

MICHAEL VAILLANCOURT ARIS

27 March 1946 — 27 March 1999

A Literary Biography of Michael Aris

Charles' Ramble

The first academic article I ever wrote was a review (published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*) of recent books on Tibet and the Himalaya. One of these books was *Bhutan: The early history of a Himalayan Kingdom* (1979), the first substantial work by one of my doctoral supervisors, Michael Aris. That I should now find myself trying to sum up in a few pages what the author achieved in the two decades that have elapsed since then is, to say the least, sobering.

The obituaries that appeared in the British national press were largely silent about Aris's scholarly achievements, and they sustained beyond his death the persona he had been allocated by the media in life (Per Kvaerne's piece in the *Independent* being a notable exception): the 'English academic' or 'Oxford scholar' husband of Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the political opposition in Myanmar. Aris, a stalwart supporter of his wife and her cause, never objected to this designation, and the press for its part is hardly to blame for mentioning the subject of Tibet or Bhutan so infrequently in connection with his name: our public imagination still classifies the Himalaya (as opposed to, say, ancient Greece, or the modern Masai) as an arena of mysticism and mountaineering rather than of historical and anthropological enquiry.

Michael Aris did as much to alter that image as anyone has in the last twenty years. I do not mean that he wrote worthy tracts with which to batter down the walls of Shangrila; the profession produces any amount of that literature, but of course it isn't read by the people on the other side of the door. Aris's opus was a wooden horse. Most of his books were the kind of thing anyone with a reasonably well-informed interest in the area might allow into his or her house. The works are by no means sensationalist, but no one who read them would feel that the Himalaya had been diminished; they

leave the edifice standing, but replace cobwebby mysticism with the magic of humanism.

Aris's books and articles are listed in the bibliography provided in this Bulletin. A sense of his achievement may be had by taking a close look at a few selected works, while at the same time trying to observe the whole opus through slightly unfocused eyes to see what shapes and colours stand out.

Geographically speaking, the most salient area was of course Bhutan. Aris had gone there in 1967 and stayed for six years as—among other things—private tutor to the younger generation of the royal family. *Bhutan* charts the country's career from breakaway Tibetan principality to theocratic nation-state, but stops short at the emergence of the present ruling dynasty in the first decade of the present century. The book received mixed reviews, with the more severe critics focusing on the usual defects of works that have begun life as doctoral theses, viz., too many facts, no obvious purpose, contempt for the reader. Until its publication, most of what was known about Bhutan had been written from an Indian (or British Indian) perspective, or depended on the accounts of a handful of European travellers. Whatever its deficiencies, *Bhutan* was the first work to look at the country's history from the inside, as it were, while giving due weight to its cultural and political neighbourhood, and as a history of that period it remains unsurpassed.

The author picked up the threads of his account in *The Raven Crown* (1994). The crown in question stands for the ruling dynasty of Bhutan, now in its fourth generation, which superseded more than two centuries of theocratic government. Although it is also a historical study, the book is altogether a different proposition from its predecessor. To begin with, it is vastly more reader-friendly. Richly illustrated with monochrome photographs, mainly from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the work has something of the quality of Robert Graves's historical pot-boilers. *The Raven Crown* does not of course masquerade as a work of fiction, but the wealth of historical detail is finely balanced by perceptive commentary and the spice of hearsay and legend. The waning years of Ugyen Wangchuk, the founder of the dynasty, recall the serene close to the martial career of Graves's *Count Belisarius*:

In the final years after the death of his much-loved queen, [Ugyen Wangchuk] went into retreat, living very humbly in a small residence he had made for himself by the side of his daughter's mansion at Lamé Gönpa. There he would receive no

one at all during the morning while he occupied himself with his devotions. It was only in the afternoon that visitors would come from far and near and he would attend to matters of government ... He greatly regretted the acts of violence he had committed in his youth, but the unprecedented peace of his long reign must surely have given him a measure of happiness. His subjects regarded him not only as a king but also practically as a lama.

[He] finally expired with his head resting in the lap of his son and heir. (p. 109)

The Raven Crown is the work of a scholar who has mastered both the subject of his study and the prose in which it is conveyed; and while the tone is never patronizing, we can surely read in the closing paragraph a tutor's valedictory words of advice to an esteemed student:

Traditions can be maintained, revived or recast, others invented. In the end it is the king alone who decides to what degree he retreats into ceremony and obfuscation or emerges into the light of day. Ritual and reality have to be balanced in new and meaningful ways. The king has to sense the mood of his subjects, and win their trust to express their will clearly and with no reserve. (p. 146)

While both *Bhutan* and *The Raven Crown* are preoccupied with rulers, high lamas, and international affairs, a number of Aris's works reveal an interest in popular culture that is unusual among historians of Tibet and the Himalaya. One example of this interest is an early piece entitled "'The Admonition of the Thunderbolt Cannon-ball' and its Place in the Bhutanese New Year Festival" (1976). The ostensible aim of the article is to present a Bhutanese document that is recited, on the occasion of the New Year, to a group of actors representing a military company. While the preamble declares the author's intention to "relate [the recital] briefly to the wider context of the New Year celebrations" in both Tibet and Bhutan, it is in fact the context itself that takes pride of place, with the text being practically relegated to an appendix. The first-hand observations of rituals are those of an eye tutored by familiarity with the society, and the economy of writing contrasts favourably with much modern Himalayan ethnography, which is too often underdescribed and overinterpreted. Aris may have spent much of his time with princes and

lamas, but a number of near-asides reveal a genuine common touch:

This process [of Tibetanization]... has tended to obscure much of the early cultural life of the Bhutanese peoples. Although the arts of textile and basket weaving bear the true stamp of indigenous crafts of great antiquity, they alone seem to survive as the single expression of the true native genius for the physical arts. (p. 604)

Many years later he was able to pursue this early interest in an article entitled 'Textiles, Text, and Context: The cloth and clothing of Bhutan in historical perspective' (1994), a highly readable account of the historical dynamics that have affected the regional textile cultures of the country. As certain observers have remarked, there is great deal in high Tibetan art and literature that is afflicted by stasis and conservatism, and Aris recognized that real vitality was often to be found on the fringes of the Buddhist State. "The Boneless Tongue": alternative voices from Bhutan in the context of Lamaist societies' (1987), a study of wandering bards of the Himalaya, is a particularly good exercise in the same spirit. (One of the unfinished projects at the time of Aris's death was in fact a study of vernacular epics of Bhutan.)

Western histories of Tibet have depended very largely on mainstream historical works by the Tibetans themselves; the social history of the Tibetan cultural area, which must depend for its sources on the local equivalent of parish registers and the like, is still in its infancy. Aris was keenly aware of this lacuna in the discipline, and a conference that he convened in St Antony's College in 1997, 'The History of Tibet: New Resources and Perspectives', was intended to be the first of several measures to draw attention to the fact and to redress the balance.

An interesting theme that recurs in Aris's work is the way in which Tibetans (or Bhutanese) and Europeans perceived each other; and, more subtly, how these encounters may have led the observers on either side to modify their perception of themselves. Such impressions were by no means always conveyed in writing but might be preserved through the media of painting and photography. *Views of Mediaeval Bhutan* (1982) reproduces the canvases (as well as a part of the journals) of Samuel Davis, who had visited the country in the late eighteenth century. *Lamas, Princes and Brigands*, of which Aris was a contributing editor, presents some of the remarkable photographs taken by the explorer-botanist Joseph Rock, who travelled in the Sino-Tibetan marches during the first half of this century. During the Eighth Seminar of

the International Association of Tibetan Studies, held in Bloomington in 1998, Aris introduced a project on which he was working, and that he did not live to complete. This was the so-called 'Wise Collection', an assemblage of maps and paintings of landscapes, buildings, and ceremonies by a Tibetan artist who had been commissioned to travel through Tibet in the mid-nineteenth century for this purpose by the eponymous British patron of the collection.

What about the Himalayan view of the Europeans? 'India and the British According to a Tibetan Text of the Late 18th Century' (1994) and *Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse on India' of 1789* (1995) both deal with the efforts of a renowned Tibetan scholar to come to grips with a description of British India that he had received from a Bhutanese disciple. A later work, 'Himalayan Encounters' (1997), is a rather odd but interesting collage of brief testimonies by Tibetans and Bhutanese of their meetings with foreigners.

Why this preoccupation with cross-cultural perspectives? There were, I think, several related motives. Michael Aris's early training was as a modern historian, not as an Orientalist or anthropologist. His doctorate, from SOAS, was in Tibetan literature, but his later Junior Research Fellowship at St John's College, Oxford, returned him to the intellectual open market. In this environment he was obviously aware that, from the viewpoint of the more mainstream specializations within the field of history, Tibet and Bhutan might seem almost comically exotic. By underscoring the connections that had been established with Tibet and Bhutan by representatives of a more familiar world—soldiers, missionaries, and servants of the Company or the Empire—Aris sought, I think, to bring the image of his chosen field out of the clouds and onto a recognizable continuum of knowledge.

This project was part of his long, and frequently frustrating, campaign to establish Tibetan and Himalayan studies on an institutional footing in Oxford. One of his first forays was a hopeful article entitled 'Resources for Tibetan Studies at Oxford' (1982), in which he argued his case by citing the *embaras de richesses* in Tibetan texts housed in the Bodleian Library. He did not live to see the project realized; but a mere month before he died benefactions had been pledged by generous friends sufficient to endow in perpetuity the post of Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Oxford which will be in place by October 2000. His family and close academic colleagues have now launched an appeal for the 'Michael Aris Memorial Trust for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies' for the purpose of endowing further posts, resources, and studentships at Oxford. Aris had the satisfaction of knowing that his

own academic subjects would continue and flourish after his passing.

But there was another facet to Aris's fascination with cultural boundary-crossing which lies closer to the heart of the anthropological enterprise, and surely has much to do with his own personal circumstances. The problem is clearly spelt out in 'Himalayan Encounters' (1997):

Is it possible to conduct a meaningful discourse across the barriers separating European and allied Himalayan cultures? Are we so locked into our own habits of thoughts and expression and so conditioned by them that true communication between them is difficult or impossible? (p. 179)

The introduction to *Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse'* offers a fine portrait of the heroic age of contacts between Bhutan and the West. Both sides are represented by men deeply immersed in their respective traditions, striving to come to terms with something profoundly alien without compromising the integrity of those traditions.

The British officials who travelled to Bhutan and Tibet in this period exemplified the cosmopolitanism and learning of the European Enlightenment, typical of a small but influential minority in India in this period ... The head lamas of Tibet and Bhutan with whom the British had their dealings were monk-statesmen who saw little conflict between their sacred and secular offices. Thus the emissaries from both sides easily assumed the combined role of scholar diplomats... The gentle prejudice and natural imperfections we can discern in [*Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse'*] now, more than two hundred years later, can surely be forgiven. (p. 2)

There is no inexorable march from the dark age of mutual incomprehension to a golden future where cultural barriers are dissolved. Aris frequently contrasted the eloquent openness of the early British travellers with the imperial bombast of their Victorian successors. But he never succumbed to the dogma of laying the blame for all things bad at the imperialists' door; on the contrary, he allowed the Tibetans and Bhutanese an active role in their international affairs:

There is a world of difference between the inspired and sympathetic accounts written by Bogle, Turner, Davis and Hamilton in

the 18th century and all the dull invective of British officials in the 19th century. Some of that difference can surely be attributed to more than a change in British imperial attitudes and a decline in English prose style. (*Bhutan*, p. 263)

Bhutanese expansionism in the Indian plains and growing civil unrest within the country itself were equally to blame. In 1979 Aris convened the Second Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies in Oxford. The proceedings, which he co-edited with Aung San Suu Kyi, were entitled *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, the representative of the British and, after 1947, the Indian governments. Richardson was the guest of honour at the 'History of Tibet' workshop in 1997; Aris edited and wrote a preface to his collected papers (*High Peaks, Pure Earth* [1998]) and, significantly, dedicated *Jigs-med gling-pa's 'Discourse'* to him on his ninetieth birthday. The Victorians may not have lived up to the promising start made by their predecessors in Tibet—there had been no one approaching the calibre of Brian Hodgson, the polymath British Resident in Kathmandu; but Aris appreciated that the Empire had at last acquitted itself in Tibet in the person of Hugh Richardson, the greatest scholar-diplomat of them all. Michael Aris himself came from a diplomatic background, and his sensitivity in dealing with the political undercurrents in Tibetan Studies earned him further respect among his colleagues. This dimension of his contribution has been expressed most poignantly by Braham Norwick, in a letter which he wrote to Anthony Aris on the death of his twin brother:

His combination of charm and scholarship won our hearts as well as our minds. It was he who set the tone of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. Thanks to his efforts and skills, that group became the major organization fostering academic studies of Tibetan culture and history. It was Michael who managed to keep the Soviet and Chinese scholars working in rational harmony with the Asian and western scholars whose major allegiance was to the Dalai Lama and democracy, and he helped to bring joy as a component of serious studies...

Michael Aris's quest to place Tibetan Studies on a par with any other established field of scholarship underlay the most controversial and, I think, the most important book he wrote. This was *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)*

(1988). To appreciate the furore caused by this book a little explanation is required.

There is a category of Tibetan literature called *terma*, literally 'treasure', which occupies a special place in the Lamaist tradition. The Buddhist treasure texts (the Bonpo equivalent are a different matter, and do not concern us here) are believed by Tibetans to have been written by Padmasambhava, the eighth-century magus who was involved in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet. Tibet was not yet ready for the teachings contained in the treasures, and Padmasambhava accordingly concealed them (in rocks, caves, and so forth) for rediscovery at a more propitious time. The occasion presented itself after the eleventh century during the reintroduction of Buddhism into the ruins of the Tibetan empire; and more pertinently, when the disparate groups of Buddhists in the country were trying to achieve institutional coherence amid the rise of new schools. The legitimacy of the Nyingmapa—literally, the 'Old'—sect depended heavily on the authenticity of these rediscovered treasures. One of the most prolific 'treasure-discoverers' (*tertön*) was Pemalingpa, and it is his biography with which the first part of *Hidden Treasures* is concerned.

The second part deals with a work that purports to be the secret biography of the Sixth Dalai Lama. The latter was removed from office at a relatively young age, and conventional evidence indicates that he died in exile on his way to Peking. But in spite of his reputation for worldliness (he renounced the few monastic vows he had taken, and is credited with the authorship of some very unmonkish poems) he has always been a hugely popular figure among Tibetans. The belief that, far from being a mere libertine, he was actually a nonconformist saint, was sustained by his 'Secret Biography', according to which he did not die after leaving Lhasa but went on to have a long and illustrious career as a wandering lama. The authenticity of the biography is officially recognised by the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Aris's conclusions were simple and unequivocal: the 'Secret Biography' is a work of fiction and the 'treasure-discoverer' Pemalingpa was a charlatan. *Hidden Treasures* managed to cause offence across an impressively wide spectrum: first, in Bhutan (the Sixth Dalai Lama was the descendant of a brother of Pemalingpa, and both are forebears of the Royal Family); second, among Western scholars, where even rationalists found Aris's position presumptuous and his categorical rejection of the *terma* tradition unreasonable; and finally, Western devotees of Tibetan Buddhism, about whom he was uncharacteristically forthright:

Aris memorial

To what extent can the symbols, habits of thought and belief systems of one people be truly intelligible to another whose own are very different? Many people today seem content to disregard this basic problem in epistemology when it comes to Tibet. Particularly the great number of westerners who now go through the motions of adopting the external forms of Tibetan Buddhism seem to believe that the myths, gods and symbols of Tibet can be transposed to a western setting and have precisely the same relevance, value and power as in their land of origin. (p. 3)

And of the two protagonists themselves:

I believe their future reputation will not benefit from the sort of uncritical adulation western devotees reserve for such figures. There one finds a conscious suspension of disbelief that is a contradiction both of traditional faith, which is deep and uncontrived, and of modern rationalism, which is our own heritage. (p. 4)

Accusations of charlatantry, hypocrisy, and exploitation are nothing new where Tibetan religion is concerned. They are indeed the normal rhetoric of Chinese Communist ideology, and it would be surprising not to hear them from that quarter. But there are, at present, only two internationally audible positions on Tibetan society: unqualified adulation and unmitigated condemnation. With a few notable exceptions, there is still a kind of tacit agreement among Western scholars to say nothing too publicly about the historical warts of which they are only too well aware, lest these be exploited for purposes of hostile propaganda. Aris regarded this reticence as a disservice: if Tibetan civilization was to hold its own as a subject of serious scholarship, there could be no special pleading, and nothing should be off limits.

There is a particular reluctance on the part of many modern scholars to recognize the entirely fabricated nature of the Tibetan 'treasure-texts'. It is as if their enthusiasm for things Tibetan and Himalayan has blinded them to an obvious truth. There is no evidence whatsoever to support the claim that any of the 'rediscovered' texts of the cult actually date from the period claimed for them.

...Most important of all, many of Pemalingpa's contemporaries were of the opinion that he was basically a fraud. If they... were

capable of holding that view, then surely the rational and critical scholars of the twentieth century can do so too. (pp. 96-7)

It is axiomatic in Buddhism that the excesses and idiosyncracies of saints are not to be judged according to the criteria applicable to common folk. But Aris gave no quarter, and the standard of ordinary decency he invokes in *Hidden Treasures* sometimes makes Pemalingpa look very shabby indeed. (Elsewhere, he did not miss the opportunity to reprimand the great nineteenth-century saint Shabkar on the grounds that he "was not slow to record the very high opinions and expectations held of him by others. ... Saint though he undoubtedly was, there is a conspicuous element of what looks like vanity in some of Zhabs-dkar's writing." [*Himalayan Encounters*, p. 183, fn. 17])

Seen from another perspective, all Aris was doing was applying to the two biographies the same stringent criteria that are quite normal in modern textual criticism. But the approach that he applied to Pemalingpa's biography—reading between the lines to reveal his mastery of the artisanal techniques essential to good legerdemain, as well as the deep personal insecurity that might have driven him to seek public adulation and a respectable spiritual paternity in the figure of Padmasambhava—provided sufficient grounds for some readers to condemn the author as a *tendra*, an enemy of the Buddhist doctrine.

It is unfortunate that the passages such as those quoted above eclipsed the equally sharp remarks Aris made about shoddy Western scholarship that too often substitutes theoretical dogma for sensitivity and thought.

Structuralism, neo-structuralism, post-structuralism, nihilism, individualism, pragmatism... are all Western constructs which developed out of conditions very far removed from those obtaining in the societies that gave birth to the mysteries studied here. To impose on oriental societies the models which these various schools have developed for the analysis of European societies can only lead to confusion, distortion or oversimplification unless those societies are first studied from their own viewpoints and through the products of their own great and literate cultures.

...One key to the problem, I believe, lies in language—in the simple recognition that habits of mind and attitudes of belief are revealed not just through a choice of words but through tone and

nuance.... this sort of fluency, which depends more on mental sympathy than on verbal dexterity, is not easy to teach and can really only be acquired by one's own efforts.... I believe this approach will continue to yield more dividends than any amount of neo- or post-structuralism. (p. 40)

Can an individual be both a scholar and a believer without placing swathes of territory out of bounds to critical inquiry? I often heard the question asked in relation to Michael Aris. One possible answer is, I suppose, that the bigger a person is the more room there will be to accommodate incompatible worlds, but a bibliographical overview such as this is hardly an appropriate place to pursue the matter. An important part of Michael Aris's achievement was his quest to wed the legacy of the European Enlightenment to Tibetan and Himalayan Studies. This is not just a question of being hard-headed: anyone can do that, and humanism is altogether a more subtle affair than mere polemic. The moral authority for hard-headedness has to be grounded in a profound sympathy with a culture, and it is difficult to convey this sympathy in a few quotations, especially when a man chooses not to advertise it in his published work. But if we are to confine ourselves to a consideration of Aris's writing, perhaps I could make my point by cheating slightly for the sake of economy, and cite a short work that he never published. A number of people were aware of Michael Aris's regard for the late Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche as something more than a scholar. The lama's reincarnation was enthroned in Kathmandu in 1997, and Aris was one of the many visitors who came to attend the ceremony. Not long after returning to England he sent me a letter that concluded with the following words:

...I managed to talk to Suu on the phone yesterday, the first time since Christmas Eve. She was in good heart, tho' impossibly busy.

Oh yes, and here is a poem I wrote in Tibetan as I flew back from Kathmandu. What do you think?

As ever,

Michael

mtshungs-bral bla-ma'i zhal-gyi dkyil-'khor de
 dus-yun ring-du ma-mjal blo-pham che /
 gsung-gi bdud-brtsi zhim-po ma-'thungs-par /
 chu-med-bzhin-du kha-skom shin-tu che /
 de-ltar sdug-kyang kha-rtsang glo-bur-du /
 gnas-tshul ya-mtshan chen-po 'di-ltar 'byung /
 khyod-kyi blo-sems ma-skyo ngu mi-dgos /
 bla-ma slar-yang mi'i tshul-du 'dzin /
 mig-gi 'bras-bu lha-rigs myu-gu gcig /
 bya-rung-kha-shor 'dabs-su 'khrungs-tshar yod /
 zla-tshes 'di-la brtan-brtan mgron-du shog /
 lo-rgyus de-ltar thos-nas dran-med brgyal /
 dran-pa slar-yang gsos-nas tshab-tshub-gyis /
 nam-rgyun 'gan-khur spangs-nas gnam-grur 'dzul /
 gnam-gyi mkha'-dbyings brgyud-nas bal-yul 'byor /
 de-nas rkang-pas sa-brtan reg-tsam-du /
 mi-rigs skad-rigs mi-gcig chos-grogs mnyam /
 chos-srid gnyis-kyi re-ba bskyed-bzhin-du /
 yang-srid khri-ston phyogs-su mgyogs-por 'byor /
 byams-brtse bla-ma'i sku-skyes yid-'ong-de /
 'jigs-zhum bral-bar khri-mthon stengs-du bzhugs /
 nges-med phyag-rgya zhabs-rgya sku-rtses gnang /
 khrom-chen dkyil-du mandal rten-gsum bzhes /
 rang-gi lha-dar dri-med phul-ba-nas /
 phyag-gi 'gram-lcag chen-po ha-har gnang /
 da-lta pha-yul phyogs-su phur-bzhin-skabs /
 mgo-yi phyag-dbang byin-rlabs gsal-por tshor /
 dga'-skyo zung-gi ngang-du rang-khyim slebs /
 snga-ma'i 'gan-gyi 'khur-po ma-bslang-gong /
 yang-srid mchog-gi zhabs-pad brtan-par smon /
 chos-sgrogs kun-la thugs-rje-che-che zhu /

An English rendering might read something like this:

The magic circle of my matchless lama's face—
 How sad I was not to have seen it for so long!
 Without the sweet nectar of his words to drink
 I was as parched with thirst as someone with no water.
 And though I mourned so, suddenly, the other day
 Something wonderful happened:
 "Don't be sad; you have no need to weep;
 Your lama has again taken human form.
 A young sprout of divine provenance, a glory to behold,
 Has been born near the Great Stupa of Bodnath.
 Be sure to come as a guest on the appointed day!"
 On hearing these words I fainted.
 When I had recovered my senses, I hurriedly
 Set aside my day-to-day duties. I took a plane
 And travelled through the sky to Kathmandu.
 As soon as I had set foot on firm ground,
 Together with my fellow-disciples of various races and tongues,
 Filled with hope for affairs of the spirit and of the world,
 We hurried to the seat of that exalted rebirth.
 The beautiful incarnation of my beloved lama
 Was sitting, unafraid, on his high throne,
 All alone, making playful gestures with his hands and feet.
 He received the threefold offering in the midst of the crowd
 And as we each presented him with an impeccable scarf
 He laughingly slapped our cheeks;
 Now, as I fly back to my country
 I can distinctly feel the blessing of his hand on my head.
 So I arrived home, joy mingled with sadness.
 But before I resume the common round of duties
 I pray earnestly to the lotus feet of this wonderful incarnation,
 And to all my fellow-disciples I say,

Thank you, thank you...

"Of the whole enormous area which was once the spirited domain of Tibetan culture and religion, stretching from Ladakh in the west to the borders of the Chinese provinces of Szechuan and Yunnan in the east, from the Himalayas in the south to the Mongolian steppes and the vast wastes of northern Tibet, now only Bhutan seems to survive as the one resolute and self-contained representative of a fast disappearing civilization"

A Cultural History of Tibet by David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson.

Michael Aris's entire career as a Tibetologist and Himalayan specialist was spent recording the history and extant traces of this "fast disappearing civilization". A few weeks before his death on 27 March this year, his 53rd birthday, he had convened a Steering Committee at St Antony's College, University of Oxford, for the purpose of seeking funds to endow posts, studentships and resources for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at the University of Oxford. His intention was to provide this country for the first time with a firm institutional base for these subjects. Even before Michael Aris's death, his hopes and efforts were rewarded by benefactions which had been pledged by friends of the family, Hans and Mirit Rausing and Joseph and Lisbet Koerner. Michael Aris's family and his academic colleagues have now established an educational and research Trust entitled "The Michael Aris Memorial Trust for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies". With the magnificent benefactions from the Rausing and Koerner families, the Trustees have decided to endow a post of Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at the Oriental Faculty, University of Oxford. The post will be advertised before the end of the year and an appointee will start teaching in October 2000.

The Trustees are also delighted to announce that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales has graciously agreed to be Patron of the Appeal.

The First Oxford International Chamber Music Festival will take place 3-8 July next year and a concert will be held at St. Antony's College on 5th July in support of The Michael Aris Memorial Trust. Further details on the Festival will be posted in November.

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