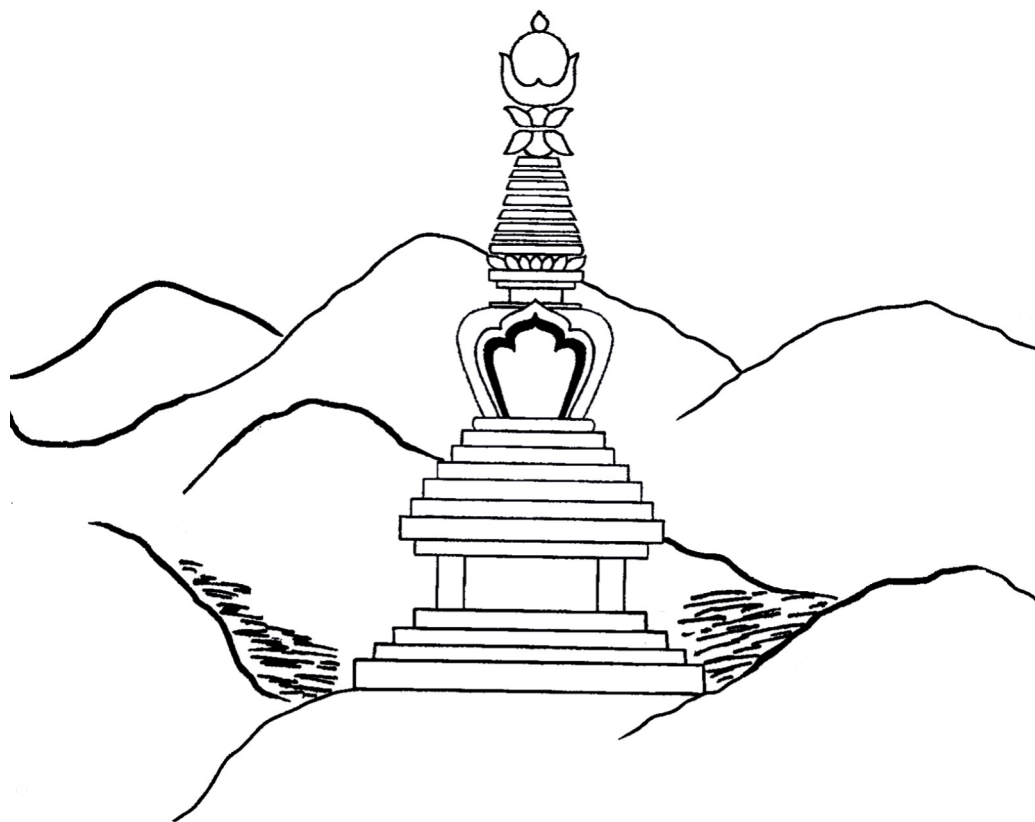


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# BULLETIN OF TIBETOLOGY

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## THE ROYAL HISTORY OF SIKKIM

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

ANNA BALIKCI and JOHN A. ARDUSSI

This issue of the Bulletin is partly dedicated to an important new publication, *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal* (Serindia 2021). Originally written in Tibetan over a century ago by the Ninth Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and his queen-consort Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma and known as the *Denjong Gyalrab*, its preliminary English translation was initially prepared by Kazi Dawasamdub in 1909–1910. A new fully annotated translation was recently carried out by John A. Ardussi and Per K. Sørensen at the behest of the authors' granddaughter, Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck of Bhutan. Later joined by Anna Balikci Denjongpa, the team added a wealth of supplementary material in order to provide background and help contextualize the many facets of the kingdom's people and history.

Dimmed photocopies of Kazi Dawasamdub's preliminary translation, known as *The History of Sikkim (HoS)*, circulated among interested Sikkimese and foreign scholars for the past many decades. Difficult to follow because of its lack of structure and headings, outdated vocabulary and countless typos, many students of Sikkimese history laboured to decipher what *The History* may be able to reveal. To these scholars, the new edition of *The History of Sikkim* is a most welcome development. For Sikkimese, who often heard rumours of *The History's* existence, to receive a version of their history as personally told by their very own king and queen, couldn't be a more pleasant gift.

With this issue of the Bulletin, the author-editors of the newly released *Royal History* are taking the opportunity to present additional aspects of the book and to relate its journey, or 'the making of the book' as it unfolded over the years.

Before presenting this issue's articles, which is complemented by a review of the newly released book by the historian Alex McKay, we would like to add a few words in honour of Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma, the principal author and driving force behind the original *Denjong Gyalrab* manuscript.

Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma was a Tibetan from the Lhading family of Lhasa who married the king of Sikkim Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and his half-brother in Lhasa in 1882–1883. As she came down to live in her new home on the borders of British India, she embraced a world vastly different from her own. Sikkim was in many ways a place of contradictions. Located on the southern slopes of the Himalayas, the Tibetan Buddhist kingdom couldn't have been more different from her native Tibet in terms of climate: monsoon raged for five months of the year, luxuriant forests teemed with wild orchids and butterflies, and tropical jungles flourished on its border with Bengal. The tiny kingdom's strategic location, which lent its disproportionate importance to its size, was perhaps its biggest contradiction of all. Central to this critical location were easy mountain passes that linked British India to Tibet and to China beyond.

During the royal couple's tumultuous reign, these two worlds would meet and confront each other in Sikkim in a way that led to war and left the royal couple in an unbearable predicament. In an effort to find peace for her family and kingdom, Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma fully embraced her circumstances while facing tremendous hardships: she acted as advisor to her husband, as a quiet rebel in the face of empire, as informal mediator, and eventually met with the future Empress of India, Queen Mary. When everything was over, she set to work to tell the story of her adopted kingdom and its tribulations in a way that equally straddled literary genres and research methods. Due to her early death at the age of 43, her *Denjong Gyalrab* manuscript and its English translation remained unpublished until her granddaughter, Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck of Bhutan, released it in May this year as *The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal*.

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The series of articles in this issue begin with a brief essay by Per K. Sørensen as to how *The Royal History* came into being, highlighting aspects of its literary traits and sources. Sørensen relates the team's findings as to how the text changes perspective and format in terms of topics and content from classical to modern issues, shifting from religious to increasingly secular modes of retelling, and thus how, as it progresses, the text displays a marked shift in the language or diction employed.

This is followed by a contribution by John A. Ardussi, which addresses one of Kazi Dawasamdub's most consequential translation lapses and how this led to a series of misunderstandings involving the British and subsequent scholars. Kazi Dawasamdub's flawed version of the enthronement of the Ninth Chogyal Thutob Namgyal missed the entire paragraph describing the Chogyal's principal 1875 coronation held at the Sikkimese Palace of Tumlong. Ardussi argues that this omission was likely unintentional. Whether intentional or not, it led to the British erroneously highlighting the fact that "the Tibetanising Raja's" coronation took place solely at the Summer Palace of Chumbi within Tibetan territory. As Ardussi points out, more research is necessary on this issue to clarify whether this was simply a translation error or if more can be read into it.

The third contribution by Anna Balikci Denjongpa describes the "journey" of *The Royal History of Sikkim* from the project inception in the mid-1990s to its 2021 completion. Considering the importance of this book for Sikkim and Sikkimese, we deemed it necessary to provide an account of events, methods and difficulties encountered by the team over the years. A summary of original sources, writers and methods used in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century writing of the *Denjong Gyalrab* is also provided. The second part describes how the team went about sourcing and researching the book's supplementary material in the form of text boxes, thangkas, watercolours, historic photographs, maps, genealogies and detailed indices.

A fourth article by Tenzin Longsel Barphungpa examines a peculiar tradition existing at Gangtok's Enchey monastery where a Bara Kagyu *kangso* tradition was established in a Nyingma monastery for some seven decades. Using both oral and literary sources, the author provides an insight into the *kangso* text, its evolution and the various narratives about the origin of this Kagyu ritual held in a Nyingma monastery.

In the last article, Marlene Erschbamer explores legendary and historical perspectives on water in Sikkim. The author first examines the legendary accounts of Guru Rinpoche connected to water, followed by that of the various Buddhist masters who followed in Guru Rinpoche's footsteps. From providing drinking water, to building bridges and establishing ritual traditions centred on water, several masters left their mark as they passed through or settled in Sikkim. The author then discusses the supernatural entities connected to water and associated rituals, particularly that of the *lu*, the rulers of the waters and the underground spaces.





## WRITING A ROYAL CHRONICLE

PER K. SØRENSEN  
*Leipzig University*

With the new publication, a complete and fully annotated translation of *The Royal History of Sikkim* (Abbr. *RHoS*) based upon the recently available original Tibetan text *Denjong Gyalrab* (Abbr. *BGR*),<sup>1</sup> now allows us to take a closer look as to how this text from the pen of the royal couple, Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma came into being. Until now, it was the preliminary and incomplete translation in English rendition conducted by Kazi Dawasamdub between 1909 and 1910 that was available to local and international scholarship. Still, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these type-written transcripts, all unpublished versions of *RHoS* (known until then as *The History of Sikkim* even in its inchoate English rendition that lacks roughly 20% to 25% of the original Tibetan text) remained the sole version available to any engaged scholar of Sikkimese history. To those attentive readers it was rightly deemed seminal, in fact the sole major historical source emerging from Sikkim. It offered an exclusive, emic perspective in its attempt to chronicle the story of the origin and formation of the local Namgyal dynasty. In a wider sense, it remained a rare narrative of the erstwhile independent Kingdom of Sikkim written by actors who had been part of the country's contentious history. *BGR* rightly is a treasure house of information largely unavailable elsewhere.

*BGR* itself is bereft of a title of its own nor does it contain a proper colophon. The text has in addition no proper chapter division, aside from consecutively marking the separate era of the succeeding Chogyals. At first sight the text proves to be very traditional in its thematic structure and lay-out, organized along similar narratives prevalent within Tibetan Buddhist historiography with its own set of classical Buddhist topics. Yet at the same time, at a number of points, the text does deviate from what so far has come to light in this traditional genre by attempting to include mixed literary rubrics that in toto straddle historiography,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Royal History of Sikkim*. Edited by J. A. Ardussi, A. Balikci-Denjongpa and Per K. Sørensen. Bangkok: Serindia Publication 2021. The reader is advised to consult this exhaustive *RHoS* for further bibliographical references.

genealogy, chronologically interspersed with a commented narrative accompanying selected quotations from official archival dossiers. The work ends with a lengthy (auto)biographical narrative, evidently from the pen or dictation of Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma. It does seem to show influences, however scant, from Western literature, not least in its candid tone, this section obviously was by the Queen perceived to serve as a counternarrative to H.H. Risley's *Gazetteer of Sikkim* (1894).<sup>2</sup>

Its writing or compilation must have taken years in its making and went through many hands, as discussed in the introduction to the new *RHoS* book. As said, *BGR* terminates with the lengthy first-person written (or at least dictated) by the Queen-consort Yeshe Dolma herself who clearly was constantly and proactively supervising the entire writing process. She even conducted a number of field or camp trips to remote places in search for additional historical information.

From beginning to end, the text appears to have changed perspective and format in terms of topics and content from classical to modern issues, shifting from religious to increasingly secular modes of retelling. It also displays a marked shift in the language or diction employed. This too makes the text quite unique.

*BGR* is nevertheless deeply embedded in the Tibetan Buddhist creed that had taken root in Sikkim: its doctrinal preferences and its concomitant cultural lore were governed by the values and ethical codes of this dominant creed. The Sikkim Namgyal monarchy had been established by three esoteric Buddhist Lamas from Tibet in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Worth noting, some of these ultimate king-makers purportedly were of royal or princely descent themselves, descending from landed nobility of great ancestry and religious stature arguably going back to the Tibetan empire. They selected a local layman of distinguished East-Tibetan ancestry to serve as crowning head known as Chogyal or Dharma Ruler, doubtlessly in titular imitation that harks back to the ancient Tibetan kings of the old Tibetan Yarlung empire, and a faint, but prestigious historical reminiscence of the classical Indian Cakravartin kings. During the very same epoch, the ascent of neighbouring states (in Tibet the Ganden Phodrang rule, in Bhutan a new nation was about to be born) might also have played a role in forging the nascent kingdom. For the state-building process to succeed, the envisaged pious kingship was only made possible through forging an ethnic political union and power-sharing consensus with the local

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<sup>2</sup> The reader is advised to read the introduction of the new publication for further details as to the *BGR* text and its content.

chieftains in the area: the Lhopos (native lineages of ancient Tibetan and Himalayan origin), the Mön, Rong or Lepcha (the first inhabitants of the region), and the Tsong or Limbu, the original inhabitants of neighbouring Limbuan in eastern Nepal, who also had an ancient presence in western Sikkim. With the signature of the resultant compact (dated to 1663), a frail confederation was ensured that despite suffering several setbacks, serious ruptures, occasional usurpation (and not least battered by ongoing invasions from neighbours around the compass), proved to stand the test of time throughout the entire turbulent era. Sandwiched between Nepal and Bhutan, Tibet to the north and British India to the south, ensured that Sikkim on all fronts around the compass was constantly trapped in never-ending territorial conflicts. Its contentious contacts and conflicts with the neighbouring states make up a large part of the entire narrative, relationships, seldom peaceful, all chronicled in great details in *BGR*.

Within Sikkim itself, the active participation of the new nation's ethnic groups in the ruling administration ensured that the fragile kingdom proved functional. The inner coherence of the tiny kingdom was galvanized (as much as the throne was open to usurpation) from time to time by intermarriage between the leading families and the royal court. Over the centuries, the traditional and strong ethnic bonds to Tibet were kept intact, based upon shared religious and political values. The special bonds to Tibet also account for the Sikkim rulers' numerous Tibetan consorts being regularly provided by the Tibetan government. More fatefully, Sikkim's highly fragile location, caught as it was at the periphery of political Tibet and bordering on India, later British rule—Tibet and British India being culturally and politically mutually irreconcilable fronts—eventually would spell disaster in the form of military confrontations.

### *Modelling Buddhist historiography*

The following brief essay attempts to highlight a few aspects of the literary traits traced in the *Denjong Gyalrab* in order to assess more precisely, not only what sources the author(s) consulted, but also what priorities were chosen, along with some of their underlying presuppositions in the text's compositional build-up. As said, the linear narrative proceeds chronologically from the legendary or mythic beginnings until 1908, the year of its completion. Overall, *BGR* is clearly modelled upon classical Tibetan historical and biographical treatises, using the traditional Tibetan Buddhist written lingua franca known as

*chos skad*. It follows in particular the standard procedure and thematic rubrics known from Buddhist treatises and historical oeuvres in Tibet, both in terms of selection of sources, their set-up and particular diction. It is couched throughout the earlier chapters in the prosimetric mode (Tib. *spel ma*), interspersing the narrative prose with verses whenever appropriate, using canonical or authoritative citations to provide time-tested arguments and legitimacy to an historical issue. The introductory metrical verses at the beginning of Chapter 1 constitute, quite similar to any treatise in Tibetan sources, a salutatory expression or eulogy (Tib. *mchod par brjod pa*) duly addressing protective deities and historical pioneers of yore, praises that often include words of supplication and auspiciousness. It most likely was written or inspired by the Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma herself, who here has left out the equally obligatory versified composition pledge verses (Tib. *rtsom par dam bca' ba*) that usually announce or introduce the subject matter (Tib. *brjod bya*) in similar works.

There can be little room for doubts that the initial chapters of *BGR*, to a large extent, are the work of the royal couple's monk-scholars, who would have trawled through countless sources in search of any, however remote, references to Sikkim. The result, the citation of a number of classical Tibetan sources, appears to be no more than the compilation (Tib. *sgrigs pa*) of a row of quoted passages successively narrated and argumentatively aligned in the narrative. These duly noted passages and references were by way of the popular cut-and-paste method excerpted from a number of selected historical and revelatory texts (Tib. *gter ma*), and referenced not least due to their contextual relevance to Sikkim's early but hazy origin. The sources quoted in the initial part of the narrative are largely identical to and copied from most of the standard texts found within Tibetan historical writings.<sup>3</sup> This section is moreover conceived of as a topical prelude for introducing the Sikkim royal house. This chapter's subtopics briefly cover rubrics such as Buddhist cosmology, the origin of man or its anthropogenesis, the lineage of the historic Buddha, the origin and development of the Tibetan Yarlung

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<sup>3</sup> The list of sources given in Tashi Tsering (2012: 38), quoted from India Office Records Eur MSS F80/28 (British Library), to represent sources used in *BGR* referring to letters of inquiry by Charles Bell, written by Rai Sahib Lobzang Chhoden, one of the local scholars, does not appear in the text itself. A number of the sources listed were not quoted and it is unclear how this list of Tibetan sources was compiled. At least some of the sources did not find their way into *BGR*.

royal house, followed by hints to the origin of the territory that was to become Denjong.

### *Putting Sikkim on the map*

As is commonly known, reliable historical information is deplorably absent as to who might have populated or traversed the territory and valleys of Sikkim prior to the emergence of the earliest treasure-finders, pioneered by the celebrated trail-blazer Rigdzin Gödem (1337–1409). The sources are meagre, and on the original settlers, surely migrants from neighbouring areas, the sources are silent or non-existing. Albeit hints are indicated that Tibetan Lamas of the Kaḥ thog<sup>4</sup> tradition might have trodden the valleys just after this pioneer, *BGR*'s authors have nevertheless chosen—unsurprisingly perhaps—to fill the vacuum by focusing on the prominent role of Gödem with his arrival in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. He first entered the virgin territory of what was to be become Denjong (“Valley of Fruits and Vegetation”) and—inspired by Guru Rinpoche and being foretold prophetically—spectacularly converted and redesigned the virtually sparsely populated area into a blessed “Sacred Hidden Land,” (Tib. *sbas yul*)—a concept and status of immense celebrity not least since in this respect Denjong was considered the most prominent among similar “Hidden Lands,” all redesigned and found scattered throughout the Himalayan borderlands. Gödem and those following in his trail in the following centuries praise the valley’s lush and serene loftiness and its unique place in the Himalayan landscape with its numerous topographical features and spiritual, esoteric and natural properties as vividly retold and enumerated in numerous contemporary “guide-books” to the area. Most of these, *BGR* routinely and duly quotes with due references, mainly authored by a row of prominent and celebrated “Treasure-Finders.” With this new status within the larger Tibetan cultural world, Sikkim now emerged on the map of travelling ascetics and prospective devout pilgrims as an ideal and much-sought sanctuary or refuge during their spiritual journeys. This devout description of Denjong (var. Dremojong) as a unique sanctuary laid the foundation for the ensuing subsection of *BGR*, a section that evidently constitutes the *raison d’être* or justification for the arrival of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Franz-Karl Ehrhard (2003), Kaḥ thog pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1466–1540) and his Activities in Sikkim and Bhutan. *Bulletin of Tibetology* 49 (2): 9–26. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

prospective king and not least the question of their ancestral and divine origin.

*The advent and genealogy of the Sikkim dynasty*

The most delicate and controversial issue in *BGR* is arguably related to the issue: the divine or celebrated origin of the Namgyal dynasty itself. The ethnogenetic origin of a ruling house is an issue that is addressed in most royal genealogies, mooted in order to provide the necessary legitimation to the throne. The role of the king-makers, the pioneer exalted yogis who paved the way for the kingdom is addressed in great detail too, whose successive arrival proved to have not only a decisive impact on the sustained dissemination of Buddhism in the area but, as said, also for installing a new ruler. The ancestry or ultimate origin of the prospective ruler is duly chronicled and here *BGR* goes to considerable length in its “fact-finding” endeavour by marshalling an array of different arguments and textual references aimed at underpinning a viable yet contested ancestry, not least by querying and foregrounding some from others. The most popular among these is the long-debated claim that the royal progenitor originally descended from Kham Minyak (of Eastern Tibet). Central to this claim is that he was a member of a local royal or noble Kham Minyak line called A’o IDong. He was popularly known under the sobriquet Gye Bumsag (i.e. “Champion or Herculean Strongman”) and eventually reached Sikkim along with his brothers after an eventful journey, an arrival that tentatively could be dated to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. The local oral tradition claims that he soon forged an alliance with a native Lepcha chieftain. Gye Bumsag’s descendant in sixth generation<sup>5</sup> was the First Chogyal Phuntshog Namgyal (r. c. 1640s–1670). The association of the Sikkim House to one of the most widespread Tibetan proto-clans, the IDong clan and to Minyak (commonly referring to the 13<sup>th</sup> century Tangut or Xixia state) and later to Kham Minyak, does hold some historical credibility, but sufficient verifiable sources are still lacking. Aside from the still-questioned Minyak descent, *BGR* also proposes additional theories as to the divine or royal ancestry of the first king. It seems that many of these historical links and references traced in the rich Tibetan literature and presented in *BGR* were conflated with conflicting accounts stemming from Tantric Vajrayāna literary sources. These textual links and

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<sup>5</sup> There are believed to be six generations between Gye Bumsag and the First Chogyal according to oral tradition. This has not been substantiated by any written records.

references naturally generate multiple chronological problems. One such still undocumented claim purports that the Namgyal lineage originated with the 9<sup>th</sup> century Yarlung prince Murub Tsenpo (who by the way is also championed as the fountain-head or progenitor of other ancient lineages in Bhutan and the surrounding areas), another construction proposes a possible link to India: the legendary king Indrabhūti, or king Dza, a tantric practitioner and pioneer from the legendary country of Zahor suggesting here some inspiration from a similar narrative Minyak link and descent, reminiscent of a constructed family history related to the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. As with similar narratives of the remote past, a retelling is always vulnerable to fiction and legends, and a distressing lack of source criticism.

Worth noting is the rhetorical tool employed in most of these claims. They consist of prophecies (Tib. *lung bstan*), such predictions come into play whether it concerns the detection and opening of Sikkim as a “Hidden Land” or concerning the imminent advent, ultimate ancestry and emergence of the First Chogyal in the sacred land of Denjong. They are, as often the case, so-called constructed prophecies, that is postdictions, that usually were pre-dated but post-executed. In cases of such narratives of the past, and *BGR* is no exception, these postdictions were a powerful rhetorical tool often referring to legendary events in the past. Usually they refer to canonical sources or contain quotations stemming from bygone saints, Buddhist masters—one repeatedly used figure is Guru Rinpoche. This is no wonder when we recall that the origin myth in the Sikkim case was dominantly reflecting assumptions and preferences honed in the Nyingmapa tradition. Such postdictions in *BGR* were deployed or embedded in the so called *gter ma* literature, and the quotes and (often constructed) allusions referring to the occurrence of the first king were copiously quoted to this effect, composed or discovered by such Treasure Finders and Sikkim pilgrims such as Sangyelingpa, Ratnalingpa, etc. among a host of other masters. The most effective outcome of referring to or using such ex eventu predictions were that they often served as a game changer in a dispute or claim serving to corroborate such an ancestry. As such they remained undisputed and unerring, to be regarded as the very words of the saint in question and thus beyond doubt in its veracity.

*A retelling: history as linear genealogy*

The writing process of *BGR* evidently had been well prepared and thoroughly researched prior to being put to the pen. It is evident it was a

serious matter for Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma who selected the best local scholars to collaborate, first of all Yangthang Jedrung Namkha Gyatsho (Athing Dewan) and Barmiak Lama Karma Palden Chogyal. Their participation is most evident in handling the first and second chapters, also evidenced by later correspondence with Charles Bell, a select group of scholar monks who worked under Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma's supervision, and who proved diligent in searching for even the slightest reference to Sikkim in the vast Tibetan literature. All in all, in this endeavour they would prove relatively successful, yet it also accounts for the overall uneven and unbalanced character of the entire narrative.

The narrative's structural build-up and regnal gallery reflect kindred literature: Aside from dynastic myths indicated for the earliest rulers, each Chogyal's reign is treated coterminous with the life of the individual ruler, and each regnal segment initiates and terminates with a summary portrait highlighting his feats and achievements, clearly chronicled by the principle of hereditary succession and linked together as a chain of biographies.<sup>6</sup> Once the following Chogyals and all available minutiae of their lives are narrated, not least from the Third Chogyal onwards, the text gets more and more dense and historical. The narrative is richer and it is evident that the reporting is fed by a number of different sources, not least lengthy passages from the biographies of the protagonists, whenever relevant, who played a role in the events. Increasingly, the narratives are here based upon solid sources and records: archival records and official correspondence material, written in a diction that has been coined chancery Tibetan with its own diplomatic vocabulary (i.e. *Urkundensprache*) not seldom garnished, like with similar correspondence and official records in Tibet, with samples of proverbial and idiomatic phraseology (often illustratively employed to avoid to address an issue directly). However, quite a large segment of this sort of archival correspondence retained in the Tibetan original, had been left out by Kazi Dawasamdub in his 1910 preliminary translation. These essential records are now duly reinstated and translated in the new book.

In the long section not least related to the Ninth Chogyal Thutob Namgyal the narrative is based upon both oral information and written sources of local origin gathered no doubt by Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma herself while travelling throughout the country. Moreover, the candid sentiments accompanying Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma in this part of the

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<sup>6</sup> See G. Spiegel, *The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*. (1997): 106–08.



narrative and her personal, often diplomatically phrased defensive assessment of the events here come to the fore. This part is rarely met with and finds no parallel in Tibetan literature not least in the light that it has been written or dictated by a ruling Queen.

It can be concluded that the saga and fortunes of the minor kingdom, its unruly court-life and its constant fight for survival reflect the troublesome saga of Sikkim itself, vividly told in *BGR* up to most recent times at the beginning of last century. This circumstance both served as a predicament and as point of departure behind the writing of the text, a writing that constituted an attempt not only to revive the memory and glory of the rulers from the amnesiac veil of oblivion, but also for the prominent author(s) to redress the depiction of Sikkim that existed at the point of writing. Importantly, the Sikkim royal genealogy ultimately would serve as a case of social and national memory. Here in these lines we retrace the legacy and hear the voice of the Sikkimese people that for too long had remained either unarticulated or overheard.



NOTES ON SOME ANOMALIES IN KAZI DAWASAMDUP'S  
UNPUBLISHED DRAFT TRANSLATION OF  
THE *DENJONG GYALRAB* – “*THE ROYAL HISTORY OF SIKKIM*”

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*University of Virginia*

In May 2021, I and my two colleagues, Anna Balikci Denjongpa and Per K. Sørensen, published our new translation of the classic Sikkim history *Denjong Gyalrab* (Tib. 'Bras ljongs rGyal rabs; hereafter abbreviated *BGR*), written in Tibetan by the Tenth Chogyal Thutob Namgyal (1860–1914) and his Tibetan consort Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma (1867–1910).<sup>1</sup> A key supporting resource was a draft English translation<sup>2</sup> commonly called “*History of Sikkim*” (hereafter abbreviated *HoS*) commissioned by the authors to be written by the Sikkim scholar Kazi Dawasamdub, well known to Sikkimese and global Tibet researchers. Our main objective was to produce as accurate a translation as possible, adhering faithfully to the Tibetan original, accompanied by period photos and explanatory texts for the benefit of readers perhaps unfamiliar with Sikkim history and culture.

We began this project some years ago at the invitation of the royal authors' granddaughter, Her Majesty Gyalyum Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, mother of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan. We worked initially with photocopies, of varying quality, of source manuscripts in English and Tibetan provided by Her Majesty.

Our initial plan seemed relatively straightforward, to base our work on the Kazi's *HoS* translation, making adjustments and additions where needed. However, in comparing the Tibetan text of *BGR* with the *HoS* translation, we quickly realized that a much different approach would be necessary. We discovered far too many differences between the Tibetan text and the Kazi's translation. In numerous cases *HoS* merely summarized the text of *BGR*, often omitting important factual details.

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<sup>1</sup> Ardussi, John A., Anna Balikci Denjongpa & Per K. Sørensen (2021). *The Royal History of Sikkim*. Chicago: Serindia (hereafter abbreviated *RHoS*).

<sup>2</sup> The unpublished English manuscript and its various type-written copies have come to bear the title *History of Sikkim*, the original Tibetan manuscript having no formal title. (For details of these manuscripts, see *RHoS*: 32–34).

We also found significant errors in translation, and in the identification of people, places and dates. Episodes cited from *BGR*'s Tibetan sources were sometimes incorrectly transcribed. In several instances, entire paragraphs of *BGR* were left untranslated or rearranged in *HoS* without explanation. In the end, in order to adhere to our primary objective to remain faithful to the Tibetan original, we felt the need to restart the project as an entirely new translation, incorporating material from *HoS* where it was accurate, or as a reference.

Late in our project documents from the Sikkim Palace Archives became available for our use, including a clearer and more original photo scan of the Tibetan *BGR* source document, and, quite unexpectedly, the original hand-written English manuscript of the 1909–1910 draft translation by Kazi Dawasamdub.<sup>3</sup> This important document was apparently unknown to Sikkim researchers until we were able to use it for the first time in writing *The Royal History of Sikkim*, more than one hundred years after it was first written.

With these new documents in hand, it became possible for the first time to closely examine some of the intriguing problems in the draft translation by Dawasamdub. In this short article I wish to address one of the Kazi's most consequential *HoS* translation lapses, and offer a potential explanation which may guide future research in these documents.

But first, some background.

### *Key features of the Denjong Gyalrab manuscript*

Fig. 1 below reproduces part of the first page of the *Denjong Gyalrab* manuscript from the Sikkim Palace Archives. Except for the opening eulogy (clipped off at the top) the entire 135-page manuscript is written in a version of Tibetan cursive (Tib. *'khyugs*) script.<sup>4</sup> This script was widely used by official secretaries of the Sikkim Government, when corresponding with their counterparts in the British Indian Government and in Tibet. Because this script is hand-written, however, it is more or less "free form," especially in private correspondence. Each author or scribe could use whatever flourishes, contractions, and abbreviations he chose. Today, though, this script is seldom used.

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<sup>3</sup> Manuscript numbered MS – 6 in *RHoS*: 34.

<sup>4</sup> Other extant versions in the *'khyugs* script reach to 161 folios. The relationship between them remains to be established. The original Tibetan text manuscript used by Kazi Dawasamdub appears to be no longer extant.

In the *BGR* manuscript, there are few sentence or paragraph-ending punctuation marks that are typically used in Tibetan texts written in block print (Tib. *dbu can*) script. Instead there are gaps of varying width, inconsistently applied, to indicate a change of subject or item in a list. The only significant topic marker occurs at the introduction of the reign of a new Chogyal.

The style of diction also varies in different sections of *BGR*. The opening chapter contains summaries and extracts of histories, monastic biographies and esoteric “prophecies” written by Tibetans involved in the exploration or “opening” of Sikkim by early Tibetan Nyingma saints. This section is written in standard literary Tibetan. The later chapters of *BGR* narrating events of the late 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries cite increasingly from official Sikkim correspondence and documents, also written in script Tibetan, some of which can still be found in the Palace Archives referenced in the collection recently edited by Mullard and Wongchuk.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of grammar, these citations are generally incorporated within *BGR* as incomplete clause extracts, often lengthy, containing arguments in favour of, or against certain events or policies, from the perspective of the Chogyal’s court. In our new translation of *The Royal History of Sikkim* we have attempted to punctuate these arguments in a fashion compatible with standard English prose composition, using subjunctive case verbs and semicolons to separate a series of extracted segments.

In summary, for all the above reasons the *BGR* manuscripts are challenging to read, containing page after page of continuous Tibetan script.

### *Kazi Dawasamdub’s version of the enthronement of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal*

With the above preview in mind, we turn now to the main focus of this paper, Kazi Dawasamdub’s flawed translation of the passage describing the coronation of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal (r. 1874–1914).

The details of his coronation are important for several reasons. First of all, when and where did it actually take place?

In the *Gazetteer of Sikkim* (1894), Risley wrote that the installation of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal was the result of British manoeuvring, implying that they were the controlling influence over the Sikkim

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<sup>5</sup> Mullard, Saul & Hissey Wongchuk (2010). *Royal Records: A catalogue of the Sikkimese Palace Archive*. Andiast, HTBS.

monarchy: “Not a whisper was heard on the frontier of remonstrance against this vigorous piece of king-making, and Tibet acquiesced silently....”<sup>6</sup> In an apparent attempt to impress his British readers (though certainly not English-reading Sikkimese), Risley used terminology relevant to the recent (1866) Austro-Prussian war in Europe. He designated Sikkim “the Belgium of Asia,” and the Chogyal’s summer palace and estates in Chumbi Valley “the Hanover of Sikkim,”<sup>7</sup> impugning Sikkim’s posture of neutrality in disputes between Tibet and British India. There was, thus, disharmony between Sikkim and the British from the very outset of the Chogyal’s reign. It was precisely to present a more truthful interpretation of Sikkim history that Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and Yeshe Dolma claimed to have written *The Royal History of Sikkim*, calling it “a new Gazetteer” in a private letter to their translator, Kazi Dawasamdub.<sup>8</sup>

According to *HoS*, the coronation took place at the Chogyal’s palace in Chumbi Valley, within Tibet, accompanied by a grand presentation of gifts from Tibetan and Chinese officials and from Sikkimese, enumerated at length. In fact, however, *BGR* specifically describes the coronation as two-fold, a preliminary coronation in Chumbi (June 25, 1874) and the main, formal coronation held at the Tumlong Palace inside Sikkim (Jan. 21, 1875). The notion of a single coronation at the Chumbi Palace, however, played into Risley’s narrative. Risley criticised the Chogyal as “a Tibetanising Raja of Sikkim.”<sup>9</sup> His supposed favouritism of Tibet over his native state of Sikkim thus became a narrative that negatively affected relations between Sikkim and British India throughout his reign. It has also been the subject of comment by 20<sup>th</sup>-century historians assessing the Chogyal’s alleged “tilt toward Tibet.”<sup>10</sup>

Let us examine the documents in question. We introduce several of them here:

1. The original translation of the relevant pages written by Kazi Dawasamdub;
2. Their reproduction in a later type-written version;
3. The actual text from two manuscripts of *BGR*;

<sup>6</sup> Risley (1894): vi. Whether this description is even accurate, given that the British Indian government had not authorized this action by Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, needs further study in the relevant archives.

<sup>7</sup> Risley (1894): iii, xi. Other cultural misstatements marred Risley’s account, which are beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>8</sup> *RHoS*: 28, fn 11.

<sup>9</sup> Risley (1894): ix.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Singh (1988): 212.

4. The correct translation from our recent book *The Royal History of Sikkim* (2021).

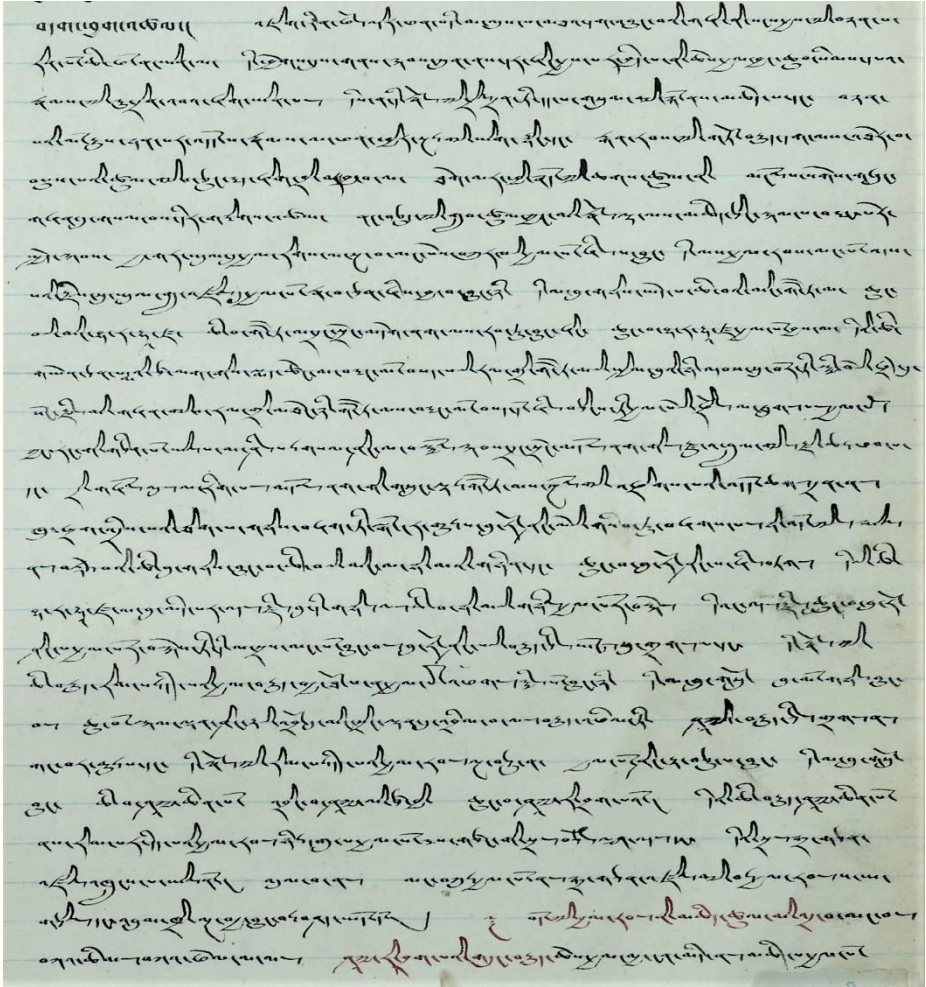


Fig. 1: Extract from the opening page of the *Denjong Gyalrab* in the Sikkim Palace Archives, illustrating the use of Tibetan 'khyugs' script. Other versions of this document (e.g. MS – 2) display a different manuscript hand, also written in the Tibetan 'khyugs' script.

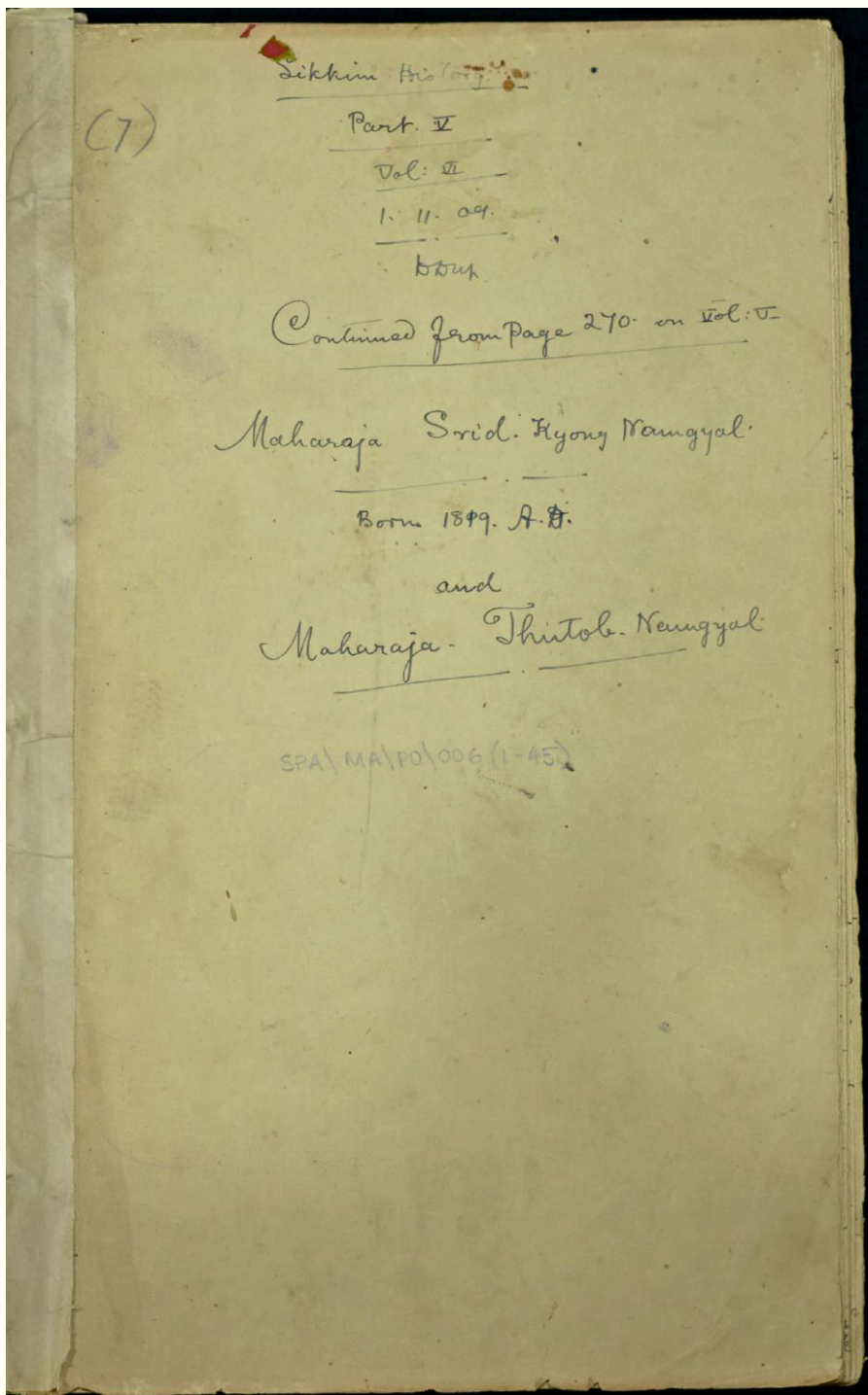


Fig. 2 Kazi Dawasamdub Denjong Gyalrab translation notebooks.  
 Cover page of Parts 5 & 6 (begun 1 Nov. 1909).



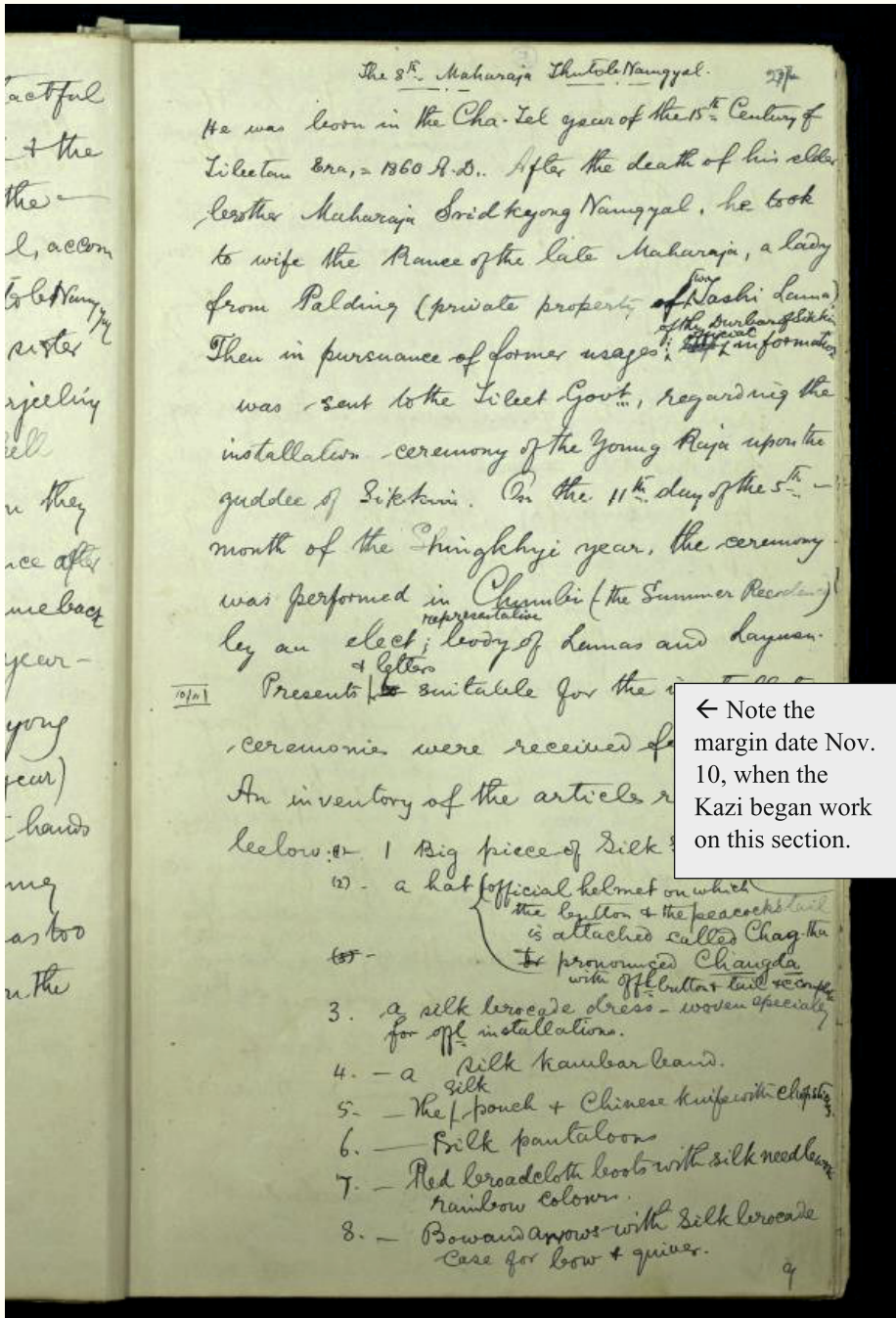


Fig. 3 Kazi Dawasamdup's manuscript translation of the *Denjong Gyalrab* (vol. 6: 277) describing the coronation ceremony of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal (noting the margin date).

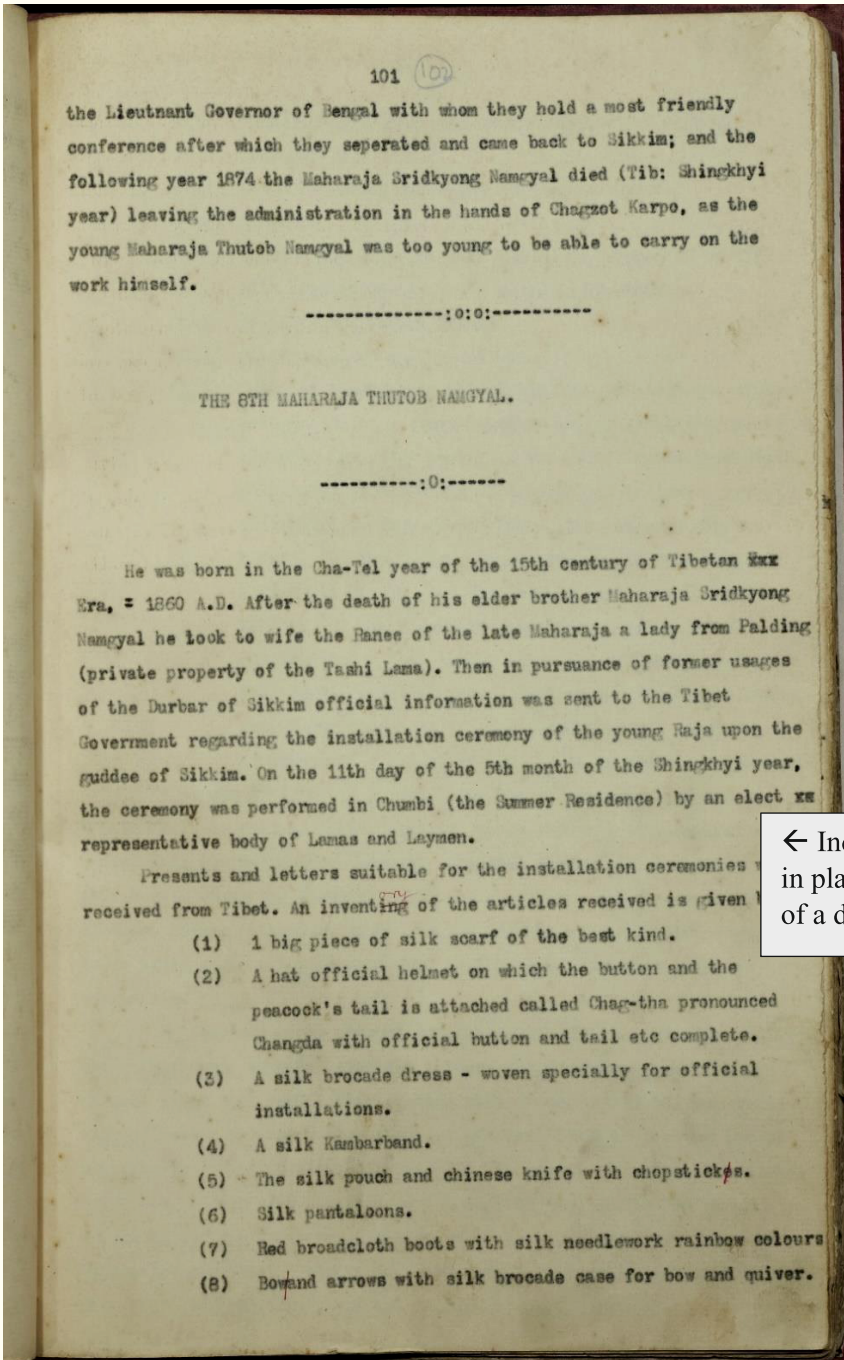


Fig. 4 The same passage, taken from a typewritten photocopy of a *History of Sikkim* MS (see also British Library / India Office Library and Records, MSS Eur E78). Notice the paragraph indent at the same place as in the handwritten MS, but lacking the Kazi's reference date.

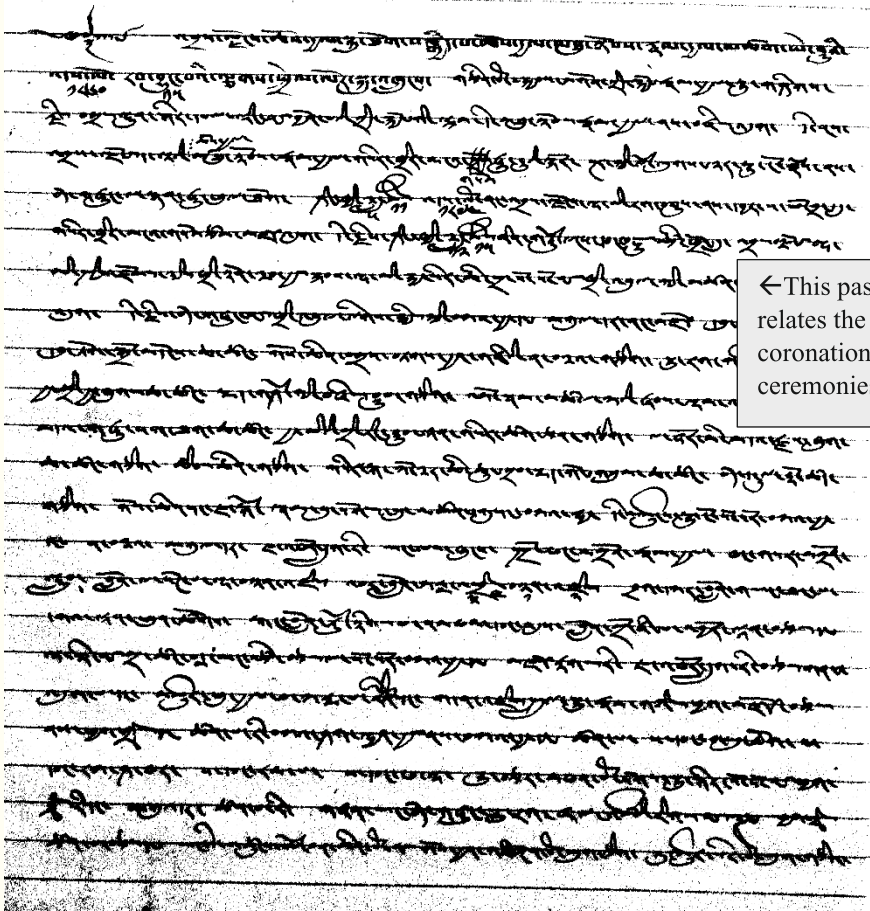


Fig. 5 The Barmiak MS (MS - 2): 69, copied in 1951 from an earlier manuscript.

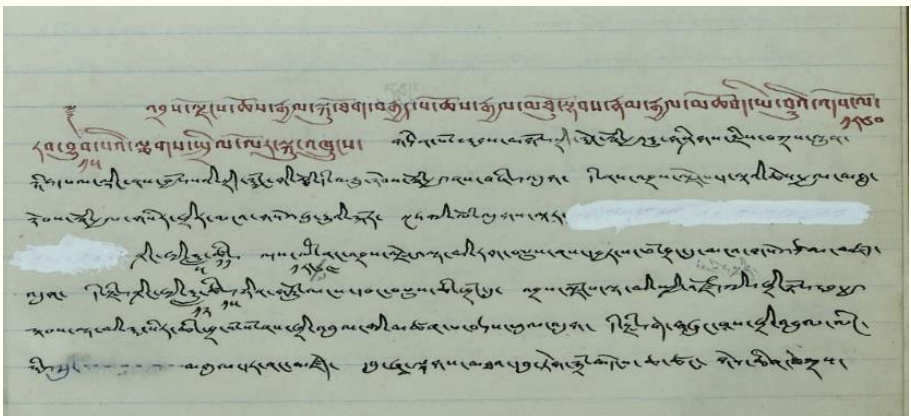


Fig. 6 The same passage from the Sikkim Palace Archives version of BGR (MS - 1: EAP880\_SPAMA\_002: 58).

## CHAPTER 9

## Early Reign of the Ninth Chogyal Thutob Namgyal

(1860 – 1914)

(reign 1874 – 1914)

The 8<sup>th</sup> [recte 9<sup>th</sup>] Chogyal Thutob Namgyal was born in 1860, the Iron Monkey year of the 15<sup>th</sup> Tibetan era.<sup>1</sup> After the death of his elder half-brother Chogyal Sidkyong Namgyal, he took to wife the Queen of the late Chogyal, a lady from the Palding estate belonging to Tashilhunpo.

## Thutob Namgyal's Installation as Chogyal of Sikkim

Now, as for the enthronement of Thutob Namgyal on the ruling Golden Throne, this was done in accord with former precedent whereby officials sent notice to the Government of Tibet. On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month of the Wood Dog year [June 25, 1874],<sup>2</sup> the Chogyal was installed on the Golden Throne in a preliminary ceremony at the Summer Palace in Chumbi, by a selected body of Lamas and laymen.

Later, on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the same Wood Dog year [Jan. 21, 1875], however, a massive assembly of monks and laymen of Sikkim, high and low, gathered at Tumlong Wangdüte Palace on the profound occasion of his formal installation on the throne, and there they presented celebratory gifts.<sup>3</sup>

Next, presents and letters suitable for the installation ceremonies were received from Tibet, a list of which follows here:

One large silk scarf of the best kind;

An official helmet on which the button and the peacock's tail is attached called *changda* complete with official button and tail;<sup>4</sup>

A silk brocade robe, woven especially for the official installations;

A silk cummerbund or waist sash;

1 His predecessor on the throne having been a monk, was apparently considered outside the numbering scheme by the authors of *BGR*.

2 *HoS* misinterprets this year as 1864.

3 The fact of a dual coronation ceremony was either missed or misunderstood by KDS. The main coronation took place not in Chumbi, as reported in *HoS*, but rather at Tumlong Palace in Sikkim, as described here from the original manuscripts. Jasbir Singh (1988: 212) and various other scholars were misled by this translation error, which contributed to the mistaken belief among key British officials during the later Curzon era that the Chogyal was more partial to Tibet than to Sikkim.

4 The term *changda* "iron rod" has been explained as a metal band which forms the inner frame of lightweight official hats worn during summer months (correspondence with Melvyn Goldstein, Oct. 2018).

← The paragraph absent from Dawasamdud translation.

Fig. 7 Coronation ceremonies of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal in both the Chumbi Palace and Tumlong Palace (see *The Royal History of Sikkim*: 287).

### *Conclusions*

The events surrounding the enthronement of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal remain a question for further research in Sikkimese and British colonial records.

- British sources, following Risley (*Gazetteer* p. vi), claim that they acted pre-emptively as “king makers,” by engineering the enthronement of Thutob Namgyal over his half-brother whom they felt at the time was more anti-British. Risley cites the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, J.W. Edgar for this information. Edgar paid a visit to Sikkim in late 1873, the year before the coronation, but offers no inkling of British involvement in his diary of the trip.<sup>11</sup> All later accounts cite Risley, who never set foot inside Sikkim. So what is the truth of this statement?
- The lengthy account of the official enthronement at Tumlong Palace lists an extensive array of inauguration presents from Tibetan authorities, the Manchu Ambans, and Sikkimese, but there is no mention of any gift or recognition by the British, who are conspicuously absent. Why, if they were the king-makers, were they not represented at the official coronation at Tumlong Palace?
- The translation by Kazi Dawasamdub errs in skipping the account of the official enthronement at Tumlong Palace, describing the events as if they took place only at the Chumbi Palace, a place which Risley later chastised as “the Hanover of Sikkim.” Why?
- The most obvious interpretation of this lapse, and the one that we think most likely, is that Dawasamdub simply lost his place in the manuscript of *BGR*, easily done as we have shown by the complexity of the document written in script Tibetan. As he resumed his work on Nov. 10, 1909, after a break of nine days, he seems to have accidentally dropped off the missing paragraph, as shown above. However, there are other possible interpretations, less favourable to Edgar and Risley. We will leave that discussion to a future article.
- Dawasamdub’s difficulty in following the script versions of *BGR* may explain other translation lapses. This can best be verified by comparing his original translation notebooks with later, typewritten versions of *HoS*, and with the original Tibetan text of *BGR*.

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<sup>11</sup> J.W. Edgar (1874).

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THE JOURNEY OF THE BOOK: FROM *DENJONG GYALRAB*  
TO  
*THE ROYAL HISTORY OF SIKKIM*

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INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The *Denjong Gyalrab* was authored by the Ninth Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and his Tibetan consort Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the Ninth Chogyal is given first credit, it is well accepted that Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma was the driving force behind the project, assisted by a number of local Lamas and scholars. One could say that it was the first and only history written in Tibetan by a woman, certainly by a queen. The English translation of the *Denjong Gyalrab* was then carried out by Kazi Dawasamdub between 1909 and 1910. Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma died in December 1910, and unfortunately never saw her book in published form. Following her demise, as Sikkim grew closer to British India, the *History of Sikkim*, which highlights Sikkim's long relationship with Tibet and by extension Imperial China, became an unpopular view and was quickly forgotten.

During the following century, the original Tibetan text remained hidden out of sight, while photocopies of Kazi Dawasamdub's English typescript, commonly referred to as the *History of Sikkim (1908)* or *HoS*, circulated among interested Sikkimese and a few international scholars, but was never published. A copy was kept in the India Office Records, British Library, and at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Enquiring about the fact that it was never published from members of the Sikkim royal family, I was told that publication perhaps had not been considered as the royal family was not portrayed in a very favourable light.

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<sup>1</sup> John Ardussi's inputs, particularly to the introduction, are acknowledged. An earlier version of this paper was read at the 2019 Paris conference of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, within the Bhutan-Sikkim panel. Several issues brought up here are further discussed in the introduction of *The Royal History of Sikkim* (John Ardussi, Anna Balikci Denjongpa, Per Sørensen, 2021, Serindia).

Sandwiched between Tibet and British India, Sikkim under the Ninth Chogyal and Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma had been a very difficult reign. Already since the time of the Seventh Chogyal, Sikkim had been pressured by both British India and Tibet to keep the other's influence out of Sikkim. Sikkim had executed formal agreements with both countries, containing mutually conflicting terms. How could she find a way to comply with them in a neutral way?

Although the Sikkimese royals always favoured alliance with Tibet, keeping the British out was not an easy task: a reality the Tibet Government failed to grasp until it was unfortunately too late. Eventually, these tensions, which overshadowed their entire reign, culminated in a series of dramatic events: first the 1888 Anglo-Tibet war at Lungthu within what was considered Sikkimese territory by the British, but Tibetan by Tibet; followed by the appointment of Sikkim's first British Political Officer in 1889, the overbearing J.C. White; the over two-year detention of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma at Kurseong and Darjeeling from 1893 to 1895; and eventually, the 1903–1904 Younghusband Expedition.

By the time the *Denjong Gyalrab* was written, the Sikkimese royals had realised that for a tiny powerless nation like theirs, it was pointless to continue resisting British India and siding with Tibet, a nation that was no match to the British and to whom Sikkim could provide little except as a helpful intermediary.

Early on, this divide between allegiance to British India or Tibet extended to the Sikkimese aristocracy, which resulted in a simultaneous betrayal by a number of the royal couple's ministers and representatives, who for their own reasons decided to support the British long before the royal couple was forced to do so. During the period that the Ninth Chogyal and his consort were clumsily placed under house arrest, for no apparent reason other than failing to uphold a British point of view, Sikkim's first Political Officer J.C. White reorganized the administration along British lines with the support of pro-British Sikkimese ministers. Under his command (but falsely under the seal of the imprisoned Chogyal) they redistributed land confiscated from loyal royal servants to those who had supported the British.

Sikkim's gradual distancing from Tibet and gradual rapprochement with British India was a painful transitional period, which *The Royal History* did not portray as favourable to the British Government in India. John Ardussi suggests that British officials of that era did not want *The History of Sikkim* to be published, as it was critical of their actions and



harsh treatment of the Sikkim royal family. Then once the Chogyal and Yeshe Dolma had passed away, the new rulers of Sikkim adopted different attitudes.

#### HER MAJESTY ASHI KESANG CHOEDEN WANGCHUCK INITIATES THE PUBLICATION PROJECT

Whether portrayed under favourable light or not, theirs was a story Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma wanted to be told. It is significant that while the history of the first eight Chogyals covers half the book, the second half is entirely dedicated to the details of Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma and her consort's tumultuous reign. And thus in the mid-1990s, when the granddaughter of Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma, Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck of Bhutan, asked her mother Mayeum Choni Wongmo Dorji for permission to publish her grandmother's *History*, permission was granted. The next stage in the long and challenging journey of the 'making of the book' began.

The original Palace copy of the *Denjong Gyalrab* had unfortunately been lost for some time, however one copy had been commissioned by Barmiak Athing in 1951, which was then further copied by a Bhutanese for Mayum Choni Wongmo.<sup>2</sup> Around the year 2000 when Dr Michael Vinding was in Bhutan as Liaison Officer for Denmark, he heard of Her Majesty's wish to publish *The Royal History of Sikkim* and kindly suggested that Tibetologists Prof. Per K. Sørensen and John Ardussi could rework the original translation.<sup>3</sup>

Both scholars began to work immediately, Per on the first half covering the hypothetical origins of the Sikkim royal family up to the Sixth Chogyal. Simultaneously, John Ardussi spared time away from his full-time engineering job to begin work on the second part covering the period of the Seventh Chogyal up to 1908. In the end, the team relied primarily on two manuscripts written in Tibetan cursive script and one in cursive Bhutanese.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tsering, Tashi (2012). A Short Communication about the 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs. *Bulletin of Tibetology* 48 (1): 33–58. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

<sup>3</sup> Her Majesty wishes to correct an earlier version of this article, to state that Prof. Michael Aris never served as tutor to the Fourth King, only his two younger sisters, and was never invited to work on a translation of the *Denjong Gyalrab*.

<sup>4</sup> On the different *Denjong Gyalrab* manuscripts, see the Introduction of *The Royal History of Sikkim* (2021).

Then in 2007, having heard of my work on historic photographs of Sikkim, Her Majesty enquired about me from Princess Pema Tsedeun (Coocoola) of Sikkim. Subsequently, Her Majesty called me to Bhutan House Kalimpong and eventually to Thimphu, and finally in March 2011, it was decided that I would assist with the illustrations of the book, and thus initially joined the team as Sikkim photo archivist. Before long, I took on several more responsibilities as Sikkim cultural expert, liaison to Sikkimese monks and scholars, co-writer of the supplementary material, co-editor of the final manuscript, co-designer of the book and general coordinator of the overall project.

#### THE MAKING OF THE *DENJONG GYALRAB*

When Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma embarked upon her ambitious book project, many people were called to help. As related in Tashi Tsering's article on the *Denjong Gyalrab* (2012), Sir Charles Bell enquired from Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden, the then Private Secretary to Thutob Namgyal, about the sources and methods used in the *History's* compilation, first in 1916 and again in 1934. In his replies Lobzang Chhoden lists nine Tibetan texts<sup>5</sup> used for the writing of the first chapters on the origins and early history of the Namgyal dynasty. For the later history following the establishment of the Chogyals, he relates that:

old Sanads, letters, Deeds of Grants, etc. in the possession of everyone in Sikkim were called up and returned after reference. For more recent events, several old people living (sic) were invited and asked to narrate what they knew personally in their times. In short, Their Highness the late Maharaja and Maharani, and especially the latter aimed at making the new history a real authentic and standard work, as far as possible.<sup>6</sup>

Again in 1934, Bell made enquiries about the *History* from Lobzang Chhoden who now added:

The object of writing the history, I understand from the late Maharani was to clear up some misunderstanding that was created by some of the old Kazis of those days, between some high British officials and the Raj family, and also to remove some discrepancies in Mr Risley's *Gazetteer of Sikkim* in connection with the old history of the line of the

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<sup>5</sup> See Tsering, Tashi (2012 - reference given in footnote 2) for the titles of these nine texts.

<sup>6</sup> Lobzang Chhoden letter to Charles Bell dated December 25, 1916. British Library, India Office Records, Eur MSS F80/28.

Raj family. Their Highnesses called up a meeting of some Kazis, Lamas and old folks in the big Durbar Hall of the old Palace, to examine old records and books dealing with scraps of historical events in Sikkim. These scraps were collected and put in historical form by the combined efforts of Their Highnesses and others gathered at the meeting, which was continued for several days. The actual writing of the history was entrusted to the late Yangthang Kazi [Namkha Gyaltscho] and Barmiok Lama, both Tibetan scholars of repute, who had their composition corrected and approved by Their Highnesses from time to time.

I also understand that after the completion of the work in Sikkim, it was sent up to Tering Raja for further correction, before the History was finally accepted in its present form.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of methodology, we also learned from Her Majesty that Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma worked very hard and travelled throughout Sikkim staying in a tent and personally interviewed many old people. Evidently, Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma had a deep interest in the subject and was determined to provide an alternative history to Risley's Anglo-centric 1894 *Gazetteer of Sikkim*. It is also possible that Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma may have been influenced by Western style literature and methods of enquiry in the course of the royal couple's two years stay (1893–1895) at Darjeeling while under house arrest. Nevertheless, John Ardussi writes that the (Tibetan) text contains no clear statement as to when it was written, and feels unfinished. The book has no formal introduction, colophon or dedication, which is very unusual for a Tibetan history. It ends abruptly with J.C. White's departure from Sikkim to England.

#### THE NEW TRANSLATION

In their first rounds of re-translation following the original English version by Kazi Dawasamdub, John Ardussi and Per Sørensen encountered countless difficulties. To start with, there were numerous differences between the Tibetan manuscripts and the English translation by Kazi Dawasamdub. Not only did the Kazi delete entire sections that may have been perceived as controversial, he inserted his own comments and interpretations with the intention of clarifying certain issues and even moved text around. John Ardussi proposed a working approach to

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<sup>7</sup> Lobzang Chhoden letters to Charles Bell dated March 20 and April 9, 1934. British Library, India Office Records, Eur MSS F80/28.

remain faithful to the original Tibetan text, with explanations in footnotes about material that had been deleted, added, moved around or mistranslated by Kazi Dawasamdub.

John Ardussi and Per Sørensen also addressed the many historical and legendary references, consulted the relevant original documents preserved in Sikkim's Palace Archives, plus Tibetan histories, biographies and Terma works accessed at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center in New York, as well as publications from the PRC, Bhutan and Tibet. They added hundreds of footnotes to help contextualise people, places and events within the wider region's political and religious history. The finished translation of the entire book was performed by John Ardussi, incorporating and revising the section produced by Per Sørensen to ensure accuracy and a uniform style.

Many problems centred around dates. Numerous errors and discrepancies were found in the dates, including copyist errors from the Tibetan source documents and mis-conversions by Kazi Dawasamdub. As John Ardussi says, there are also many places where the date of some document or event is simply marked with place-holder words "month" "day" "year" as if waiting to be filled in after further research. A decision was made by John Ardussi to convert all of the Tibetan sexagenary dates to Western or Gregorian format using the Phugpa calendar system that was adopted in Sikkim. This greatly improves the accuracy and readability.

#### THE SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

As we have seen, Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma wished to make "the new history a real authentic and standard work." Keeping her wish in mind, we soon realized that while remaining truthful to the original text, we needed to include not only footnotes and illustrations but supplementary material in the form of maps, genealogies and some 60 text boxes to render the history more accessible to those readers not so familiar with Sikkimese history and culture. With this aim in mind, we set to work on creating new maps highlighting Sikkim's historical and sacred locations, drawing genealogies of influential families, writing short biographies and other essays that would provide context and background on important events, monuments, symbols and people of the era as well as recurrent questions of Sikkimese history.

While working on the original text, a myriad of questions specific to Sikkim's localities, individuals, and Sikkim's social and political history

came up that needed to be answered to better understand the text and its context. By carrying out interviews with Lamas, scholars and members of the landlord families, together with researches carried out in local archives and on-the-ground investigations of historical and sacred sites, we succeeded to some extent in answering many of these questions and providing contextual material.

*Families and individuals: genealogies, biographies and detailed people's index*

As a first step, lists of every single person mentioned in *The Royal History* were compiled after which we proceeded to identify and establish links between the most significant, starting with the royal family whose many minor members were forgotten over the centuries. Several years ago, Alice Travers compiled a genealogy for the Sikkim royal family, which she very kindly shared with me. Using Alice's genealogy as a starting point, we gathered further information about members of the Namgyal family from archival and other sources, including the manuscript itself, and created a series of updated genealogies of the royal family for the book.

Proceeding onto Sikkim's landlord families, the English typescript of *The Royal History of Sikkim* has an appendix with the title: *The Pedigree of the Kazis of Sikkim and the History of their Ancestors*. This appendix is absent from the *Denjong Gyalrab*, and whether an original Tibetan version of the *Pedigree* ever existed is still being debated.<sup>8</sup> Whichever is the case, neither a Tibetan original nor a handwritten translation were ever located in Sikkim. The first part of the 38 page English typescript version consists of notes on the hierarchy of offices at the Palace, followed by the origin and genealogies of the landlord families. These notes are difficult to follow, even for Sikkimese, and it is not clear who the author(s) may have been. Discrepancies between the details of individuals listed in the appendix and how they are presented in *Denjong Gyalrab* made me question Kazi Dawasamdub's involvement since he would have been very familiar with the protagonists active in the *Denjong Gyalrab*. The second part of the appendix briefly describes the origin myths, clans, lineages, marriage, religion, political organization and selected aspects of culture of the chief tribes of Sikkim: the Lhoris/Lhopos (Bhutia), the Lepchas and the

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<sup>8</sup> On the subject, see the introduction, *The Royal History of Sikkim* (2021) and Tashi Tsering (2012).

Limbus. It concludes with notes on taxation and recent economic development activities. In its structure, this write-up is clearly influenced by early 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial ethnographic descriptions, which lends doubt to the possible existence of a Tibetan original, at least for this second ethnographic section. Kazi Dawasamdup's *HoS* translation bears his name on the last page, which is conspicuously absent from the appendix. The latter however bears a typewritten reproduction of the Chogyal's seal and thus we must conclude that whoever the author may have been, the final version of the appendix before being typewritten, was approved by Chogyal Thutob Namgyal.

Lacking an original Tibetan version to go by in order to produce a new translation of the appendix, it didn't seem advisable to include the appendix in its present form in the final book. However, some genealogical and biographical support was required in order to help the reader identify the influential families and individuals active throughout the history. Already in the 1970s, Yap Dorje Dahdul, the fourth son of Rai Bahadur Lobzang Chhoden who served under two Chogyal's and retired as the state's Chief Secretary, wrote his own updated version of a history of Sikkim covering events through 1975. It remains unpublished. Similarly, Yap Dorje Dahdul also included an appendix to his history with the title *Pedigree of Sikkim's Leading Families*. Basing himself on the appendix to Dawasamdup's *HoS* translation, he plotted 26 genealogies, which he updated up to the 1970s. Using Yap Dorje Dahdul's genealogies as a starting point, we prepared fresh genealogies for some of Sikkim's leading families by pulling together the sometimes conflicting information from the appendix to Kazi Dawasamdup's *HoS*, the *Denjong Gyalrab* text itself, the confidential reports published by the British on the "Who's Who" of Sikkim, documents found in the various archives, interviews with descendants, and from events recorded in historical photographs for which, in some cases, attendance lists were provided in the manuscript. Although most of these new working genealogies are not included in the book, they greatly helped us understand the personages active in the history, their immediate families, alliances and marital relations, and possible motives. Some of this information was written up in short biographies dedicated to the leading characters and included in the form of text boxes in our new *Royal History of Sikkim*, some together with their photographs when available. In line with Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma's wish, particular attention was given to those leading Sikkimese who were loyal to the Chogyal and who were neglected in Risley's *Gazetteer of Sikkim* as his informants, naturally, were from those families who had supported the British early on. The

only genealogies included in the book are those of the royal family and that of the Barfung clan, including only members of the various Barfungpa lineages who were active and mentioned in the *Denjong Gyalrab* manuscript, or otherwise mentioned in footnotes or text boxes.

In lieu of genealogies for the remaining families and in order to help connect people and families over the centuries, a detailed people's index was compiled, regrouping individuals under their respective family lineage. Over the years, names were corrupted and adapted to British pronunciation. The index thus provides the original Tibetan spellings for these names as provided in the Tibetan manuscripts.

*Text Boxes on important events, monuments and symbols of the era as well as recurring questions of Sikkimese history*

In addition to text boxes covering short biographies, we quickly realised that a series of other subjects required additional background information. Important events needed to be contextualised; Palaces, forts, other monuments and forgotten sites needed to be located, photographed and documented; the origin and meaning of royal and national symbols required to be investigated; and an attempt needed to be made throwing new light on recurring questions of Sikkimese history.

In my many years at the institute and as editor of the *Bulletin of Tibetology*, I had the opportunity of reading and discussing finer points of Sikkimese history with a number of local and foreign scholars including learned Lamas. Over the years, it became obvious that a number of questions remained prominent on Sikkimese minds, and that little progress would be made with these unless new sources were uncovered by Sikkimese, or scholars such as John Ardussi and Per Sørensen pondered these questions from a different perspective. Thus, they set to work on some of these and offered their insights in the form of short essays on, for example, Dremojong as a valley of fruits and plants; the Minyak origin of the royal lineage of Sikkim; and the existence of Bhutanese and Lepcha hill forts in the region.

Other questions required on the ground investigations, which led me to several field trips in the wider region. Starting with Sikkim's consecutive Palaces at Lasso, Yuksam, Rabtentse, Kabi, Tumlong and Gangtok, we also visited the remains of the Sikkimese fort at Nagri south of Darjeeling and that of the Lepcha hill fort at Daling. We endeavoured to understand the origins of Darjeeling's early Sikkimese monasteries, located one of the houses in the Darjeeling district where Gyalmo Yeshe

Dolma and Chogyal Thutob Namgyal had been kept under house arrest by the British, and visited the remains of some landlord estates and manor houses.

Eventually, we also pondered the origins and meaning of Sikkim's coat of arms, royal standard, national flag, royal seals, royal hats and headdresses as well as Sikkim's social and political titles.

### *Maps*

As for maps, the hundreds of localities, sacred locations, mountain passes, rivers and lakes mentioned in the manuscript first had to be identified, located and plotted. For this, lists were compiled and dozens of historical maps consulted over several months.<sup>9</sup> We worked closely with a 1941 map prepared by the British and issued by the Survey of India.<sup>10</sup> A number of local place-names had changed or their location altogether forgotten since the writing of the *Denjong Gyalrab*. These were located by consulting historical maps, archival material or through interviews with older people who knew these regions first hand or had walked through them in their youth.

Three historical maps covering Sikkim and its neighbouring regions, where Sikkim had historically exerted influence, were reconstructed and designed.<sup>11</sup> A detailed index was compiled providing these place-names' Tibetan spellings as written in the Tibetan manuscripts before these were corrupted in the course of the following decades.

As a last minute addition, an extraordinary Tibetan military map of the region was procured. The map was produced c. 1886 by Tibetan military authorities preparing for war with British India over the location of Tibet's border with Sikkim.<sup>12</sup> It centres on the Chogyal's Chumbi Summer Palace, extending from Phari Dzong in the Upper Chumbi Valley down to the Lungthu Fort at the disputed border, covering Sikkim and the Kalimpong-Darjeeling region onto the plains of India. Although produced for military purposes, the map offers an original visual

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<sup>9</sup> Samten Choden Bhutia at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology pored over dozens of historical maps of the region in order to identify and plot all locations mentioned in the *Denjong Gyalrab*.

<sup>10</sup> We were grateful to obtain from Hugh Rayner a very accurate scan of the 1941 map of Sikkim.

<sup>11</sup> The author-editors of *The Royal History of Sikkim* hereby state that the three newly designed maps are covered under the book's copyright.

<sup>12</sup> A lithograph of the Tibetan Military Map is located at the Royal Geographical Society in London. It was brought to our attention thanks to the work of Joy Slappnig.



representation, dating from the same period, of the theatre in which the history described in *The Royal History* unfolds.

### *Historic photographs*

At the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok, Sikkim, we have been collecting, scanning and documenting historic photographs of Sikkim since 2002. The Palace Collection of Photographs is our principal collection of original prints, which is held in the Institute's archive. Considering Sikkim's humid climate, we encouraged local families to have their historic photographs scanned at the institute so that digital copies may at least be preserved and documented for posterity. Likewise, we encouraged the descendants of British officials stationed in Sikkim before 1947 and other foreign visitors to Sikkim to share digital copies of their ancestor's albums. A large number of photographic scans were also obtained from public archives and museums in the UK. The Institute now holds a substantial collection of documented prints and high resolution digital copies of historic photographs of Sikkim, which were displayed in a series of exhibitions and is currently being prepared for internet upload.

This collection of historic images led to a research on the identification of members of the royal family, members of Sikkim's two dozen landlord families who most commonly appear in the photographs, as well as Lamas and villagers. Most private and public photographic collections of Sikkim around the world lie undocumented, with many question marks remaining about the locations and people present in the photographs. Over the years, and thanks to the help of Sikkimese elders,<sup>13</sup> the Institute's project team succeeded in identifying a large number of these. *The Royal History of Sikkim* seemed like the ideal place where our photographic collection and its accompanying documentation could come together.

The Institute's collection includes beautiful large format photographs taken during Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma's lifetime. J.C. White, who was an avid photographer, personally photographed Yeshe Dolma and prepared

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<sup>13</sup> Prominent among Sikkimese who helped identify early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century members of the royal and landlord families in the early years of the project were Sem Tinley Ongmu with the help of her daughter Tenzin C. Tashi (Tina), Princess Coocoola, late Tshering Wangchuk Barfungpa, late Tashi Tobden and Barmiak Rinpoche. They were joined by several others in later years from the Pulger, Mazong, Lingmo, Khangsarpa, Dragkarpa, Libing, Shar Kalön and Lassopa families among others.

fine albums of Sikkimese landscapes, published together with the famous Calcutta firm Johnston and Hoffmann. I can only imagine that similarly, Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma would have approved of our incorporating several turn-of-the-century photographs of important events involving the Sikkimese Chogyals, in the final book.

### *History of Sikkim thangkas*

In the 1960s, a series of five thangkas illustrating the history of Sikkim was commissioned by Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal and subsequently entrusted for safe keeping to the Namgyal Institute by Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal. As I studied these thangkas, I soon realised that the artist must have relied on the same *Denjong Gyalrab* in making his illustrated rendition of Sikkimese history. Each thangka has a series of scenes that were individually photographed and included to illustrate the text. These thangkas had been literally tailor-made for *The Royal History of Sikkim*.

When I shared these paintings with Her Majesty Gyalyum Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, she acknowledged their high quality and expressed that probably no Lharipa today could produce such intricate work. The painter in question, Rinzing Lhadripa Lama (1912–1977), also known as Barmiak Lhadripa from the Chungyalpa family, was the best thangka painter Sikkim has ever had. Born in 1912 in the village of Temi in South Sikkim, he joined the Ralang monastery at about ten years of age where he excelled in his studies and served Barmiak Lama, Karma Palden Chogyal, the then head of the monastery. He stayed with Barmiak Rinpoche serving and receiving teachings from him for several years. Barmiak Rinpoche soon noticed Rinzing's artistic talent as he drew with charcoal on the walls.

While Rinzing Lhadripa was with Rinpoche, the Panchen Lama's court artist Champa Tashi Lharip U Chenmo (Byams pa bKra shis), the greatest artist of Tsang,<sup>14</sup> arrived in Sikkim from Tashilhumpo on his way to Kalimpong. Recognizing Rinzing's artistic talent, in 1924 Rinpoche placed Rinzing under the great master of Tashilhumpo with

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<sup>14</sup> Information about Champa Tashi from *Selected Writings of Burmiok Rinpoche Karma Palden Choegyul (1871–1942)*, compiled and edited by Tashi Tsering, Sikkim: Zimig Sang ngag Dud dul Ling Gongpa 2013.

whom he trained for seven years. He thus had the unusual good fortune for a novice to be trained directly under a grand master.<sup>15</sup>

### *Watercolours*

Little known Walter Hodges, who resided in Sikkim for 23 years from 1890 to 1917 (except for a two year posting in Assam and an additional two years while on leave) was J.C. White's Clerical Superintendent. Together with his wife Eva, the Hodges enjoyed painting watercolours of Sikkimese landscapes and monuments. These fine watercolours were preserved by their niece Joan Schneider-Hodges, who kindly shared the collection with the Namgyal Institute along with a large number of photographs. Several watercolours were published in the book, including a rare representation of Gangtok's first Palace destroyed by the Great Assam Earthquake of 1897.

The process of selecting, researching, writing, and inserting the supplementary material in the text was carried out in different stages over several years. I first placed the historical photographs, watercolours and scenes extracted from the thangkas in their appropriate locations, while the translation work was still going on. We then proceeded onto researching and writing the text boxes, as well as working on the maps and genealogies and compiling the complex indices, while we were co-editing the main text. The book was thus built gradually, chapter by chapter, with proofreading and additions still going on until the very last minute. Maps and genealogies were designed at Echostream Studio in Gangtok, while the book's main design was conceived by Serindia Studios in Bangkok. During the pandemic, unable to travel to either, layout was continued by myself with long-distance assistance.

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<sup>15</sup> Anna Balikci (2013). Rinzing Lhadripa Lama (1912–1977) and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology's Ajanta Hall. *Bulletin of Tibetology* 49 (2): 67–72. Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology.

## PUBLICATION AND RELEASE OF THE BOOK BY HER MAJESTY

As the project's patron, Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choeden Wangchuck was closely involved in every step of the "making of the book." Her Majesty shared all information, recollections, manuscripts and photographs of relevance to the project, and likewise, interesting insights and discoveries were shared with Her Majesty as we came across them. Mock-ups of the book in its various stages of production were periodically presented to Her Majesty for approval.<sup>16</sup> Once, on the occasion of Her Majesty's birthday, a hardbound mock-up of the first eight chapters was printed in Siliguri. The mock-up's quality was so poor that it had to be redone on a Sunday, picked up at midnight, pressed under a television for the rest of the night so as to allow the glue to dry, then hand-delivered to Drukair at Bagdogra at 5 o'clock in the morning, on time to be presented on the occasion of Her Majesty's birthday lunch in Thimphu. Her Majesty was regularly appraised of the book's progress when Her Majesty visited Bhutan House, Kalimpong, for Losar.

Eventually, the book's layout was finalised by Umaporn Busabok at Serindia Studios and the publisher, Shane Suvikapakornkul, together with the printer in Italy, settled on the choice of paper, cloth cover, shade of gold stamping, dust jacket, etc. The first copies of the book rolled off the printing press just on time to be dispatched by express to Thimphu for Her Majesty's 91<sup>st</sup> birthday on May 21, 2021. The book was released by Her Majesty the following morning in the presence of her daughters HRH Ashi Kesang Wangmo and HRH Ashi Pema Lhadon, granddaughter Princess Ashi Kesang Choden Tashi, together with great grandchildren and close attendants. On this joyful occasion, a rainbow was witnessed around the sun as if Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma and Mayum Choni Wongmo also approved of the freshly minted *Royal History*.

Due to Sikkim's recent political history, younger Sikkimese are generally ignorant of the history of Sikkim as an erstwhile kingdom. There is however a great interest among the youth, who perhaps more than ever before are asking questions about their history and culture. We hope that *The Royal History* will help provide answers, and that in due course, it becomes a baseline resource for the people of Sikkim and for future Sikkim Studies. Above all, we are grateful that Her Majesty is pleased with this rendition of her grandmother's History, which Her Majesty wishes to gift to the people of Sikkim.

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<sup>16</sup> We are grateful for all the assistance provided to us over the years by Her Majesty's relatives, aides and supporters.

## A TALE OF TWO KANGSOPAS:

A UNIQUE TRADITION AT ENCHEY MONASTERY<sup>1</sup>

TENZING LONGSEL BARPHUNGA  
*Namgyal Institute of Tibetology*

## INTRODUCTION

Perched on a leafy ridge above Gangtok is the Sangag Rabtenling monastery, known colloquially as Enchey monastery. Built on a site blessed by the accomplished yogi, Drubthob Karpo, this monastery belongs to the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism and attracts a large number of devotees every day. It is revered not only by Buddhists, but by people of all faiths as a powerful, wish fulfilling monastery.

At the Enchey monastery to the left of the main lhakhang or main altar, are two kangso (Tib. *bskang gso*)<sup>2</sup> lhakhangs. The singular feature of these kangso lhakhangs is that they belong to two different sects of Tibetan Buddhism. One belongs to Enchey monastery itself where the primary Nyingma sungmas (Tib. *srung ma*)<sup>3</sup> such as Ekajati (Tib. *ral gcig ma*) are propitiated. The other is the kangso lhakhang of the Tashi Choling monastery, Pabyuk, which belongs to the Bara Kagyu tradition. Therefore, we have a case of a Kangsopa (lama performing the kangso) of one sect (Kagyu), performing kangso in the monastery of another sect (Nyingma). This is unprecedented, or at the very least, most uncommon. Moreover, the fact that this tradition has been going on for at least seven decades, denotes the importance lamas and lay people have attached to it.

Using both oral and literary sources, this paper attempts to provide an insight into the kangso text, its evolution and the various narratives about the origin of this Kagyu ritual held in a Nyingma monastery.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Jigme Losal for his help during my fieldwork. I am also grateful to Dr. Anna Balikci Denjongpa for guiding me during the writing of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Kangso is a ritual propitiating the deities in a liturgy of repair and fulfilment.

<sup>3</sup> Sungma denotes a guardian.

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO BARA KAGYU

The Bara Kagyu (Tib. 'Ba' ra bKa' brgyud) is a sub-sect of the Drukpa Kagyu school, which in turn is a branch of the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism. It was founded in the fourteenth century in Tibet by Barawa Gyaltzen Pelzang (Tib. 'Ba' ra ba rgyal mtshan dpal bzang), whose birth place of Bara Drag (Tib. 'Ba' ra Brag), Tibet, gave the school its name.

The school made its way into Sikkim in the seventeenth century through the efforts of Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltzen (Tib. grub thob dKon mchog rgyal mtshan).<sup>4</sup> The latter in fact built the first Kagyu monasteries of Sikkim at *sba spung* (may correspond to Barfung, South Sikkim),<sup>5</sup> 'Dam bzang (modern day Kalimpong district of West Bengal)<sup>6</sup> and *bTsun mo rin chen thang* (modern day Chungthang, north Sikkim).<sup>7</sup> All these were built in the seventeenth century with a *terminus ante quem* at 1687 (when Kunchok Gyaltzen died). Therefore, as Marlene Erschbamer points out, the oldest Kagyu monasteries are not the Karma Kagyu monasteries built in the eighteenth century as is generally believed.<sup>8</sup>

Owing to its proliferation in Dromo or Chumbi, a slice of land wedged between Sikkim and Bhutan, the Bara Kagyu in Sikkim is also known as Dromo Kagyu.

## DIFFERENT VERSIONS

There exists various explanations of how this curious tradition came into being:

1. *Acharya Samten Gyatso Lepcha's version*<sup>9</sup>

Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltzen was, at one time, a lama of Pabyuk monastery. One day he was called to the Gangtok Palace to perform a shabten (Tib. *zhabs brtan*) or 'stability of life prayer'. After the shabten

<sup>4</sup> John A. Ardussi, *Bhutan before the British: A Historical Study*, 1977, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> See *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*, Vol. III, 112.6.

<sup>6</sup> See *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*, Vol. III, 116.4.

<sup>7</sup> See *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*, Vol. III, 131.5.

<sup>8</sup> Marlene Erschbamer, The 'Ba' ra ba Teachings Reach the Hidden Land of Demojong ('Bras mo ljongs): Mahasiddha dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (1601–1687) and the Taming of Demons in Chungthang, Gangtok, Sikkim, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2013, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Acharya S.G. Lepcha, Retd. Sr. Researcher, NIT, *Chu skyes bung b'i rol mtso*, 2008, p. 204.

was over he returned to Pabyuk but forgot to take his dorje (Tib. *rdo rje*) and drillbu (Tib. *dril bu*), which were left behind at the palace. The dorje and drillbu or, Vajra and Bell, are important tantric practice objects, loaded with symbolism.

The following few years brought unhappiness and misery to the palace. In desperation for a solution, astrologers were beseeched. They divined that lamas from Pabyuk monastery had to be called to placate the sungma, Gyalpo Pehar (Tib. *rgyal po dpe har*),<sup>10</sup> who had come to the palace with the dorje and drillbu. The sungma, on not being regularly propitiated, had turned malicious and the troubles were a result of his wrath. Things would get better only when solkha (Tib. *gsol kha*) or ‘libation to the Dharma protector’ was performed regularly by a lama from Pabyuk monastery. The question of where the appeasement would take place arose and a novel idea was hit upon.

The premier monastery of Gangtok, Enchey, had been rebuilt around 1908 in its present design, which is known as ‘Gyanag Riwo Tsenga’ or ‘Chinese Five Peaked Mountain.’ Being a multi-storeyed structure, it was ideal. On the ground level, the Kangsopa of Enchey monastery could practice and above, a Kangsopa from Pabyuk monastery could perform. In this way the liturgical ceremonies—shabten and kangso—could be carried out and this arrangement suited everyone. Over time the sungma was also content and the fortunes of the palace turned for the better.

After some time, however, the solkha was stopped. No Kangsopa came from Pabyuk and only the Enchey monastery Kangsopa practiced. This was probably a case of the Nyingma sect not letting another sect grow roots in its establishment. As a result, the Gyalpo was angered and he caused much disease and destruction once again. The lamas consulted Khamtrul Rinpoche Dongyud Nyima<sup>11</sup> who divined that as the Gyalpo had been displeased, whatever solkha was being done earlier must be continued. Accordingly, the tradition of a Kangsopa from Pabyuk monastery was revived. The solkha rituals began and things returned to normal again. The local populace of Gangtok also made offerings of serkyem (Tib. *gser skyems*)<sup>12</sup> and the Gyalpo was appeased. Since then the solkha goes on regularly.

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<sup>10</sup> Gyalpo means king-spirit.

Gyalpo Pehar is believed to be a non-Tibetan spirit propitiated by all sects of Tibetan Buddhism. For more information on Pehar, see “Pehar: A Historical Survey” at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.733.2607>

<sup>11</sup> Could be the Eighth Khamtrul Rinpoche Dongyud Nyima (1931–1980).

<sup>12</sup> Serkyem or ‘golden libation’ is an offering of a liquid, most often alcohol.

## 2. *Tsampa Jowo Samdup's version*<sup>13</sup>

Tsampa Jowo Samdup's version, contained in the book, *'bras ljong dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus*,<sup>14</sup> gives the following account:

Once upon a time in Kham, Tibet, there lived a very devout lama, who adhered to a strict vegetarian diet. One day, while he was eating his meal, an eagle soaring above dropped a piece of meat she was carrying and it fell into the lama's bowl. He unknowingly ate the piece of meat. But instead of feeling repulsed, he relished it and became addicted to meat. From a vegetarian diet, he changed to a non-vegetarian one. When he could not find meat, he would steal the villagers' sheep and kill and eat them. He grew particularly fond of the soft flesh of lambs.

The villagers became incensed. Since he would not stop eating their sheep, they killed him. Having met his death in a violent manner, he transformed into a powerful and wrathful deity. If appeased he could offer protection, but if not, then he could cause a lot of suffering. So people began to appease him in solkha rituals.

Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltzen brought this practice with him when he came to Sikkim. Similar solkha rituals were carried out. However, Sikkim being a Nyingma stronghold, the practice was rejected by the people and the Chogyal alike. Thus the rituals stopped. This caused much misery to the people of Sikkim. Therefore, the monks of Pabyuk monastery, the closest Bara Kagyu monastery, were called and the solkha was offered regularly.

## 3. *Lama Ngodup Dorje's version*<sup>15</sup>

A third account was gleaned from an interview with Lama Ngodup Dorje from the Pabyuk monastery, who is the current Bara Kagyu Kangsopa at Enchey monastery.

When the third Kagyu Trulku,<sup>16</sup> Ngawang Chokyi Gyatso died in 1831, the question arose as to who should succeed him. Two possible candidates were found. One, Kalzang Choying Gyatso, who was from Paro in Bhutan, while the other was from Sikkim, son of one Gangtok Jerung (Tib. *rJe drung*). Both were summoned to the Kagyu Gonsar (Tib. *bKa' brgyud dgon gsar*) monastery in Chumbi, seat of the Kagyu Trulku.

<sup>13</sup> Tsampa Jowo Samdup, Senior Lupon at Enchey monastery.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. J. Losal, *'bras ljong dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus*, 2019, p. 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> Lama Ngodup Dorje, Pabyuk monastery, age, 52 years. Interviewed at Enchey monastery, 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 1:15 pm.

<sup>16</sup> An incarnation lineage with Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltzen as the first. The Kagyu Trulku is the patriarch of the Bara Kagyu tradition in Sikkim.



Rigdzin Choying Dorje (1772–1838), a high lama of the sect and a pupil of the third Kagyu Trulku, was the authority to pronounce the next incarnate. The decision rested, literally, on the throw of a dice and Kalzang Choying Gyatso won. The Paro Penlop (governor of Paro) was elated and supported the decision. Ceremonial accoutrements were bestowed upon the Paro candidate and he was enthroned in the presence of lamas, patrons and the Daling lama, representative of the Paro Penlop.<sup>17</sup>

However, the Sikkimese candidate had wealthy patrons and after much gold coins exchanged hands, the first decision was reverted and with a fresh roll of the dice, the Sikkimese candidate was declared the fourth Kagyu Trulku.

In Chumbi, there were two main monasteries, the aforementioned Kagyu Gonsar was one, and Chamdag Gon (Tib. *mTshams brag dgon*) or Gon nye (Tib. *dgon rnyi*) was the other. A compromise was reached between the two candidates. While the Sikkimese Trulku was placed in Gonsar, Kalzang Gyatso took his seat in the Gon nye.

However, there was much antagonism against the Sikkimese Trulku and one day in the courtyard of Kagyu Gonsar, an old patron of the monastery bad mouthed him. He called him a fake Trulku and refused to accept him as the fourth reincarnate of the Bara Kagyu patriarch. When his abuses reached the ears of the Sikkimese Trulku, he was infuriated. He ordered his subordinates to catch the man and thrash him as punishment for his transgressions. His retainers did so and, though unintended, the man died from his injuries. Fearing any reprisal from the government, the Sikkimese Trulku took all the valuables of the monastery and left for Gangtok that very night.

On arriving at Gangtok he was welcomed by the Chogyal. He kept all the valuable artefacts such as thangkas and statues in the Palace Tsuglakhang. Among the artefacts was a thangka of the Bara Kagyu refuge tree (Tib. *tshogs shing*). Unbeknownst to him, the Bara Kagyu sungma Drubwang Gyalpo (Tib. *Grub dbang rgyal po*) had also come with the artefacts. There followed much ill fortune for the palace and the royal family. Strange things started to take place at the palace. When the thangka was placed on one wall, it would, by itself, move to the opposite wall. The statues also changed positions without any one touching them.

It is believed that when an object is moved from its in situ position, the spirits get angered. Therefore, even if plucking an apple from a tree

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<sup>17</sup> See *bKa' brgyud gser phreng*, Vol. IV. 624–625.

or picking up a stone from the river side, permission is sought from the guardian deities of the land. Since the religious artefacts had been moved in haste, without seeking permission from the Gyalpo, this had angered him.

Astrologers were asked to find a solution to end the troubles. It was divined that the sungma Drubwang Gyalpo had to be placated. To this end, a Bara Kagyu lama was needed. Since Pabyuk was the closest Bara Kagyu monastery to Gangtok, a lama from this monastery was called. In this way the solkha was offered at the palace and the sungma was appeased.

Overtime, however, the Nyingma lamas began to get disgruntled. In particular those from Pemayangtse monastery were particularly offended that in a Nyingma dominated kingdom, the Nyingma monarch had allowed monks of another sect to perform rituals in the palace. They protested vehemently and finally the Chogyal agreed to stop the practice. This again infuriated the sungma and a panoply of troubles fell upon the palace. Khamtrul Rinpoche was consulted and he opined that the solkha must go on.

The Chogyal knew full well that solkha at the Palace Tsuglakhang would again bring on the ire of the Nyingma lamas. Desperate for a solution, he decided that the solkha would go on at Enchey monastery instead. The solkha lhakhang for Drubwang Gyalpo was set up on the first floor where a Bara Kagyu monk from Pabyuk would carry out the propitiation ritual. The Pabyuk monastery would send a monk who would perform kangso at Enchey for a year. In the next year, the Pabyuk monastery would send another monk. In this way a tradition was established.

After the 2011 earthquake, in which Enchey monastery sustained heavy damages, the lhakhang was shifted to the ground floor, its current location. The over one hundred year old thangka of the Bara Kagyu refuge tree can be seen here. In this lhakhang is also a statue of Drubwang Gyalpo built around the year 2000, by a sculptor from Bhutan.

#### 4. *Ajo Bhaichung's version*<sup>18</sup>

Ajo Bhaichung, one of the senior monks at Kagon Tsecholing (Tib. *bKa' dgon Tshe mchog gling*) monastery, Gangtok, the main Bara Kagyu monastery at present in Sikkim, gives a slightly different version.

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<sup>18</sup> Ajo Bhaichung, Kagon Tsecholing monastery, Age, 45 years, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 11:30 am.

Ajo Rinpoche, whose real name was Ngodup Dorje, was a great yogic practitioner (Tib. *rnal 'byor pa*) and master of meditation (Tib. *sgom chen*). He was born around 1855, probably in Tsangay, East Sikkim. After a few years of his birth, he was sent to Dromo for education. He was a brilliant student and excelled in his studies. Therefore there were many who were jealous of him. In particular there was an old lama who was consumed by jealousy. One day the old lama died. Even in the moment before his death, his mind was pre-occupied with jealousy. This became the cause for his rebirth in the lower realm. He was born as a spirit and he suffered terribly.

One day, he got into the body of a woman and took possession of her. Going before Ajo Rinpoche, he spoke through her and announced his true identity. He confessed and begged Ajo Rinpoche for forgiveness. He had paid enough for his bad karma. He said that he had not known the consequences of his actions would be so dire. He begged for forgiveness.

Ajo Rinpoche overcome by sympathy for the tortured, repentant spirit, forgave him. Being an accomplished master, he then put the spirit completely under his control and added him to the pantheon of Bara Kagyu sungmas. He named him Drubwang Gyalpo. He commanded the sungma to always protect and uphold the dharma. He used to talk to the sungma and would get quite cross when someone opened the door without knocking first. Dungse Rinpoche, a high ranking lama of the school, told Ajo Bhaichung that Ajo Rinpoche could make the sungma do his bidding.

He also composed a short solkha to propitiate the sungma. He requested Togden Hishey Nyingpo, a lama from Kham, to compose a medium and long version of the solkha.

During the interview, Ajo Bhaichung also mentioned that this tradition was initiated during the period of the fourth Kagyu Trulku. Earlier, before Ajo Rinpoche subdued Drubwang Gyalpo, the Bara Kagyu had a different sungma called Tsen Gangripa (Tib. *btsan gangs ri pa*).

These different versions put forward to explain the provenance of this ritual, have a few points in common. For instance, there transpired events or conflicts within the Bara Kagyu school, which brought it into contact with the Nyingma. Also, propitiation of the angry sungma to put an end to a spell of bad luck, is ultimately the reason why the solkha was introduced. These similarities aside, there are considerable differences. While one version places itself in the middle of the seventeenth century,

another brings us two hundred years forward into the nineteenth. This change in timeline, changes the prevailing zeitgeist in which the events unfolded, thereby changing the impact it would have had on the wider history of Sikkim. For how long this ritual has taken place, also, cannot be said with any certainty.

There is also a slight confusion about the identity of the Gyalpo. According to some it is Pehar Gyalpo or Pehar Gyalpo Kunga. Pehar Gyalpo is considered supreme among the Gyalpo spirits, tamed in the eighth century by Padmasambhava. Though Pehar is a significant deity for all schools of Tibetan Buddhism including the Bara Kagyu, the particular deity propitiated at the Bara Kagyu lhakhang of Enchey monastery seems to be a different one as the iconography of Pehar does not match with the description given in the kangso text. Pehar is usually shown with three faces, six arms, wearing a bamboo hat and astride a white lion or a horse. The statues and pictures at Enchey Bara Kagyu lhakhang and at Bara Kagyu monasteries show a different figure completely, who is most likely Drubwang Gyalpo. His description is given in the following section.

#### A SHORT SUMMARY OF THE KANGSO TEXT

The text (Tib. *dpe cha*) has eighteen chapters in total. The solkha of Drubwang Gyalpo is in the seventh chapter.

It begins with an ‘invitation’ or ‘welcoming’ (Tib. *spyan ‘dren*) to Drubwang Gyalpo, his consort and their entourage. The physical description of Drubwang Wangchuk Chenpo (Drubwang Gyalpo) is given. He is envisaged in a Mahayogi form. His body is reddish-brown in colour.<sup>19</sup> He wears the white undyed cotton cloth of a yogic practitioner and his long uncut hair is wound into a top knot (Tib. *gos dkar lchang lo can*). On his ears he wears large conch spiral earrings. He also wears a red meditation belt (Tib. *sgom thag*) across his torso. He is seated in a cross-legged, relaxed position and his eyes are turned slightly upwards.

Next his consort, Dakini Nyima Karmo is described. Seated to his left, she is envisaged in a beautiful, youthful form. Gently smiling with a slight pride in her beauty. There are sweet smelling flowers in her hair.

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<sup>19</sup> However, this varies. The statue at Enchey monastery, as well as his painted depiction there show him to have a white body, while he appears in a reddish brown form in a statue and small pictures at Kagyu Choling monastery, Pedong, West Bengal.

She wears colourful clothing. She carries in one hand a jewel (Tib. *nor bu*) and in the other, she holds a human skull cup (Tib. *ka pa la*).

They are surrounded by an entourage of supernatural beings: *za* (*gza* ' ) or 'malevolent planetary deities,' *lu* (*klu*) or 'aquatic deities,' *dü* (*bdud*) or 'malevolent black spirits,' *tšen* (*btsan*) or 'red male rock-dwelling spirits,' *shindre* (*gshin 'dre*) or 'malignant ghosts of certain dead men,' etc.<sup>20</sup>

They (the *sungma*, consort and entourage) are all invited. As they have the power to manifest themselves anywhere at short notice, they are requested to come immediately.

In the second step, they are requested to be seated (Tib. *bzhugs gsol*). Along with this request, this part of the text also offers them words of praise (Tib. *bstod pa*). Their minds are not bound by the web of illusion. They have fully tamed their minds and are in control of it. Some of them have peaceful, beautiful faces, while some others have a wrathful, fearsome visage. They are all eulogised and welcomed. Drubwang Gyalpo is seated on an elephant and he can go around the world in an instance. His powers make his mind and his actions as fast as the speed of light. He is a Bodhisattva of the Eighth level (Tib. *sa brgyad kyi byang chub sems dpa* ' ) and has thus directly seen the emptiness of objective existence.

Thereafter, 'offerings' (Tib. *mchod pa*) are made to Drubwang Gyalpo, his consort and their entourage. Some offerings are external or tangible, such as flowers and fruits, while others are internal, for example, prayers. Formal offerings are made of the six perfections and five aggregates; along with informal offerings of mantras and mudras.

After the offerings, the 'mending' ritual (Tib. *bskang ba*) begins. It is a rite by which any sins committed in the past can be expiated.

The fifth step is 'confession' (Tib. *bshags pa*). Like in the previous step, here also, previously committed non-virtuous actions or transgressions of vows are confessed. Any act of laziness, shamelessness, etc. is regretted, confessed and the *sungma* is asked for forgiveness. Moreover, the *sungma* is entreated to continue protecting us.

The last step is 'putting the deities and supernatural beings to work' (Tib. *'phrin bcol*). They are all asked to listen. Once, when Pema Karay

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<sup>20</sup> Anna Balikci, *Lamas, Shamans and Ancestors: Village Religion in Sikkim*, Leiden, The Netherlands, Koninklijke Brill, 2008, p. 105, 161.

(Tib. *pad+ma ka ras*)<sup>21</sup> brought all of them under his control, he had transformed them into protectors of the dharma (Tib. *chos skyong*). A great Shangpa Kagyu lama had also done the same. The deities had made promises to both.

The Kangsopa commands them to fulfil their promise to help the people who have come to offer prayers. To ensure that the Kagyu teachings (Tib. *bKa' brgyud bstan pa*) flourish for a long time, they must help the lamas find food, clothing, shelter, etc. The Buddha dharma upholders, i.e. lamas of all sects, must be blessed with long lives, particularly those living in the Himalayan regions. There must be no obstacle in this region, like war, famine, etc. People of this region should be blessed with long and healthy lives. Their fortunes must rise with the speed of the wind. When innocent people are faced with obstacles, they must come at once and help.

It says that this text was composed by Togden Hishey Nyingpo at the behest of Ajo Rinpoche. Ajo Rinpoche himself has composed a shorter version of the same text.

## CONCLUSION

No visit to Enchey monastery is complete without offering prayers at both the kangso lhakhangs. It is a strongly held belief by the people of Gangtok that the monastery, and in particular the two kangso lhakhangs, are powerful places where one can have one's prayers answered. However, why it is important and how this tradition came about is less explored and often misunderstood. To add to the confusion there exists so many legends that one has a tough time making sense of it all.

There are also grave errors in narrations. Acharya Samten Gyatso Lepcha's version has Drubthob Kunchok Gyaltzen (1601– 1687), the Pabyuk monastery, the Gangtok Palace and Khamtrul Dongyud Nyima all existing at the same time. This is most unlikely. For instance, there wasn't a Gangtok Palace till the end of the nineteenth century.

Such faux-pas notwithstanding, the different versions give us an insight into what is a remarkable tradition. A Kangsopa propitiating in a monastery of another sect is indeed unique. The sungma has served an important purpose, which it still does and hence the tradition continues. It has been useful in explaining any unfortunate incident or conflict and has also helped to find solutions. Today, people from all walks of life,

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<sup>21</sup> Pema Karay probably refers to Padmasambhava.

and from all religions, make a beeline to Enchey monastery to offer their gifts and prayers, so that the sungmas (both Nyingma and Bara Kagyu) will clear the obstacles in their way and fulfil their wishes.

Equally noteworthy is how big a role the Bara Kagyu has played in the history of Buddhism in Sikkim, hitherto thought to have been the exclusive domain of Nyingma. This relatively small sub-sect, has carved out a niche for itself in Sikkim, giving rise to this fascinating tradition at Gangtok's Enchey monastery.

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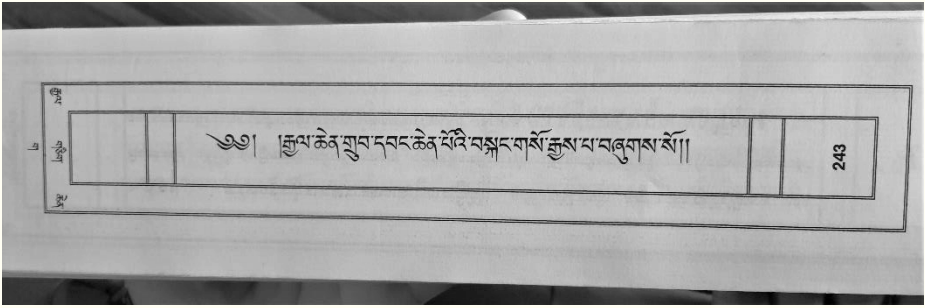
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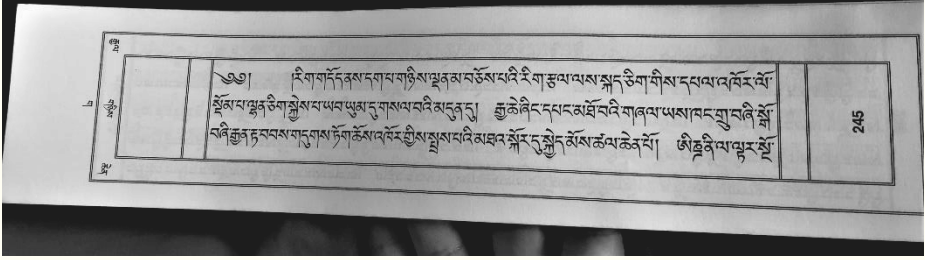
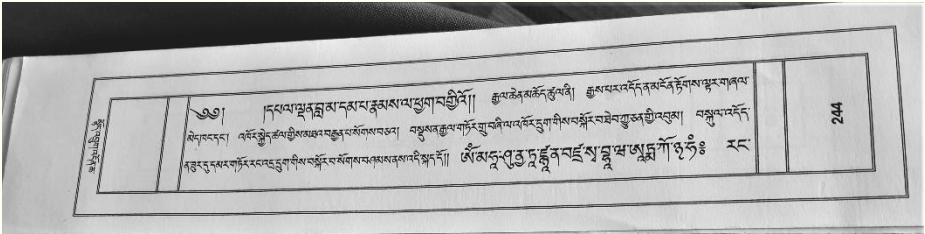
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Ajo Bhaichung, Age 46, Kagon Tsecholing monastery, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2021, 11:30 am.

Lama Ngodup Dorje, Age 54 years, Pabyuk monastery, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2021, 1:15 pm.



Title of Kangso text

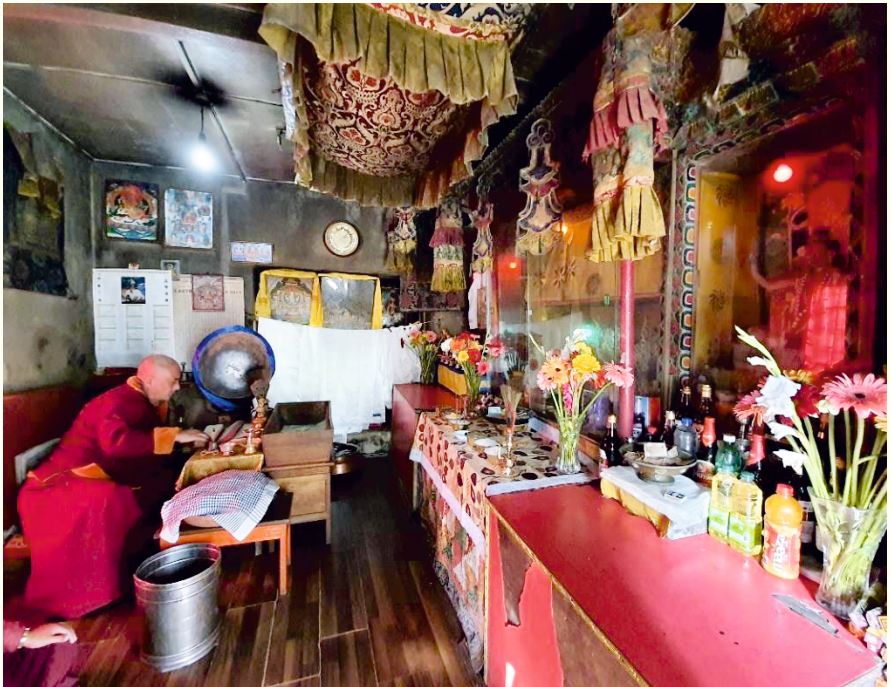


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Enchey monastery, Gangtok



Bara Kagyu lhakhang at Enchey monastery, Gangtok, 2021



Statue of Drubwang Gyalpo at the Bara Kagyu lhakhang, Enchey monastery

## PROVIDER AND DESTROYER OF LIFE:

LEGENDARY AND HISTORICAL BUDDHIST  
PERSPECTIVES ON WATER AND ITS SOCIO-CULTURAL  
SIGNIFICANCE IN SIKKIM

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Water influences every single aspect of life: it is the root of all life and therefore a significant resource. From a cultural point of view, water has always played a remarkable role and has found its way into daily life in a variety of ways, including rituals, legends, and narratives. Water is a vital resource and a rich element that symbolises and shapes people's interaction with nature, their own culture, and thus connects various social components with one another. Since fresh water is essential for living creatures to survive, it is hardly surprising that water sources were in all likelihood the first sacred places of mankind to be worshipped.<sup>2</sup> Most of the fresh water is stored in the polar region and in glaciers in the form of ice. Nestled between such glaciers in the Himalayas, which due to the amount of stored water have the reputation of being the Third Pole, lies the former Buddhist kingdom of Sikkim. Comprising 84 glaciers, 227 wetlands, 104 rivers, and 9 hot springs on 7096 sq.km, Sikkim is a water-tower of India that supplies water to millions of people directly or further downstream.<sup>3</sup>

Mythological accounts contain natural features, including rivers, lakes, and hot springs. These narratives were incorporated into Buddhist beliefs, and as a result, the features became sacred objects of worship, and ultimately formed a part of Sikkimese identity.<sup>4</sup> Important lakes, hot springs, rivers, and waterfalls are mentioned in Buddhist guidebooks to sacred places (གནས་ཡིག་), in historical accounts (ལོ་རྒྱུས་), and in hagiographical

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2 See Ray 2020: 20.

3 See Dokhampa 1998: 1; Government of Sikkim 2010a; 2010b.

4 See Balikci-Denjongpa & Lachungpa 2017: 7; 65–66.

writings (ལྷན་མཁའ་) of Tibetan Buddhist masters that visited the land. A number of these locations are now under protection as they are considered sacred places.<sup>5</sup> In addition, every kind of water source is believed to be inhabited by water spirits. These entities influence the inhabitants, the land, political entanglements and social life. Therefore, people worship these entities to pacify and please them. During the seventeenth century, three Tibetan masters, Ngadak Sempa Chenpo Phüntso Rigdzin (1592–1656), Lhatsün Namkha Jikmé (1597–1650/3), and Kahtok Küntu Zangpo, opened Sikkim ritually to Buddhism and enthroned the first Buddhist king of the land. This was the beginning of the so-called Namgyal Dynasty and the Buddhist Kingdom of Sikkim that lasted into the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Today, Sikkim is a multilingual and multi-ethnic Indian state in the Himalayas, where various groups practice Buddhism, including Lepcha, Bhutia, Tamang, Gurung, and Sherpa. It should be noted that numerous Sikkimese refer to themselves as Buddhists but cling to shamanistic rituals. Elements of Tibetan Buddhism and the ancient local rites are closely related and not interpreted as a contradiction by the local communities. The shift to Buddhism was never a complete shift in belief. In contrast, village practice is inventive and an interaction between Tibetan Buddhism and ancient local rites.<sup>7</sup> Buddhist legends and narratives as well as historical and personal reports exemplify the social, cultural, and religious significance of water.

This study examines the following research questions: Which legendary accounts about water have been passed down and what role does water play in them? What experiences did Buddhist masters have with water in Sikkim? What role do supernatural entities, here the *lu* (ལུ) as an example, play in this context? Is there an overarching consensus or context regarding these points? These are results from textual studies of Tibetan and Sikkimese sources.

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- 5 For a list of sacred natural sites that stand under special protection, see Government of Sikkim 2001; for a description of the land by addressing natural features involving water, see Kelzang (1995: 3–7, in Tibetan).
- 6 For a royal history of Sikkim and a chronicle of the House of Namgyal, see Ardussi et al. 2021.
- 7 See Balicki 2008; Erschbamer 2019.

*Legendary accounts of Guru Rinpoche connected to water*

As widely believed, supernatural beings inhabit the entire environment and are one with the physical landscape. Guru Rinpoche tamed many such beings and used them as protectors of Buddhism. In other words, he domesticated them. This can be observed in Tibet and in the surrounding Himalayan landscape. All owners of the base or ground are regarded as very powerful. They are understood as protectors of the land in accordance with the command of Guru Rinpoche.<sup>8</sup> Thus, various legends address the conversion of supernatural entities into protectors of the Buddhist faith, including those that contain the element water. Guru Rinpoche also foresaw the decline and suppression of Buddhist teachings in Tibet and, therefore, hid treasures or *terma* (གཏེར་མ་). They were hidden at auspicious places, either in the earth or in the mind. When the right time had come, they were rediscovered by so-called treasure revealers (གཏེར་སྟོན་). While earth treasures were hidden in natural features, mind treasures were hidden in the mind of Guru Rinpoche's disciples and rediscovered by their reincarnations.

The following narrative of the third Lachen Gomchen, Ngawang Kunsang Rinpoche (1867–1947), is an example of a *terma* that was discovered in a river: Lachen Gomchen meditated in the Duthang hermitage and told one of his students that the latter would find something floating in the river during the next day. The disciple received the order to get the object out of the river and to bring it to Lachen Gomchen. He did as he was told and discovered an item in the form of a vase, which he brought to the Lachen monastery in North Sikkim.<sup>9</sup>

Guru Rinpoche also blessed so-called hidden lands along the Himalayan slopes on the Tibetan borderlands. They were described as places equalling paradise that would bear shelter for Buddhist practitioners in times of turmoil. These hidden lands satisfied the wish for a kind of paradise on earth and, even more, they assumed a religious-political function by providing shelter for Buddhist practitioners. Consequently, Guru Rinpoche created sacred space and sacred landscape.<sup>10</sup> Sikkim was depicted as an outstanding *beyul* (བླ་མ་ཡུལ་)—a hidden place or valley that was once blessed and where beings live protected by Guru Rinpoche in the end times. However, not all Buddhists were allowed to travel to this much-vaunted hidden land. The Himalayan

<sup>8</sup> See Dokhampa 1998: 3; Torri 2015: 263.

<sup>9</sup> See Tshering 2011?: 4. On the Lachen Gomchen, see also Erschbamer (2015: 55–56).

<sup>10</sup> See Ardussi et al. 2021: 53; Gentry 2016: 54; Mullard 2011: 10; Quintman 2008.

Buddhist nun Orgyen Chokyi (1675–1729) from Dolpo, for example, had no more ardent wish than to go on a pilgrimage to Sikkim like many of her friends. But she was always stopped by her teacher, Orgyen Tenzin (1660s–1737), which made her deeply sad.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, legends and narratives that address Guru Rinpoche's encounters and experiences in Sikkim have been passed down and became part of the cultural memory and identity. His activities play a central role in creating pilgrimage sites associated with sacred landscapes. In this context, water plays a noteworthy role. As an important source of life, problems are inevitable, both with a lack and with an excess of water. Freshwater is a symbol for new life but also for renewal during life. It is a universal means that has a purifying effect and that is believed to wash away accumulated impurities.<sup>12</sup> Guru Rinpoche likewise is associated with various legends wherein water along with its positive aspects play a major theme.

It is told that Guru Rinpoche travelled to Sikkim around the eighth century. He saw a good omen in Gurudongmar Lake in North Sikkim and then decided to enter the heart of this land. According to legend, local people asked Guru Rinpoche for help as Gurudongmar Lake remained frozen most of the year, leaving people living nearby without drinking water. Guru Rinpoche touched the lake, and thereafter this spot stayed unfrozen throughout the year. Pilgrims offer their prayers at this lake ever since. Additionally, Guru Rinpoche tamed a demon living at or in the lake by using his supernatural powers. He fixed the demon with a huge boulder and thus kept it at bay. A small prayer house was established near this stone to commemorate the deed.<sup>13</sup>

Another legend tells how Guru Rinpoche tapped the ground with a stick at Chörten Nyima (མཚོ་དཀྱིལ་ཉི་མ་) in North Sikkim and a source of medicinal water appeared. This place became known as Guru Menchu (གུ་རུ་མཚོ་ལྷ་མ་)—healing water from Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche thus provided locals with drinking water at both Gurudonmar Lake and at Chörten Nyima. The water from these places was considered sacred, and thereafter was bottled and taken away by pilgrims. Couples who wished for a child visited these lakes and the water from Chörten Nyima was

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11 See Schaeffer 2004: 81; 113; 159.

12 See Ray 2020: 3.

13 See Acharya & Dokham 1998: 13–14; Government of Sikkim 2020; Gyatso 2016: 98; Tshering 2011?: 1.

also supposed to clean of incest.<sup>14</sup> These two legends clearly emphasise the symbolic value of water and its positive effects that are connected to a venerated religious figure.

Yet another legend is connected to the area around present-day Ship Kunzang Chöling monastery (ཤིབ་ཀུན་བཟང་ཚོས་གླིང་དགོན་) in North Sikkim. Lamtar Lake is located above this monastery and it is said that Guru Rinpoche defeated a demon nearby. Following this, Guru Rinpoche opened a spot close to this monastery as hidden treasure, where sacred water still flows out.<sup>15</sup> This narrative combines three components: First, Guru Rinpoche conquered a demon, a recurring theme related to this religious personage; second, he hid treasures or in this case he opened a place as hidden treasure and thus created a sacred place; third, locals consider the water from this freshwater source sacred, as a revered Buddhist figure caused it to spring up.

Guru Rinpoche also turned numerous hot springs into sacred sites throughout the Himalayas, including in Sikkim. Locals regard these hot springs as effective medical therapy options, and frequently bathe in them for medical and spiritual reasons. Hot springs are thus a combination of cultural, medical, religious, and social venues. They represent intersections where nature, culture, and religion are closely intertwined.<sup>16</sup> According to these examples, Guru Rinpoche created sacred places and made water even more precious. Water thus acquired religious and cultural importance in addition to its survival value. Numerous Tibetan masters followed in Guru Rinpoche's footsteps, visited Sikkim, and made their personal experiences with water.

### *Buddhist masters and their experiences with water*

The dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet and across the Himalayas involved the integration of pre-Buddhist landscapes into Buddhist concepts. The complete Tibetan landscape was regarded as a huge Buddhist mandala or sacred enclosure. It was also understood as a hierarchical and spatial concept of landscape's re-organisation. In other words, Buddhism came in contact with pre-Buddhist conceptualisations and interpretations of sacred landscapes which became incorporated into Buddhist thought. Consequently, natural features became part of this

<sup>14</sup> See Boord; 2003 Buffettrille 2004. For information on sacred lakes in Sikkim, see Balikci-Denjongpa & Lachungpa 2017: 140–45; 161–63.

<sup>15</sup> See Tshering 2011?: 21.

<sup>16</sup> See Balikci-Denjongpa & Lachungpa 2017: 191; Erschbamer forthcoming b.

Buddhist mandala and a unity was created in a pre-dominating chaos. This process has been labelled ‘Mandalisation’, part of a far reaching ‘Buddhacisation’.<sup>17</sup> The latter implies the conversion of supernatural entities that inhabited natural features and, simultaneously, the creation of sacred Buddhist sites.

This process can also be seen as a symbol of domestication or taming of the mind and society.<sup>18</sup> Such a process was authorised and legitimated by connecting and rooting sacred landscape to important Buddhist masters, in the case of Sikkim mainly to Guru Rinpoche. Various Tibetan Buddhist masters visited Sikkim following in Guru Rinpoche’s footsteps, and contributed further to this process. Treasure revealers, for example, revealed travel guides to Sikkim. They praised the land as an outstanding place, where one could find all kinds of pure water, including curative hot springs. Such sites became part of the lived tradition and cultural identity. The beneficial effects of baths in these sacred waters are depicted in different text genres, such as historical, autobiographical, medical, and religious.<sup>19</sup>

Waters were also used to describe the land of Sikkim, and to underline its positive qualities. It is said that Lhatsün Namkha Jikmé sung a hymn of praise to Guru Rinpoche and thus blessed the hidden land of Sikkim following its ritual opening. His song mentions the water from the Chumbi valley that comes from the right side, the purifying water from Sikkim that flows from the left, and the main river of Sikkim in the middle. Together, these three rivers form the precious sacred land.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the song, water with its positive and purifying qualities was used to describe the land. This also implies the sacredness of rivers or lifelines blessed by Guru Rinpoche.

Narratives were passed down, relating to the eighth century, according to which locals asked Guru Rinpoche for drinking water. The same request was also made to later Tibetan masters, after the establishment of the Buddhist kingdom in the seventeenth century. For example, Ngadak Sempa Chenpo Phüntso Rigdzin, one of the Tibetan Lamas who had opened Sikkim for Buddhism, was asked for water sources. He miraculously produced two drinking water sources for Silnon and Tashiding villages in West Sikkim. He also told the Lamas of Tashiding monastery to perform the Chap Chu ritual once a year

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<sup>17</sup> See Buffetrille 1998; Diemberger 1997; Huber 1999; McKay 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See Balikci-Denjongpa 2002: 21.

<sup>19</sup> See Erschbamer forthcoming b.

<sup>20</sup> See Lachung Rinpoche 2012: 161.



during the summer, to commemorate this miracle and to guarantee the purity of the water. For this purpose, a statue of Ngadak Sempa Chenpo is carried to the water source where, according to tradition, this master once bathed. The ritual ends with a bath and a water fight by the participants.<sup>21</sup>

The Bumchu, the most important Buddhist ritual in Sikkim, has been held at Tashiding monastery since the seventeenth century. It is closely connected with Guru Rinpoche and Ngadak Sempa Chenpo. This ritual exemplifies the religio-cultural significance of water and the sacredness of a river. It is said that Guru Rinpoche consecrated the Bumchu, a sacred vase, and concealed it as hidden treasure. During the sixteenth century, the same vase was rediscovered by Tertön Zhigpo Lingpa, and eventually brought to Sikkim by Ngadak Sempa Chenpo. The latter filled the vase with water from the Rathong River and performed prayers. It is believed that the water will prophesy the future for the land and its people for the coming year. Devotees also believe that the water from the Bumchu is like an elixir for long life and that it contains the seed to enlightenment. Participation in this ritual is often combined with a visit to the hot springs nearby.<sup>22</sup> The sacred water from the Rathong River is essential for this ritual. Consequently, people keep the river clean and protect it.

Buddhist masters belonging to the Nyingma tradition—the most widespread Tibetan Buddhist tradition in Sikkim—were involved in the narratives quoted so far. But Kagyü masters also travelled to Sikkim shortly after the establishment of the Buddhist kingdom.

The visit of the Barawa Kagyü master Könchok Gyeltsen (1601–1687) is yet another example of a Tibetan Buddhist personage who provided locals with drinking water. He travelled to Sikkim soon after the ritual opening, met the first Buddhist ruler, and also established the first Barawa monasteries in Sikkim.<sup>23</sup> During that time, he was asked by locals in Chungthang, North Sikkim, to provide drinking water for the village. He performed rituals and a new spring appeared that was still visible and connected to this religious figure during my visit in 2010.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Bhutia 2011.

<sup>22</sup> See Ardussi et al. 2021: 100; Balikci-Denjongpa & Lachungpa 2017: 121; Dokhampa 2003; Lachen Gomchen 1995; Lepcha & Bhutia 2012; Vandenhelsken & Wongchuk 2006.

<sup>23</sup> See Erschbamer 2013; 2017. The Barawa Kagyü tradition is a sub-branch of the Drukpa Kagyüpa. It is practiced in Sikkim since the seventeenth century.

<sup>24</sup> This is not the same source that Guru Rinpoche is said to have produced during his rest, close to famous Guru Néydo (ལུང་གནས་རྩེ) in Chungthang.

The inhabitants of Chungthang, Lepcha from the Aaphey Phocho and Thendup Phocho clans, were glad for his help. As a result, Könchok Gyeltsen found new followers who performed pujas in the religious structure he had established at Chungthang.<sup>25</sup>

The above examples illustrate how Tibetan Buddhist masters helped locals when they travelled to Sikkim. They procured drinking water but were also active in bridge construction. Severe floods tore out bridges every year, as they still do so today. Such events disconnected villages, and raging rivers became insurmountable obstacles.<sup>26</sup> Water is thus both a provider but also a destroyer of life. Supernatural entities that inhabit waters, including the *lu*, are similarly ambivalent.

*The power of the local spirits called lu (ལུ)*

Balikci-Denjongpa has written how the Sikkimese environment is said to be inhabited by more supernatural entities than humans.<sup>27</sup> They are believed to have influence on the people and on the land. Some of these beings are connected to the element water, such as the *lu* (ལུ), *tsomen* (མཚོ་སྐལ་), and *dréchu* (འདྲེ་ལུ་). In this section, we focus on the *lu*, their depiction in Sikkimese sources, and their ascribed power and influence. *Lu* are usually portrayed as half human / half snake. They are the rulers of the waters and the underground spaces. They have control over water sources, rain, and fertility. On the one hand, they have the power to cause harm and illness. But on the other hand, they can also protect and help to heal diseases.<sup>28</sup> Hence, they are viewed as ambivalent beings. Narratives that combine supernatural beings in the form of snakes with water are a recurring theme all over the world:

Snakes are ubiquitous supernatural protectors and residents of sacred waters. Except in a few cases of obvious diffusion, water-dwelling serpentine beasts appear so regularly in tales around the world because of the centrality of water in mythic cosmologies and an almost panhuman fascination with the silently undulating and sidwinding snake.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Tshering 2011?: 15.

<sup>26</sup> See Erschbamer forthcoming a.

<sup>27</sup> See Balikci-Denjongpa 2002: 5.

<sup>28</sup> See Vargas O'Bryan 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Ray 2020: 13.

During a visit to Chungthang in North Sikkim in 2010, a local resident guided me up a hill to see the Barawa Chörten. It was quite hot, but the local man was wearing boots, and in a very polite and friendly manner he urged me to move on and not take too many photos. Only afterwards did he explain: because of the snakes. Similar observances were recorded by the English botanist and explorer Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911), who travelled through North Sikkim in 1849. In his *Himalayan Journals* he reported that seven out of twelve snakes in Sikkim were poisonous. He found a specimen of the extremely poisonous small black viper during his visit to Chungthang. Since they saw that snake frequently in the area, he and his team only left the paths with the greatest care and caution.<sup>30</sup>

In Buddhist scriptures, the appearance of snakes is connected to the influence of *lu*. The great treasure revealer Dorjé Déchen Lingpa (c.1876–1928), for example, depicted Sikkim as a place of powerful *lu*.<sup>31</sup> Buddhist authors pointed out what would happen if the *lu* got angry: venomous snakes might appear, no rain would fall, too much rain might fall, or people might get sick. The scholar Dokhampa, for instance, stated that poisonous snakes may appear if the rivers become polluted—a circumstance that annoys the *lu*.<sup>32</sup>

The transmissions of the treasure revealer Sanggyé Lingpa (1340–1396) are a much older example. He noted in his guidebook to Sikkim that the gods and demons of this land are very powerful. Should rain not fall on time, it is due to angry *lu* and their magic. The famous treasure revealer Padma Lingpa (1450–1521) also described the gods and demons of this country as very powerful and fierce in his guidebook to Sikkim. He added that too much rain is a sign of *lu* that have been annoyed.<sup>33</sup>

The *lu* are responsible for good levels of rain but they are also associated with a number of diseases. It is again Guru Rinpoche who realised this around the eighth century. He left his footprint on a blue stone in the centre of a forest, which is in the form of a vase. Devotees that ask for blessings are said to recover from diseases connected to *lu* by merely seeing this stone.<sup>34</sup> The anthropologist Martin Brauen also mentioned this blue rock that will “forever cure diseases caused by *nagas* (serpent beings), such as madness and paralysis”.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See Hooker 1854: 25–26; 98.

<sup>31</sup> See Tsering Josayma 2008: 33.

<sup>32</sup> See Dokhampa 1998: 10.

<sup>33</sup> See Padma Lingpa 2008: 269; Sanggyé Lingpa 2008: 223.

<sup>34</sup> See Sanggyé Lingpa 2008: 217.

<sup>35</sup> Brauen 2010: 110.

These examples illustrate the ascribed power and ambivalence of *lu*. Besides, different Tibetan Buddhist masters encountered *lu* during their journeys in Sikkim. This eventually led to the establishment of different Buddhist monasteries across the land. The reasons for this, however, were different. The above-mentioned Barawa master Könchok Gyeltsen encountered a serpent demon (ལྷ་བདུད་) and a water or lake spirit (མཚོ་ལྷ་ན་) of the ancient faith (རྩམ་རྩེན་པ་), referring to pre-Buddhist traditions. He described these supernatural entities as tall, having red eyes, and staring with big, wide-open eyes. He discovered a stone in the form of a snake-hat in Chungthang and erected a Buddhist structure to subdue this *lu*.<sup>36</sup> Such a narrative also fits those that deal with the legitimation of Buddhism through the inclusion of pre-Buddhist beings.

The *lu* are ambivalent beings. Likewise, encounters with them are not exclusively of negative connotations. For example, Ngadak Rinchen Gön, grandson of the already mentioned Ngadak Sempa Chenpo, interpreted such an encounter as a good sign. It is said that Ngadak Rinchen Gön slept in a small rocky cave above today's Singchit Ngadak monastery, during a tour to North Sikkim. One morning, he could no longer find his walking stick. He recognised a female *lu* that had taken the stick away and deposited it at the location of today's monastery. This Buddhist master interpreted this as a good omen, blessed the area, and told his followers to build a monastery there.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the meeting with a *lu* again led to the establishment of a Buddhist structure at the place of encounter. While Könchok Gyeltsen defeated a *lu*, Ngadak Rinchen Gön was shown a special place by a *lu*. This fits perfectly with the ambivalent picture used to describe the *lu*.<sup>38</sup>

### *Rituals invoking or involving the lu*

The *lu* are addressed in various rituals. For example, rituals in which appeasements are made to *lu* are performed as part of the daily practices of village Lamas in Sikkim, including the *Ludö* (ལྷ་མདོས་, fol.114–116).<sup>39</sup> Another ritual text, the *Ludüd Zhakdröl* (ལྷ་བདུད་ཞགས་ཐོལ་, fol.163–174), is

<sup>36</sup> See Erschbamer 2013: 29–30; 2017: 148; 204–205.

<sup>37</sup> See Tshering 2011?: 26.

<sup>38</sup> Similarly, temples were built and rituals were carried out to weigh the element of water in Tibet. The story of Lhasa, for example, is a story of water, which combines two opposites: life-giving and life-destroying properties; Sørensen & Hazod 2007: 259–263.

<sup>39</sup> On *Dö*-rituals in Sikkim, see Steinmann 2011.

used to cure diseases that are related to the *lu*. These texts were published as part of a collection of daily rituals of the Nyingma tradition.<sup>40</sup> The most important ritual text in Sikkim is the *Nésöl* (གནས་གསོལ་) by Lhatsün Namkha Jikmé, one of the Tibetan Buddhist masters who had opened Sikkim. This text is an offering to the deities of the land. Simultaneously, it is an apology for damage done to the environment and to the abode of supernatural entities. The *lu* are repeatedly mentioned in this text. One reads, for example, that the earth is full of *lu*. Powerful *lu* are gifted with magical powers, dwell in the northern hemisphere, and are owners of the land. This text has by no means lost its importance over the centuries. It has been repeatedly performed in many Sikkimese households, when the construction of hydro-electric projects began in the 1990s.<sup>41</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Water played a prominent role in a Buddhist environment. Accordingly, this element was also addressed in Tibetan and Sikkimese sources, both in historical and contemporary writings. It is considered a provider and also a destroyer of life—depending on the prevailing extent and form. The topic of infrastructure is relevant in this context. The Buddhist kingdom of Sikkim came to an end in the twentieth century and Sikkim became an Indian state. As a result, its infrastructure has been expanded. This also includes the dams that Nehru referred to as “temples of modern India”.<sup>42</sup> There have been ambivalent voices on this in Sikkim for decades.<sup>43</sup> Even centuries earlier, infrastructure was brought to Sikkim by outsiders or visitors, mainly by Tibetan Buddhist masters. They either followed in the footsteps of Guru Rinpoche, fled from inadequate conditions in Tibet, or simply looked for new followers of their teachings. Many of these religious personages provided locals with new infrastructures. They built bridges that crossed torrent rivers or provided locals with drinking water. In return, they found new sponsors and followers of their Buddhist teachings.

Starting with Guru Rinpoche, Tibetan Buddhist masters arrived in Sikkim and performed virtuous deeds in connection with water. Water demons, for example, had to be tamed to gain legitimacy for introducing

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<sup>40</sup> See Lama 1978.

<sup>41</sup> See Balikci 2008: 207–210; Balikci-Denjongpa 2002: 34; Balikci-Denjongpa & Lachungpa 2017: 192; Namkha Jikmé 2000: fol.18v.

<sup>42</sup> Ray 2020: 22.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Eden & Wangchuk 2018.

Buddhist teachings. To this end, sacred Buddhist sites were created by incorporating natural features and transforming supernatural beings that inhabited these sites. Locals repeatedly asked Buddhist masters to provide them with drinking water if none was available. This essential good for life and survival brought grateful followers of Buddhist teachings. Notably, mainly masters from Nyingma tradition travelled to Sikkim. Religious personages belonging to different Kagyü traditions and individual Sakya masters also arrived. These masters either tamed water demons and/or provided sources of drinking water to the locals. Central Buddhist rituals, such as the famous Bumchu, have water as their main component and were introduced by Tibetan masters. Further, visits to hot springs and the use of medicinal water have a long tradition in Sikkim. Overall, narratives that include sacred natural sites form part of Sikkim's identity. The importance of these sacred sites, including hot springs and lakes, has also been recognised by the Government of Sikkim, which placed them under special protection. Last but not least, recent developments such as dam building activities reminded people of the importance, cultural aspects, and religious significance of water—an elixir of life that is inherent in every aspect of life, not just from a Buddhist point of view.

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Plate 1: Buddhist masters who provided locals with drinking water: Guru Rinpoche (l. Sera Jhe Dophenling monastery), Ngadak Sempa Chenpo Phüntso Rigdzin (c. Sera Jhe Dophenling monastery), Könchok Gyeltsen (r. Chungthang monastery) – author 2010



Plate 2: Lhatsün Namkha Jikmé (Sera Jhe Dophenling monastery), composer of the *Nesöl*-text, wherein *lu* are repeatedly mentioned – author 2010

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Royal History of Sikkim: A Chronicle of the House of Namgyal. As Narrated in Tibetan by Their Highnesses Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma.*

Based upon the Preliminary Translation by Kazi Dawasamdub. Corrected, Supplemented and Thoroughly Revised by John A. Ardussi, Anna Balikci Denjongpa and Per K. Sørensen. Under the Patronage of Her Majesty, Gyalum Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, Queen Mother to HM the Fourth King of Bhutan.

Serindia Publications, Chicago. 2021. 635pp, maps, illustrations.

ALEX MCKAY

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Following the British take-over in 1888–1889, the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim was transformed from an autonomous state under Tibetan influence into a British-Indian frontier protectorate on the imperial “Princely State” model. With the British seeking to reduce Tibetan influence and to expand the tax-payer base in Sikkim in order to finance modernisation projects there, Nepalese immigration, which had begun in the decades preceding British control, was encouraged during the first two decades of colonial rule. White institutionalised their position in Sikkim and Sikkim was thus transformed from an ethnically Bhutia-Lepcha-Limbu (i.e. Lhopo-Rong-Tsong) Buddhist state into one in which the majority of people were Hindus of Nepalese origin.

Political Officer John Claude White, the effective ruler of Sikkim during that period, strongly promoted these policies, and tried to suppress the power and influence of the Namgyal dynasty in the person of the 9<sup>th</sup> Chogyal Thutob Namgyal. White's harsh treatment of the Chogyal and his family, who were banished from the kingdom in 1892, proved too extreme even for his own government. His superiors allowed the Chogyal to return to Gangtok in 1895, from where he was able to gradually reach a certain accommodation with British authority. With Sikkim being used as the base for the British invasion of Tibet in 1903–1904 (the so-called “Younghusband Mission”), White's stature was much diminished during his last years, and with the Namgyal dynasty proving a stabilising force on the frontier, this period paved the way for

a close alliance of interests between Sikkim and the British. That eventually culminated in April 1918 in Sikkim's return to autonomy (albeit under British suzerainty).

A significant residue of White's tenure in Gangtok was a *Gazetteer* of Sikkim, first published in 1894 and frequently reprinted. Edited, as were a number of other *Gazetteers* by H.H. Risley, who was not a regional specialist, its political and historical aspects were largely informed by White's perspective on his domain. The Sikkimese perspective represented by the Namgyal dynasty was, however, very different. In the aftermath of the "Younghusband Mission," they recognised the many benefits of British overlordship in such areas as health, education, law and order, infrastructure, and material progress. Perhaps even more importantly, they appreciated that the British had treated the Buddhist faith with respect and had very largely avoided any actions that challenged the institutional and social power of Tibetan Buddhism in Sikkim. On a more personal level, the royal family had been treated with unexpected respect and friendship by the Prince and Princess of Wales when they had been received by the visiting British royals in Calcutta on several occasions in 1905–1906. The Chogyal and his family had, to an extent at least, become personally reconciled to John Claude White and even supported his being granted an extension of service to remain in Gangtok when his retirement was due. But the colonial lens of Risley's *Gazetteer* demanded a response that represented the voice of the indigenous people of Sikkim and its Buddhist ruling class.

This rather lengthy preamble is the historical context to an unnamed manuscript that has come to be known as *The History of Sikkim*. This was compiled by local authorities (notably the Yangthang Kazi and Barmiak Lama), around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the initiative of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal and in particular, his Tibetan-born consort Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma. The Gyalmo was a strong and independent personality who is acknowledged in this work under review as 'the driving force behind the project' (p. 25). Originally written in Tibetan, which version is referred to in short as *Denjong Gyalrab* ('*Bras ljongs rGyal rabs*'), it was subsequently passed to the Sikkimese scholar Kazi Dawasamdup, well-known for his translation work with scholars such as J.C. White's successor (Sir) Charles Bell, and Dr. W.Y. Evans-Wentz, who drafted a preliminary English translation of the Tibetan text in 1909–1910. But following the death of Gyalmo Yeshe Dolma in 1910 and the 9<sup>th</sup> Chogyal early in 1914, the Kazi's work on the text ceased, partly perhaps, due to the many other projects in which he was engaged.

He may well have intended to return to it, but died somewhat prematurely in 1922.

The introduction to this new work under review attributes to political factors the fact that *The History of Sikkim* remained unpublished, in particular the text's exposition of Sikkim's long association with Tibet, and by inference China. Its account of the royal family's sufferings at White's instigation may also have been a factor. While those sufferings were well known to Bell and the colonial government, English language publishers would have been loath to provide further ammunition for the growing strength of the anti-colonial movement in India at the time. With the many vicissitudes of Sikkimese history in ensuing decades, the text languished in semi-obscurity, although an English language version was long present in the SOAS library in London. A handful of earlier scholars – notably Joseph Rock, W.D. Shakabpa, and René Nebesky-Wojkowitz – drew on the work,<sup>1</sup> but the political situation in Sikkim in the 1970s saw it take on something of the nature of a *samizdat* text, hidden from view and passed only to trusted parties. One result of this was the existence of a number of English versions of Dawasamdub's English translation of the *History*. These were marred by scribal and printing errors compounding the initial problems with Dawasamdub's version, which we must remember was an unfinished draft.

More recently the growing body of scholars working on Sikkim have made increasing use of these English versions, and Dharamsala historian Tashi Tsering made a significant contribution to its understanding in an article published in the *Bulletin of Tibetology* in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Along with an analysis of existing versions (both English and Tibetan), he highlighted that the principal intention of its compilation was to demonstrate that Sikkim had left the Tibetan orbit and fully accepted their status as a British protectorate.<sup>3</sup> Given the emphasis in the text on Sikkim's

1 One wonders if John Claude White (who did not read Tibetan), ever saw a version of the manuscript.

There is no evidence in his memoirs (published in 1909) that he did. In the published works of White's successor, the administrator-scholar (Sir) Charles Bell, to whom Kazi Dawasamdub was well-known, there is just one reference to a historical "chronicle" of Sikkim, which is presumably this work. While Bell's publications were almost entirely concerned with Tibet, it is unclear to me why he did not make more use of the *History of Sikkim*.

As noted by the editors (p. 27), Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa was the only scholar known to have had access to an original Tibetan manuscript prior to this publication.

2 Tashi Tsering, 2012. "A short communication about the 1908 '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*'" in *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 48.1, pp. 33–60.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

religious personalities and visitors, and their continued performance of traditional Tibetan Buddhist rituals, practices, and adherence to protocols even under British overlordship, we might suggest that this aspect of the text and its intention may have been equally significant. It was intended to demonstrate that while remaining a traditional Tibetan Buddhist society and culture, it accepted its political submission to the British empire.

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While *The History of Sikkim* was not a critical historical study in the western tradition, indeed its account of the origins of the kingdom is framed in a traditional Buddhist world-view, it is unique in representing the perspective of a Himalayan ruling family and is, therefore a historical document of the highest regional importance. The need for a proper edited version of the text has long been apparent. Early in this century, with impetus from H.M. Gyalyum Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, the grand-daughter of Chogyal Thutob Namgyal, leading regional historian John Ardussi and Tibetan specialist Per K. Sørensen began compiling and comparing the various existing versions of the text in both its Tibetan originals and English translations, including the original ten notebooks containing Kazi Dawasamdub's draft version of the text. Ardussi and Sørensen were subsequently joined by Namgyal Institute of Tibetology research coordinator Anna Balikci Denjongpa, a leading Sikkim specialist and long-term resident in Gangtok. Not the least of her expertise is in the fields of historical photography in Sikkim and in the history of its aristocratic families. The fruits of the trio's long labour have now emerged in a publication that is very much more than a critical edition of the preliminary translation.

The work under consideration is monumental in more ways than one. It comprises 635 foolscap pages and weighs around 5 kilograms [!], in contrast to reproductions of Dawasamdub's translation that are generally much less than 200 pages. This work consists of a completely new translation of the Tibetan originals (of which three versions were available), neatly divided into chapters and sections. For the reader this ordering is a vast improvement on earlier English language versions comprised of a single running narrative divided only by reign. Printed on fine art paper in keeping with the high standards characteristic of the Serindia catalogue, it includes a particular highlight in the just under 350 period photographs and other illustrations selected from a wide range of

public and private collections, the great majority of which are previously unpublished. These photographs, in both black and white and colour, are beautifully reproduced, often in full or even double page, and the individuals featured are identified to the extent possible at this remove. There are furthermore, superb colour reproductions of a number of *thangkas* by Sikkim's master painter Rinzing Lhadripa Lama, including his famous series depicting Sikkim's foundational Buddhist masters and scenes from their lives. There is also a series of very pleasant watercolour landscapes painted by Walter (and his wife Eva) Hodges, whose long career in Sikkim began as John Claude White's clerical assistant. In addition, a fold out reproduction of the Tibetan military map of Sikkim recovered from a house near the Chumbi palace of the Namgyal dynasty during the British invasion of 1888, is published here for the first time.<sup>4</sup> Finally a separate map of Sikkim referencing the place names in the text is contained in a sleeve on the inside back cover. That a publication containing such a rich variety of important visual material is available at such a reasonable price is a testament to the support of Her Majesty the Queen Mother to HM the Fourth King of Bhutan.

Supplementing the translation at the heart of this work is an extensive but never superfluous series of separate text boxes concisely containing essential information on individuals, institutions, and places referred to in the text itself. These provide necessary background to the study of Sikkimese history, albeit one can suggest other topics that might have benefitted from this treatment. One thinks, for example, of British aims and power structures, the impact of the Younghusband mission, the settlement and advancement trajectories of Nepalese social groups, monastic organisation, and local history writing traditions, all of which might have been included here. The reader will no doubt think of others according to their particular interests, but in fairness to the editors a line had to be drawn somewhere.

One additional related feature of particular value are the genealogies of leading families and clans which correct those usually included as an appendix (or secondary section) in Dawasamdub's manuscript. The complexities of genealogical studies in Sikkim are well known, and there is no doubt that the material included here will not only be a valuable resource for historians but of considerable interest within Sikkim. Otherwise, the additional appendices in the original are wisely omitted.

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<sup>4</sup> This complements Diana Lange's *An Atlas of the Himalayas by a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Tibetan Lama* (Brill: 2020), as a significant contribution to the understanding of Tibetan geographical conceptions and their depictions in mapping.

Apparently modelled on the entries in Risley's *Gazetteer*, they were devoted to the customs, religion and history of the Rong and Tsong, as well as the marriage customs of the Lhopo, matters being more appropriately considered in an ethnographic or anthropological study than in this history. Indeed no Tibetan original of these sections has been located and the authors suggest here (pp. 30–31) that these were not part of the original Tibetan text or authored by the Kazi, but were rather 'data compiled by local scholars under the supervision of the royal couple to supplement their book'.

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The many editorial decisions required in completing this work appear to this reader sound and consistent, with appropriate footnoting of additional and complementary information. In the section concerning the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal, however, resort has been made to the autobiography of Dzogchen Lama Jigme Pawo, which was probably the principal source for the Tibetan original. Specialists may therefore need to compare the different texts concerning this complex period, aspects of which still remain unclear to us.

The translation was no simple matter. The three versions in Tibetan that were consulted (one other version known to exist in a private library was inaccessible) were in the hand-written cursive script (*'khyugs*) rather than the classical Tibetan (*dbu med*) known to most European scholars (and indeed Himalayan peoples). While I do not have access to the Tibetan originals, the new translation appears both sensitive and readable, and perhaps most importantly restores the original account in Tibetan in place of what were apparently Dawasamdub's efforts to amend and even supplement the text in order to make it more accessible to European readers. Those efforts were, if not necessarily misleading, certainly problematic in some ways, particularly for specialist study. Thus, in the earlier English version which I possess, we read of the oath of friendship forged between the Tibetan Gye Bumsag and Lepcha Thekong Tek that:

The friendship was cemented by a ceremony at which several animals, both domestic and wild were sacrificed and all the local deities invoked to bear witness to this solemn contract of friendship, binding the Lepchas and Bhutias in an inseparable bond. They sat together on the raw hides of animals, entwined the entrails around their persons and



put their feet together in a vessel filled with blood, thus swearing the blood troth together.

In the new publication under review, this section (p. 72) is translated, in regard to their oath of friendship, as:

They killed many cattle and wild animals and spread out their hides as a mat. They then stood with their feet in a vessel in which they placed the blood and entrails of the animals, invoking the protective deities and local terrestrial gods headed by the ancestral and personal gods of the Bragtsandar, to bear witness to their pledge.

The differences here may seem subtle, but are significant to any student of ritual.<sup>5</sup>

It becomes clear that Kazi Dawasamdub's personal involvement in the events of the time impacted on his translation, as has the political context of its creation. To give one brief example, in the final lines of the text describing White's sadness at his departure from Sikkim, the Kazi has inserted a sentence absent from the Tibetan, which reads; 'And to the people of Sikkim, he [White] was so dear that every one felt his departure very keenly.' That was no doubt, a sentiment the British were pleased to read, but it might be better filed under the heading of "diplomatic fictions" rather than "truth"!

For those of us with well-thumbed copies of Dawasamdub's earlier manuscript, this new translation is an invaluable resource, a fundamental text of Sikkimese history that will be the basis for any future study of the period. Its coffee-table presentation and rich array of additional material is a model for any such enterprise. It contains the minimum of typos, none of any great significance (e.g.; David Macdonald, not McDonald). The earliest published European accounts of Sikkim by Walter Hamilton seem worthy of inclusion in the bibliography,<sup>6</sup> while only an earlier

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- 5 For similar or related ritual practices, compare S.W. Bushell, 1880. "The Early History of Tibet. From Chinese Sources" in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, new series 12, p. 441. Also see Toni Huber, 1999. *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain. Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*, (OUP: Oxford / N.Y.), pp. 138–39.
- 6 Walter Hamilton. 1820. *A Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries; in two volumes*, London; John Murray; 1828. *East-India gazetteer: containing particular descriptions of the empires, kingdoms, principalities, provinces, cities, towns, districts, fortresses, harbours, rivers, lakes of Hindostan and the adjacent countries beyond the Ganges and the Eastern Archipelago*, Vol. II, London; Parbury, Allen & co.

much-reduced version of W.D. Shakabpa's history is included there, although the Tibetan original is cited.<sup>7</sup> But these are minor points. In sum, this is a work that has been well worth waiting for. It is not only an essential historical source on the region, but a veritable feast of information and an exquisite addition to any library.

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<sup>7</sup> See rather, W.D. Shakabpa, 2010. *One Hundred Thousand Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet*, 2 vols., translated and annotated by Derek F. Maher, Leiden; Brill.

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