zeit nach dem 15. Jahrhundert. Meine Rekonstruktion der Geschichte Nubras vor dem 15. Jahrhundert basiert auf tradierten Mythen, auf Burgruinen und Felsreliefdarstellungen. Sie zeigt, dass sich der Buddhismus zuerst von Westen in Richtung Nubra ausbreitete und dass der tibetische Buddhismus einer zweiten Welle zuzuschreiben ist. Die Felskulpturen lassen erkennen, dass diese Region nicht nur mit Ladakh, sondern auch mit Gilgit und Punyal religiös verbunden war. Die Geschichte Nubras nach dem 15. Jahrhundert konnte durch die neu entdeckten Schriftstücke, die größtenteils von Vertretern der *dGe-lugs-pa*-Sekte verfasst worden sind, genauer dokumentiert werden. Für diese Zeit kennen wir die Namen der örtlichen Herrscher, das beweist, dass Suzeränität, wenn überhaupt, nur eher nominelle Bedeutung hatte.

Auf der ethnischen Ebene weist Nubra neben der dominanten Mehrheit der Ladakhis auch einen Anteil von mehr als 25% Baltis auf. Das kulturelle Erbe beider Gruppen zeigt, dass neben den tibetischen auch bemerkenswerte dardische Einflüsse vorhanden sind, die an jene Gilgits erinnern.