

# THE NAVEL OF THE DEMONESS

TIBETAN  
BUDDHISM AND  
CIVIL RELIGION IN  
HIGHLAND NEPAL

CHARLES RAMBLE

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*Tibetan Buddhism and Civil Religion  
in Highland Nepal*

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*For Anne*

Margaret: Father, that man's bad.

More: There is no law against that.

Roper: There is! God's law!

More: Then God can arrest him....

Alice: While you talk, he's gone!

More: And go he should if he was the Devil himself until he broke the law!

Roper: So now you'd give the Devil benefit of law!

More: Yes. What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?

Roper: I'd cut down every law in England to do that!

More: Oh? And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast—Man's laws, not God's—and if you cut them down—and you're just the man to do it—d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of the law, for my own safety's sake.

Roper: I have long suspected this; this is the golden calf; the law's your god.

—Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons*

# Acknowledgments

Since more than two decades have passed since the inception of the research on which this book is based, it is not surprising that the list of people who have helped it on its way should be a long one. In 1999, when the work was substantially completed, I asked Michael Aris if he would give me comments on the draft. The provisional title at the time (now relegated to the title of chapter 8) was *Agedness of Error*. In addition to the suggestions he gave was the unequivocal recommendation that this be changed to *The Navel of the Demoness*, a reference to an etymology for the name Te (the community that provides the focus for this study) that features in its foundation myth (see p. 190). As grateful as I am for the title, it is only the most conspicuous of the many pieces of valuable advice I received from my late friend and teacher.

Extensive and very helpful suggestions were later made by Pascal Boyer, David Gellner, Toni Huber, and Geoffrey Samuel. For comments on a more recent draft, I would like to thank Arezou Azad, Patrizia Bassini, Hildegard Diemberger, Brandon Dotson, Per Kvaerne, and Jill Sudbury.

Minor changes are rarely as minor as anticipated, but the modifications the book has gone through since then do not address the demographic and socio-political evolution of Te since 1999. A chapter about the developments of the past decade would not have contributed greatly to the fabric of this book: updates are themselves soon outdated, and the main argument, which concerns the nature of

religion in a highland community, is not affected by the changes that have taken place in the interim. Nevertheless, my slowness in completing this work is not for want of encouragement from my associates in Oxford, where I have received unfailing support from my friends and colleagues in the Oriental Institute and Wolfson College. I am also sincerely grateful for the help and support given me by Anthony and Marie-Laure Aris.

After completing my D.Phil. in 1985 I received funding from the Leverhulme Trust for two years of post-doctoral research. Although the main focus of my work at that time was in Tibet, this studentship enabled me to begin my enquiries on Te. Most of my research on the village and in surrounding areas was carried out between 1992 and 1997 in the framework of a multidisciplinary project, funded by the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). I shall say more about this project in the Introduction, but here I would like to express my deep gratitude to the director of the project, Dieter Schuh; to Jens-Uwe Hartmann; and to Christoph and Savitri Cueppers.

Among other things, this project afforded me the privilege of working closely with colleagues from a variety of disciplines. I made several field trips with Christian Seeber, affectionately known in Mustang as the Red Man, whose good humour and friendship remained unshaken in spite of a regime of high passes, the odd freezing night without cover, and, on one occasion, broken ribs in one of the most remote corners of the district. I am grateful for his companionship, his scholarly collaboration, and, more immediately, for his permission to use his map of the Shöyul in this book (figure 2.1).

Two of the most complex features of Te are its architecture and its irrigation system. Although this book has relatively little to say about these aspects of the settlement, both were essential to my understanding of Te's social institutions. I would have had no hope at all of grasping their dynamics had it not been for Niels Gutschow, who brought his considerable experience to bear on the intricacies presented by Te. Watching his meticulous documentation of fields, lifts, leats, stupas, residences, and threshing yards, and following his patient explanations to a slow-witted amateur, were among the most rewarding aspects of my fieldwork in Te. I am especially thankful to Dr. Gutschow for permitting me to reproduce here a number of the many maps and drawings of Te and its surroundings made by him and his assistant Bijay Basukala.

Some of these maps and diagrams have been modified in order to represent the particular concerns of this work, and to conform to the orthographic conventions I have used. For the sake of consistency, they have all been redrawn by the architect Jeremy Lim. I wish to thank Mr. Lim for his patience and inventiveness in undertaking this task.

My knowledge of the economy, architecture, ecology, and archaeology of the general area were greatly enriched thanks to field trips undertaken with Purna Bahadur Chhetri, John Harrison, Tracey Parker, Werner Schon, Sukra Sagar Shrestha, and Angela Simons.

Living and working in Nepal over these years was possible thanks to a series of associations with the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies of Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. I am indebted to my colleagues in CNAS, and especially Nirmal Tuladhar, for facilitating my research.

In spite of the somewhat daunting reputation they have among their neighbours, the people of Te always showed great generosity, warmth, and forbearance in the face of endless questions. I wish to thank the community as a whole, and to extend special gratitude to Kyikyab, Kunga Samdrug, Draba Phuntshog, and Duli; to the lamas of Baza and Tshognam, Karma Tshering and the late Chödrag Gyatso; and to their brother, Nyima Drandul. My debt to Nyima will become apparent in the following pages. Among the many other people in southern Mustang who helped me in the course of my work, I would like to make particular mention of Nirmal and Laxmi Gauchan, Ananda Serchan, Angya Gurung of Dzar, Pema Dolkar of Kag, Palsang and Tshewang Tenzin of Lubra, Karma Tshering of Taye, and Urgyen and Pema Tshering of Tshug.

In stark contrast to the leisurely gestation of this book is the extraordinary speed of its delivery, and for this I am especially indebted to Brian Desmond, Meechal Hoffman, and Cynthia Read.

There are surely a great many other people whose kindnesses and expertise made the various stages in the production of this book such a pleasure. In the case of one omission, I hope a simple dedication will do where many words could never be enough.

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# The Navel of the Demoness



The Navel of the Demoness: approaching Te from the pasture areas of Kope and Yathang, where monks and nuns were not allowed to go (see chapter 7).

# Introduction

## The Starting Point

Sylvain Lévi notoriously remarked that Nepal (meaning the Kathmandu Valley) was India in the making.<sup>1</sup> By the same token, it could be said that Nepal (meaning the northern borderlands) is a kind of inchoate Tibet. Buddhism entered Central Tibet in the seventh century AD, and proceeded to eliminate or absorb the indigenous beliefs and practices that it encountered. The outer margins of the Tibetan cultural world, located today within the national boundaries of Nepal, might offer examples of the same process at an earlier stage.

This was the point of departure of the study on which this book is based. The focus of the inquiry was a village of forty-eight households and about three hundred people, called Te, situated at an altitude of 3,000 metres in Nepal's Mustang District. The people of Te are nominally Buddhist, but they also perform animal sacrifices connected with a cult of territorial divinities. The community seemed like an ideal place in which to examine the interaction of Buddhism and paganism (a term I will justify later).

Closer investigation revealed that the situation was far more complex than a straightforward clash of two opposed worldviews. Both Buddhism and paganism were peripheral to a “dark” third manifestation of religion, which was produced by the complex interaction of individuals with their civic institutions. The evolution of the study

from its original premises to the final form of this book is closely linked to the development of my own acquaintance with the area, and the two stories are best told together.

### Nyima Drandul

It was Nyima Drandul who first told me about Te, in 1981. I had come to Nepal in 1980, and was doing fieldwork for what would become a doctoral thesis on a village of Bonpo priests, called Lubra, in the southern part of Mustang District. My fieldwork had been interrupted by a bout of hepatitis, and I spent part of my convalescence in Kathmandu writing an article about death-rituals. I hoped to illustrate the article with a photograph of an effigy in which the corpse is enclosed on the way to the cemetery. I asked a friend if he knew a lama from Mustang who could make one. He came to my house the next day with Nyima Drandul, a thin and poorly dressed young man, who duly built the effigy in my back garden. Nyima explained that he was not a practising lama but that, as the youngest brother in a family of Buddhist tantric priests, he knew how to read and write Tibetan, and how to perform a number of rituals. He was himself recuperating from a long illness—a relapse into tuberculosis—and was presently working in a small factory sewing track suits.

We met again when I was next in Kathmandu. Apart from the fact that we quickly became good friends, it was obvious to me that Nyima combined intelligence with a detachment that enabled him to explain aspects of his own culture to an outsider. He in turn had been curious to know why anyone might want a funeral effigy built in his back garden. The idea that a person should wish to study a religion for a reason other than to practise or persecute it was a novel one, but it interested him. If I was curious about people's customs, he said, I should come to Te.

I had heard about Te. I knew that it was one of a group of five villages that spoke a non-Tibetan language in the otherwise Tibetan-speaking enclave where I had been working. It lay half a day's walk to the north of Lubra but in the part of Mustang district that was forbidden to outsiders, so I had never been able to go there.

For several generations Nyima's family had served as the Buddhist priests of Te. The priests speak Tibetan as a first language, but Nyima had been born and brought up on Te's territory and, like his brothers, spoke the language of Te fluently. He had spent all his early life in Te but was not of it, and it is this, I suppose, that equipped him to speak about the community at once with familiarity and fascination. Even by the standards of Mustang, Te seemed exotic.

What was especially interesting, however, was that it sounded archaic. These are siren voices, and anthropologists do not listen to them.

I returned to Nepal as soon as I had completed my doctorate, with the aim of finding out more about this exotic, archaic village. Nyima met me on the day I arrived. I hardly recognised him. He was stout and well-dressed and he had a gold tooth. He had left his job in the sweatshop and entered the lucrative gold-smuggling business, which was then at its height. I could not hope to employ him as an assistant at a competitive salary, but he agreed to help me whenever he was in Nepal—which, as it turned out, was frequently—on the condition that I did not pay him. He preferred, he said, to work out of interest and friendship rather than to be an unreliable employee.

Lengthy periods of fieldwork in Te were out of the question because Upper Mustang, where the village is located, was still prohibited to foreigners. A handful of European scholars had visited Mustang in the past, but their interest had been directed to the northern, Tibetan-speaking area, which had the special attraction of boasting a walled city and a king. Perhaps the only author to have said anything of interest about Te and its neighbours was Christoph von Führer-Haimendorf, who had described the people as “Ur-Thakalis.” The Thakalis are an ethnic group who live primarily in south Mustang, below the Tibetan-speaking area, and the language spoken in Te is a variety of Thakali. The Thakalis have attracted the attention of an even more researchers than have the Sherpas. It was known that they had gone through successive phases of acculturation by the Tibetan north and the Indo-Aryan south. The Tepas (the people of Te), as “Ur-Thakalis,” might offer a clue to an earlier phase of civilisation in Mustang (Führer-Haimendorf 1966: 157; 1975: 132–203).

The idea was not completely fantastic. I knew that animal sacrifices to territorial gods had been common practice in the Tibetan-speaking area within living memory, and that all the villages had abandoned such rites at the instigation of one or another Buddhist or Bonpo missionary from Tibet. The custom of blood-offerings still persisted in Te. (Much later I was to discover that Te was not in fact alone in this regard—at least two other villages in the north still offer animals to their gods.) The survival of the tradition was likely to be an indicator of the endurance of other aspects of pre-Buddhist religion, and the probability of this was increased by the evident conservatism of the culture. Contrary to the case of other villages, the headmen of Te were endowed with real authority to maintain both secular and religious traditions and to punish even minor violations of customary law.

Fieldwork at this time, I have said, was necessarily an exiguous aspect of my research, and most of the information was gathered by Nyima, who paid visits to the village with a tape recorder and a list of questions, or by

interviewing Tepas during their visits to unrestricted areas. I was working around the notion that Te was a case of a community clinging to an obsolescent faith in defiance of Buddhist missionary activity. But the nature of this faith remained nebulous. The Tepas did interesting things, but these things did not seem to belong to any kind of system that might have extended beyond the confines of the community. Other Tibeto-Burman peoples had elaborate myths with cosmogonies and migration-stories recited by priests or shamans. There was nothing of this in Te. The village priest mumbled a few incomprehensible words when he officiated at sacrifices, but that was the extent of his sacerdotal performance. The main festival of the year, the *Lama Guru*, bore little resemblance to any other ceremony I had seen or heard of; or rather, it resembled a great many things. A number of elements were visibly of Buddhist origin, but, in this context, carried none of the meanings that Buddhism would attribute to them. Moreover, the lamas themselves played no part in the ceremony. In the case of the *Lama Guru*, and other superficially Buddhist ceremonies, the Tepas seemed to be doing some of the right things but for all the wrong reasons. The Tepas' mistakes were not casual, but formalised and sustained with considerable rigor.

Several authors—notably Samten Karmay and Philippe Sagant—were at that time writing on the subject of traditional local leadership in Tibet, and demonstrating convincingly that in a number of areas the chief derived his authority and legitimacy from the territorial gods.<sup>2</sup> Such gods were certainly important in Te, and the headmen wielded real authority, but there was no evidence of any link between divine and political power. The Tepas were a strongly democratic society, but it was the villagers themselves who appointed the headmen as a rod for their own backs.

In the mid-1980s, Mustang was still officially closed, but Tibet was opening, and I suspended my research in Te to travel north of the border and to write about matters more closely related to my earlier work on the Bon religion. Nyima divided his time between farming and smuggling gold.

### The Nepal-German Project on High Mountain Archaeology

In 1992 I returned to Mustang in the framework of the Nepal-German Project on High Mountain Archaeology (henceforth the Nepal-German Project), a research programme that set out to trace the process of settlement in Mustang by combining the methods of half a dozen scholarly disciplines. One section of the project entailed photographing and cataloguing local and private archives, and the overall director of the project, the Tibetologist Dieter Schuh, engaged

me to help him to carry out this part of the work. In the course of my doctoral research I had acquired some familiarity with the highly idiosyncratic type of Tibetan in which most of the village documents of this area are written. The Danish anthropologist Michael Vinding and I had published a translation and commentary of a quasi-historical work concerning Thini, which had once been a powerful settlement in the Thakali-speaking area of Mustang (Ramble and Vinding 1987). My translation of this work contained numerous errors that in turn distorted aspects of the historical political situation. But, presumably on the grounds that I had some capability and willingness to tackle the vagaries of the language that the waiting archives were likely to contain, Dieter Schuh asked me to join the project (and I am very grateful for that).

Upper Mustang had recently opened to foreigners in a limited way, which meant that tourists (and researchers) were permitted to go there on payment of a substantial royalty. I was now able to visit Te officially for short periods. Nyima was by now fed up with farming his acre in the upper Muktinath valley, where he had bought a house, and the smuggling business was no longer as lucrative as it had once been. He agreed to join me in the Nepal-German Project as a salaried assistant. There were certain conditions: he did not want to be the assistant of a lowly anthropology student. Young men who leave Mustang as poor villagers to seek their fortunes in the outside world should manifest their success when they return. If I wanted people to take me seriously enough to let me photograph their private or community archives, I would have to do likewise. This meant, he said, exaggerating my salary when people asked how much I earned—rather than understating my already meagre student grant, as I had been accustomed to doing in the past—and generally showing largesse. And by the way, he added, if I didn't have a horse I wasn't a man. I bought a horse, and Nyima taught me how to ride it. Over the next few years, we made about a dozen trips to Upper Mustang and more to the south, staying for periods ranging from two weeks to three months. We rode everywhere, showed largesse, suffered very little injury, and photographed several thousand documents.

The project gave me an opportunity to investigate, in other villages, institutions that had particularly interested me in Te. One of these was what might provisionally be called pagan religion. I found to my surprise that the cult of the local gods was more elaborate—or at least clearer and more articulate—in a number of places where I had supposed that it would have been eclipsed by the strong presence of Buddhist institutions. The recitations of the pagan priests were well constructed and relatively lucid, and the priests themselves had ritual functions in their communities other than at the periodic propitiation of the local numina. Moreover, some of the processes of social

change that I had suspected for Te—such as the gradual shift from a clan-based polity to one organised around residence—were clearly identifiable in the archives of other villages.

It is possible to talk about Tibetan Buddhism independently of the lives of Tibetan Buddhist villagers. Buddhist doctrine is flung over the Himalayas and Tibet like a vast net; the unevenness of the cultural topography shows through the fabric, but it can nevertheless be understood—admittedly in a two-dimensional sort of way—without reference to local ruggedness. Up to a point, this is also true of the pagan cult of territorial gods. Unlike Buddhist monks, the priests of these cults (there is usually just one in each village) have nothing to do with one another. They are individuals who serve one village or a group of villages, and they never convene either to perform rituals or to homogenise their practice. Nevertheless, the general similarities in these local cults—the types of gods that are invoked and the form of the ceremonies, as well as the defining features of the priesthood—are clear evidence that these are not isolated phenomena. In the case of Te, however, it was apparent that both Buddhism and pagan religion were being treated in a way that detached them from their networks, selecting only certain aspects and reorganising these according to some local logic. Te was not, after all, the last island of some submerged cultural archipelago.

Marked idiosyncrasies are less likely to arise in communities with completely permeable boundaries, and it was important to understand the terms on which Te had interacted with its neighbours and the rest of the world. The past cannot of course provide a definitive explanation of the present; on the other hand the structural-functional denial of the explanatory value of history is a dogma that served its purpose in its time and might be relaxed. The changing political configurations of the wider region have been discussed by a number of authors, whose works I cite here, but the past that is most relevant to this case was the much more local one that is preserved in the archives of the villages of south Mustang.

The documents did nothing to dispel the impression I had formed of Te's isolated character, but they did reveal how and why this isolation might have been manufactured and preserved, while showing that it was consistent with a general pattern of mistrust and grudging alliance among the communities of the area. Te's insularity is particularly marked by the fact that the village is endogamous. A few people have married out of the village, but there are no records of anyone ever having married in, a situation that is unique in Mustang today.

It is probably this enduring aloofness that is responsible for the general unpopularity of the Tepas in the area. Before ever visiting the village I had

supposed that, in view of the prevailing mistrust between Te and its neighbours, I would find a group of mutually supportive individuals shoring one another up against the unkindnesses of the outside world. As it turned out, the level of reciprocal suspicion and one-upmanship was more striking than I had seen in any other village. How could such a place survive? It seemed to hold together according to the principle of the arch, where precisely the antagonistic forces of its components assured cohesion. But this individualism was matched by an equally striking capacity for collective activity. One of Te's irrigation canals used to collapse with great frequency until it was upgraded in 1997 by the installation of modern building materials. I vividly remember the first time I saw the community setting off to repair the dyke. People came along with the requisite tools and other items. When all the villagers were assembled they began to chant—a simple, wordless, heave-ho kind of intonation—and the gathering suddenly took on a completely different appearance. The different tasks of the undertaking were assumed by groups of varying sizes, and the headmen and constables detached themselves from the mass to supervise the workers and urge them on with abusive shouts and stick-blows. Intravillage rivalry and communal labour were nothing new to me. What was impressive about this case was the contrast between habitual individualism and the instantaneous production of a collectivity based on impersonal roles. The types of collectivities that were generated in different situations were remarkable; in some cases—such as community rituals—the whole was constituted by drawing formal lines through the population, separating out the pieces, and then putting them together with the satisfying fit of a jigsaw puzzle. The sense of an organic whole was also apparent on slack afternoons when people would gather in a public place to spin or card wool or sew rope boot-soles. The informality of such occasions makes it difficult to see the mechanisms by which a collectivity was created, although it would be possible to describe their variety and dynamics along the lines of the observations Elias Canetti makes in his *Crowds and Power*.

## The Problem

The most fascinating aspect of Te was the relationship between the individuals in the village and their public institutions. Latter-day manifestations of Durkheimian thought have tended to place a greater emphasis on the dialectical relationship between the individual and society than did the original paradigm. Berger and Luckmann sum up the reciprocity in this formula: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product" (1967:

79). The objectification of society is the culmination of a series of stages of interaction between individuals. In a hypothetical *in vitro* encounter between two people, A and B, who have been socialised in different milieux, a working relationship is established on the basis of each observing and responding to forms of behaviour in the other that are perceived as typical and habitual. The arrival of a third person—characteristically, in the next generation—changes the situation, because the newcomer, who has not seen the individual manoeuvrings that have gone into the creation of the relationship, inherits them as a given:

the habitualizations and typifications undertaken in the life of A and B, formations that until this point still had the quality of *ad hoc* conceptions of two individuals, now become historical institutions. With the acquisition of historicity, these formations also acquire another crucial quality, or, more accurately, perfect a quality that was incipient as soon as A and B began the reciprocal typification of their conduct: this quality is objectivity. . . . The institutions are now experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact. (76)

Until the arrival of the third party, the institutions are imperfectly objectivised, and the transparency of their ontological status means that they are still relatively accessible to their creators.

The evanescence of crowds scarcely entitles them to qualify as institutions. They are, nevertheless, collective manifestations that have an effect on their component individuals; and even though they may persist for only short periods, the recurrence of recognisable varieties of crowd suggests that they are a phenomenon to be taken more seriously than is usually the case in the study of any community. If crowds do not figure much in this book, it is only because the methods by which the relationship between the individual and the group in such situations might be discerned do not lie within the existing competences of either social anthropology or history. While the kinds of interpersonal communication that create crowds may be too subtle for discussion here, it is true that the degree of rational individualism in the production of public entities differs greatly. All these products are objectivised to the extent that they have a coercive effect on the individuals whose interaction generated them.

Te's isolation has contributed to a significant complication of the usual dialectic between individuals and the social order. Te's social order is discontinuous in important ways with that of the outside world. But in spite of a strong sense of opposition between "inside" and "outside" that finds expression in a number of contexts, the village is of course not hermetically sealed.

Tepas do travel a great deal, and are therefore exposed to influences from elsewhere than the public representations they themselves create; and it is individuals who modify the local institutions to accord with changes in the outside world.

The question then arises: if the objectification of institutions is only partial, and their “manufactured” character is transparent, what is the basis of their persuasiveness? This is the central question of this book. The search for an answer is tackled by addressing a number of related issues: how the community of Te creates institutions in such a way that they can have sufficient autonomy to be effective; the techniques by which individual access to collective entities is opened and closed; and the relationship between the degree of autonomy that characterises different institutions on the one hand and on the other the forms of interaction that generated them.

### The Explanation: Civil Religion

Most of the recent literature on religion in Tibetan communities has tended to focus on Buddhism, and to explore the ways the religion has been adapted to a given social setting. (I discuss some examples of this literature in chapter 5.) The setting in question may include a different religion to which the principles of Buddhism are opposed, but with which the main exponents seek some sort of accommodation. This book is not intended as an implicit criticism of the approach these writers adopt. It is simply that, in the case of Te, a focus on Buddhism and its confrontation with the local religion does not work. The process whereby this gradually became apparent to me is documented in chapter 7. The attitude of the Tepas to Buddhism and their ability simultaneously to entertain the conflicting worldviews implied by two radically different faiths became increasingly enigmatic in the course of my enquiries. Most disturbing was the apparent deflection of my questions about religion with responses that concerned the welfare and integrity of the community (*yul* or *lungba*). For a while I even thought that this obliqueness was a gracious way of preserving the secrecy of religious activities without having to resort to offensive silence. It was only when I attempted, rather halfheartedly, to take such remarks at face value that the apparent paradoxes and contradictions were spectacularly resolved. Neither Buddhism nor paganism could serve as the vantage point for an understanding of religion in Te. Both were relatively peripheral when seen from the perspective of this mysterious entity known as “the community.” The “true” religion of Te was effectively a form of civil religion, whose components included Buddhism, the sacrificial cult of place-gods,

and a number of ceremonies and legal institutions of a dramatically local character. Some explanation of the concept of civil religion is required at this point, and in the following pages I will attempt to offer a sketch of some of the most relevant literature.

The starting point of modern scholarship on the concept of civil religion is Robert Bellah's celebrated article "Civil Religion in America," published in 1967. One of Bellah's proximate influences was Herberg's 1955 study of the ways immigrants to the United States had overcome the potential obstacles to peaceful cohabitation posed by their different faiths through subscription to an overarching American identity. In his rather portentous essay, Bellah proposed that the ideal of the American Way of Life was functionally a religion. It had the equivalent of sacred texts: *inter alia*, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; sacred places, such as the Gettysburg and Arlington national cemeteries; a ritual calendar of occasions, including Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and the Fourth of July; and, finally, "sacrificial martyrs," such as presidents Lincoln and Kennedy. The content of the texts themselves might not be explicitly religious, but their "form and tone" were undeniably ecclesiastical in inspiration.

The term "civil religion" was coined by Rousseau—another of Bellah's influences—who devotes the penultimate chapter of the *Social Contract* to the subject (Rousseau 2001 [1762]: 169–80). Rousseau's concern is with the kind of religion—if any—that would best serve the interests of the state. There are, he suggests, three kinds of religion: that of the individual (*la Religion de l'homme*), that of the citizen, or "civil religion" (*la Religion du Citoyen*, which he also calls *la religion civile*), and a third form that conflates the first and second, and paralyses its followers by subjecting them to conflicting loyalties and obligations. The last is "so obviously bad" that the author will not waste his time spelling out the reasons why. The examples he cites are Japanese religion, Roman Catholicism, and Lamaism (*la religion des Lamas*; 173–74).

The first, *la Religion de l'homme*, is genuine Christianity, which although it is unquestionably holy, sublime, and true, is profoundly asocial insofar as it is concerned with other-worldly affairs. Apart from the fact that it fails to reinforce the state's laws, it leaves the citizenry vulnerable to tyrants: the violence and bloodshed implied in the effort to overthrow a Cataline or a Cromwell would be prohibitively un-Christian: "The important thing is to get to heaven, and resignation is just one more way of achieving this" (Rousseau 2001 [1762]: 176).

The second, the religion of the citizen, or "civil religion," is "a purely civil profession of faith whose articles it is for the sovereign to fix; not exactly as

religious dogmas but as feelings of sociability, without which it would be impossible to be either a good citizen or a faithful subject" (Rousseau 2001 [1762]: 178). This religion "unites the worship of the divine with love for the laws and, making the nation [*la patrie*] the object of the citizens' worship, teaches them that service to the State is service to its tutelary God" (174).

Rousseau has two reservations about this sacralisation of the law. First is that it might succeed to the point of making its followers aggressively intolerant of different faiths from theirs; second is that, "insofar as it is based on falsehood and lies, it deceives people, turns them into superstitious believers and drowns the true worship of divinity in empty ceremony" (174).

Other commentators have been a good deal more sanguine about the expediency of fooling the people. The civil religion of ancient Rome, known as the Religion of Numa, after its promulgator, Pompilius Numa, also entailed a strategy of forging good citizenship by attributing divine authority to the laws of the state. Livy, writing in the first century BC, had no illusions about the mechanism of persuasion:

As Numa could not instil the state religion into the Romans' hearts without inventing some marvellous story, he pretended to have nocturnal meetings with the goddess Egeria, and that hers was the advice which guided him in the establishment of rites most approved by the gods, and in the appointment of special priests for the service of each.<sup>3</sup>

Livy's tacit approval had been anticipated, about a century earlier, by Polybius:

I believe that it is the very thing which among other people is an object of reproach, I mean superstition, which maintains the cohesion of the Roman state. . . . My opinion is that they have adopted this for the sake of the common people. It is a course which perhaps would not have been necessary had it been possible to form a state composed of wise men, but as every multitude is fickle, full of lawless desires, unreasonable passions, and violent anger, the multitude must be held in by invisible terrors, and suchlike pageantry. For this reason I do not think that the ancients acted rashly and haphazardly in introducing among the people notions concerning the gods and beliefs in the terrors of hell, but rather that the moderns are most rash and foolish in banishing such beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

Like Polybius, most modern writers on the subject take it as axiomatic that civil religion is cynically manufactured as a means of legitimising the state. James

Thrower goes so far as to propose a direct historical link between the civil religion of ancient Rome and that of the Soviet Union, “mediated to Russia from Byzantium and . . . passed on to the new Communist rulers of Russia and her Empire” (1992: 145).

Much as in the case of France immediately after her own revolution, Russia in 1917 saw a proliferation of secular rites—“Bolshevik ceremonies”—that were fabricated as substitutes for the discredited Orthodox rituals: an Octobrist ceremony to celebrate childbirth, “red weddings,” “red funerals,” and so forth. However, it was only in the decade following the death of Lenin in 1924 that Marxism-Leninism began to take on the characteristics of a civil religion; it became the “transcendental reference” in the background of all Soviet Russia. “The first step in this process was taken when the Communist Party, the Government and the State became an interlocking, single monolithic institution—an institution that from this period until his death in 1953, was both symbolically and effectively, Stalin himself” (Thrower 1992: 164). To this extent, Thrower suggests, Stalin’s position was analogous to that of Augustus in later Roman civil religion.

The importance of a canon in the constitution of any religion—civil or otherwise—will be discussed in chapter 9 (where the concept of transcendence, invoked above, will also be considered). Soviet civil religion, Thrower maintains, was no exception: the canon was the only permitted interpretation of Marxism-Leninism—Stalin’s own *A History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): A Short Course* (1938). The real purpose of the *Short Course* was not history but myth: it was intended to legitimise the Soviet state and the Communist Party’s role in it. Marxism-Leninism was “a civil religion whose primary purpose, like that of the great state civil religions of antiquity, was to legitimate the existing order of society, keep chaos at bay, and to purvey a sense of historic mission” (Thrower 1992: 168).

According to Liebman and Don-Yehiya, it is precisely the fact that it is elaborated around a social agenda that distinguishes Israel’s civil religion from Judaism. The former may look very similar to traditional religion (the authors’ term), “but at its core stands a corporate entity rather than a transcendent power, even if it also refers to a transcendent reality or even a supernatural power” (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983: 4). What gives traditional religion its superiority is the centrality of God and the concomitant possibility of a private soteriology. The transfer of supreme authority from God to society means that civil religion “can neither provide the individual with ultimate meaning nor evoke from him the intensity of commitment which traditional religion can.” The “objective” of civil religion, that is, “the sanctification of the society in

which it functions,” the authors maintain, is achieved by three main expressions:

1. Integration (uniting the society by involving its members in a set of common ceremonies and myths, which are themselves integrative and in turn express a sense of a common past, a common condition, and a common destiny on the part of the participants);
2. Legitimation (transmitting the sense of an inherent justness or rightness in the nature of the social order and in the goals pursued by the society);
3. Mobilization (galvanizing the efforts and energies of society’s members on behalf of socially approved tasks and responsibilities. (4)

That there should be no straightforward definition of civil religion is hardly surprising, the authors observe, since there is no consensus on the definition of “religion” *tout court* (1). This difficulty notwithstanding, Richard Pierard and Robert Linder (1988) have proposed a more elaborate formulation entailing five criteria. However, it does not differ substantially from the general characterisations proposed by the various authors cited earlier, and will not be reproduced here.

While all the works referred to so far deal with civil religion at a national level, a number of authors have applied the concept successfully to smaller-scale communities. Perhaps the most relevant of these for the purposes of the present study is Gerald Parsons, who has published several books and articles on the Italian city—and former city-state—Siena.<sup>5</sup> Parsons (who rather dutifully takes the trouble to demonstrate how his subject fulfils the criteria proposed by Pierard and Linder) presents Sienese civil religion as a complex made up of several key elements. There is, to begin with, a significant historical strand, in which certain episodes from the city’s past have been embellished and enshrined as mythic landmarks. The most important of these is the Battle of Montaperti of 1260, in which the Sienese repelled an attack by a much larger Florentine army. The victory was attributed to the help of the Virgin, to whom the city had been formally “given” on the eve of the battle, and who subsequently manifested as a white cloud over the defending Sienese army. The city eventually fell to Florence in 1555, not long before the period when, in any event, the Italian city-states lost their independence and became part of a larger political constellation. This coincided with an effort on the part of the Catholic Church “to reassert the specifically religious—as opposed to civil—significance of festivals dedicated to the Virgin and to other patron saints” (Parsons 2002: 7–8). Some local festivals consequently fell into decline or disappeared altogether.

However, several elements from the medieval and Renaissance periods have survived down to the present day, and the integration of these with later traditions and rituals “may plausibly be interpreted as a modern version of Sienese Civil Religion” (8). The ceremony that lies at the heart of this religion, Parsons argues, is the Palio, the twice-yearly horse race (with all its associated traditions) that brings the seventeen *contrade* (sectors) of the city into passionate competition with one another.

The significance of Siena’s cult of the Virgin is worth our attention insofar as it relates to a distinction, made by some authors, between “civil” and “civic” religion. Edward Bailey, for example, argues the case as follows.

Since “civic” suggests the formally organised and societally representative, “civic religion” can refer to that “official” form, the *“Great Tradition end of the spectrum. . . .”* “Civil religion” [on the other hand] is then available to describe that congeries of self-propagating festival [sic], local cults, and familial religiosity, which is akin to the “popular” form of canonical religions and to the “Little Tradition” end of the spectrum. (1990: 502–3)

James Thrower rejects Bailey’s proposal principally on the grounds that “his suggested definition of ‘civil religion’ would retain nothing of Rousseau’s or Bellah’s usage.”<sup>6</sup> Bailey’s understanding of the concept is better designated by other, more familiar terms, such as “folk religion” (Thrower 1992: ix n. 5). While I emphatically agree with Thrower on this score—the difference between civil religion and what I shall call “paganism” in Te is crucial to the argument of this book—I would suggest that there are good reasons for preserving the civic/civil opposition. Among historians of Europe, “civic religion” customarily denotes Christian ceremonies—such as celebrations of the Virgin or of other patron saints that were accorded special prominence in the city-states of late medieval Italy. The emphasis, in other words, is on the cult itself, rather than on the community that would make such a cult a component of its civil religion. Comparable instances of civic religion would not be difficult to find in the Tibetan tradition. The Great Prayer Festival (Mönlam Chenmo) of Lhasa is a particularly good example. Established in 1409 by Tsongkhapa, the founder of the now-dominant Gelugpa school, the ceremony had the ostensible purpose of commemorating the Buddha’s legendary humiliation of a group of heretics by a display of miracles, propitiating certain divinities, and offering prayers for various categories of beneficiaries. Over the course of time the festival grew in complexity, with the increasingly conspicuous involvement of institutions such as the government and the army, and the dominance of Lhasa’s three major Gelugpa monasteries (Richardson 1993: 20–51; Rigzin 1993: 8–19).

## Organisation of the Book

The structure of this book is hourglass-shaped: a broad historical and ethnographic base closes in to a localised study of a single community, which in turn raises issues of a more general theoretical character. Chapter 1 begins with a cursory outline of the history and people of Nepal before focusing on the district of Mustang and its component enclaves. Particular attention is paid to the principality of Baragaon that corresponds broadly to “Lower Lo.” In chapter 2, the Shöyul, a subenclave of five villages within Baragaon that includes Te, emerges as an ethnic anomaly with distinctly factional tendencies. A presentation of the rather scant information about the history of this territory and its communities, past and present, is followed by an examination of the strategies whereby the Shöyul manufactured their political solidarity against the rest of the world. The alliance between the five Shöyul villages was based not on any sense of “natural sympathy” but on disagreeable necessity, and chapter 3 reveals the tensions that lay below the shallow accord by examining the records of Te’s disputes with its neighbours. The documents presented in this chapter range from sometimes poignant, village-eye perspectives on the hardships of war to the recurring irritation of boundary disputes in times of peace.

It is only in chapter 4 that this study crosses the territorial boundary, as it were, and enters the community. Before this chapter, little will have been said about Te itself, and the village will have featured mainly as a vantage point on local disputes. The detailed analysis of the Shöyul’s relative isolation in Baragaon and the mutual suspicion prevailing among its members provide an important background for understanding both Te’s introspectiveness as well as a number of its institutions. Following a survey of the main landmarks within the village and a description of its remarkable architecture, attention is shifted to the origins of Te’s major clans and the evolution of the community’s structure. The evidence examined suggests that clan-based organisation was displaced over the course of time by the growing importance of residence. The main divisions below the level of the village are no longer descent-groups but residential sectors, while the corporate entity with which individuals identify most strongly is the household. This identification, combined with the fact that institutions once associated with clans—such as protector gods and inheritance—and are now focused on the household itself, within a general atmosphere of interhousehold rivalry, raises the problem of the cohesion of the community. What holds Te together?

The ideal of collectivity that opposes the divisiveness implicit in Te’s “household culture” has to be seen in the light of its Buddhist heritage. The

Tepas do not encounter Buddhism as an abstract ideology but through the mediation of its different vectors. The most important of these are the successive lineages of tantric householder-priests who have lived in Te's territory. The particular branch of Tibetan Buddhism (the Nyingmapa school) that they purvey is the subject of a growing number of fine scholarly works in European languages.<sup>7</sup> The lives of several prominent figures of this school are available to us in translation;<sup>8</sup> but while the weight of the biographical genre does not altogether eclipse the daily lives of the protagonists, the emphasis is invariably religious, and all such accounts are, in some sense, "authorised versions." The lives of Te's priests are reconstructed here not from biographies but, for the most part, from family papers relating to disputes.

While it is true that Tibetan biographies tend to inflate the spiritual qualities of their subject, the cumulative impression conveyed by any domestic archive is likely to err on the side of shabbiness. If the portrait of Te's priesthood that consequently emerges seems to give undue prominence to the warts, it is worth remembering two points. First, these lamas are *unlikely* to be unique among the Tibetan clergy with respect to their material preoccupations. Second, it would be grossly unfair to judge the lamas for lacking suitable unworldliness, since the Indian tantric tradition to which they ultimately belong never did set much store by abstinence. Marpa, the eleventh-century founder of the Kagyupa school, notoriously "quarrelled with his neighbours." Moreover, his uninhibited enjoyment of pleasure and *his* accumulation of great wealth from his students' fees are not regarded as having compromised his spiritual qualities in any way (Snellgrove 1987: 497). The second part of chapter 5 assesses the legacy of Buddhist monasticism in Te.

In Te, as in many other High Himalayan communities, Buddhism co-habits uneasily with a cult of territorial gods who demand animal sacrifice. Chapter 6 examines the main features of this cult, with particular reference to the notion of sacred landscape and territory. How do the Tepas reconcile the conflicting worldviews that are implicit in the two religious traditions?

Chapter 7 takes a closer look at particular cases where Buddhist and pagan ideologies have clashed—or rather, appear to have clashed. Apparent anomalies in the examples cited are found to evaporate when an ideological standpoint is abandoned in favour of a community perspective.

Chapter 8 presents a protracted annual ceremony, the *Lama Guru*, that is unique to Te. The choreography of the event, the survival of fragments of Buddhist ritual, and the reproduction of historical episodes are shown to constitute a dramatic representation of the community as a reified entity.

Against the somewhat emblematic image of Te offered by the *Lama Guru*, chapter 9 examines the relationship between the Tepas and their community

through a close analysis of the institutions whereby the community's component individuals create a collectivity. The focus of the discussion is the corpus of oral and written legal structures that ensure the integrity of the society in the face of household-oriented self-interest. The way societies reconcile the conflict between the public weal and private advantage has preoccupied a number of major social thinkers, and some of their arguments are reviewed in the light of the solutions developed by Te.

An important concept that is introduced in this chapter is the idea of "transcendence," understood as the attribution to an institution of a degree of autonomy from the people who created it. By now, the distinction between religious and secular processes has become increasingly blurred, and Chapter 10 compounds this fusion by describing and analysing an important political ceremony, the annual appointment of Te's headmen, which entails a clear representation of a "transcendent community."

Chapter 11 summarises the main points in the development of the argument and follows it to its logical conclusion: if the representation of a complex of institutions as a civil religion is to be more than a mere conceit, the complex should be demonstrably susceptible to the same life-cycle changes as any other religion. It is suggested that certain critical developments that have occurred in Te in recent years can be understood in terms of the Weberian idea of disenchantment.

## Sources and Language

This book makes use of a large number of local archives written in either Nepali or Tibetan. Unless otherwise indicated, the archives were photographed by me between 1992 and 1995. Works in Nepali have been translated or summarised by Dr. Madhab Lal Karmacharya, and the Tibetan documents by myself with the indispensable help of Nyima Drandul. Many of the Tibetan items are problematic, either because of their poor physical condition or the strangeness of the language. Readers who are familiar with Tibetan will undoubtedly be irritated by the absence of the original text against which they might check my interpretations. All the works cited here (and many that are not) have now been published in separate volumes that provide facsimile reproductions, transliterations, and summaries or translations. These three volumes, which carry the generic title *Tibetan Sources for a Social History of Mustang, Nepal*, deal with the archives of Te, Tshognam, and Baragaon, respectively. The titles of individual documents cited in this book are of course the same as those used in *Tibetan Sources*, while the titles themselves indicate

the particular volume in which they are found.<sup>9</sup> The Nepali documents from Te's archive are identified according to the numbering scheme used in Madhab Lal Karmacharya's unpublished compilation (Karmacharya n.d.).

Where it is necessary to reproduce Tibetan words, I have opted for a simple, roughly phonetic rendering. At their first appearance, these words are accompanied by a Tibetan orthographic form based on the Wylie system, one of the standard conventions for transliteration (Wylie 1959).

The people of Te speak a dialect of a Tibeto-Burman language that is called Seke in Mustang. "Seke" has been abbreviated as "Sk." (and to avoid confusion, "Sanskrit" as "Ssk."); "Tk." (for Teke or Tepeke) denotes words that are used in Te but may not be generally current in Seke. Many words in Seke have Tibetan cognates ("Tib."), and in some cases I have indicated this relationship. My knowledge of Seke is not particularly good. The people of Te all speak South Mustang Tibetan fluently as a second language, and this was the medium in which I usually communicated with them. This language—one of several dialects of Western Tibetan—is mutually incomprehensible with all forms of colloquial Tibetan occurring outside Mustang, including the language spoken in Lhasa and Central Tibet. Words in South Mustang Tibetan are prefixed with "SMT," for "South Mustang Tibetan" (which itself subsumes a number of slightly different dialects). Since I do not wish to reduce either Seke or the Tibetan dialect of Mustang to the status of divergences from standard literary Tibetan, it might be pointed out that the symbol < is used here as much in the sense of "cognate with" as "derived from."

Insofar as it is closely related to Thakali, Tepeke belongs to "the Gurung Branch of the Bodish Section of the Bodic Division of the Tibeto-Burman Family of Sino-Tibetan languages" (Mazaudon 1978: 157, citing Shafer), although it should be mentioned that a growing number of scholars are challenging the validity of the taxon "Sino-Tibetan."<sup>10</sup> While Tepeke surely shares a common ancestry with Tibetan, the latter has reentered the language at a variety of points in more recent times. To cite just two examples of vocabulary: the Tepeke word for "moon" is *lhanyi*; the second syllable, *nyi*, corresponds to Tib. *nyi [ma]*, "the sun," while *lha* is probably an archaic pronunciation of Tib. *zla*, which in modern Tibetan is pronounced *da*; but the term for "month," Tib. *zla ba*, follows the Tibetan pronunciation *dawa*. The term for money in coin, *mar*, is undoubtedly derived from the word for "gold" in certain Tibeto-Burman languages (including Zhangzhung). To signify gold itself, Teke uses both *mar* and the Tibetan *ser* (Tib. *gser*).

A number of terms also attest to the likelihood that aspects of the Tepas' (and other Seke-speakers') agrarian technology were acquired by contact with a Nepali- or at least Indo-Aryan-speaking population, either in Mustang itself or

during some unrecorded phase of migration. The Teke word for “radish” (SMT *lawu* < Tib. *la phug*) is *mole*, which is cognate with Nep. *mula*; *phalyo*, the word for ploughshare (SMT, Tib. *thong*), is clearly related to Nep. *phāli*.

Ceremonial formulae of the sort that will be encountered here are frequently a mixture of Tepeke with standard Tibetan and SMT honorific expressions.

The language in which interviews were conducted or narratives recorded, by Nyima Drandul, was Tepeke, and passages that I could not understand he would later translate into SMT for my benefit.

It is considered a matter of normal courtesy nowadays to refer to communities by the names they use of themselves. Te has three current names. It appears on most maps as Tetang, which is the usual Nepali appellation. Seke-speakers (including the Tepas themselves), refer to the village as Timi, and the inhabitants as Timiten, “people of Timi.” (In fact, local Seke usage habitually extends the term for the inhabitants of a place to denote the place itself.) “Te” and “Tepa” are the corresponding names used by Tibetan speakers. This book uses the latter forms for the reason that Tibetan was the main medium in which I carried out the study.

A few words may also be said here concerning the names of other settlements in and around the Shöyul: there is a certain amount of confusion (on recent maps, for example) owing to the fact that the names differ in Nepali, Tibetan, and Seke. The following table provides the names, in the three languages, of certain settlements that reappear with particular frequency in this book.

As a general rule, phonetically simplified forms of the Tibetan name will be used. It should be noted that some maps create confusion between Te and two villages lying further to the north, Dhi/Dri and De. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the advent of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in northern Mustang has incidentally enriched the local toponymy still

Nepali	Seke	Tibetan
Tangbe	Tangbe	Taye
Chusang	Tshugsang	Tshug
Tetang	Timi	Te
Chaile	Tsangle	Tsele
Ghyaka	Gyuga	Gyaga
Jhong	Muga	Dzong
Kagbeni	Kag	Kag
Jharkot	Dzar	Dzar

further. Visitors to the area will have noticed the trilingual green signboards—Nepali, English, and Tibetan—that stand at the entrances to the villages. In a number of cases, the Tibetan script represents not the usual Tibetan appellation of the locality but a Tibetanised version of the Nepali name. To cite just one example, the name Tshug (Nep. Chusang) is generally given in Tibetan documents as Tshug, and myths concerning the foundation of the settlement relate the name to homonymous expressions such as *tshug*, meaning mustard in SMT, or Tib. *tshugs pa*, “to settle.” In reproducing the Nepali “Chusang” the ACAP Tibetan version has unwittingly created a new myth by opting for a similarly pronounced *phyugs bzang*, which would mean something like “excellent cattle.”

# I

## The People of Mustang and Their History

Several pioneering works of anthropology in Nepal have been criticised for setting their subjects in aspic, treating them as if they had been untouched by the swirl of the history and culture of their neighbours and the nation. That the point has been taken is evident from the appropriate contextualisation that distinguishes more recent studies. If there is an obverse side to this improvement, it is an occasional tendency to overcompensation that suppresses the remarkable distinctiveness of many Himalayan societies in the interest of finding common denominators. The first three chapters of this book all talk around the main subject of the study, which is the village of Te, with a view to situating the community within the historical and ethnic complex of Nepal and, more specifically, the part of Mustang where Te stands. These three chapters are intended as more than just a statutory warning that, contrary to the impression that may be created by the later sections of the book, Te is not an isolated oddity. There are many features of its undoubtedly singular institutions that simply cannot be understood without a grasp of political and social currents in the wider environment. While the greater part of the sociohistorical context is reconstructed from local archives and field research, there are good published accounts of the history and ethnic composition of Nepal and, to a lesser extent, of Mustang; if the early part of this first chapter summarises material that can be found in secondary sources, it is to emphasise processes, events and

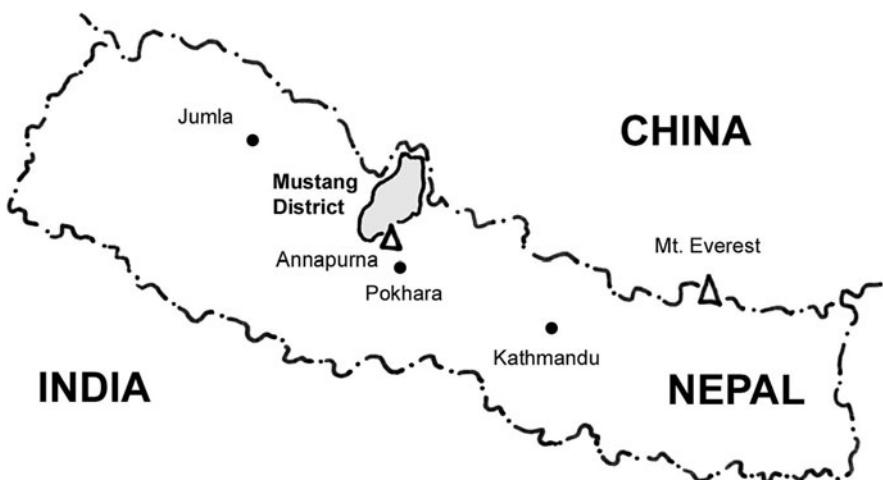


FIGURE 1.1. Map of Nepal showing the location of Mustang District. (Drawing by Niels Gutschow)

ideologies that have a particular explanatory value in the later development of this study.

### Mustang in the Kingdom of Nepal

The nation-state of Nepal began to crystallize in the second half of the eighteenth century, when Prithvi Narayan Shah, the young king of Gorkha, embarked on a series of conquests that would bring a vast swath of the Himalayas under a single rule. The process of unification, which was taken up by the successors of Prithvi Narayan, continued into the early years of the nineteenth century and came to a halt when the boundaries of the new kingdom extended from the Sutlej River in the west to the Tista, between Sikkim and Bhutan, in the east. These dimensions were reduced by about a third following the treaty of Segauli in 1815, which concluded a war with the British East India Company. A substantial area of fertile lowland was later returned to Nepal in recognition of the military help it had provided the hard-pressed British during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and these boundaries have remained largely unchanged down to this day.<sup>1</sup>

The area occupied by the new kingdom welded together the territory of some sixty previously independent or semi-independent principalities. Some of these principalities, such as the kingdom of Gorkha itself, were relatively

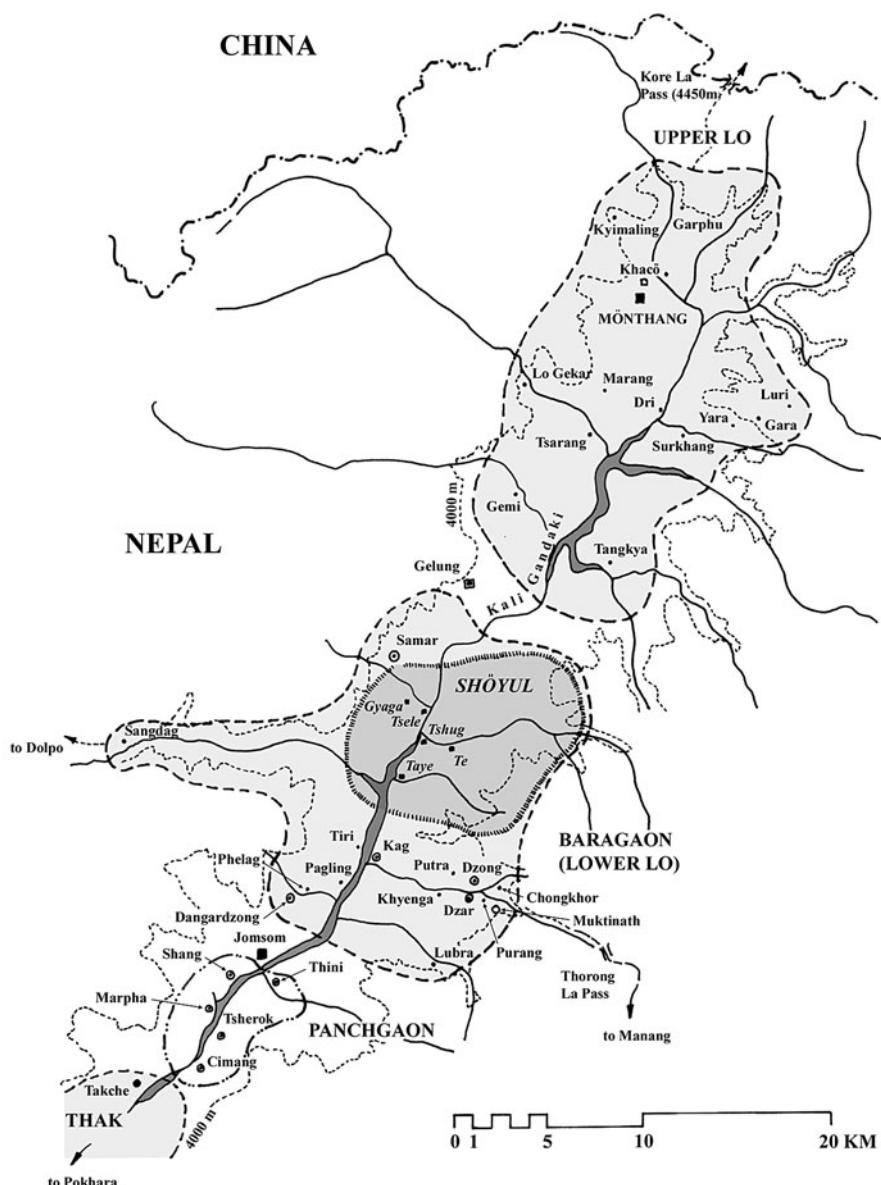


FIGURE 1.2. Map of Mustang District, showing the enclaves of Upper Lo, Baragaon, Panchgaon, and Thak. The broken lines highlight the “core” areas of the enclaves, and do not correspond to the boundaries of their much more extensive territories. (Drawing by Niels Gutschow)

small, and depended for their survival on their participation in confederations with their neighbours. Others, by contrast, were large and powerful, and exercised considerable political influence over weaker ones. One of the kingdoms in the highlands of west-central Nepal at this time was Lo. The name Lo appears in Tibetan literature from the earliest times, but the region itself remained relatively obscure until it was seized, in the fifteenth century, by Amepal, a nobleman from the neighbouring Tibetan principality of Gungthang.<sup>2</sup> Amepal established himself in a stronghold, called Duri Khachö, on a strategic hilltop. The city of Monthang was founded by Amepal's son, Agönpal, who apparently felt sufficiently confident in the security of the region to shift the capital to a plateau near the base of his father's fortified hill. Lo's power increased, and in the course of time its influence was extended southward to encompass a territory corresponding roughly to the dimensions of the modern administrative district of Mustang.

Monthang, the capital city of Lo, soon became a prosperous centre of commerce, art and religious activity, thanks in large measure to its location on one of the most important north-south trade routes in the central Himalaya. Lo's fortunes declined with the ascendancy of Jumla, which came to be the most powerful kingdom of what is now western Nepal.<sup>3</sup> In the first half of the seventeenth century, Lo was brought under the direct rule of Jumla, with an obligation to pay a substantial annual tribute and to provide military assistance in times of need (Schuh 1994: 77). Jumla reduced the potential threat of political opposition from its vassal by exploiting regional tensions and fragmenting the kingdom. An important instance of this policy in action was the secession by Lower Lo from the ruler of Monthang in the seventeenth century. Since the sixteenth century, Lower Lo had been governed by the Kyekya Gangba, a noble family, but when the Kyekya Gangba ruler sought the aid of Jumla in a conflict with the north, Jumla readily sent troops to help the petitioner. In the ensuing battle, the saying goes,

The soldiers of Jumla were nothing less than wolves;  
The soldiers of Lo were nothing more than sheep

And so the political independence of Lower Lo from Monthang was assured. The origins of the Kyekya Gangba lineage are recounted in the autobiography of one its most celebrated members, Tenzin Repa, who lived from around 1640 to 1723. According to this account, the lineage descended from Jampa Thobgyal, who was a minister of the semi-mythical founder of the Tibetan dynasty, Nyatri Tsenpo. A more authoritative source has it that the first member of the family to come to Lo—at the instigation of the king—was a certain Trowobum (Tib. *Khro bo 'bum*), who settled in a place called Kyekyagang, a

short distance to the east of Monthang. It was Trowobum's son, Trowo Kyabpa (Tib. *Khro bo skyabs pa*), who was sent to the Muktinath Valley to rule southern Lo on behalf of the king in the first half of the sixteenth century (Schuh 1995: 42–43; 52–53). Although the family may have adopted the name of its residence in Lo, it is now more commonly referred to in Baragaon as Jampa Thobgyal, after its legendary founder. The different branches of clan are identified by the names of their noble houses. Following their secession from Lo, the Kyekya Gangba retained their power in the vicinity of the Muktinath valley, but were thenceforth under the direct authority of Jumla, whose representative, the O-ompa, would reside in the area for several months each year (23).

The suzerainty of Jumla appears not to have generated much of a sense of loyalty among its vassals. When the Gorkha forces passed through Lo on their way to make war with Jumla in 1789, they were offered no resistance. In recognition of this cooperative attitude, the Gorkhas permitted the rulers of Upper and Lower Lo to retain their customary power, and the tribute previously levied by Jumla was now simply paid to the new sovereign power (Regmi 1970: 99).

From 1846, the government of Nepal effectively shifted from the hands of the Shah dynasty to a succession of hereditary prime ministers, the Ranas, initiating a period that lasted until 1951. As far as Lo was concerned, the most immediate consequence of this change of national government was the creation of a monopoly on the salt trade along the Kali Gandaki. Since the late eighteenth century, the collection of trade duties had been carried out by entrepreneurs who held government contracts (obtained by auction), but from this time on traders from the north were obliged to sell all their salt to the contractor.<sup>4</sup> The contractors in question—none of whom, as it turned out, was from Lo—were also entitled to exercise a considerable degree of legal authority in the area, a state of affairs that critically undermined the power of the ruling families. The practice of auctioning off customs contracts was abolished in 1927, but the old nobility never recovered its earlier dominance. It is true that the nobles of Upper Lo continue to enjoy certain material privileges in respect of their hereditary status, but the benefits of aristocracy in the southern part are now almost entirely ceremonial.

In short, until the era of the contractors, Upper and Lower Lo enjoyed a degree of autonomy as long as they continued to pay their tribute and to offer no political opposition to their sovereign or suzerain power. As we have seen, the ruling family of Lower Lo established its authority in the region in the sixteenth century. They built elaborate fortifications, established or confirmed local territorial boundaries, levied taxes, and promulgated certain laws; it is

unlikely, however, that they entered a political vacuum or a region of political anarchy.

No local documents concerning the political and administrative situation immediately before the arrival of the Kyekya Gangba have yet come to light, but there are good grounds for supposing that a system quite different from that imposed by these rulers prevailed before their arrival. This system survived the era of the contractors and probably remained largely unaffected up to the end of the Rana government in 1951. Ironically, it was probably the democratic reforms that followed the implementation of the Partyless Panchayat System in the 1960s that precipitated the decline of this system. By the same logic, this disintegration appears to be accelerating since the advent of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1990. This being said, the archaic system of government survives with varying degrees of vitality in a number of communities, but most conspicuously, perhaps, in Te.

### Where the Tepas Fit in the National Caste Hierarchy

While this outline of the history of Lo in relation to the kingdom of Nepal will be adequate for my purposes, closer attention deserves to be paid to the territorial divisions of the region and the people who live in them. The Gorkha unification of Nepal did not merely weld a number of previously independent principalities into a single political entity; part of the legacy of the conquest was the Babel of linguistic and ethnic groups who peopled them. General descriptions of the ethnic composition of Nepal are legion;<sup>5</sup> but at the risk of oversimplifying a highly complex situation, the general picture may be painted in a few broad strokes.

Broadly speaking, the high valleys of Nepal's northern borderland are populated by ethnically Tibetan peoples. Although these people all speak some dialect of Tibetan as their first language, and follow one or more sects of Buddhism or Bon, they should probably not be understood as making up a single ethnic group. From Limi in the far west to Walung on the border of Sikkim there are about fifteen Tibetan enclaves (Jest 1975: 33–36). The dialects they speak are for the most part mutually incomprehensible, and since the seasonal trade routes that they follow run north-south rather than east-west, they actually have very little to do with one another.

The middle hills of Nepal immediately to the south of these high valleys are home to a number of racially Mongoloid speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages. From west to east (allowing for a good deal of overlap), the most significant groups in numerical terms are the Magar, Gurung (who prefer to be

called Tamu), Tamang, and Kirati, the latter being represented mainly by the Rai and Limbu. Interspersed among these populations are settlements of Parbatiya, Nepali-speaking people of relatively recent Indian provenance. In the middle hills of the far west, Tibeto-Burman speakers are largely replaced by the Nepali-speaking Khas, an Indo-Aryan people established much longer than the Parbatiyas. Racially Caucasoid peoples speaking a variety of Indo-Aryan languages share the Nepalese lowlands with a number of other ethnic groups, the most numerous of which are the Tharu. The Tharu are analogous in certain respects to the Tibetan-speakers of the highlands; in spite of a shared ethnonym, they are not really a coherent ethnic group, but make up a series of more or less discrete enclaves, each linguistically influenced by the north Indian population immediately adjacent to it.<sup>6</sup>

The suggestion that the people of the north Nepal borderland do not really form a single ethnic group is further supported by the absence of a common ethnonym. For this reason, in speaking of them as a collectivity, we are obliged either to use language as a metonym for ethnicity ("Tibetan-speakers") or adopt the Nepali term *Bhoṭe*, which, as I will show, is unsatisfactory for reasons even beyond its pejorative overtones. Since we must have recourse to names applied by outsiders, perhaps the most useful term is Höfer's "Tibetanid," which designates "groups being Lamaists or followers of the Bonpo religion and speaking a dialect closely related to High Tibetan" (1979: 43). The main disadvantage of the name is a certain awkwardness owing to its having acquired little currency in ethnographic literature.<sup>7</sup>

A few words may be said here about the term *Bhoṭe*. Literally, a *Bhoṭe* is someone from *Bhoṭ*. "*Bhoṭ*" in turn derives from the Tibetan word *Bod*, meaning Tibet, via the late Sanskrit *Bhoṭa* (Turner 1931). In Nepal, *Bhoṭ* was traditionally used not only of the Tibetan state but also of ethnically Tibetan areas that the Gorkha conquest had brought within the boundaries of the new kingdom. It is still used as a suffix to certain toponyms, as in *Mustangbhoṭ*, *Manangbhoṭ*, *Charkabhoṭ* (*Tsharka* in Dolpo), and so forth.

As a number of authors have pointed out, an important feature of Nepal's caste system that distinguishes it from its Indian counterpart is the central location it accords to ethnic groups; Indian tribes, by contrast, have a marginal position. In the Nepalese Legal Code (*Muluki Ain*) of 1854, Nepal's ethnic groups are clustered mainly in the second and third of three "pure" categories, below the cord-wearers and above the impure and untouchable castes. The *Bhoṭe* fall in the third pure category, the enslavable alcohol-drinkers (*māsinya matwāli*) (Höfer 1979: 45). The application of the term *Bhoṭe* is not limited to the Tibetanid people but encompasses "Tibetanoid" groups, primarily the Tamang and Thakali—and, therefore, the people of Te. Höfer adds the

observation that “to my knowledge, some high caste speakers label even the Gurung as Bhotे” (147 n. 58). Not only is “Bhote” decidedly vague as an ethnic category, it was also apparently used as a nonethnic designation of legal status. Höfer cites a passage in the Muluki Ain to the effect that members of the “non-enslavable alcohol-drinkers” (*namāsinya matwāli*) could be degraded to “enslavable Bhotya” as a punishment for incest. Thus, in addition to its specifically ethnic application, Bhotya was also “a sort of reservoir for degraded persons of various ethnic origin” (147).

### The Enclaves of Mustang District

In the historical outline just presented, I referred to the region with this study is concerned with simply as Lo, following a local convention in designating the northern part as “Upper” and the southern as “Lower.” At this point, it is necessary to complicate the situation somewhat by giving a more precise picture of subsidiary territories and adjacent areas. The exposition will also offer an opportunity to provide a certain amount of ethnographic information concerning the populations with which this study is dealing.

To begin with, we should clarify a degree of confusion that sometimes surrounds the names Lo and Mustang. These two names are used interchangeably in a number of recent works, and although there is a certain historical justification for this conflation, it would be as well to say clearly how they are to be used here. The name Mustang is used in Nepal to denote a large administrative district, created in 1962, that extends all the way from the Tibetan border down to the temperate forests of Ghasa. To judge from Nepali documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see e.g. Pant and Pierce 1989: 17; Regmi 1970), “Mustang” originally denoted what was, by then, the much-reduced territory ruled over by the king of Lo, and was therefore coextensive with Lo itself. Although appropriated by the Nepalese administration and foreign writers, the name is Tibetan in origin, and probably derives from an archaic pronunciation of Monthang, the capital city of Lo.<sup>8</sup> The name of the relatively small northern part was extended to encompass the entire district after its creation in 1962, following a procedure that was applied in numerous other parts of Nepal: modern-day “Dolpa” district, for example, covers an area lying well beyond the Tibetan-speaking enclave originally identified by the name Dolpo.

It should be emphasised that the names “Upper Mustang” and “Lower Mustang” that are frequently heard nowadays represent a recent administrative distinction created for the purpose of managing tourists. Upper Mustang

was closed to foreigners before 1991, since which time limited numbers of tourists have been permitted to travel there on payment of a substantial royalty. The line corresponds to no traditional boundary between old administrative entities or ethnically distinct groups but seems to be largely a matter of supervisory convenience: the last settlement on the Kali Gandaki within the unrestricted part of Mustang is Kag (Nep. Kagbeni), which was long ago favoured by the local rulers as the site of a customs post, since its geographical situation permitted a clear view of travellers up and down the main trade route.

Mustang district is made up of a number of enclaves that are recognised either as the residues of old administrative entities or the territories of ethnically distinct groups. The northernmost part, as we have seen, is referred to as Lo. Upper Lo is the territory that was ruled by the king of Mustang at the time of the unification, and recognised by the Gorkhas as his domain. The area is referred to more fully as Lotö Tshodun (Tib. Glo bo stod tsho bdun), “the Seven Sectors of Upper Lo.” The word *tsho* (Tib. *tsho*), which I have translated here as “sector,” is an old Tibetan administrative division that might be better rendered as “county” here; however, since we shall later encounter the same word being used to signify subdivisions within individual settlements, as well as assemblies of people, the vaguer “sector” is probably more appropriate. Each of the seven sectors contains one or more settlements. Larger communities, like the city of Monthang, account for an entire sector, while other sectors consist of several small villages that have been grouped together. It is likely that these sectors were above all tax-paying units, with all sectors being required to pay the same amount in terms of cash or other commodities. How a sector would organise the distribution of its tax burden among its component settlements or houses seems to have been largely its own affair.

Below Gemi, the southernmost village in Upper Lo, is the large community of Gelung, which (with the help of Jumla) broke away from the kingdom in the 1754 (Schuh 1994: 85). Immediately to the south of Gelung is Baragaon, corresponding to the region I have referred to earlier as Lower Lo. Since the latter is sometimes used in Tibetan works to include areas even further south, I shall abandon the name altogether in favour of the unambiguous Baragaon. Baragaon (Nep. Bāhrāgāū) now is made up of nineteen settlements that, with the exception of five villages, are all Tibetan-speaking. Since it is Baragaon and, more particularly, the five non-Tibetan-speaking villages that are the main concern of this book, I shall return to this enclave later and continue for now with a rough sketch of Mustang as a whole.

South of Baragaon is a group of settlements known as Panchgaon (Nep. Pāngcāū), a Nepali name that has its Tibetan equivalent Yulkhang (Yul kha lṅga). Both terms mean “the Five Villages.” The villages are Thini, Shang,

Tsherog, Cimang, and Marpha. The further subdivisions of this group, however interesting they may be historically, do not concern us here. The district headquarters, Jomsom, began life as a little satellite of Thini on the left bank of the Kali Gandaki, but has now crossed the river and acquired the proportions of a small town, with an airport, a military barracks, a great many hotels, and rows of offices that serve the purposes of an abundant governmental and non-governmental officialdom. The region between Panchgaon and the southern boundary of Mustang district, made up of thirteen settlements, is known as Thak, and the people who inhabit it as Thakalis, an ethnonym that is also sometimes extended to include the inhabitants of Panchgaon.

### Baragaon

North of Jomsom, the Kali Gandaki valley opens into a wide, boulder-covered flood plain that offers the river a vast choice of shallow beds over which to spread its capillaries. The hills that flank the river, patched with occasional juniper and a variety of thorny shrubs on a background of overgrazed pasture, are a stark contrast with the plentiful forests less than a day's walk to the south—a reminder that Dhaulagiri and Annapurna, the snow-covered massifs between which the river cuts its path, form a gigantic wall against the northward passage of the monsoon rains. An hour's walk north of Jomsom, the Kali Gandaki is joined from the east by the Panda Khola, a small river that traditionally marks the boundary between Panchgaon and Baragaon. The village of Lubra, whose houses and fields stand on its southern side, is also considered to be a part of Baragaon, though the land on which the settlement was founded in the thirteenth century originally belonged to Thini (see Ramble and Vinding 1987: 18). On the opposite side of the Kali Gandaki, and visible from the valley floor, are two other villages, Dangardzong and Phelag. A short way to the north of these, and closer to the river itself, is the settlement of Pagling. The village is said to be the most recent in Baragaon, having been settled by one family from each of the existing communities. This collective enterprise is sometimes cited as the origin of a variant of the name: Pigling, which may mean “the Common (or Shared) Place” (Tib. *sPyi gling*). There are references to a temple having been built at Pagling in the thirteenth century (see Jackson 1978: 207), and there are indeed ruins near the present village to support the possibility that this is the site. It is quite likely that—as in a number of other cases—the site was abandoned for a period before being resettled.

A short distance north of Pagling, on the left bank of the river, where the gorge converges to a narrow waist, stands the village of Kag, which has grown

outward from its now-ruined palace—cautiously at first, in the form of older, cramped dwellings, but more recently with greater abandon, as witnessed by the school, government offices, and hotels (Gutschow 1994).

The Nepali name of Kag, Kagbeni, derives from the fact that it stands at the confluence (Nep. *beni*) of the Kali Gandaki and the Dzong Chu, the stream of the Muktinath valley that runs parallel to and north of the Panda Khola. At the head of this valley stands the temple of Muktinath, a Hindu pilgrimage site of major importance, although the enclosure within which it is situated also has shrines that are revered by Buddhists and Bonpos. The villages on the south side of the valley, in ascending order, are Khyenga, Dzar, Purang, and Chongkhor. On the northern side are two others: Putra and Dzong. The communities of the Muktinath valley are sometimes referred to collectively as Dzardzong Yuldrug, “the Six Villages [including] Dzar and Dzong,” or more popularly, Dzardzong. The complex historical and ritual relations that obtained between the communities of this valley will not be dealt with in this book, but a few observations, whose relevance will become apparent later, may be made here.

Dzar and Dzong are, like Kag, the site of now-derelict castles. Noble families from the north, led by the Kyekya Gangba clan, who came to Baragaon in the sixteenth century on behalf of Lo, established themselves in these two settlements and in Kag, as well as in Dangardzong, and ruled the area from castles that (in the case of Dzar, Kag, and Dangardzong) they either built themselves or (in the case of Dzong) inherited from an earlier political era. Dzar, Dzong, Kag, and Dangardzong are four of what are accordingly referred to as the five “capitals” (Tib. *rgyal sa*) of Baragaon. The fifth capital, Samar, is now a small village at the northern end of Baragaon, some two hours’ ride below Gelung. In addition to their castles, the villages of Dzar, Dzong, and Kag each has a monastery (Tib. *chos sde*) affiliated with one branch or another of the Sakyapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, with monks being recruited from a number of surrounding villages. Chongkhor, which stands on land donated to the founder lama by the village of Purang, is a community of householder priests (Tib. *dbon po*) of the Nyingmapa sect, whose relations with the monastic community are, for a variety of reasons, less than cordial. The inhabitants of Lubra, to the south of the Muktinath valley, are also of priestly class (Tib. *bla mchod*) but are followers of the Bon religion.

Returning to the Kali Gandaki valley, the settlement immediately to the north of Kag is Tiri, which is located on the right bank of the river, and a full day’s walk to the west of it, on the way to Dolpo, is Sangdag.

All the villages I have mentioned so far in Baragaon are linguistically homogeneous, to the extent that they speak mutually comprehensible variants

of the same dialect of Western Tibetan (see the introduction). This language is most commonly referred to by native speakers as Dzardzongke, “the language of Dzardzong.” For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to this whole area simply as southern Baragaon.

North of the territory of Tiri, this linguistic homogeneity is broken by a group of five villages: Tsele, Gyaga, Tshug, Taye, and Te. The people in these settlements speak a Tibeto-Burman language that is mutually comprehensible with the dialects spoken in Panchgaon and Thak. Noting this linguistic distinctiveness, and also the fact that the people had been largely bypassed by the conspicuous cultural changes that had taken place in the Thak Khola, Fürer-Haimendorf described them, surely very aptly, as “Ur-Thakalis” (1966: 157). The five villages are collectively referred to as the Shöyul (Tib. *Shod yul*), “the Low-Lying Communities.” The name may seem somewhat fantastic, in view of the fact that none of them is much lower than 3,000 metres above sea level, and all are at a higher altitude than Kag and Tiri, the last two villages of southern Baragaon; but reaching the Shöyul from two much-frequented approaches, the main route from Upper Lo via Samar and from the upper end of the Muyala pass, near the head of the Muktinath valley, entails a long and sometimes steep descent, so the etymology is more credible might at first appear.

Since I will examine the Shöyul more closely in the next chapter, I shall pass over them quickly for now and conclude this survey of Baragaon. Although it does not technically belong to the Shöyul, Samar, the northernmost village of the enclave and the fifth of the five “capitals,” will be considered along with them because of its close historical and territorial links.

Baragaon is the anglicised form of a Nepali name meaning “the Twelve Villages” (*Bährāgāū*), but documentary evidence suggests that this is the translation of an older Tibetan name, Yulkha Cunyi (Yul kha bcu gnyis), meaning the same thing (Schuh 1994: 43). In Tibetan documents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at least, the term Yulkha Cunyi is habitually replaced by a Tibetanised rendering of ‘Baragaon’ (*bha ra gung, ba ra ga’ung*, etc.), often in conjunction with the epithet “Lower Lo” (*Glo smad*). Another sobriquet for the area that appears commonly in local texts, either by itself or preceding the term Baragaon, is Ngazhab (Tib. *mNga’ zhabs*), “the Subject [region or people].” The name—like Baragaon/Yulkha Cunyi—may date from the period when the region was under the sway of the Kyekya Gangba family. When it appears in documents, the name denotes the population or representative assembly of Baragaon minus its aristocratic rulers; as I will show, the commoners and the nobility were not always on the best of terms. The original justification for the name Baragaon/Yulkha Cunyi remains

something of an enigma, since the region is made up of not twelve but nineteen settlements. It is worth noting that the nineteen villages were grouped into eight taxpaying sectors (*tsho*). Smaller settlements, such as Lubra, were rated as quarter-sectors; some (Dzar, in the Muktinath valley, is an example) were classified as halves, while a few, such as Te, were full sectors by themselves. This sort of sectoral organisation was not confined to Upper Lo and Baragaon; Dolpo, to the west, was traditionally divided into ten and a half sectors (Jest 1975: 286), and Manang, to the east, into three, while areas of Tibet adjoining Mustang are also referred to in local documents in terms of sectors.

I have heard two versions of the sectoral groupings of Baragaon's villages. One of them is as follows:

1. Purang and Dzar
2. Dzong and Chongkhor
3. Kag and Khyenga
4. Tangbe (two-thirds) and Gyaga (one-third)
5. Tshug
6. Te
7. Tsele, Putrak, Tiri, Samar
8. Lubra, Phelag, Dangkardzong, Pagling

Thus Lower Lo comprises eight sectors; Upper Lo has seven; Gelung, in the middle, which seceded from Lo in the seventeenth century, probably had the status of a full sector. Altogether, then, we have sixteen sectors in Lo; sixteen, as I will show, is a number that occurs frequently in the representation of bounded territories.

The other version replaces Lubra with Sangdag in the last sector, and Lubra is a quarter-sector on its own. Either configuration is possible, and I have found no documents that might settle the matter. It is true that Sangdag is frequently unrepresented among the signatories to agreements concerning Baragaon; but this may be not because of its administrative exclusion from the enclave but a consequence of its geographical remoteness (on the one occasion, in 1993, that Baragaon has assembled in the past few decades, no one from Sangdag came). In the second scheme, Lubra's status as an afterthought may be simply because it was still a satellite of Thini at the time the sectors were arranged, and entered the enclave of Baragaon only at a later period.

In spite of its linguistic heterogeneity—to which I shall return—Baragaon has existed as some sort of corporate entity for at least as long as the period covered by available documents, although its boundaries may have changed over the course of time. Issues that concerned Baragaon as a whole—whether internal matters or questions of policy regarding the enclave's dealings with

external agencies, such as Upper Lo or the government of Nepal—were debated at general assemblies, when representatives of all the villagers were required to be present. The local nobility originally shouldered the task of representing Baragaon in dealings with Kathmandu, but after the rise of the *subbas*, the customs-brokers from Thak, a Thakali warden, called the *ci-khyab* (Tib. *spyi khyab*), assumed this mediatory role. The people of Baragaon are said to have requested the intervention of the powerful Serchan family some time in the 1930s. Baragaon was duly apportioned out between prominent brothers. Mohanman took over the wardenship of southern Baragaon, while the five Shöyul and two villages of Panchgaon fell to Hitman. The two parts of Baragaon were united under a single warden in the next generation. For part of his long career, the last warden of Baragaon, Sankarman Serchan, combined this unofficial role with the official one of tax collector (Nep. *talukdar*). The warden advised the villagers of Baragaon about developments in government policy, intervened in local disputes, and when occasion demanded, summoned general assemblies of the enclave. He was assisted by a team of eight supervisors (*centsug*, Tib. *spyan btsug*) who were appointed on the basis of their personal competence, and these in turn would liaise with villages through their headmen.

Information regarding the supervisors is inconsistent. Sankarman himself was vague on the subject, saying only that he did not recruit these officials. One villager informed me that the supervisors were appointed from Baragaon by the two priestly communities of Lubra and Chongkhor, to help in the organisation of responses to specific crises, and were not a permanent or long-serving corps. Some documents seem to imply that individual villages had officials called supervisors, which suggests that the term may not always denote the same office.<sup>9</sup>

The expenses of the supervisors, as well as those of anyone charged with undertaking tasks on behalf of the community, were shared by all the villages.

### The Place of Te in the Hierarchy of Baragaon

The complex matter of marriage relations and status in Baragaon is a subject I have dealt with in some detail elsewhere (Ramble 1984), but the general picture may be outlined briefly. The Tibetan-speakers of Baragaon are ranked in four main strata: Nobles, Priests, Commoners and Artisans. These names are translations of the local terms, not descriptions of occupations: many Priests perform no sacerdotal functions and no Artisan, as far as I am aware, does any professional artisanal work. (Blacksmithing and tailoring are the province of a

few outcaste Nepali-speaking families.) Nobles usually marry other Nobles, and Artisans, too, rarely marry outside their own stratum. Priests and Commoners do intermarry, but the hierarchical difference is objectified in the form of standardised bridewealth payments according to the respective status of the bride and groom. Status is said to be inherited in the male line, but the provenance of one's mother can also be a critical determinant in certain circumstances. Only members of one rank inhabit some settlements, while the population of others is heterogeneous, and birth or marriage into a village that has associations with a particular group in the hierarchy can in fact override inherited status.

The Commoner community is regarded as being further subdivided, but the criteria for the distinction are vague. The "Subcommoner" stratum embraces two villages of southern Baragaon, Khyenga and Phelag, and all five of the Shöyul. Two reasons are usually cited for the distinctness of the "Subcommoner" group. The first is that, under previous regimes, they were liable for providing unpaid transport service, or *ulag* (Tib. *'u lag*, ultimately from Turkish *ulak*);<sup>10</sup> and Ulag is one of the names by which they are generically known.<sup>11</sup> The other reason given is that Khyenga and Phelag were, as the Shöyul still are, Seke-speaking, and therefore ethnically different. But the two groups now recognise nothing in common with each other, and indeed, in spite of allocating them to the same vague category, the other villages of Baragaon regard them as being quite different from each other. Most significantly, while Khyenga and Phelag intermarry with Commoners and Priests, the Shöyul are regarded as lying beyond the pale of marriageability. It is not that they are neatly slotted into a hierarchical category somewhere below the "Subcommoners" of southern Baragaon and above the Artisans; they are barred from the usual domains of social exchange by virtue of a more general alienness.

The reasons for the isolation of the Shöyul are worth examining. Superficially, at least, the most striking feature about them is that they are a linguistic anomaly, a group of Seke-speakers in the middle of Tibetan-speaking Mustang. How do they come to be there?

### Serib and Se: Residues of an Old Ethnonym?

A name that occurs with some frequency in early Tibetan works dealing with the Upper Kali Gandaki is Serib (Tib. *Se rib*, among other spellings).<sup>12</sup> David Jackson, who has devoted considerable effort to locating this political entity, concludes that it was

the name of a large region encompassing many villages in the Kali Gandaki valley south of Lo. Among its lands were the areas of Lubra and Kagbeni. There are several other villages in modern Baragaon and Panchgaon that are no more than ten miles from Lubra and Kagbeni. Most likely these, too, belonged to Se-rib. Downstream from Lubra valley, for example, there was a strategic stronghold near the present village of Thini. Unless it were the last outpost of a separate principality to the south, which seems unlikely, it would have been an important centre of political power in Se-rib. (1978: 207–8)

The earliest Tibetan reference to Serib I am aware of appears in the Dunhuang Annals of the eighth century, where an entry for the year AD 705 says tersely that “Serib revolted against the rule of Central Tibet” and later remarks that in 709 “the king of Serib was captured” (Bacot, Thomas, and Toussaint 1940–46: 41, 42, cited in Jackson 1978: 199). Pelliot proposes that the Serib of the Dunhuang Annals is identical to the Si-li of Chinese sources (199 n. 42). That Si-li corresponds at least to an area of northwest Nepal is suggested by some of the characteristics of its inhabitants. Pelliot notes that the majority of the settlements are on the banks of swift rivers, that the men tie their hair up in a topknot, and that the women braid their hair (199 n. 8). Topknots for men have certainly remained fashionable in places such as Humla and Purang, at least among the older generation, up to today. The Bonpo lama Karu Druwang Tenzin Rinchen (Ka ru Grub dbang bStan 'dzin rin chen), who visited the Muktinath valley in the middle of the nineteenth century, begins his observations on its inhabitants with the following remarks: “The appearance of the people of this area is as follows: the men have topknots on their heads and wear Tibetan clothing” (*Autobiography of Ka ru*: 160).<sup>13</sup> Topknots are no longer worn, but some people in the Shöyul have childhood memories of old men with their hair arranged in this way. One villager recalled the pleasing detail that the topknot was customarily transfixated with a long needle to prevent it from being grabbed during fights. Similarly, until the last generation it was possible to see women with their hair in scores of tightly braided tresses, an unusual coiffure that is still obligatory for younger women on certain ceremonial occasions.

Territorial subdivisions with new names may have been superimposed on the old region of Serib (whose boundaries are nowhere clearly defined), but certain parts of Baragaon apparently preserved the idea that they were a part of Serib well after these changes took place. A document from Tshug, one of the Shöyul, eulogising the delightful environment of “this happy little village,” describes the location of the settlement as being “in the central part of the

valley of Serib, in Lower Lo, in Ngari [broadly, western Tibet]." A chronicle from Te, complaining about the misdemeanours of Tshug against settlements in its vicinity, claims that "the people of Tshug, like poisonous snakes, have harmed all the lords and servants of Serib" (see chapter 4). In the absence of more substantial documentary material, there is little use in speculating about the possible political boundaries of Serib. The point I wish to stress here is simply that, at least as late as the eighteenth century, the people of Te and Tshug regarded themselves as being a part of Serib. Now it is probably not fortuitous that the people of Serib should speak a language called Seke. I have suggested elsewhere that the latter may be a contraction of the Tibetan *Se rib kyi skad*, "the language of Serib" (Ramble 1984); and Jackson, discussing the element Se in other compounds that I shall explore, proposes that "the word 'Se' probably derives from the old name 'Se-rib'" (1978: 213). With the benefit of hindsight, it now seems that both these suggestions put the cart before the horse; in other words, that "Serib" is derived from Se, and not the other way around; and that "Seke" means not "the language of Serib" but, more simply, "the Se language."

The fact that all the villagers of Baragaon but the five Shöyul are Tibetan-speaking would appear to contradict our hypothesis that Serib was the territory of the non-Tibetan-speaking Se people. As it happens, there is evidence to suggest that the people of Lower Baragaon may well be—with the exception of a few immigrants from Tibet—the Tibetanised descendants of a Seke-speaking population. This suggestion was first made on the basis of Seke toponyms in the Muktinath valley, and what appear to be Seke residues in the dialects of the two "Subcommoner" villages, Khyenga and Phelag (Ramble 1984: 104–5). More recent research has produced further evidence: until the last generation the language in which the territorial divinities of several Tibetan-speaking villages were annually propitiated was not Tibetan but Seke, and this is still the case in two villages today (Ramble 1998).

The fact that four adjacent Tibetan-speaking communities in the Muktinath valley should either today or within living memory address their territorial gods in Seke argues very strongly in favour of the likelihood that speakers of that language once populated the area. Moreover, it is likely that—as certain other evidence suggests (Ramble 1984; Schuh 1995)—the linguistic change is not the consequence of the earlier population having been displaced by Tibetan-speakers but of their having been Tibetanised. This process of Tibetanisation is likely to have received its main momentum from the arrival in the area of Tibetan-speaking rulers from the north during the sixteenth century, with further changes taking place over subsequent generations due to the influence of Bon and Buddhist reforms, as well as considerations of status.

Cultures evolve, but the different components of a given culture do not all evolve at the same rate, and in this case the notion of place appears to be marked by a relatively high degree of cultural conservatism.

While Khyenga and Phelag, in southern Baragaon, have brought themselves into line with the Tibetan-speaking majority, the Shöyul have remained unaffected by this cultural shift. The Tibetanisation of Mustang was not limited to Baragaon but extended as far south as the Thak Khola, where Buddhist temples and monasteries were built, and certain festivals were even created along the lines of Tibetan ceremonies. But this trend was abruptly reversed in the late nineteenth century as a result of growing political and economic ties with the Hindu rulers of Nepal. From this point onward, the Thakali elite did their very best to create as much cultural distance between themselves and everything Tibetan, to the extent of banning the consumption of alcohol and yak meat, the conspicuous practice of Buddhism, and even the use of the Thakali language, which was too close to Tibetan for comfort (Bista 1967: 94; Vinding 1998: 371–76). There is a certain irony in the fact that at the same time the Seke speakers of southern Baragaon were trying to submerge their ethnic distinctiveness in the dominant Tibetan culture of their neighbours—it is even said that, in Khyenga, fines were imposed on anyone who was heard to speak Seke rather than Tibetan—those of the Thak Khola were showing the world how little they had in common with Tibet.

The Shöyul were largely unaffected by these efforts to manufacture a more pleasing or inconspicuous public identity, and whatever features they may previously have exhibited that set them apart from the rest of Baragaon became further accentuated. The circumspection with which the Tibetan-speakers of Baragaon treat the Shöyul may have its origins in an uneasiness experienced when confronted with a cultural atavism, a past from which they wish to remove themselves by dissociation, although this divergence is expressed not in terms of history but in the commoner idiom of impurity.

### Internal Tensions

The brief historical sketch provided here has said little about the prevailing political ideologies in Mustang—monarchy and democracy—and the ways they have interacted. While the matter may not be especially relevant in this context, it is crucial to our understanding of certain central institutions in Te's civil religion. I shall therefore have occasion to revisit the political environment of Baragaon and Panchgaon in chapter 10, as a prelude to a study of community leadership in Te. As I will show, the villages of Baragaon showed

themselves on numerous occasions to be capable of developing a common policy and of taking concerted political action without the need for a focal coordinating authority. However, this does not mean that harmony always prevailed, or that the different villages always took the same view in whatever situation may have arisen. The villages seem to have had at least the theoretical option of leaving the enclave. It is not sure exactly what this would have meant: there would certainly have been a readjustment of tax liabilities, such that each of the remaining communities would have had to pay more to make up the annual sum demanded of Baragaon by the government. There seems to have been a provision whereby a community could buy its liberty by paying a substantial sum of money to Baragaon, and thereby compensate it for the additional financial burden. What was then supposed to happen to the seceding community is even less clear, but presumably it would have had the possibility of merging with a larger enclave—in this case, Lo—or forming an independent tax unit, as in the case of Gelung.

None of the villages ever actually left the enclave, but the threat of secession certainly arose from time to time. One such incident occurred in the 1950s, when (to make a long story short) the people of Taye refused to accept the mediation of the Thakali warden of Baragaon, Sankarman Serchan, as the general tax collector and aligned themselves with a relative of his. Representatives of all the other villages of Baragaon assembled at Dzar—eight people from each of the eight *tsho*—to debate the matter. The conflict was eventually resolved with Taye remaining in the enclave, but it is clear that, for a while at least, the village's secession was a real possibility. The missive with which the five representatives of Taye were summoned to the meeting reminds the addressees that “there is a document to the effect that if, following a discussion, a sector secedes [from Baragaon], it should pay 2,000 rupees, and if a settlement secedes it should pay 1,000 rupees” (HMA/Baragaon/Tib/07). The five representatives are ordered to bring this forfeit with them to the assembly. Taye was classified as making up three-quarters of a sector, so presumably part of the discussion would have addressed the question of just how much money Taye would have to pay. Unfortunately, I have not found the “sealed document” (*gan brgya* [*sic*, for *gan rgya*]) that is referred to here.

The archives of Baragaon bear witness to frequent conflicts between villages, but since these clashes were usually between just two communities, any divisive effects could be fairly easily contained. The greatest threat to the unity of the enclave was presented by the Shöyul. One-to-one disputes between villages of the Shöyul and those of southern Baragaon seem to have been a rarity. When the Shöyul clashed with the rest of the community, they did so as a united body defending a common interest. In 1922, for example, the

headmen and the warden of southern Baragaon were undoubtedly disconcerted to receive the following ultimatum from the Shöyul:

Because a few wicked people have been inflicting various forms of hardship on us lowly, simple subjects, we shall henceforth abandon whatever procedures may have been usual in the past and adopt new policies. We shall certainly not behave with duplicity (lit. “as if we had two tongues in one mouth”), but in whatsoever matter may arise, whether it be as great as a double six [in a game of dice] or as insignificant as a deuce, we five Shöyul shall act as one, and stand undivided. Whichever of us five Shöyul diverges from this policy shall pay a fine of 500 rupees, and no excuses will be accepted. This is [the first] point.

The [second] point: we five Shöyul have decided not to pay so much as a half-rupee toward the expenses of the Warden’s Supervisors who go down to Pokhara.

The third point: if a written order should arrive from lowly, inferior people [summoning us] to meet in Kag we shall not comply—this is the third point.

[The fourth point]: as for the matter of providing fodder, when the dzos<sup>14</sup> and goats of the Supervisors are hungry, we five Shöyul have decided that we shall not pay any expenses—this is the fourth point.

[The fifth point]: if the Supervisors tell the Headmen of Te that they should not act in this way, and persecute them, the Shöyul will [support their Headmen] unequivocally, and if the Supervisors persecute not just Tshug but any of the other four villages, we five Shöyul shall, as stated in this document, commit our wealth, our voices, and our force [to the conflict] (HMA/Baragaon/Tib/05).

We do not know what provoked this document, or how the disagreement was eventually settled; but the point is that an exhibition of unanimous noncooperation such as this would have made it very difficult for southern Baragaon to ride roughshod over the interests or protests of any one of the five Shöyul. They were, and are, a distinct enclave within the larger enclave of Baragaon, and are treated as such.

Understandably, the archive of Baragaon itself contains nothing that might tell us about the strategies adopted by the Shöyul in elaborating—and enforcing—common policies concerning the surrounding communities. This information was naturally kept secret, and it is only in the annals of the Shöyul themselves that we find some indication of how the five villages were able to form an effective, if sometimes precarious, confederation.

## 2

# Inside the Shöyul

As we have seen, the Shöyul, the five Seke-speaking communities of Baragaon, became increasingly isolated by the cultural changes that transformed the enclave. This is not to say that the five have been preserved in an archaic condition while the rest of the world has gone on without them. Far from it: the question of social change and its management is a subject to which I shall give close attention in later chapters. The point is that largely as a consequence of political events in the region, probably beginning in the fifteenth century, there was a bifurcation in the two parts of Baragaon that resulted in a greater Tibetanisation of the south, the appearance of an increasingly distinct linguistic and ethnic boundary, and the reification of the Shöyul as a community.

The Shöyul we see today are not simply the result of five villages waiting passively to be circumscribed and marginalised. They, too, have seen internal movements, and indeed their present configuration is largely the result of a demographic implosion that occurred around three centuries ago. That the Shöyul do form a distinct enclave within Baragaon was made clear in the previous chapter, where I explored something of southern Bargaon's perspective on the group as both an ethnic anomaly and a political faction.

This chapter, which is divided into two parts, will examine the two main processes whereby Taye, Tshug, Gyagar, Tsele, and Te became a single community: first, the straightforward matter of the creation

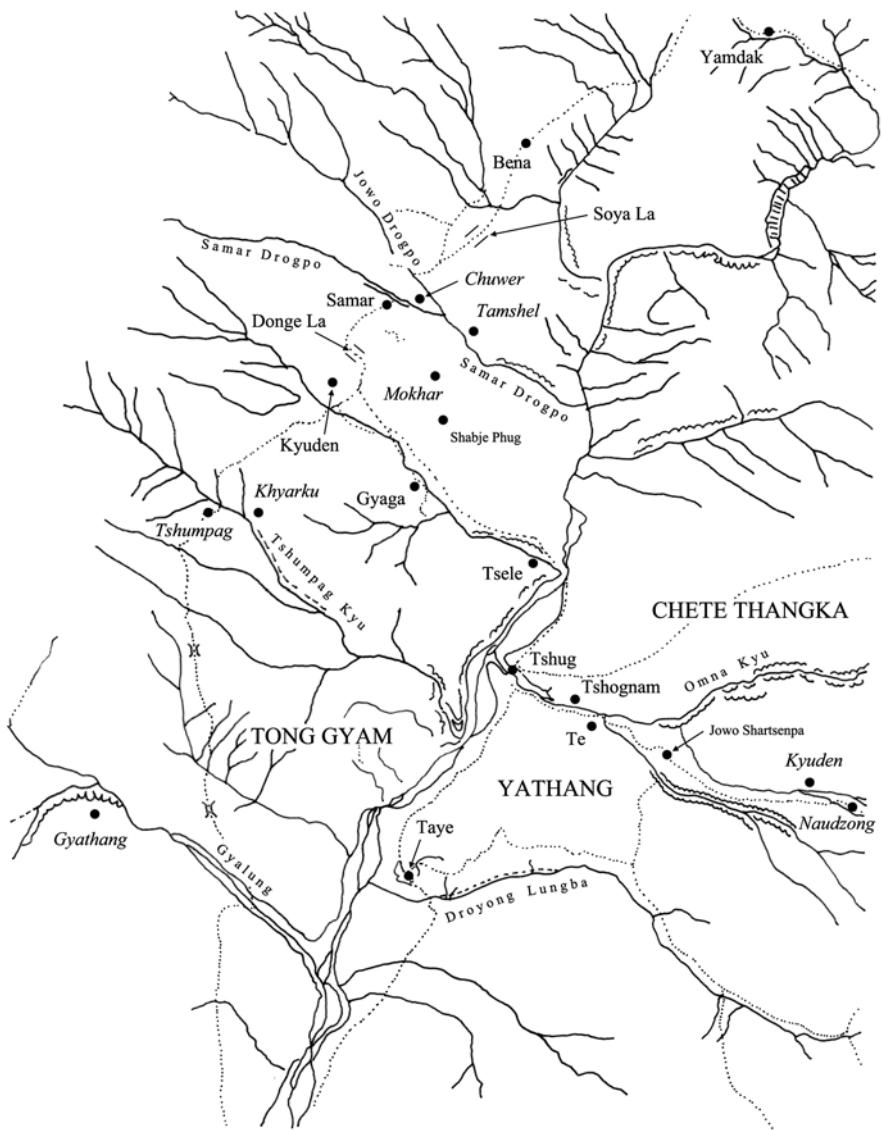


FIGURE 2.1. Map of the territory of the Shöyul and surrounding areas. Italicised names refer to abandoned settlements. (Drawing by Christian Seeber)

and dissolution of settlements and the movement of groups of people from one place to another; and secondly, the policies and treaties which later enabled the five villages to project an impression of themselves as a corporation.

### PART I: DEAD AND LIVING SETTLEMENTS

No one who travels up the Kali Gandaki north of Kag can fail to be struck by the vestiges of human agency that mark the landscape: areas of long-abandoned fields, the scars of old irrigation systems, warrens of empty caves in the towering cliffs, watchtowers and fortresses of rammed earth, some of which have almost returned to their native element.<sup>1</sup> Archaeological research in the Muktinath valley and southern Mustang has begun to tell us something about the people who lived in the caves and in the old villages more than a thousand years ago. No excavations have yet been carried out north of Kag; but even if the ancient history of abandoned sites in the Shöyul is yet to be discovered, there is enough—just enough—in the archives and in the clues provided by toponyms, clan names, and territorial boundaries to tell us of the relationship of many of them to the living communities.

#### The Territory of Taye

The southern limit of the territory of the Shöyul begins at Gyalung/Gyagalung (both these forms of the name are used), a western tributary of the Kali Gandaki a short distance to the north of Tiri. On the southern side of this valley, there is an abandoned site known as Gyathang, where little remains except the terraces of old fields and barely discernable ruins. The inhabitants of this community are said to have been potters, and even now old earthenware containers in Te that were reputedly made here are called *gyapu*, “pots (Seke *pu*) from Gya [thang].” As in the case of many narratives within the region, the abandonment of the place is attributed to the failure of the irrigation system. In order to increase the productivity of their fields and the abundance of their livestock, the story goes, the community of Gyathang began by making periodical sacrifices of chickens to their territorial gods. The success of this measure encouraged them to make more substantial offerings of goats, with similarly encouraging results. They then increased the value of their offering by sacrificing a yak. Since the prosperity of the village increased in proportion to the size of the offering, the community finally undertook to sacrifice a horse. The result was catastrophic: the wooden aqueducts to the fields collapsed, the reservoir dried up, and the people were forced to leave.

The story is interesting because it can be seen to convey a moral from either of two distinct religious worldviews. The first can be seen as a straightforward Buddhist one, in which the community is punished for its cupidity: the theme of a village being destroyed because of its preoccupation with material wealth is one we shall encounter later in connection with Te. The story can also be understood as a salutary warning against poor judgment in dealing with territorial divinities. While bovids were—and in a few places, as I will show, still are—acceptable blood-offerings to local gods, horses never have been. Because of the close association between horses and humans—particularly men—the two are functionally identical in certain sacred-magical contexts. It is common enough in Mustang, when a man's horse dies in a remote area where the body has to be abandoned, that the owner will first decapitate the corpse and conceal the head, or else simply smash the skull, for it might otherwise be used by his enemies in black magic rituals against him. In the nearby village of Dzong, it is said, the main place-god abandoned the village and moved to Manang because the site had been polluted by the spilled blood “of men and horses.” This close association also underlies the general Tibetan aversion to the consumption of horse meat: “To eat horse meat is considered morally condemnable since in Tibetan society the horse is not only the companion of man, but also, as illustrated by the ‘wind-horse’ (*rlung rta*), a symbol of his welfare” (Karmay 1998a: 391).

A part of the community of Gyaga, it is said, went to settle in Sangdag, on the way to Dolpo. (It may be worth noting that although this village is Tibetan-speaking, it is sometimes referred to as a Shöyul, the implication being that it was once populated by Seke-speakers.) The rest of the community is said to have settled in an extensive area of caves on the east bank of the Kali Gandaki where it is joined by the Gyalung River. The area of caves is known as Gyagalung in Tibetan and Gyagagyung in Seke. To the north of the caves is an area of abandoned fields said once to have been cultivated by the community. The water for Gyagalung was the stream of the Dröyong Lungba (called Gayang Gyung in Seke), which is also the only source of irrigation water for nearby Taye. When, over the course of time, the quantity of water in the stream diminished so that there was inadequate surplus from Taye, Gyagalung and its fields were abandoned. The community occupied the area of caves above Tshognam (discussed later) for a certain period before moving up to Gyaga. The name Gyaga is said to be derived from the names of the places previously inhabited by the people, that is, Gyathang and Gyagalung. As we have seen, the Seke name of Gyaga is Gyuga.

Taye itself (the name is usually spelled Tang yos, *gTang yos*, etc. in local documents) is a village of thirty-one estates (Tib. *grong pa*) and six subsidiary

households (Tib. *pho rang mo rang*), three of which are landless. More than any of the five Shöyul, Taye's population has been reduced in recent years by permanent or long-term outmigration of the younger people. At a rough estimate, the population of Tayepas and their descendants permanently living outside the village is double that of the remaining number. The present village lies between two apparently older abandoned settlements, referred to simply as Dzong gog, "ruined fortresses."

There are grounds for supposing that Taye may once have been abandoned before being resettled, as in the case of other villages that I shall discuss. The Tayepas are said—both by themselves and their neighbours—to be relatively recent immigrants from Manang. The Seke name of Taye, Tangbe, is explicitly linked to an abandoned village in Manang, the district immediately to the east of Mustang, where the group's ancestors are said to have lived. Another feature of Taye worth noting in this context is the diminutive size of its territory by comparison with that of the other Shöyul, especially Te and Tshug. The small area of pastureland is especially surprising, in view of the earlier grandeur suggested by the ruins. Although I have not found any documentary evidence to support the suggestion, it is possible that Taye may once have been abandoned and, as in the case of other old settlements I shall discuss, its territory occupied by its neighbours, who may then have ceded a part of it to accommodate new settlers from Manang.

### Tshug

About an hour's walk north of Taye, at the junction of the Narshing Chu and the Kali Gandaki, is the village of Tshug. The settlement, consisting of a total of more than sixty estates, consists of three distinct units: north of the Narshing Khola is Tangma; south of it is Braga, and west of Braga, toward the Kali Gandaki, is Cikyab. These locations are referred to by Tibetan-speakers as Kyangma, Dragkar, and Tseyab, respectively.<sup>2</sup> The community is further divided into four sectors (*tsho*), corresponding to the three main settlement areas, with Kyangma being divided into two parts, Jowo Shartsen Gyalpo (Jo bo Shar btsan rgyal po) and Jowo Lhaptsen (Jo bo Lha btsan). The names signify clan gods (respectively, of the Khangtö and Rele clans, discussed later), who are now also territorial divinities.

For certain administrative purposes, the community is divided more simply into two moieties, Kyangma on the one hand and Braga-Cikyab on the other. This is apparent in the case of recruitment of village officials (see chapter 10). The population of Tshug consists of eight named clans. In addition to

these, there are several nameless artisanal households and one family of out-caste Tailors (Duli; Nep. *Damāi*).

In some cases, the clan affiliation of houses in Tshug can be told from their external appearance. Thus the Rele clan may use no colours at all, other than plain whitewash, on the outside of their house walls; the Khangtö houses (but not the Khyungpo houses of Te) are distinguished by their red and blue (or black) stripes on a white background, while the Tamshel Lama clan paints its houses with red stripes.

### Tshognam

East of Tshug, some twenty minutes' walk up the Narshing Chu, on the northern bank of the river, lies the little settlement of Tshognam. The community is made up of just three households: Tshognam Og (Tib. 'og), Tshognam Barma (Tib. *bar ma*), and Tshognam Nyama (Tib. *nya ma*)—Lower, Middle, and Upper Tshognam. The community is not an independent entity; it has no land of its own. Lower and Middle Tshognam stand on Tshug's territory, and Upper Tshognam on Te's. The territorial boundary is marked by a *thowo* (Tib. *tho bo*), two stones piled on top of a large rock in the bed of the Narshing Chu. In the cliff behind Tshognam is the set of caves, called Tshognam Dragphu (Tib. *brag phug*), the "Cliff Caves of Tshognam," referred to earlier. I have already mentioned the belief that these caves, which lie in Tshug's territory, were once inhabited by the population of Gyaga. In more recent times, one of the larger, more accessible caves was converted into a tavern run by Tshugpas for customers from the Khamba resistance force.

The family inhabiting Upper Tshognam has served for several generations as the priesthood of Te, and I shall have more to say about it in the following chapters. The priests in question are married Nyingmapa lamas of the Shari Pungita clan. The clan is said to have originated in Zurgang (Zur sgang: "the Ridge at the Edge"), a small village of just three houses on the eastern side of the Kali Gandaki, opposite Dri. The first part of the clan name derives from the fact that this entire eastern region (consisting of the villages of Zurgang, Yara, Gara, De, Tangya, and Dri, the last being in fact on the western side of the river) is known as Shari (spelled in a variety of ways: Sha ri, Shar ri, Shwa ba ri, etc.). The second part of the name (Tib. *dpon brgyud pa*) simply signifies "noble lineage." One branch of the family is said to have prospered in Tibet as the noble Pön Lugukar clan. The ruins of what is believed to be the old family house stand on a low ridge a short distance to the west of the present village. The house is called Zurgang Gang-ga (possibly < Tib. *sgang khang*, the "House

on the Ridge"?), and its associated divinity, Meme Gang Tshebten (Tib. *Mes mes sGang Tshe brtan?*) is worshipped annually at a nearby cairn.

Middle Tshognam is now occupied by a Tepa family, who purchased the house from its previous, Chongkhor-born owners. The inhabitants of Lower Tshognam are referred to as Drenjong Gyalpe Gyupa (Tib. *'Bras ljongs rgyal po'i brgyud pa*), the Clan of the Kings of Sikkim. The documents that have been photographed in the house shed little light on the implications of this name. The lineage was preceded here by the priestly Lama Domari clan,<sup>3</sup> with patrons in Tshug, who maintained a long-running enmity, marked by spell-casting and magical battles, with the lamas of Upper Tshognam.

The inhabitants of Upper and Lower Tshognam are Tibetan-speakers, who speak Seke only as a second language. The story of their recent generations is told in chapter 6.

### Tsele

The next inhabited Shöyul north of the Narshing Chu is Tsele, situated half an hour beyond Tshug on the western slope above the Kali Gandaki. Tsele is a small community of thirteen estates (altogether seventeen hearths). On a promontory to the east of the village, directly overlooking the Kali Gandaki valley, are extensive ruins, said to have been the original site of the settlement. The name of this promontory is Dzongbagang (presumably *rDzong pa sgang*, which would mean "the Ridge of the Fortress-Dwellers"). The frequently related story concerning its abandonment runs as follows. Once upon a time, Tsele used to levy taxes on goods traveling up and down the Kali Gandaki. The revenue office was located at a site now marked by a mani wall (a pile of stones engraved with sacred formulae) on the trail that passes along the foot of Dzongbagang, between the river and the village. Tsele at that stage had 108 houses, one hundred on the promontory and eight where the present village stands. One day, a lama of Namgyal monastery (just north of Lo Monthang) came through Tsele on his way from the south, and the officials manning the customs post insisted that he pay duty on a huge copper cauldron that he was carrying. The lama argued that since the cauldron was for the monastery kitchen, it should be duty free. But the officials stood their ground, and the lama was eventually obliged to pay. A short time later, however, he took his revenge by smiting the village with a destructive spell (Tib. *mthu*). As a result of this assault, the one hundred houses on the promontory that had insisted on the levy being imposed were destroyed, while the remaining eight were spared. The present settlement grew from these eight households.

## Gyaga

The boundary between Tsele and the adjacent settlement of Gyaga is formed by the deep gorge of the Gyaga Lungbe Chu. The route to northern Mustang used to pass along this gorge, but in the 1980s the people of Tsele cut a trail along the northern cliff-face. Gyaga may be reached by descending into the valley from this new trail and following a path up the opposite cliff, entering the village through a tunnel some 60 metres long. Alternatively, one may follow the valley of the Gyaga Lungbe Chu up from where it joins the Kali Gandaki south of Tsele. A short distance above this confluence, in the south-facing cliff, are areas of caves for which I was able to obtain no name other than simply Gyaga Phu—the Gyaga caves.

## Kyuden

Beyond the point where the trail from Gyaga meets the main route between Tsele and Samar, the road turns northward and crosses a low pass, the Donge La, marked by a cairn. Before the pass, to the west of the trail, is a large area of abandoned fields, in the middle of which stand a number of stone goat pens. On a ridge above these pens are some stone foundation walls. These ruins and the old field terraces that surround the ridge (to the south of the ridge it is even possible to discern an old reservoir) are called Kyuden. Although Kyuden is bounded by the territory of Tsele, Gyaga, and Samar, it forms part of the territory of Tshug. I shall discuss the reason for this apparent anomaly.

## Samar

As noted, the area this discussion concerns is the territory of the five Seke-speaking Shöyul of southern Mustang and the settlements that stand on it. Samar, the next village to the north of Gyaga and Tsele, is peopled by Tibetan-speakers, and although it is classified as part of Baragaon, it does not belong to the Shöyul. Nevertheless, it will be considered here because of certain peculiarities in the relationship between its territory and that of Tshug.

The territory of Samar begins at the Donge La. Samar itself is a little village of just twelve households that takes its name from a red-coloured ridge (Tib. Sa dmar: “Red Earth”) extending eastward from the northern end of the settlement. This ridge is said to have been the site of an earlier community con-

taining a far larger number (variously given as 136 and the ubiquitous 108) of households. One informant suggested that the original settlement had been destroyed in the course of warfare with Jumla, leaving just three households from which the present village grew. The ridge bears clear traces of old buildings. The name of this location is Samar Chöde Drag (Tib. Sa dmar chos sde brag, "the Convent Ridge of Samar"), although one informant gave the second word as Chorten (Tib. *mchod rten*), explaining that, seen from below, the ridge resembles a stupa. The ruins at the eastern end of the ridge are said to be of a nunnery, and those immediately to the west, of a fortress. Ruins of an old ring-wall indicate that this was a defensive settlement.

Southeast of Chöde Drag, in the bay of the hills facing east, is another ridge called Mokhar Gata, on which stand the ruins of a building. From the foundations and ring-wall ruins it may be concluded that this, too, was a fortified settlement.

Below the ridge, the path descends along the base of a south-facing cliff. This area is called Mokhar Gyam, and in the cliff above are a few caves said to contain arrows and spindles. Although our companions from Samar interpreted these items as signs of past habitation, it may be noted that, in certain exorcistic rituals, arrows and spindles are used as emblems of men and women, respectively.

Some 50 metres beyond these caves are the stone ruins of the settlement of Mokhar itself. To the west of Mokhar is a wide valley named Zhabjiphu (Tib. Zhabs rjes phu). The name, meaning "Upper Valley of the [Sacred] Footprints," is derived from the abundance of prehistoric carvings of animal and human figures, as well as other motifs, that are visible on several large rocks.<sup>4</sup>

In the northeast face of Chöde Drag is a set of caves, known simply by the Tibetan name of Chöde Drag Phugpa (Tib. Chos sde brag phug pa), Chöde Drag Caves. North of the Crag, from west to east, is a gorge called Samar Drogpo. Drogpo (Tib. *grog po*) is the usual north-Mustang term for ravine. Some 500 metres below Chöde Drag, the Samar Drogpo converges with another stream, the Jowo Drogpo, that rises further north. The name Jowo (Tib. Jo bo) derives from the fact that Samar's two main divinities stand at the edge of this ravine. The first of them, Samar Jowo—who still receives annual animal sacrifices—is in the form of a large cairn situated some distance upstream, while the second, Jowo Mä (Tib. *smad*: "lower") is revered at a juniper tree growing at the confluence. The area of land lying between Samar Drogpo and Jowo Drogpo is called Chuwer (possibly derived from Tib. Chu bar, "between streams"). As we shall see, there is documentary evidence that there was once a settlement here, although we could find no traces of one. The area between the

Jowo Drogo and the Bena La, a pass about an hour's walk further on, is called Tamshel, and was also the site of a settlement. Ruined buildings can still be seen amid abandoned fields, and there is a small cluster of caves in a cliff at the northern end of the plateau. It will be recalled that one of Tshug's clans is said to have come from Tamshel, so it is no great surprise to learn that Tamshel still belongs to Tshug. In fact Tshug's territory extends north of the Bena La to the place called Bena, marked by a tavern. The area between Bena and Yamdak—the site of another tavern—is held commonly by Tshug and Gelung, while after Yamdak lies the territory of Gelung alone.

## Te

Since the following chapter will look closely at Te, it will be enough here to say something of the settlements to which the people attribute their origins, without yet examining the relationship of Te's individual clans to these places or considering the circumstances of their abandonment.

Te itself is situated about a half hour's walk to the east of Tshug, on the south side of the Narshing Khola. Oral tradition, supported by archival material, has it that the ancestors of the present inhabitants came from four settlements, now abandoned, in the highlands to the east of the village.

The southernmost of these places is called Tshethang Dzong. The stone foundations of this fortified settlement, built on a long promontory, stand amid old field terraces to the east of the trail from Te to Dzong, a short distance to the north of the Muyala pass. It is clear that the settlement occupies a strategic position at an important crossroads. The area itself is known simply as Chumig Gong, the Upper Spring, a reference to a row of three small water sources on this grassy slope. Just to the north of it passes the route from the Shöyl to the Muktinath valley; and a few hundred yards to the east, meeting the latter trail at the Muyala pass, is the main north-south trade route to Tangkya over the Tiu la. A third trail, descending from the Muyala, skirts around to the west and north of the ruins and drops into the gorge formed by the headwaters of the Dröyong Lungba. The latter is the name of this stretch of stream that provides Taye with its sole source of water. Further down, it also forms the boundary between Taye and Te. After crossing the stream, the trail emerges from the gorge onto a wide, flat area known as Tshethang (mTshe thang, "Ephedra [a type of low gymnosperm] Plateau"). This is the site of a long-term encampment of three tents, inhabited by a family of refugee nomads from Khartang in Tibet. It is not clear whether Tshethang Dzong is the original name of the ruined settlement or whether it is merely a descriptive term based

on its proximity to Tshethang. Near this junction are the ruins of a single stone house amid abandoned fields. This location is called Oldog Kamsa, the “Place for Drying Turnips.”<sup>5</sup>

The northward trail crosses a pass, the Tiu La, about half an hour’s walk from Tshethang and runs across the head of a valley that slopes westwards down to Te. On a sandstone spur in the middle of this valley, some distance below the trail, are the ruins of a settlement called Naudzong.

The large number of field terraces surrounding Naudzong suggests that the settlement may once have contained a sizeable population. As for the site itself, sections of rammed earth walls are still standing, and the presence of a ring-wall indicates that it was a defensive settlement. Standing amid these walls, it is possible to see far below, near the course of the Kali Gandaki, the ruins of the hilltop fortifications above the village of Tshug. And to the north, there is a clear view of the terrain surrounding the ruins of Aga. The importance of visual communication in the positioning of fortified settlements along the Kali Gandaki has been remarked on with regard to the “capitals” of southern Baragaon (Ramble 1984), but a proper study of the subject has been undertaken more recently by Christian Seeber, whose work has revealed the existence of a complex network of forts and watchtowers over much of Mustang. Signaling between distant vantage points by means of fires—and, possibly, mirrors—would have made it possible to communicate urgent information (most crucially, one might suppose, concerning the approach of hostile forces) over a large area within a very short space of time (Seeber 1994).

A large, apparently natural cave at the base of the low cliff west of Naudzong provides shelter for several hundred Tepa goats and their herders. The area around the ruins is one of Te’s most important stretches of pasture, and the constant demand for fuel on the part of the goatherds has resulted in the removal from the wall of whatever scraps of wood might have made it possible to date the site by dendrochronological techniques or C-14 analysis.

The third settlement of the four is Aga.<sup>6</sup> The site can be reached by continuing directly along the northward trail from Naudzong. The trail from Te begins by ascending eastward, as if one were going to Naudzong, but branches northward after less than an hour’s climb. The path ascends to a ridge from which it is possible to see the Tibet border, almost three days’ walk to the north. The trail runs eastward along the crest of the ridge until the narrow valley on the left opens out into an area of abandoned fields, and shortly after, just before dropping into and crossing the gorge of the Aga Chu stream, it reaches the sparse ruins of Aga itself. What is left of the settled area covers a stretch of land about a hundred yards long, but part of the eastern end appears to have slipped into the Aga Chu gorge. The location of a reservoir to the west of the main

building and the eroded condition of the valley wall support the popular account that the village was abandoned following the collapse of its irrigation canal. Below the settlement, to the north, is a large field area with abundant potsherds. There is also evidence of extensive cultivation on the eastern side of the Aga Chu, but it is not clear whether or not these fields belong to Aga. Some distance downhill, on the edge of a sheer cliff overlooking an area of pasture called Shitong, are the remains of another settlement. The ruins, which also extend across about a hundred yards, are aligned north-south. The general area is called Kyanglung (the “Valley of the Wild Asses”), but I have not been able to obtain a name for the site itself. The northeast-facing wall of the Aga Chu gorge is said to contain caves in which large earthenware jars can still be seen, but Christian Seeber, Nyima Drandul, and I were unable to locate them during our exploration of this area.

### Kog

The main north-south Shari trail passes just to the east of Aga and continues on to the village of Tangkyu, several hours to the north. Unlike Tshethang Dzong, Naudzong, and Aga, Kog—the last of the four parent villages of Te—lies some distance from the main north-south trail. Kog can be reached from a junction in the main trail an hour or so to the north of Aga, but since this approach is often damaged by landslides, an alternative path that runs directly eastward from Aga, before turning north to cross two high ridges, is usually preferred—not that Kog ever receives many visitors at all. Apart from its sheer remoteness—with the exception of Sangdag, there is probably no other site in Mustang that is so far from the nearest village—Kog is almost inaccessible for several months of each year because of the banked snow on the northern slopes of the intervening ridges.

Kog comes into view from the last of the high ridges. The land beneath the pass slopes down northward to the gorge of the Yaktsang River, an eastern tributary of the Kali Gandaki, about 530 metres in altitude lower than the pass. From this distance, the ruined houses of Kog are barely visible, but the vast inclined plateau where fields once were is already striking, and confirms the stories, which I shall discuss in the next chapter, about the great wealth of the community. The trail from the pass descends into the Yaktsang valley and crosses the gorge about a mile upstream of Kog by a natural bridge created by a fallen pillar of rock. After a steep climb on the farther west bank, the trail then runs northward until, after a half-hour walk, it reaches the gorge of a tributary that enters the Yaktsang from the east.

After crossing the milk-white stream of the tributary, the path ascends diagonally up the steep cliff opposite and eventually opens out onto the Kog Plateau. On the way up, it cuts through an exposed part of an irrigation tunnel that had its source at a point further up the tributary and ended in the fields of Kog along a network of reservoirs and canals.

The main settled area of Kog is built at the southern end of the plateau, on the top of the cliff that plunges into the tributary. On the very edge of the cliff, a short distance west of the cluster of houses, are the ruins of what appear to be a small fortress with a northern wall just 32 metres long. The western wall, which runs to the very edge of the cliff, measures 18.70 metres. To judge from what is left of the remaining walls, the ground plan of the building was not a regular shape, but since the part of the clifftop on which most of the construction stood has fallen into the gorge, we can have no idea of the original size or form. The selection of cliff edges for situating defensive buildings is obviously a matter of balancing tactical military advantage against the whims of an unpredictable landscape. In any event, it is likely that the fort collapsed before the settlement itself was abandoned, since a chronicle from the Te archives refers to the collapse of the dzong as one of a series of misfortunes the inhabitants were forced to witness before they finally gave up and left. The disposition of the buildings in Kog suggests a certain confidence that is not seen in the other three (four if we count the nameless one at Kyanglung) settlements, where the dwellings seem to have been cramped together into a concentrated block. Outside the main residential cluster of houses in Kog are a number of massively built individual houses, each of which stood at least two storeys high. Just to the north of the cluster is a big reservoir with a canal issuing from the dry stones of its sluice-gate. On the south bank of the reservoir are the remains of a mani wall, a pious construction of the sort that is found throughout the lamaist world, consisting of stones carved with sacred syllables displayed against a purpose-built wall. Only one stone, bearing the formula Om Mani Padme Hum, is left, propped up at the eastern end of the wall, its lichens and crystalline exudations an indication of likely antiquity.

To the northwest of the settlement, at the opposite end of what was once the cultivated area, stand the walls of a single building. The isolated location of the building, its size and shape, and the traces of red clay wash on the exterior of its walls suggest that it may have been a temple. The folklore about Kog does refer to the activities of a village lama—who was, indeed, instrumental in the downfall of the community—but even if he ever lived, we cannot of course know if he was connected to this temple. On a ridge between the temple and the settlement is a watchtower that commands an unbroken view of all the possible approaches to the village. The plateau on which Kog stands is formed

of conglomerates with a high proportion of fine sediments—an ideal land for grain production. There are two tiers of shallow field terraces, covering an area of some 500,000 square metres, exposed to the south, east, and west, and therefore the whole arc of the day's sunshine, while remaining protected from the wind by the high ridges encircling it at a distance.

The irrigation tunnel that fed the fields ran for perhaps a kilometre inside and parallel to the cliff face until it emerged onto the plateau just east of the village and shed its waters into the reservoir by the nucleus of houses. Standing on the cliff edge near the settlement, it is possible to see the tunnel opening into a void where the cliff has slid away, disastrously interrupting its passage up to the fields. Even more poignant is the sight of two juniper beams in front of the tunnel: evidence of a valiant, but ultimately futile, attempt to throw an aqueduct across the gap left by the landslide. There is an area of fields east, and therefore uphill, of the point at which the tunnel meets the plateau, suggesting that there must have been another, probably smaller, canal. The *Chronicle*, a document from Te's archives that I shall discuss, does say that the inhabitants struggled on for a few years after the irrigation system failed, implying that some limited cultivation must have been possible. Directly south of Kog, clearly visible through the gorge of the Yaktsang, rises the mountain of Gang Zhurpo, which, as I shall discuss, was probably the main territorial god of Kog. Although the name may have been borrowed from a well-known Tibetan mountain, the title "Gang," meaning "snow-mountain," is justified by the fact the the snow never completely melts, even though by the end of each year it is reduced to a small patch on its north face.

Just over a half hour's walk to the east of Kog is an area called Ribug, which is now used almost exclusively by goatherds from Tangkya. A steep, uneven trail to the northwest leads to the Tasola (probably Tib. lTa so la, "surveillance pass") pass, which runs below a hill called Piu (probably Tib. sPe'u, "tower"). Beyond this is the territory of Tangkya.

### The Consolidation of the Shöyul

The picture of the region before these various local migrations is very different from that of the modern Shöyul. There were, to the west of the Kali Gandaki, six more settlements than there are now: Tsumpag, Kyudeng, Chuwer, Rele, Khyarku, and Tamshel. The inhabitants and territories of all six were absorbed by Tshug. The *Complaint* of Te, which I discuss in chapter 3, suggests that the first three were abandoned by the late seventeenth century, and it is likely, for reasons I shall discuss in that chapter, that the evacuation of the other three

took place around the same time. Samar itself was abandoned at this time, and although it was resettled at a later date, the community never resumed its earlier dimensions. Tsele, too, suffered a drastic reduction in size, probably from natural causes, and mention has also been made of the abandoned villages of Mokhar, near Samar, and Gyathang, near Tiri.

If, as seems likely (though we have no clues about Mokhar, and it is uncertain whether Gyaga was inhabited before the abandonment of Gyathang), all these villages were contemporary, the western part of the Shöyul was once a considerably more vibrant area than it is today, with a larger population distributed over three or four times the present number of communities.

The dating of the settlements of the eastern hills is more problematic. The earliest available date for Kog, based on C-14 dating of wood recovered from the walls, is the tenth century, while the latest is the seventeenth century (Christian Seeber, personal communication, July 1996). The second date concerns only the temple, which may have been maintained, or even built, as a remote hermitage after the town itself died. Emigrants from Kog stayed for an unspecified period in Aga before moving to Te, but because Aga is recognised as being the home of Tepa clans other than those that came from Kog, we can be fairly sure that Aga already existed prior to the fall of Kog. As for Naudzong, one of the Te documents implies that it was still in use at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but in a very limited way and perhaps only as seasonal settlement for a small number of people. As for Tshethang Dzong, we have no clues, other than the assertion that its inhabitants moved to Te without—unlike the people of Kog—sojourning anywhere in between.

It is clear the the limited evidence available leaves considerable scope for interpretation. Nevertheless, we can sketch a possible picture of developments in the eastern hills on the basis of the principle of parsimony, where the architectural and documentary materials are, provisionally, taken at face value.

According to this approach, Kog was founded around the tenth or eleventh century. After the disaster of its irrigation system, a group of refugees moved to Aga, which was already inhabited, leaving Kog wholly or partially abandoned. Some time later, possibly also as a result of the failure of the irrigation system, the population of Aga moved down to the Narshing Khola. Here they lived in an abandoned cave settlement, later called “the Homes of the Ancestors,” while they set about establishing a settlement on the south bank of the river. We know from local documents that at least as late as the eighteenth century, these caves were still being used by Tepas, if not as primary residences then at least as a place of refuge.

There is no evidence, either documentary or legendary, to suggest any genealogical link between the people who made these caves and the present

inhabitants of Te. The documents do, however, attribute the building of the present village to the present clans who settled here after—or more accurately perhaps, during—the dissolution of the eastern settlements. There may well have been ruins of some earlier habitation at the present site—as in the case of other sites in Baragaon, which recent excavations reveal to have undergone successive episodes of abandonment and resettlement. The Homes of the Ancestors may therefore be an accurate name, to the extent that they served as a ready-made temporary dwelling for the founders of Te.

In this enterprise, the immigrants from Kog were joined by the people of Tshethang Dzong and of Naudzong. The shift from the eastern settlements to Te may not have been an abrupt one in any of the four cases. A residual population may have been left behind, either to follow their predecessors to Te in a later generation or to move somewhere else, or simply to die out gradually. In any event, Kog, Aga, and Tshethang Dzong were no longer viable settlements at the end of the seventeenth century; the temple of Kog may have been inhabited at this time by a priestly family, and Naudzong continued to function as a seasonal satellite of Te.

The details of this outline may well need to be revised in the future if contrary documentary or archaeological data come to light. A feature that is not likely to be seriously challenged is the contemporaneity of the four eastern settlements. It is even possible that they all—including Kog, with a reduced population—overlapped in time with Te. It is also highly probable that the western settlements I have just reviewed were already in existence before the eastern hills were depopulated. The implication, in short, is that the territory in which the five Shöyul and Samar now stand was once (if we ignore Mokhar) occupied by a total of fifteen communities. Over the course of time the region underwent a sort of autodigestion, in which the higher, peripheral settlements were abandoned and their population drawn in toward the relatively low-lying centre, specifically to Te and to Tshug. This retraction was completed by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

A question that needs to be addressed concerns the ethnic—or at least linguistic—composition of the abandoned places. Were they Seke-speaking or Tibetan-speaking? Unfortunately, we have very little evidence to go on. Personally, I am inclined to think that they were all Seke-speaking. In the case of the eastern settlements, there is nothing in their names to argue for either one or the other. According to the *Chronicle*, the people of Kog migrated to Te, Tshug, and Nar, in northern Manang. All three of these places are now Seke-speaking, and we have no reason to suppose that they were ever anything else. It is conceivable, of course, that the inhabitants of Kog were Tibetan-speakers who became acculturated to the populations with which they subsequently came

into contact; but in the absence of supporting evidence, it is surely better to stay with the simpler explanation. If, as seems to be the case, the population of the Muktinath valley at the southern end of the route linking Aga, Khyungdzong, and Tshethang Dzong were Seke-speakers and that of Kog, immediately to the north, also was, it would certainly be surprising if any of these three were Tibetan-speaking; even more so if the legend—supported by the coincidence of a Te clan name with a Muktinath valley toponym—that the inhabitants of Tshethang Dzong had themselves originally come from Putra (which, as one document from Te suggests, used originally to be called Butra), below Dzong were true. In the case of southern Baragaon, we have a reasonable explanation of why the language should have changed from Seke to Tibetan. With the eastern settlements, there is no similar support for a notion that three villages that were bounded to the south, west, east (Manang/Nar), and—if we include Kog—north by Seke-speakers should have used a different language.

The same argument applies to the western hills: with Seke-speaking Baragaon to the south and the five villages of the modern Shöyul in their midst, are these six settlements likely to have been Tibetan-speaking? It could be argued that since Samar is Tibetan-speaking, so might these have been. But what about Samar itself? Was it always Tibetan-speaking? The name itself is certainly Tibetan, and that of neighbouring Chuwer appears to be. But the picture is confused by the presence of Seke toponyms in the village—particularly the farmland area—of Samar. Samar, it will be remembered, is one of the five “capitals” of Baragaon, and to this extent was probably the site of some administrative, fortified building with a noble representation (probably on the red ridge itself) that was established in a non-Tibetan community. As for the fact that the present population is Tibetan speaking, it should be noted that Samar was abandoned around the turn of the eighteenth century at the same time as Kyuden and Chuwer and subsequently resettled. The original population and the present one are not continuous.

As for Tamshel, Khyarku, Rele, and Tsumpag, there is nothing in the names themselves to suggest an obviously etymology, but the names of sites near them are recognisably Seke. The name Kyuden is unquestionably Seke.

Now if, as I am suggesting, the balance of probability is that the dead settlements of the Shöyul were all, or very largely, Seke-speaking, the situation of the present enclave becomes all the more interesting. The entirety of what is now Baragaon would have been a culturally homogeneous enclave, with a larger number of settlements. Over the course of time, the five Shöyul came to be hedged about and set apart as an enclave as a consequence of two complementary processes: first, the majority of the settlements were abandoned, and the population came to be concentrated in just five villages, and second,

this discrete, easily circumscribed group came to be further isolated by the linguistic and cultural changes that were taking place at around the same time in Baragaon. A third factor that cannot be ignored is that the five Shöyul were allocated demeaning portage duties that undoubtedly reduced their status still further. Khyenga and Phelag, in southern Bargaon, were similarly earmarked, but although they are treated as a slightly lower category within the Commoner caste, their geographical proximity and linguistic adaptation undoubtedly contributed to their rehabilitation.

## PART 2: THE SECRET ALLIANCE OF THE SHÖYUL

### The Shöyul versus Southern Baragaon

The foregoing pages are primarily an attempt to show that, if the Shöyul are now a distinct entity in Baragaon, there are historical factors of a demographic and political character that explain how this situation is likely to have arisen.

The end of the last chapter gave an impression of the general tenor of the relationship between the two communities, but so far I have said nothing of the shape this bipartition of Baragaon took in a more formal, administrative context.

In the document cited toward the end of chapter 1, the Shöyul are clearly keen to communicate to southern Baragaon that they are acting in concert and that there is no point in trying to foment discord among them. None of the five can be persuaded to duplicity—be made to speak “as if it had two tongues in one mouth.” To drive this point home, the document declares that the five have made a binding agreement, to the effect that a violation of this agreement will commit the offending community to a fine of 500 rupees.

The message to southern Baragaon appears to be: we stand united on this matter. Our solidarity is a moral issue, but just in case you suspect this moral unity of fragility, we might point out that it is further cemented by persuasive financial considerations.

Clearly, in the matter of the Shöyul’s integrity, things were best not left to chance. In the same document, the community went so far as to advertise to southern Baragaon how the solidarity had been achieved. But this was an exceptional case, in which the nature of the dispute itself—whatever it may have been—set the two communities against each other. But meetings of Baragaon were held over matters other than rifts between the south and the Shöyul; trading practices, for example, or questions concerning taxation. Whatever the case, situations periodically arose in which Baragaon would be required to vote in favour of one course of action or another, and the Shöyul

regarded one option in particular as being to their advantage. In the light of southern Baragaon's jaundiced view of the Shöyul as a secretive community with its own agenda, it would clearly have been poor tactics for the Shöyul to declare their shared interest in the course of a general assembly.

Prior to such assemblies, the Shöyul would have their own meeting, attended by representatives of each who would meet at the Flower-Garden of Tshug, an area just to the west of the boundary with Tshug and Te, and discuss the matter in advance. I shall have more to say in the following chapters about the theory and practice of democracy in Te, but for the time being a simple outline of the process of decision-making will serve. In any such meeting, discussion of an issue leads to a vote in favour or against. Votes are cast by means of each member of the meeting placing a stone on one of two piles—the Ayes and the Noes. After the voting, the stones are publicly counted, and the more numerous pile carries the vote. But while balloting establishes a majority, it does not achieve unanimity. (Devices for assuring unanimous decisions are, as it happens, used in Te, but these do not concern us here.) When the Shöyul would meet to decide how to vote at a forthcoming general assembly of Baragaon, a majority vote would not necessarily reflect the preference of all the villages. How, then, could it be guaranteed that this decision would be translated into unanimous voting at the coming assembly?

A Tibetan document from Te (HMA/Te/Tib/51), dating from 1849 or 1909, provides a succinct illustration of how the necessary provision was made.

An agreement among the five Shöyul. Wherever we have to attend a meeting, whether far or near, in accordance with the traditional practice of Ngazhab [Baragaon], we five villages shall place our votes in the same place, not separately. Whichever village casts its votes separately shall be fined.

The concern with solidarity and secrecy emerges from a number of documents in the Shöyul archives. One particularly revealing item is an agreement, dated 1817, that is kept in a private collection in Tshognam.

Concerning the five Headmen [i.e. the fifteen or so Headmen of the five communities]: the five Headmen must adhere to past custom. If enemies come from north or south, from without or within or wherever, all the villages and the households must act as one, and no one may say "You are Te Shö, you are Taye Shö" and so forth. If an entire village acts in this way the fine will be 100 rupees; if a household does so, it will be 23 rupees.

Regarding the five Supervisors:<sup>7</sup> if outside (i.e. Tibetan?) enemies come from the north, and inside enemies (Nepalese?) come from the south, the Headman should be in front, the Supervisors behind them, and the populace in an outer and inner circle, and they should act as one. [Each Supervisor] should not say “I cannot act as the Supervisor of Te” or whatever. The Headmen each in turn should grasp the hands of the Supervisor; each man and woman offers his or her hand to the Headman. Having so united they swear an oath to the effect that they should bear information about the outside to the inside, and should not convey inside information to the outside. This oath shall be sworn on the tenth day of every third Hor month.

The document is affirmed by being passed around to all members of the assembly.

If a Headman (or whoever) goes to Kag for a meeting he shall not speak with two tongues in one mouth; if a Headman, Supervisor or all the villagers say that they have sworn this oath there will be a 25-rupee fine for individuals and a fine of 100 rupees for villages.  
(HMA/LTshognam/Tib/16)

The need for unity is strongly enjoined in the opening lines: no village should ever adopt the attitude that the problems of another of the Shöyul are not its own: “You are Te Shö, you are Taye Shö”—and it is therefore not our business to help you; all must consider themselves as making up a single community.

An important aspect of the role of the headmen and other officials is hinted at in the second part of the document: that these officials are expected to lead the community, but it is the community that has coerced them into this position of prominence and responsibility. Cooperation is not left to chance or to the goodwill of the Shöyul’s members: it is enforced by means of an oath everyone is required to swear each year. We are told very little about the ritual context in which this oath was taken, other than that it involved gestures of solidarity on the part of the assembled company. However, the substance of the oath is clear enough: members of the five villages should accumulate intelligence about what is going on outside the community, but they are forbidden to tell outsiders anything about the internal affairs of the Shöyul. Similar undertakings of vigilant discretion are known from the archives of other settlements in Mustang;<sup>8</sup> and, as I shall discuss later, Te maintained this policy with regard to the other members of the Shöyul itself.

The last clause in the document takes the strategy of secrecy one step further: not only must all the people of the Shöyul swear not to convey any information to the outside; by affirming this document, they are also promising not to admit to anyone (in Kag, for example) that the Shöyul have sworn such an oath in the first place.

This document bears comparison with a seventeenth-century treaty between Thini, Marpha, and Thak that I shall discuss in chapter 10. In both cases, the primary concern is defensive strategy. The communities composing the alliance are obliged to unite in providing military support for any one of their number in the event of external aggression. What is relevant here, however, is the fact that the basis for the creation of a confederation of autonomous principalities in the seventeenth century is exactly the same as that for the consolidation, over two centuries later, of a secret alliance of villages. These villages were not autonomous, but part of the dukedom of Baragaon at a time when the ruler of the area exercised real power in his domain with the blessing of the Gorkha government. It is clear that beneath the top-down, hierarchical model of administration that prevailed in the area, a tradition of acephalous, horizontal political coordination survived as the basis of a civil society. The similarity of the 1817 agreement among the Shöyul and the treaty of 1697 between Thini, Marpha, and Thak further suggests that the former was not a new invention but the reinforcement of an existing state of affairs, something that is hinted at in the opening injunction that “the five Headmen must adhere to past custom.”

### The Shöyul versus Lo

Southern Baragaon was not the only entity to which the five Shöyul were obliged to present a unified front. Another powerful neighbour against whom they periodically closed ranks was the king of Lo. As the central government of Nepal made its presence increasingly felt during the Rana period (1846–1951), so the local power and rights of the king were successively eroded. Sometimes these rights were not given up without a struggle. One of the documents in the Te archives is a copy of a letter sent in 1900 to the prime minister of Nepal, Bir SJB Rana. The letter requests the prime minister to order the king of Lo to desist from claiming from the village certain unspecified tributes that Te had been paying to the Customs Office since 1863. Evidently, the redirection of these revenues to the state coffers continued to rankle in the palace of Lo nearly forty years later. We do not know whether the unspecified “tributes”

mentioned in Te's complaint of 1900 referred specifically to the *khurchang* taxes on trade.<sup>9</sup>

In 1910, the government of Nepal officially resolved the matter with an order (Nep. *rukka*) issued by Chandra SJB Rana, the prime minister of Nepal, and addressed to "the people of the six villages in Baragaon in the jurisdiction of the Thak Dana Customs Office." The order officially abolishes the *khurchang* dues "so long levied upon the people of the six villages and appropriated by the Raja of Mustang." It is dated Sunday, Vaisakh 19, BS 1967 (AD 1910; Kar-macharya n.d. 7.1.13).<sup>10</sup>

What is of particular interest to us, however, is the process whereby the Shöyul went about having this tax rescinded. Not surprisingly, the government order tells us nothing about the background to the decision, but a number of Tibetan memoranda in Te's archives give us some idea of the machinations leading up to and following this coup. In the summer of 1908, the Shöyul had held a meeting and drawn up the following resolution:

Two lords have gone to Kathmandu and have kindly secured a sealed document to the effect that the five villages of the Shöyul are no longer obliged to provide *khurchang* dues or transportation services [to the King of Lo]. If they run into trouble about this in the future, all members of the Shöyul should stand behind them and support them vigorously. If a village fails to provide its support, it shall be fined 100 rupees. (HMA/Te/Tib/46)

In order to approach the government in Kathmandu, the community needed a mediator. Since these events took place before the wardenship of Baragaon had passed to the Thakalis, the necessary mediation was provided by the nobles of the Muktinath valley. Foremost among these was Kushog Zangdor (short for Zangpo Dorje), the lord of Baragaon, who held certain powers under the Thakali *subba*. The nature of the "sealed document" referred to is unclear. While the order abolishing the *khurchang* dues was issued only in May 1910, the people of the Shöyul evidently considered that the matter had been settled by this earlier document, and resolved to act accordingly. They formulated their position at a meeting held in April 1910:

Regarding the *khur chang* taxes and '*u lag* obligations: if anyone does not respect the sealed document issued by the ruler of Nepal, and continues to cause us hardship, messages have to be sent to [five] communities and all the officials must meet. We should act only in accordance with the law; no one shall act independently and con-

tinue to provide transportation duties or pay *khurchang* taxes. (HMA/Te/Tib/47)

A memorandum from a meeting held a week later implies that the cooperation of the king of Lo was going to be a costly affair.

Kushog Zangpo Dorje brought a sealed document from the nobles of Lo concerning the *khurchang* tax. Because we five villages had not enough [resources to cover] costs, we experienced hardship. Funds have therefore been collected on the basis of dzos and goats, and 1,000 *tam* (i.e. 500 rupees) were given to Kushog Zangpo Dorje. We five Shöyul subsequently met and drew up the following agreement.

From [this] Bird year onward, information about the outside should be brought to the inside, and inside intelligence may not be conveyed to the exterior [i.e. specifically concerning the ongoing negotiations for the forthcoming break from Lo]. Nothing more shall be said about our collection of funds on the basis of dzos and goats. Henceforth money shall not be raised on the basis of dzos and goats. If anyone conveys intelligence to the outside, or tells outsiders that money was raised on the basis of dzos and goats, there will be a fine of 100 rupees. This agreement is signed by the Headmen of Taye, Tshug, Gyaga, Tsele, and Te, and confirmed by the assembly by being passed around from hand to hand. (HMA/Te/Tib/48)

The Shöyul apparently feared that their position would be weakened if their strategy of raising funds “on the basis of dzos and goats”—in other words, by each household providing a sum of money proportionate to the numbers of these animals it owned—became known to outsiders. It may not have been the particular method of raising the funds that was sensitive, but the fact that such a large sum was accumulated at all. The money in question was clearly intended to cover the legal fees, and presumably also a number of unofficial costs: a “petition fee” to the king of Lo (discussed later) and, we are probably entitled to suspect, an honorarium for the noble intermediaries themselves: as I shall discuss in chapter 10, Kushog Zangdor, the principal mediator, was on another occasion caught with his fingers in the public coffers.

In January 1910, the king of Lo issued a memorandum saying simply that the *khurchang* dues the five Shöyul and Phelag had been bound by law to pay were to be abolished by the government the following month. He also acknowledged the receipt of 250 rupees as a “petition fee”—half the sum the community had raised on the basis of their livestock (HMA/Te/Tib/49).

Interestingly, the memorandum does not seem to have been a cause for celebration. The Shöyul appear to have doubted the king's good faith in the matter, and the subsequent documents give the distinct impression that the communities were bracing themselves for reprisals.

On March 14, 1910, the following resolution was drawn up following a meeting of the Shöyul:

An agreement between the five villages of the Shöyul. We should not show reverence to the King of Lo (*or* there is no support for the thieving king of Lo),<sup>11</sup> but, as laid down in the edict (*lālmohar*) of the precious king [of Nepal], wherever [the king of Lo] may go, whether north or south, or to the court in Kag, the five Shöyul may dispense with having to supply him with provisions, and it has also been decided that we should not receive him formally by leading his horse by the bridle. Wherever the king goes, whether north or south, messages should be sent [among the five villages]. If Headmen fail to attend [the meeting] they shall pay a fine of 16 rupees, and if a village does not attend the assembly the fine shall be 100 rupees, with no excuses. Failure to send a message will result in a fine of 100 rupees. If [a village] provides food [to the king] or welcomes him formally by leading his horse by the bridle, it will be duly fined as specified above. If this should happen to any one [of the five], even though it may mean the loss of wealth [through the payment of fines], we five villages are one. None of the five villages should deny [this agreement], since it has been decided that the above should hold true. (HMA/Te/Tib/52)

The edict to which this document refers cannot have been the prime ministerial order of May 1910, since it had not yet been issued. This resolution, in fact, does not refer to *khurchang* dues but to a type of service that, from its description, resembles transport duty. Although related, the *khurchang* dues and the transport obligations were separate issues, and the latter appears to have been rescinded shortly before the *khurchang* tax.

### The Victory of the Shöyul

The Shöyul did not expect the king of Lo to take the withdrawal of his rights lying down, and the importance of this document, from our point of view, lies in its presentation of a strategy to preserve the community's hard-won liberty and to take collective action in the event of royal bullying. The movements of

the king must be watched, and the whole community kept informed of his whereabouts; if he should visit one village or another, he should not be received with the type of formal hospitality that would imply a continuation of the status quo ante; any village whose courage fails and receives the king in such a way is liable for a heavy fine; in order to encourage the host village in its resolve, representatives of the other four must assemble there as quickly as possible. The representatives in question may be either the headmen or the entire community, presumably depending on how serious the situation is judged to be, and the size of the fine for failure to provide support will depend on whether the individual representatives (16 rupees) or an entire village (100 rupees) are at fault. Negligence in circulating relevant information within the Shöyul will be considered the fault of a village, and will be punishable accordingly; and finally, these rules may be stringent and the punishment of villages to be regretted, but this is the price we are willing to pay in order to guarantee the solidarity that is our best hope in dealing with oppressive neighbours.

Among the items contained in Te's community storehouse are two sets of iron shackles that are said to date from the time of these tax wars. Two headmen of Te had gone to Lo to negotiate with the king the rescission of the *khurchang* tax that was being mooted at that time. Instead of parleying with them, the king chained them up in his dungeon. The Tepas—the story does not say whether they were joined by the other Shöyul—marched on Monthang. They broke through the rammed-earth city wall and into the prison, freed their companions and brought them back to the village, where their chains were struck off. It was shortly after this that Kushog Zangdor went to Kathmandu and returned with the decree that released the Tepas from their tax burden. But he was not acting alone. Lama Suna Yeshe, the highest of Te's territorial gods, accompanied him to the capital and possessed him, endowing him with a persuasive fluency that assured the desired result. Before Kushog Zangdor arrived in Te with the decree, Lama Suna Yeshe possessed his medium in the village and announced to the community that they would soon be receiving good news. The god added the detail that the nobleman had changed the black horse on which he had descended to the capital for a white one. And so it turned out.

The 1910 memorandum from the king of Lo makes specific mention of Phelag, and the prime ministerial order of 1910 declared the abolition of taxes on six villages of Baragaon—undoubtedly a reference to the five Shöyul and Phelag. In terms of their material obligations—the provision of *khurchang* dues and transport services—the six were apparently identical. One might therefore have expected that there would be some collaboration between the Shöyul and Phelag in the struggle to achieve fiscal independence from Lo. In fact there is

no evidence of such collaboration having occurred. The relevant internal memoranda from Te are concerned exclusively with arrangements between the five Shöyul. Phelag may have been in communication with the Shöyul over the matter, but it was not privy to their strategies for fundraising or the presentation of a united front against the king of Lo. The exclusion of Phelag is important: it leaves us in no doubt that eligibility for *khurchang* dues and transport services, which covered both Phelag and the Shöyul, was not the primary basis for the collective character of the latter. Even in the matter of tax obligations, the Shöyul chose to manage their affairs separately from the one other village that was, as it were, in the same tax bracket.

Among other things, the entire episode provides an illustration of the way the five Shöyul collaborated in order to secure a revision of the law. Clearly it was not possible to alter the entire legal or administrative structure on the grounds that a number of its features were irksome. What could be done, however, was to ensure that the regulations in force were no worse than they had to be by insisting that the law be observed to the letter. A perennial source of irritation in Baragaon was the obligation to provide hospitality to visiting dignitaries. People still tell stories of the discomfort of their grandfathers, obliged to sit out all night on frozen hilltops to await the belated arrival of a nobleman and his entourage. “Hospitality” is perhaps a somewhat misleading term, since it implies a spontaneous expression of warmth. The hospitality extended to visiting dignitaries was nothing of the sort; the archives of southern Baragaon include itemised lists detailing the entitlements of visitors according to their importance—right down to the number of cushions on which they might sit and the provision of a jug of water to stand on their bedside tables. We have already seen that the very act of leading the king’s horse by the bridle was part of a package of material and ceremonial services to which he was entitled—or not, as the case may have been.

The Shöyul’s obligations of hospitality extended to a list of named individuals—apparently noblemen of Tibetan Baragaon and Lo—who performed various intermediary functions between the enclave and the state. It seems that a number of unlisted people were taking advantage of the hospitality, because in 1909 the five villages resolved to take action. The resolution was passed on January 23, 1910, a few months before the Shöyul’s declaration of noncooperation with the king of Lo and the subsequent rescission of the *khurchang* dues. The document also makes a passing reference to a royal edict from Kathmandu (*lālmohar*) that appears to have given the villages a greater level of judicial autonomy than in the past. The text conveys something of a fighting mood. The policy of solidarity was paying off, and they were determined to press their advantage:

This is an agreement among the Five Shöyul. According to the unwritten tradition of our forebears, if a dispute arises in our community and someone comes to settle it, only a dignitary whose name is in the official register shall be considered as eligible [for hospitality]. Only the morning and evening meals shall be provided. [If the registered dignitary himself is indisposed], whoever comes in his lieu shall be accorded hospitality....

If [a dignitary] should come again within the year at another time than in spring, he shall not receive food or beer. (HMA/Te/Tib/50)

As in the case of resolutions concerning forthcoming meetings of Baragaon, there was clearly a risk that one or another of the five might sense an advantage in acting outside the agreement, and measures against potential treachery were duly taken. Security did not depend on an oath but on the vigilance of villages in detecting breaches of the rule in neighbouring communities. It was incumbent on any village that did observe such violations to report them to the whole community on pain of paying a fine. The document continues:

If one village does otherwise than stipulated above, another village that hears about it should inform the others. If the village [that detects the violation] does not impart this information [to the Shöyul], it shall be fined 8 rupees. If a village is informed [that a violation has occurred and an assembly is to be held] and it fails to attend [the assembly], it shall be fined 8 rupees.

Since there was no centralised organisation in the Shöyul, the procedure for transmitting information is also specified in the document:

If it is Taye that [detects a violation in a neighbouring village and] must send a message, two messengers must be sent: one to Tshug and one to Te. If it is Te that must send a message, one must be sent to Tshug and one to Tsele. If messengers are to be sent from Gyaga or Tsele, one must be sent to Te and one to Tshug.

We may reasonably assume that messages would pass between Tsele and Gyaga on the one hand and Taye and Tshug on the other without this needing to be spelt out.

## Conclusion

This, then, is the enclave that forms Te's immediate neighbourhood. The emphasis in this chapter has been on the relationship between the enclave as a



FIGURE 2.2. Ruined houses in the abandoned settlement of Kog, the provenance of three of Te's clans. The snow-capped mountain in the background is Gang Zhurpo, the territorial divinity of Kog.

whole and the surrounding political environment. The Shöyul as we see them today are the result of a demographic concentration process whereby a more scattered population was drawn into a remnant group of five settlements, and further set apart from its surroundings by the Tibetanisation of the rest of Baragaon.

The long-term advantage of the alliance was the relative security it provided against troublesome rulers and factions, but there was always a risk that this solidarity might be compromised by one of the five pursuing some short-term advantage against the common interest.

The next chapter will look beyond the unified front presented by the alliance to see the prevailing tensions underneath. Every village, of course, has its own story to tell; the point of view adopted in the survey is that of Te, since this is the only one that really matters here.

# 3

## Neighbours and Enemies

### A Fragile Alliance

There can be no doubt, from the evidence presented in chapter 2, that the confederation of the Shöyul was an important entity to which its members were genuinely committed; and that, even though the alliance might sometimes have opposed the immediate interests of the individual villages, the sacrifices required for its sustenance were abundantly rewarded in the long term by a greater security and other material advantages. We have also seen that the association of the five villages was something natural in view both of their shared obligations to the regional administration and of their ethnic distinctiveness.

I have presented the social and political environment of Te as a set of Russian dolls: Baragaon is inside Mustang; the Shöyul are inside Baragaon; Te is inside the Shöyul. All these various entities are, logically, outside Te. The entities that are most obviously and immediately outside Te are its closest neighbours. The territory of Te is bounded to the southeast by Dzong and Putra, to the east by Manang, to the north by Tangkya and Gelung, to the southeast and southwest by Taye, and to the west by Tshug. The border with Manang is padded out by a no-man's-land of impenetrable mountains, and Manang is therefore irrelevant in the matter of boundary maintenance. As I will show, disputes did arise between Te on the one hand

and Gelung, Dzong, and Tangkya on the other. But the bitterest conflicts Te ever experienced were with the Shöyul, and above all with its closest neighbour, Tshug. The rhetoric of solidarity that pervades the documents concerning the alliance creates a misleading impression of spontaneous amity among the five. The alliance was, rather, an evil necessity in which the five were obliged to participate in order to protect themselves from a more general menace. The oaths and financial penalties with which the alliance was protected are a preliminary indication that nothing could be left to chance. One's closest neighbours were potentially, by virtue of their very closeness, one's deadliest enemies.

If ever there was a community that could be described as tightly knit, it is Te. In later chapters I shall discuss the manifestation of this tightness in a unique system of internal administration and even the near-elimination from the community of what conventionally passes for religion. The fact of community insularity is not of course confined to Te, but may be observed in varying degrees in other villages of Mustang, perhaps most notably in the Shöyul and in Panchgaon. Documents from other villages suggest that extreme cautiousness with regard to outsiders was habitually enjoined on their inhabitants, although we have no way of knowing how these injunctions translated into behaviour. If these communities were in practice as xenophobic as Te, then the distinctive feature of the latter is the fact that it has retained this character up to today. Why it should have done so is explained partly by its location off the main north-south trade route, but mainly by a remarkably persuasive civic system.

For now, however, I am not concerned with the ways Te's insularity is perpetuated, but the circumstances in which it might have arisen in the first place. As we might expect, most of the items in the community archive are concerned with disputes of one sort or another. They may be local documents, but to suppose that they are representative of the pattern of daily life would leave us with a distorted view of history; they create the illusion that the past was made up of unmitigated strife. This surely cannot have been the case, and I do not apologise for repeating at intervals through this book the point that *longueurs* of peace and stability are absent from the record simply because they are not newsworthy. What must be understood, however, is that hostile encounters with neighbours are a regular feature in the fabric of history, and that the real possibility of conflict, whether bloody or merely irritating, is something of which the community has constantly been aware. A chronological survey of Te's intermittent difficulties with its neighbours will help us to appreciate their awareness of an ever-present menace, the particular forms it took, and the ways the community confronted it.

## Trouble with Jumla

The earliest record we have of friction between Te and its neighbours is a long Tibetan document contained in the community archives. The philological and historical problems presented by the text are analysed in some detail elsewhere;<sup>1</sup> so I can gloss over its many difficulties and concentrate on those aspects of it that are relevant to my immediate concerns.

The document—which, because of the tenor of its content, I shall refer to henceforth as the *Complaint*—was probably originally a single scroll that has now fallen into two pieces (parts 1 and 2). Part 1 contains 120 lines and the fragments of a few others. Part 2 contains 110 lines. Each part consists of a number of sections (identified by Roman numerals) dealing with different topics. A number of different, or possibly different, hands (identified by capital letters) are recognisable. The scroll was made by sheets of paper of varying length and width being pasted end to end. The coherence of the text is reduced by the fact that the sheets in question appear to have been written before the scroll was compiled, probably at different times, and some passages have been inserted in the wrong order. As if all this were not bad enough, the edges of the scroll have suffered a certain amount of wear and tear over the years, with the consequence that several passages consist of series of incomplete lines. Almost inevitably, the most badly damaged section is a passage that is historically the most interesting. The work is written in cursive script, and although it contains numerous vagaries of orthography as well as some idiomatic forms, both the handwriting and the style suggest a degree of erudition that is rarely matched in other documents of the archive. Today, scribal tasks are carried out by the Nyingmapa lamas of Tshognam. However, we know that Te once had a number of monks who were associated with the Sakyapa monasteries of the Muktinath valley. The likelihood that at least part of the work was written by a Sakyapa monk rather than a Nyingmapa lama is enhanced by a quotation from Sakya Pandita (1182–1251) at the end of section 8. No dates appear in the text, but certain indicators provide us with a clue as to when it may have been—and when it was not—written. An important hint is provided by the following two passages.

In the time of...[?] gardzong, the army of the Pöndrung and the armies of Thag and Som [and the army of Lo?]...when they surrounded Dangardzong with their armies, the dzong was abandoned...on top of the...os Pass [?]...the Tshugwas all turned back from the military camp...

...Also, from Lego [?] Sonam Pema said, "Wicked [people of] Tibet, in the past you [or, first of all you] . . .

...we shall see whether or not you/they send orders to the subjects [i.e. Baragaon?], he said. This point is [an instance of the way] they brought disgrace upon you. (pt. 1, ll. 84-88)

And later:

During the conflict between Tibet and Mon, we went to [the side of] the good [lit. white] people of Tibet. (pt. 1, ll. 117-18)

The second excerpt tells us simply that there was a war between Tibet and Mon, and that "we," the Tepas, fought on the side of the former.

The opening phrase of the section, "In the time of [Dang]gardzong," implies that Dangardzong had been destroyed by the time the document was written, and the remaining lines do appear to deal with the events that led up to its fall. The modern settlement of Dangardzong is situated to the west of the Kali Gandaki, near the larger village of Phelag. On a ridge to the west of the village are the ruins of a fortress locally called Drakardzong (presumably Brag dkar rdzong), "the Fortress of the White Crag." At the foot of the fortress it is possible to discern the remains of a settlement that, local folklore has it, was destroyed along with the defensive structures in some forgotten military action. The implication of this passage in the document is that Dangardzong was besieged, and possibly destroyed, by a combined force from Baragaon ("the army of the Pöndrung"), Thag, Thini (Som), and one other area: all that remains of this last location in the text is a subscript *l*, which suggests that the army in question may have been that of Lo (Tib. Glo bo), but this must remain conjectural. We do not know whether Dangardzong was being attacked because it was on the side of the Monpas, or because the Monpas were using Dangardzong as a stronghold.

Jumla helped Baragaon to secede from Lo in the second half of the eighteenth century. The two excerpts cited here tell us that this could not have been the conflict in question: first, Tibet is involved in the conflict; second, the Monpas are the enemies, not the allies; and finally, if Lo was involved, it was on the same side as Baragaon. A possible date is 1693, when a force from Dros Hö (Gro shod) in Tibet, under the leadership of the Mongol general Ganden Tshewang, helped the army of Lo to repel an attack by Jumla (Dhungel 2002: 107). Deferential reference is made to the ruling family of Baragaon—"you who protect us, the Kyagyal family" (pt. 1, ll. 20 and later). The first member of this family to come to Lo—at the instigation of the king—was a certain Tro-wobum (Tib. Khro bo 'bum), who settled in a place called Kyekyagang (Tib.

sKya rgyal sgang, among other spellings), a short distance to the east of Monthang. It was Trowobum's son, Trowo Kyabpa (Tib. Khro bo skyabs pa), who was sent to the Muktinath valley to rule southern Lo on behalf of the king in the first half of the sixteenth century (Schuh 1995: 42–43; 52–53). Absence of acknowledgement of any institutions and representatives of Jumla, and the ongoing skirmishing with "Monpas," suggests that Jumla had not yet established itself in the area.

Among the protagonists mentioned in this document are two kings: one is named as Big ram sras, the other Sa li ban (pt. 1, l. 91). "Big ram sras" almost certainly denotes King Vikramāśāhī, who ruled Jumla from 1602 to 1631 (Pandey 1997: 196–201); "Sa li ban" is probably Salivhana, a seventeenth-century Magar king of Jumla.<sup>2</sup> Another possibly identifiable figure is "the minister dBram shing" who appears in line 107 of part 1. A historical work from Lo, the *Mon thang bem chag*, refers to two diplomatic missions by a certain "minister Sram shing" of Jumla in the years 1638 and 1639 (Schuh 1994: 82). Both forms are undoubtedly attempts to reproduce the Hindu name "Rām Singh" in Tibetan, and it is likely that they are the same person. The events described in this document therefore seem to have taken place around the middle of the seventeenth century, and may concern the actions leading to Jumla's establishment of its hegemony in the region during the reign of [Vira]bahādur Śāhi (1635–65; see Pandey 1997: 202; Schuh 1994: 77).

The *Complaint* is precisely that: a long litany of grievances set down by the people of Te and sent to the rulers of Baragaon in the Muktinath valley. It may be supposed that this manuscript was a draft that was retained in the village. As a result of the damaged condition of the beginning and end of the scroll, neither the sender nor the addressee is specified, but the content of the work leaves us in little doubt as to the intention underlying the composition. The complaints relate to the behaviour of the people of Tshug, who are accused of having perpetrated a variety of crimes against other settlements in the region, but particularly against Te. The document appeals to the rulers of the region, the Kyekya Gangba nobles who reside in the Muktinath valley, to punish the Tshugwas for their misdemeanours. It points out that in addition to causing widespread suffering among the common people of Shö, the Tshugwas have violated a number of laws that were promulgated by the rulers. These grievances are especially interesting insofar as they tell us which laws were regarded at the time as having been promulgated by the Kyekya Gangba rulers.

The opening section of the *Complaint* (pt. 1, ll. 1–59) is devoted to a comparison of the law-abiding nature of the Tepas with the cavalier manner in which Tshug has flouted the laws of the Baragaon rulers, and is worth quoting at length:<sup>3</sup>

This, too, is an instance of how we, the Tepas, have honoured you. We would like to say a few things about the way we have been looking after our dependents. Even the dung from the hillsides has been measured out in baskets and divided up equally without consideration of status. If it happens that someone is left behind as the orphan of a poor man we have stipulated that no [poll] taxes need be paid for such a person before he or she reaches the age of thirteen. This is also an instance of how we honour you. If the wife of an unfortunate person dies, he does not need to come to the assembly place [to attend village meetings for a specified number of days?]. (pt. 1, ll. 1-7)

Lines 8, 9, and 10 of the text are too damaged to translate. The passage seems to mention payments to the community, which include “interest” and a quantity of beer made from one bushel (of grain).

(10) In this case too we have honoured you. Although the renouncer Paldendar has left the community, we have not dissolved his estate but have put Norpal there to occupy it. This, too, is an instance of the way we honour you. Tacang has gone off to lead a religious life. Kunga Tshering begged him to renounce his vows, but he would not agree to renounce. Although we told one of the sons of Tshering Lhundrup of Gyaga that we needed him as a substitute occupant he did not agree to come. Not only have we been unable to find a substitute occupant, do whatever we might, we have not harmed the integrity of the estate in any way. And furthermore, after Buchen Thorang left for the religious life our noble masters (20) told us to bring him back. We left the estate for one year without making any infringement on it. He has come [back] here after becoming a bard. While awaiting [the relevant] permission from you nobles, he has not shared any utensils at all with us Tepas (lit. “mixed mouths”). We have let Yungdrung Norzab beg for his flour beside the water mill, and have occupied ourselves with his [possible] tenancy of [the empty estate]. This, too, is an instance of how we honour you. You nobles have heard whether or not we have reduced the corvée obligations of those [households] with few [lit. no] family members, and the tax payments of those with little wealth.

But those Tshugwas have brought disgrace on you. Those Tshugwas have (30) killed the only son of Mar Sonam. The responsibility for depopulating [lit. emptying] the community of the people

of Tsele lies with the Tshugwas. Kindly reflect on whether this is to your honour or your disgrace. The Tshugwas, for their part, speak as if they honoured you highly [?]; but they turned their backs on the Pöndrung Kyekya Gangba and [defected?] to Tsarang. Please consider whether this is honour or disgrace. Even though Tshelden defected, your lordships forgave him. His son returned here [to Tshug], but the Tshugwas had appropriated his estate and would not give it to him. Please consider whether this is an act of honour or contempt. Namkha Samdrup left the community. However, [the Tshugwas] did not call him back but occupied his estate and will not give it to him [now that he has returned?]. (40) Please consider whether this is to your honour or your disgrace. Göpa left the community. They did not bring him back but appropriated his estate, acting in such a way as to violate the law (lit. destroy the doctrine) and remove its foundations. Please consider whether or not this constitutes something that disgraces you. And furthermore, after Lodrö Dondrup left the community they took away his estate. They did not bring him back, but seized it—please consider whether or not this tends towards the destruction of the community. Then Lhundrub also ran away, and they seized his entire estate. Please consider whether or not this comprises a fundamental violation of the law.

Not only this, because the powerful ones among you Tshugwas did not make up the small tax deficits of the Tshugwas in your care, the Monpas (50) seized Samdrup by the neck and enslaved him/her. Palbar's sister, Palmo, has also been enslaved by the Monpas.

Tshering Dondrub's mother has seized Namoche by the neck and has enslaved Namoche for life. Both Lugti and her daughter have been seized by the neck and enslaved.... Moreover, they have taken seven bushels of barley as well as meat and beer from Sangye Shime, the son of Lugu, [in return for a debt of] a side of mutton. These things, too, are a disgrace to our rulers. (pt. I, ll. 10-59)

This initial section contrasts the civic virtues of Te with the violations committed by the people of Tshug. It is evident that there were certain laws to which members of all communities were obliged to conform, but we do not know whether they were actually introduced, or merely reconfirmed, by the Kyekya Gangba rulers. Thus the Tepas, who emphasise that they have been taking care of the weaker members of their community, provide a number of illustrations of their law-abiding nature. To summarise:

- There has been an equitable distribution of animal dung (a valuable source of fuel and fertiliser) among all villagers irrespective of their status.
- Orphans under thirteen years of age have been exempted from paying poll taxes to the community.
- Compassionate leave of absence from village duties has been granted to recently bereaved householders.
- Transportation duties for households with few members have been reduced, and the tax burden of poorer members of the community has been lightened.
- Te has complied with laws against the dissolution of estates.

These instances of civic conformism are then contrasted with the offences of the Tshugwas, who have “turned their backs on the Pöndrung Kyekya Gangba.” There is a reference to Tsarang in the same sentence, but because of damage to the text we unfortunately do not know the relevance of this town in the context. We may only speculate on the possibility that there was some tension between the noble rulers of Tsarang and those of the Muktinath valley, and that Tshug is being accused of some treacherous association with the former.

The document then lists several examples of how Tshug, in contrast with Te, has failed to abide by the rule whereby abandoned estates should not be dissolved, and has even gone so far as to forbid those who have returned to the village to reclaim their property—behaviour that, as the document points out, “tends towards the destruction of the community.” Furthermore, in contrast to the compassion shown by the Tepas to the poor of their community, the Tshugwas have enslaved a number of individuals who were unable to pay their poll taxes, and have extorted from certain defaulting debtors property greatly exceeding the value of the debt.

### Tshug's Territorial Ambitions

A particularly intriguing remark is the assertion that “the responsibility for depopulating the community of the people of Tsele lies with the Tshugwas.” What is meant by this? The accusation is clarified in the second section:

We think that [the Tshugwas] should pay the taxes for the abandoned settlements of Chuwer, Samar, Kyudeng, and Tsumpag. They are using the pastures and fields of these places. We think that they should be responsible for [performing] the government transportation duties [accruing to these abandoned settlements].

The main responsibility for causing these small settlements to be abandoned lies with the Tshugwas. Please allocate the government transportation duties of these small settlements to them. If you do not so allocate them, please divide up these hill-fields among all us people of the Shöyul, and (70) give them to us. Please note that the government transportation duties of these abandoned settlements are being borne by all of us Shöpas. Thinking that if the villages of Gyaga and Tsele too were uninhabited they would take them for themselves, [the Tshugwas] are putting pressure on all their pastures and fields. Concerning our salt mines: in the capital towns<sup>4</sup> everyone has been exempted from paying taxes except for those who are exploiting the pastures and fields. Only if everyone can use Tshug's extensive pasturelands (80) shall we let them [use] our salt mines. We Tepas settled here only for our salt mines. If [the fields of] Chuwer are planted, whoever does the planting should be responsible for fulfilling the transportation duties pertaining to Chuwer's section of the trail. (pt. 1, ll. 60-83)

The accusation may be summarised as follows. Tshug was responsible for annihilating four villages: Chuwer, Samar, Kyudeng, and Tsumpag; it was also responsible for the partial destruction of two other settlements, Gyaga and Tsele. The consequence of this aggression—and, it is implied, the motive behind it—is the possession of the farming and grazing land of the victims. Before proceeding any further, it would be as well to examine the veracity of these accusations.

In chapter 2, some attention was given to the abandoned settlements to be seen in the territory of the Shöyul. Among these were three sites named in this extract: Chuwer, Kyudeng, and Tsumpag. Tsumpag is adjacent to Tshug, and the abandoned fields and forests near the settlement are all part of Tshug's territory (see fig. 2.1). Kyudeng is located between Tsele and Samar, but although it is not contiguous with Tshug, it is undisputedly part of Tshug's territory. Chuwer, too, was a part of Tshug's territory until it was claimed and won by Samar in a recent legal case. In short, the territorial configuration of today lends credence to the *Complaint's* assertion that Tshug occupied the territories of these of these communities, and probably drove out the inhabitants in order to do so. In the case of Samar, as we have seen, the present population is said to be fairly recent, and we have little reason to doubt the *Complaint's* statement that the place was empty at the time of writing. No mention is made in the document about the village of Tamshel, north of Chuwer, which is even now part of the territory of Tshug. Since clans originating in both Tamshel and

Tsumpag are represented today in Tshug, it may be supposed that the latter was not averse to taking in refugees from the territories they were annexing. It may well be the case that Tshug dealt roughly with its weaker neighbours, but we should not ignore the possibility that the inhabitants of Tamshel, at least, chose to abandon their settlement and bring the usufruct of its lands with them in exchange for the relative security of living in a large, fortified town.

### The Distribution of Transport Obligations

But the *Complaint* is less concerned with the violence perpetrated by Tshug on its neighbours than with the injustice of the resulting state of affairs. The argument runs as follows: transport duties on behalf of the ruler were shared equally among all the villages of the Shöyul. Four of these villages have now ceased to exist, and the burden has therefore been redistributed among the remaining five (we must assume from the context that Samar, too, was subject to transportation duties at this time); but if the duties are redistributed evenly, usufruct of the territory of the abandoned villages must also be apportioned out equally among the survivors. In fact Tshug is monopolising this usufruct, and this being the case it alone should inherit the duties of the empty villages. If the Tshugwas continue to prevent the Tepas from using the pastures, the Tepas will reciprocate by forbidding them to use Te's salt mines. (I shall say more about these mines.) The *Complaint* compares this situation with that which prevails "in the great *dzongs*"—by which we should probably understand all the communities under the aegis of Dzar, Dzong, Kag, and perhaps Dangardzong—where the tax obligations of any settlement are paid only by those who use its fields and pastures.

It is worth leaving the *Complaint* for a moment to examine another brief document from the Te archives that supplements the information provided here. This item consists of two sheets of paper sewn end-to-end to form a short scroll. The upper sheet is badly damaged, and only the last two of the remaining seven lines are complete. However, it is the second sheet, containing lines 8–19, which is largely intact, that is of interest here. There are no dates, but it is reasonable to assume that the fragment is roughly contemporary with the *Complaint*, since both refer to the unpeopling of Chuwer by Tshug, apparently as a recent event.

The wolfish Tshugwas are like the proverb "what a horse eats will not be sufficient for a sheep." We beg you to consider this behaviour. The Tshugwas repeatedly claim that they are suffering hardship. They

have come to press us on the matter of [obligations concerning] their land as well as their taxes and transportation duties. We pray you, consider this behaviour! Force the Tshugwas to take part in [the obligations concerning] the land on which we Tepas live, as well as our taxes and our transportation duties! According to past usage, it was customary for the class of people concerned with transportation duties to [have to travel] only from Dzar, Dzong, and Kag up to the Shöyul, and from the Shöyul, to Chuwer. Those Tshugwas have put an end to the people of Chuwer. Those Tshugwas never fail to win [?]. Please judge the matter. Otherwise, please grant that we Tepas may be exempted from [transportation duties across?] the Muya Pass. (HMA/Te/Tib/37)

This excerpt sheds some interesting light on the nature of transportation duties under the Baragaon lords. It is implied that the first stage of portage duties northward on behalf of Dzar, Dzong, and Kag, the three main “capitals” of Baragaon, extended up to the Shö enclaves. Although we are not told who was charged with this section, it is likely to have been Phelag, which, as we have already seen, shared the burden of transportation duties with the Shöyul until the early part of this century. The second staging post is said here to have been Chuwer, although there is no mention of the village or villages of the Shöyul that were responsible for this leg of the journey. In the concluding sentence the Tepas say that if the various wrongs against them are not redressed, they wish no longer to have to cross the Muya Pass as part of their transportation duty. The Muya, as we have seen, is the pass that divides the Muktinath valley—more specifically, the settlement of Dzong—from Te’s territory. It may be concluded from this that at least a part of the transportation requirements of the Tepas involved them travelling through the eastern route via Dzong, rather than down the Kali Gandaki valley to Kag.

### Pillage, Arson, and Betrayal: Te Stands Alone

But the injuries suffered by Te were more grievous than the injustice of disproportionate corvée labour. The *Complaint* again:

(90) While a detailed account would be [as dense as] the constellations, we shall present a brief summary [of the main features], like the sun and the moon.

... King Salivahana and his minister, Gyampalzang, those two, ... to Tshug

...this is the first instance of [the Tshugwas] bringing disgrace [on you?].

The Tshugwas said, If [we] can...the Tepas' caves, the other Shöpa will give themselves up [?]. They were longing to...from the secret [entrance?]...of the caves....This is the second point.

Those who would seize the caves, the Khawa [?] and the Tshugwas...as far as they were able to. They brought the Monpas and pillaged as much of the harvest as there was—this is the third point.

But they were not satisfied with that. When the Monpas left them, the Tshugwas set [fire?] to the houses of the Tepas—this is the fourth point.

Furthermore, they channelled stolen water into the sprouting crops...

...The Tshugwas said, “Apart from Dzar and Dzong, everyone has surrendered; you, too, must surrender. If you [do not?] surrender, later on, in the end, it will not be good.” They came to tell us that—this is the fifth point....

(100)...Not only this, the people of Taye, Gyaga, and Tsele had to surrender. The fact that they were left with no option but to submit was the doing of the Tshugwas—this is the sixth point.

The...who were headed by Alcangpar said, “Come and collect the compensation for your [damaged] crops.” But in actual fact they [the Tshugwas?] betrayed us to the Monpas and we, a noble people led by our Headmen, were almost annihilated—this is the seventh point.

Then, the Monpas ceased their actions against us (?). [Our?] Headmen...

...Until support from [the?] Bamen<sup>5</sup> came we were able to take care...

...Then, following the example of the Tshugwas, in the same way as at the dzong [?]. . . the Bamen, the minister Ram Singh and Alcangpar, those three...go into the dzong. Because the dzong could hold out only for a few days, this time it would be best to avoid [launching a direct attack?]. This is what they decided. The Tshugwas are the ones who are primarily responsible for [digging a way into?] Dangardzong—(110) this is the eighth point.

...ought to seize the harvest of us Tepas and the harvest of seven households in the vicinity of Dzar,...and at that time we [?] were unable to gather the ears of barley [?].—this is the ninth point.

When [we] Tepas, powerful and lowly alike, took refuge in the Cliff Caves of the Birds, we had [nothing] to eat but dried buckwheat stalks and leaves. The Tshugwas are the main reason for thirteen of the Tepas' hearths leaving the community—this is the tenth point.

Like sparrows filled with grain that . . . the proud royal vulture,<sup>6</sup> with the support of the Monpas they acted arrogantly, saying that they would punish us in the crags and in the dzong (or in Dangardzong?)—this is the eleventh point. (pt 1, ll. 90–117)

Part of the problem with understanding the events described here is the uncertain identity of the “Monpas,” whom the Tshugwas appear to have been backing. On the face of it, it seems that the treachery of Tshug against its neighbours went as far as supporting Jumla against the Kyekya Gangba dukes. “Monpa” may also refer to some other group of southerners such as Parbat, who are known to have intervened in later conflicts between Lo and Jumla (see, for example, Dhungel 2002: 108, 110). If this is the case, then the Monpas are friendly forces who were behaving in an undisciplined manner toward the local civilian population, and the Tshugwas were profiting from their excesses. If not, and the Monpas are indeed the hostile troops of Jumla, then we are confronted with the extraordinary spectacle of a member of the Baragaon enclave acting against the interests of all the others. How could it be that Tshug was in a position to ally itself with an enemy of both the Muktinath valley and of Lo? Tshug, and indeed the other Shöyul, seem at this stage to have enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy from the Muktinath valley than they did in later times. As I said in chapter 1, the name Baragaon (Tib. *Yul kha bcu gnyis*) means the “Twelve Villages,” but actually denotes a group of eighteen settlements. We know that by the mid-seventeenth century, Tshug and its neighbours were regarded as part of Baragaon. Could it be that, prior to the events described in the *Complaint*, the Shöyul were not directly under the jurisdiction of the dukes of the Muktinath valley, and that they were reined in only after the subsequent reprisals against Tshug—mentioned in the text—by the Kyekya Gangba dukes? The exclusion of the five Shöyul and Samar would leave us with twelve villages—possibly the eponymous core group. In the absence of supporting evidence, however, this must remain conjectural for now.

In any event, in the Muktinath valley only Dzar and Dzong seem to have been able to hold out against the invaders, while Te stood alone in the Shöyul. But the price of Te’s resistance was high: the attackers destroyed the harvest and forced the Tepas to take refuge in “the Cliff Caves of the Birds”—almost certainly the complex that is usually referred to nowadays as the Homes of the Ancestors (see fig. 6.1)—where they faced starvation; a number of houses were

abandoned, but the community held firm. The contrasting image of a majestic vulture being pestered by thieving passerines is repeated in the second part of the *Complaint*:

(5) To relate briefly the story of the Tshugwas' thieving. Under the leadership of Gatrug they stole two and a half *zho* in cash from the cave of the Tepas Drungpa and Sangye—this is the first point. And then someone with information entered the storeroom, and brought someone with [the appropriate technical] knowledge (10) as an enemy [?]. After that Zhanglhakyab deceived the sentry of the caves of us Tepas, and from inside Horbum's cave stole one and a half *zho* of gold and a sack used for transport service—this is the second point.

And then they have stolen so many goats from us Tepas. When Tshering Dondrub and Namkha Samdrub disputed the matter with them, they all thought that their den of thieves would be revealed, one by one—this is the third point.

And furthermore, it has become publicly known [or: it emerged last year?] that Gadrug burgled Drungpa's cave—this is the fourth point.

And then, *Samchog*, who committed robbery in the caves of the people of Gyaga, *killed an old woman who was on guard* [deleted]—(20) this is the fifth point.

And then they stole the contents of Dorje Paljor's trunk [? *zan tshul* < *zem*?] from inside his very house. They broke his trunk [?—this is the sixth point.

When [we?] went to war in Neshang<sup>7</sup> . . . [remainder of sentence too damaged to translate]—this is the seventh point.

Then they went to Namgyal<sup>8</sup> and stole from there—this is the eighth point.

Being unable to stay in one place because of their awareness of their own guilt about stealing, they fled and came back here, and were consequently punished by the Pöndrung nobles. This (30) you are aware of.

Furthermore, the Tepas are like the proud royal vultures in the high caves of the upper cliffs; the Tshugwas are like grain-eating sparrows that do nothing but steal property. You who protect us, the Kyekya family, kill these grain-eating sparrows at one stroke like a hawk! (pt. 2, ll. 5-34)

The events referred to in this excerpt (written in a different hand from the passages cited earlier) clearly took place at a different time from those docu-

mented in the first part. They have the character of acts of petty peacetime banditry, rather than of offences perpetrated against whole communities during the general mayhem of war. Moreover, the Kyekya rulers, instead of being besieged in their strongholds, are in a position to do something about the misbehaviour of their Tshugwa subjects. In this case, the Tepas are not lodging any formal complaint, as due punishment against their neighbours seems to have been meted out. They are merely listing the Tshugwas' offences in various parts of Mustang for the sake of the record.

The next section (written in the same hand as section 5 earlier) brings the narrative back to a period of war, and the injustices suffered by Te over the system of military corvée that was imposed in the villages.

In the past when King Vikramaśāhī [of Jumla] came, on his way down after defeating... Drakmar, the transportation requirements for... his army were too onerous.

They said that a recruitment had to be carried out. This is not our custom, [the Tshugwas?] said, and did not comply in recruiting anyone. Although we (40) organised everyone who was capable of working, they said that we had to send more people to make up the insufficiency of transport personnel. All the senior [Tshugwas] came, led by the Headmen Pema Trashi and Tshering Dondrup. After slandering us to the Monpas, [the Tshugwas or Monpas or both?] destroyed the crops of two of our fields without leaving anything behind, and then set fire to the houses in the village.

[We?] were able to put out the fire of the Bamen. Since [the Tshugwas] did not agree to provide the additional transport workers who had to be enlisted, we had to bear the burden. It had not been customary to carry out recruitments in the past. It was therefore said that, if the king should come in the future, recruitment would be carried out for both northbound and southbound transport duties. (pt. 2, ll. 36-49)

The remainder of the *Complaint* is largely concerned with details of the way the Shöyl went about organising this corvée labour. The accusing finger now turns on other villages of the Shöyl—specifically, Taye and Gyaga—and Phelag. The narrative, which consists of summary exchanges between individuals of unidentified provenance, instances of to-ing and fro-ing on the part of village representatives and various missed encounters, is hard to follow, but the gist is clear. These other villages, too, have been conspiring with Tshug against Te. The tenor of the passage is summarised in an appropriate quotation:

If we reexamine the matter . . . as King Songtsen Gampo says, "Those who are drawn to wickedness are more numerous than those who are drawn to good; well-born people do noble deeds; for the crimes we have committed we lay the blame on others; for fear that we ourselves might go hungry we turn our fathers out." So he says, and leaders such as you must also think this. (pt. 2, ll. 51-57)

The quotation—whose provenance I have not been able to identify—is as damning an assessment as might be found of the vulnerability of the Shöyul's fragile alliance to the self-interested action of its members. "They are all," we are later assured, "wicked deceivers."

In spite of their various hardships, however, the Tepas eventually gained the upper hand. Whatever may have been the historical outcome of these hostilities, the *Complaint* gives Te the final credit for the humbling of Tshug:

The Tshugwas, like poisonous snakes, have harmed all the lords and servants of Serib; the Tepas, like the great *khyung* in the sky, have destroyed the poisonous snake at a stroke. (pt. 2, ll. 87-90)

This is the third occasion—if we exclude the reference to the Tepas' taking refuge in "the Cliff Caves of the Birds"—on which the Tepas are explicitly assimilated to vultures or the mythical eagle called *khyung*. In this case, the image of the *khyung* is developed more powerfully to accord with the mythology and iconography of this creature by changing the Tshugwas from sparrows (which are contrasted with vultures) to snakes, which *khyung* characteristically kill and devour.

### The Ngolak Pasture Dispute with Gelung

The period covered by the *Complaint* may have represented an uncommonly low point in Te's relations with its neighbours—particularly Tshug—but conflicts with the surrounding communities continued to arise from time to time. The two commonest causes of disputes between neighbouring villages in Mustang are on the one hand shared irrigation sources and on the other usufruct of pastures. Since the water for Te's fields is drawn from sources that are not used or claimed by any other settlements, it has been spared this problem (unlike, say, Gyaga and Tsele, whose common stream has been a cause of recurrent and sometimes violent argument). Claims to pastureland, by contrast, have not always been undisputed. The territory of Te, as we have seen, adjoins that of six other communities in Mustang: Dzong, Putra, Taye,

Tshug, Gelung, and Tangkyā. An undated Tibetan document from Te, which I shall discuss, says that the boundary between Dzong and Te was fixed by a certain King Surtise. This is probably a reference to King Surataśāhī,<sup>9</sup> who ruled Jumla in the first half of the eighteenth century and fought a war with Mustang (Pandey 1997: 204).

The important thing to note is that this border, like the territorial divisions within the Muktinath valley, was established not by the mutual consent of the communities concerned but by the authority of a ruler. Te's northern boundaries, by contrast, were not legitimised by royal edict. The circumstances are described in a Tibetan document from Te (HMA/Te/Tib/56).

After requesting [damaged] to act as witness, for the establishment of the pasture boundaries of Gelung, Te, Tshug, and Tangkyā, the four villages swore an oath, with a red meadow below them as a seat, wearing a red copper vessel on their heads, appearing naked but for a black yak lead-rope around their waists, and the boundaries were fixed. [The boundaries are then described.] On an auspicious day and date the four villages met at Gelung and reached this agreement about pastures. This document has been affirmed by being passed from hand to hand among the people of Gelung who are led by their Headmen.

The text is then affirmed by eight representatives of Tshug and Te, and three of Tangkyā. The final sentence says that “this document was written on a high peak [possibly a place name] by the nobleman Norbu.”

In this case, the lines were not drawn by a ruler but settled by a strange and solemn oath on the part of representatives of the four communities concerned. Someone—whether god or human dignitary is obscured by damage to the text—is present as a witness, but whoever it may have been is clearly not regarded as the author of the boundaries.

Unfortunately, this agreement cannot be dated with any certainty. The top of the scroll is badly damaged, and all that can be seen of the date is “... [day], the eighth day of the third month in a female ... bird year.” The element that precedes the animal is unfortunately completely missing. Following the date (the eighth) is a syllable of which only the last letter, -ng, is visible. This may be a remnant of the word *bzang*, “good”—that is, auspicious—an epithet that also appears toward the conclusion of the document, or else the end of the word for Friday, *pa sangs*, lacking the final -s (an orthographic error that is not at all unusual in this type of literature). Bird years occur every twelve years, but the latest bird year in which the eighth day of the third month fell on a Friday was 1729.

A boundary dispute between Te and Tshug flared up in 1796. The matter was settled following adjudication by Trithob Trowo Palgön, the lord of Baragaon. The details of the quarrel are not provided in the relevant document (HMA/Te/Tib/39), but the text asserts that witnesses confirmed the validity of a certain “earlier document.” The affirmation ends with the statement that

people may gather wood and dung from the pastures of their own territory, and none may prevent them from doing so. Whoever does not abide by this ruling shall pay a fine of 1,000 rupees to His Most Precious Majesty [*rgyal zhabs rin po che*—probably signifying whoever happens to be the supreme authority at the time] and 500 rupees to Trithob Trowo Palgön.

We therefore know that, in 1796, there was an existing boundary settlement that was regarded as authoritative. The likelihood that the agreement in question was document HMA/Te/Tib/39 is increased by circumstantial evidence that I shall discuss.

Relations between Te and Gelung seem to have remained generally amicable. Apart from one clash, when Te complained that the lord of Baragaon was unjustly favouring Gelung in an otherwise unrecorded argument over pastures, the only major dispute occurred in 1928. Because the legal battleground for this case was the government court in Thak, the affair is for the most part recorded in the Nepali documents—more than a dozen of them—from Te’s archive. The development of the quarrel is best summarised by paraphrasing the content of the relevant documents, as follows.

(1) The matter first arises in June 1928, with a request by Te to Chandra Samser Rana, the prime minister of Nepal, to order the Thak court to recover the value of animals, dung, and other property that have been stolen by Gelung, and to reconfirm Te’s ownership of an area of pasture called Ngolak (Karmacharya n.d. 3.36).

(2) This is followed, two weeks later, by an official complaint made directly to the Thak court, apparently by a noblewoman (the Nepali rendering of the name is not clear) representing Te. The letter requests the court to take action against a group of villagers of Gelung and Tamagang (a satellite of Gelung) for stealing 103 goats, five sackloads of salt, and ten sacks, and subsequently burning the animals. The letter concludes with the reminder that Ngolak has traditionally been the common territory of four villages: Tshug, Tangkyā, Gelung, and Te (Karmacharya n.d. 3.51).

(3) Te apparently does not wait passively for the course of justice. In July 1908, Gelung, represented by a Thakali intermediary, submits its own official complaint to the Thak court, claiming that Te has committed an act of banditry

and demanding compensation of 1,318 rupees 31 paise, representing the value of the property that has been stolen (Karmacharya n.d. 3.31, 3.47, 3.48).

(4) Te responds (Karmacharya n.d. 3.40, 3.62, 3.63) to this complaint in August 1928 with a rejoinder (*pratiuttapatra*), demanding that the fifteen plaintiffs of Gelung, represented by the Thakali author, be punished for filing a “false and fictitious statement” and denying the charge of banditry. The rejoinder further insists that Ngolak pasture be recognised as the territory of Te alone (contrary to what they had argued earlier) and invokes a certain boundary settlement that was drawn up in “the third month of the Tibetan year Samojhya.”

(5) A few months later, in December 1928, the community of Te assembles and formulates a policy of suspending commercial relations with its troublesome neighbours. Since this policy is not relevant to the ongoing legal case, it is written in Tibetan as a sort of internal memorandum (HMA/Te/Tib/44). The document records the Tepas’ resolution: to desist from lending cash and grain to Tshug, Tsele, and Gelung; to prevent indigent members of the community from engaging in casual labour for these three villages; that Tepa traders should not sell salt to Mohan Man Subba. Anyone who violates these conditions will be fined.

Even now, in Baragaon, legal disputes between two villages are often enough accompanied by the suspension of all economic and social exchanges between the quarrelling parties. At the time of writing, Kag and Dzar, in the Muktinath valley, are engaged in a protracted legal battle over the ownership of an area of grazing land. (Interestingly, the main obstacle to reconciliation is an ambiguous passage in the boundary decree, mentioned earlier, attributed to Pöndrung Trokyawa, the first member of the Kyekya Gangba family to settle in the Muktinath valley.) Each of the two villages has passed an internal ruling to the effect that no one may spend the night in the opposing village or sell so much as a cup of tea to any of its members who happen to be passing through.

What is particularly interesting in this document is the revelation that although the actual legal case is confined to Gelung, the orbit of informal hostility includes Tshug and Tsele. There are two possible reasons why the embargo might have extended to them. First, because they may have been known to be actively supporting Gelung in the dispute; second, they may have been neutral, but the prospect of members of its community working and sleeping in these villages was deemed too great a security risk in Te. During the dispute between Dzar and Kag mentioned earlier, it was for a while forbidden—on pain of paying a fine or 10,000 rupees to the community—for any Kagpa to stay overnight in Jomsom. When spending the night anywhere away from home, there is always the likelihood of getting drunk and saying too much; and careless talk costs pastures.

It is not clear why the Tepas should have banned the sale of salt to Mohan Man Subba, the Thakali customs contractor at the time. It is probably quite simply that he was supporting Gelung in the dispute, and that the Tepas did not wish to trade with him on principle. In any event, it is clear that it is not Mohan Man who is intended by the reference to “him who has been placed in charge of the government office in Thak,” an uncommonly sycophantic (nowhere else are Te’s headmen described as being led by any outsider) turn of phrase that seems to indicate Te’s hopes for a happy outcome to the legal process. For the further development of the case we must turn again to Te’s Nepali archive.

(6) In February 1929, Gelung sends a rejoinder to a complaint (which is not preserved in the archive) by Te, requesting the recognition of its ownership of Ngolak pastureland (Karmacharya n.d. 3.42).

(7) The documents are silent about the further development of the dispute until April 1931, when the Thak court issues a summons (*purji*) to the headman of Te, informing him that Gelung has been found not guilty of the offences of which Te has originally accused it, and informing him that Te has three days in which to appeal against the verdict (Karmacharya n.d. 3.57).

(8) In May 1931, the Tepas write to Bhim Samser Rana, the prime minister, requesting a staying order in the name of the Thak court with regard to the banditry case against Gelung (Karmacharya n.d. 3.37).

(9) They follow this up in June with a petition to a touring general, requesting him to suspend the verdict of March 1931 by the Thak court on the grounds that Gelung and Te have already reached an out-of-court settlement (Karmacharya n.d. 3.38).

(10) The last item in the series dates from January 1932. It is an adjudication (*tajbipatra*) from the Thak court finding Te not guilty of the act of banditry of which it had been accused by Gelung.

The exchange peters out at this point. Te and Gelung may have been fighting the matter out in court, but the legal dimension of the case seems to have been something of a sideshow. Between February 1929, when Gelung made its last official claim to Ngolak, and the verdict of the court in March 1931, the two parties must have become impatient with the law’s delay and sorted the affair out by themselves: Te’s two responses to the verdict suggest a certain amount of surprise at the unexpected resurgence of a case that they obviously considered closed. How was the matter sorted out? Unfortunately, we are not told, but one interesting feature of Te’s last claim—number 4—is the invocation of a boundary settlement drawn up in “the third month of the Tibetan year Samojhya.” “Samojhya” is a Nepali rendering of the Tibetan *sa mo bya*, the Female Earth Bird year. The nearest Earth Bird year to this dispute was 1909.

Another Nepali document in the archive, concerning a boundary dispute involving Tshognam (which is spread across the territorial line separating Tshug from Te) also invokes a settlement “concluded in the third month of the Tibetan year Samojhya.” Although this document is undated, it does say that the Samojhya settlement was “later confirmed by Commanding General Ranabir Jang Bahadur in BS 1938,” that is, AD 1881. The Earth Bird year in question must have been earlier than 1909.

The three preceding Earth Bird years were 1849, 1789, and 1729. As we have seen, there are grounds for dating the original boundary between Te, Gelung Tshug, and Tangkyä (document HMA/Te/Tib/56) to 1729. No element is mentioned in the date of that agreement, but it is stated to have been written in the third month—the same month that is given in the case of the Earth Bird year agreement cited as authoritative in two Nepali documents.

So we cannot be sure, but it seems likely at least that the point of reference for the resolution of the conflict between Te and Gelung was an occasion, two hundred years earlier, when representatives of four communities swore an oath to maintain the boundaries while seated on a red meadow, wearing a red copper vessel on their heads, and naked but for a black yak lead-rope around their waists.

### Boundary Disputes between Te and Tshug

After this quadripartite boundary settlement, there appear to have been no problems between Te and Tangkyä. The surroundings of Kog are both claimed and used by graziers of Tangkyä. Although the *Chronicle*—as well as other documents of Te—refer to Kog as lying within the latter’s territory, the area is too far away from the village to constitute grounds for a dispute.

Te’s relations with Taye, too, have for the most part been friendly. The only clash mentioned in the Nepali archives of Te is an episode in 1982—and then only implicitly—when the two villages came to an agreement over a contested irrigation source.

None of the Tibetan documents in the collection reveals any disagreements—apart from the *Complaint*—in which Taye is accused of having aligned itself with Tshug. A reference to the spirit of cooperation between the two is contained in an undated, but certainly old, Tibetan document that was provoked by an argument with Dzong, with which Te shares its south-eastern boundary. This short work (HMA/Tib/Te/55) is issued by “his precious majesty” (*si ri... rgyal bzhab rin po che bzhabs nas*), probably a reference to the Gorkha government, but the authors are evidently the community of Te itself.

The opening lines of the text seem to claim that certain areas of land belong to Te on the grounds that they were declared by King Surataśāhī (see earlier) as lying within the village's territory, and that the Tepas have been collecting fuel on these pastures for several generations. "But you people of Dzong built Yungtre corral [on this land]. We Tepas toppled it into the gorge so that not a single stone was left. It is our territory." Somewhat later, during the time of the headmen Pema Gyatsho and Orgyan Palsang, an appeal was made (by Dzong?) to the nobles, and the nobles summoned Zangpo of Putra (more accurately, Butra, Tib. Bu 'khra). Zangpo assured the nobles that he could remember Tepas collecting fuel from a corral in the disputed area. The nobles apparently took this as sufficient evidence that the usufruct of the land in question traditionally belonged to Te, and "the matter was quietened down."

The boundaries were later fixed authoritatively, apparently by the representatives of the Gorkha government, who set up flagpoles near the Muya La, which separates Te from Dzong. The document closes with the information that

in the third month, when the people of Te and Taye customarily held their gathering, each would contribute half a *gyangbu* of beer, and they would assemble. . . . Then we would cut willows from the head of the irrigation canal and set them as bridges at Gyung-ngamce—this, too, was customary.

It is clear from many of the documents I have discussed so far that the pastures are seen not merely as grazing land, but as the source of the precious dung that the herds leave behind them. In certain cases, non-Tepas have been permitted to use Te's pastures for grazing, on the condition that they did not remove any natural resources from the territory. Many families of Tibetan nomads who crossed into Nepal in 1959, following the annexation of Tibet by China, were permitted to live with their herds on Te's pastures. Originally they were required to pay a nominal quantity of butter as a grazing fee, but even this was waived a decade or so ago. The two Tibetan families who now live on the high pastures were permitted to remain without charge, as long as they carried no dung or fuel beyond Te's frontiers. A similar policy had already been adopted with regard to the village of Chongkhor, Dzong's eastern neighbour in the Muktinath valley.

According to a written agreement between Te and Chongkhor (HMA/Te/Tib/54) drawn up in a Water Dragon year (1892/1952), Chongkhor is allowed to pitch tents and to graze yaks and dzos at certain times of year in the pastureland between the Tiu La and the Muya La passes.

If they go a little way [eastward] toward Tsala by a nose or a mouth [i.e., just a short distance] the Tepas shall not complain. They may collect firewood and uproot *betsera* [*Caragana* thorn-bushes] for the dzos [as fodder], but they may not take wood or dung beyond the boundary to Dzardzong [the Muktinath valley], or they shall be fined according to village custom. They must pay 10 rupees to Te every year before the sixth month [July]. Dzos from other villages may not be mingled with Chongkhor's animals, or there shall be a fine of 10 rupees per animal.

The ducal edict of 1796 (document HMA/Te/Tib/39) issued a stern reminder to Te and Tshug that “people may take wood and dung from pastures of their own territory, and none may prevent them from doing so.” The historically poor relationship between the two villages was exacerbated by the fact that Te’s access to certain of its grazing areas involved passing through land that belonged to Tshug. In view of the climate of potential hostility prevailing between the two villages, this territorial configuration has on a number of occasions provided the trigger for open conflict. The *Complaint* cites several instances of banditry committed by Tshug against Te. The latter’s archives contain ample evidence to show that the periodical antipathy between the two villages did not end in the early eighteenth century. This is clear from a cursory examination of the relevant documents.

(1) The 1796 edict was not the first occasion on which the ruler, Trowo Palgön, had intervened in a pasture dispute between the two communities. A Nepali document, the translation of a 1781 ruling by the duke, orders Tshug to allow the Tepas to cross its territory when carrying dung and wood back to the village (Karmacharya n.d. 5.26).

(2) In 1798, the Gorkha king Rana Bahadur Shah issues an order (*rukka*) to the community leaders of Te and Tshug to certain existing settlements regarding the use of pastureland (Karmacharya n.d. 3.23).

(3) Te’s uncultivated land is very extensive but almost devoid of trees, and timber and other forest products are customarily purchased from neighbours, mainly Gyaga. To bring these products back to the village, however, means crossing through Tshug’s territory. In 1866, a group of Tepas are robbed of what they are carrying. The Tepas apparently feel that not enough is being done to support them against Tshug, so they boycott the other three villages and bring a legal case against Tshug.

In May 1867, they are rewarded with a promising response from Kathmandu: the prime minister, Jang Bahadur Rana, issues an order (Karmacharya

n.d. 3.25) to the contractor-chief (*amāli mukhiyā*) of Baragaon to investigate Te's claim that Tshug had stolen beams bought from Samar, Gyaga, and Tsele.

(4) The people of Gyaga become anxious about the loss of revenue resulting from Te's boycott. They must have heard about Te's litigation against Tshug, because shortly before Jang Bahadur's order is issued they send a letter to Te with the reminder that according to well-established tradition, it has been customary for Gyaga to sell pine needles, beams, and laths and for the Tepas to buy them. The letter goes on to assure the Tepas that if, henceforth, members of another village commit the offence of seizing pine-needles, wood, beams, and laths that have been sold to them by Gyaga, the latter will have the Tepas stand to one side while they litigate on their clients' behalf.

(5) If there were further instances of wood piracy against Te by Tshug, they are not recorded in the archives. Arguments over boundaries and resource-use do however continue to flare up once in a while. A letter sent by Kag to Te on the twenty-fourth day of the second month in an Earth Tiger year (March 1878) provides a welcome change from the dry petitions submitted to the court. This letter, which is certainly not intended for general circulation, affords a rare insight into the machinations underlying lawsuits. The substance of this document (HMA/Te/Tib/38) may be paraphrased as follows. There is some disagreement about the boundaries of the grazing lands of Te and Tshug, and the matter has now been taken to the court in Tukche. The prominent persons who have been drawn in are the (unnamed) *subba*,<sup>10</sup> Ada Naren,<sup>11</sup> Kushog Bhelpo (the noble contractor-chief), Kushog Chandra Bir, a certain Nyima Samdrup, and Kushog Dorje. The letter consists of a report to the Tepas on the development of the affair in Tukche, and includes advice on how they should proceed in the dispute. The Kagpas, it seems, are on the side of the Tepas in the conflict. They reassure the Tepas that, when everyone from Lower Lo was interviewed on the matter, they concurred that the outcome was just as the Tshugwas would have wished it, and that this was improper. The implication is that many of the dignitaries named here, who have probably been assembled as a sort of jury, are favourable to Tshug and are even in its pay. The Kagpas have told the body that they should not yet go up (to inspect the boundaries) but that they should go later—presumably when the Tepas had prepared themselves better. The authors (the Kagpas) and the nobleman Bhelpo—who are on the side of Te—begged leave and returned to Kag. The Tshugwa representatives, along with Ada Naren, are insisting that the jury should go up to the pastures now. The Kagpas advise the Tepas to formulate an effective plan, or there will be a “mediocre” outcome to the matter. A capable Tepa must make a short visit to Kag to discuss the matter before the *subba* goes up to the pastures. There

follows a cryptic remark: “a white conch fed on milk—if it is no use against the hostile water-sprite . . .”

The subject then changes. The Kagpas have heard from the *subba* that, as of the coming Monday, the price of rice will be 12.5 *zoba* (of salt per bushel?). This price will obtain for only a period of ten days. The Tepas still have a balance of 12 rupees in Tukche. If they need rice, they should come down quickly (while the price is still low). All the Tepas should be called (to Tukche to buy rice?). After everyone had departed from Tukche, two headmen of Tshug were retained (in custody?) for a day, because they said that they were planning to go further south (presumably to sell salt, thereby violating the *subba*’s monopoly?). The goats were sent back up, and the nobleman Bhelpo stood as guarantor.

The last paragraph, in which the Kagpas advise the Tepas to buy rice while the rate is still good, strongly suggests that the *subba* is favouring Te, whereas two Tshugwas have been apprehended by him. Could it be that the *subba* was not entirely disinterested as a mediator in the main subject of the letter, the dispute over Te and Tshug’s pastures? Kushog Bhelpo, the Baragaon contractor, is also clearly on the side of Te. He was certainly not a constant friend of the community: in an undated Nepali document (Karmacharya n.d. 3.66) the Tepas on another occasion wrote to the (unnamed) prime minister complaining that he had maliciously judged in favour of Tshug’s closure of a transit route to one of Te’s pastures.

We are given an important clue in the enigmatic remark about the “white conch fed on milk.” The reference is to an episode in the *Khye'u padma 'od bar gyi rnam thar* (The Biography of the Young Boy Pema Öbar), a Tibetan verse play that dramatises the childhood of a previous incarnation of Padmasambhava. The young Pema Öbar undertakes a marvellous sea voyage, but before he does so lists the effects that he and his crew are likely to need in order to survive the hazards:

We need a dove to keep a look-out for sea-sprites; we need sesame oil to feed the dove; we need a live young conch to subdue the sea-sprites; we need a wish-fulfilling cow to feed the young conch.  
(Blondeau 1973: 37)<sup>12</sup>

Anne-Marie Blondeau, from whose annotated French translation the excerpt is taken, remarks in a footnote that “all Pema Öbar’s requests relate to notions that are purely Indian but have found their way into the Tibetan tradition. The conch is supposed to kill sea-sprites [*makara*] by piercing their bodies” (120, n. 26).

The significance of the reference in the context of this dispute is clear. The Tepas, like Pema Öbar and his mariners, are under threat. They have a

powerful source of protection at their disposal. And since they are feeding it—with cash, rather than milk—they might as well exploit it to the full.

(6) A year later, the matter is still unresolved. In March 1879, Te registers an official complaint with Subba Kaviraj, to the effect that a gang of Tshugwas has stolen all the accumulated dung, and even a goat pen from one of Te's pastures (Karmacharya n.d. 3.45).

(7) A Tepa herder is attacked while crossing Macethang, a section of Tshug's territory that lies between the village of Te and an area of the latter's pastureland. The list of stolen items in his accusation includes the price of a dog that was killed by the attackers (HMA/Te/Tib/42).

(8) Te wins the case. Exactly one year later, in March 1880, the court sends a receipt to Te for the sum of half a rupee, representing court fees, after the three accused Tshugwas have been found guilty of stealing dung (Karmacharya n.d. 3.16).

(9) We saw earlier that, during the dispute with Gelung in 1929, the Tepas may not have relied entirely on the process of law to obtain satisfaction for wrongs done to them: they were accused by Gelung of committing a reciprocal theft. Of course we do not know whether they really did commit this theft, or whether this was merely strategic retaliatory accusation. Whatever the case, much the same thing happened in the wake of the last judgment in favour of Te: in August 1880, Te submits a formal response to the court in Kag, denying a charge brought by three Tshugwas that nine Tepas have beaten up the plaintiffs, stolen the loads carried by their goats, and killed their dog. The witness produced by Tshug, they insist, is a liar (HMA/Te/Tib/41).

(10) The problem of Te's transit-rights across Tshug's territory resurfaces two years later (March 1882). General Ranabir Jang Rana, the commander of the northern wing of the Nepalese army, orders the headmen of Baragaon to investigate a complaint by Te that Tshug has closed the route through its territory, thereby depriving Te of access to its pastures (5.20). There are no subsequent records to indicate how this case was resolved.

(11) The recurrence of disputes is indicated by the survival of odd documents written in the course of elaborate cases. Sometimes, we know only that a lawsuit is in progress, but not what the subject of contention might be. In April 1929, for example, a Tshugwa is informed by the court in Kag that he has a month within which to appeal against a verdict in a defamation case that has ruled in favour of Te.

(12) We have already seen that, during Te's legal dispute with Gelung in 1928–29, the two enemies were able to settle their differences out of court. We also saw that Te regarded Tshug as an actual or potential enemy during this conflict. In connection with either this, or some other dispute, Te applies to the



FIGURE 3.1. The opening lines of the *Complaint*, the main source for the seventeenth-century history of Te.

Thak court in March 1929 (the Nepalese date is Phagun BS 1985) to conclude a bond of reconciliation with Tshug.

(13) The peace with Gelung has held, but Te and Tshug are soon at odds again. Later in 1929 (BS 1986—the month is not given) a Tepa files a complaint against four Tshugwas for beating him up, and stealing his turban, cash, and jewellery while he was returning to his village (Karmacharya n.d. 3.29, 3.30).

(14) Either as a consequence or as a prelude to the last complaint, Tshug formally accuses Te, in August 1929, of stealing dung to the value of 76 rupees 4 paise from Tshug's pastures (Karmacharya n.d. 3.32, 3.33).

Boundary disputes have arisen on a number of occasions since the period covered by these documents, but the records have not been preserved in the Te archives.

A close understanding with the rest of the Shöyul was, as we saw in chapter 2, essential in Te's dealings with southern Baragaon and Lo, but it is clear from the records examined here that the greatest threat has always been presented by the people on Te's very doorstep. Te was at times hard pressed by its neighbours, and on at least one occasion its very existence was menaced by those who were supposed to be its nearest allies. Now that we have blocked in the historical and political environment surrounding Te, we are in a better position to understand what lies within the territorial boundaries of the community.

# 4

## From Clans to Households in Te

The ideal of community, which, as I shall discuss in later chapters, is of such central importance in the development of Te's civil society and religion, has been neither a given nor a constant in the history of the settlement. It is something that was actively worked at, and it developed at the expense of other corporations—patrilineal clans—that had laid rival claim to the loyalties of the Tepas' ancestors. The emergence of a real collectivity out of the ashes of clan solidarity was shadowed by the development of the household as the immediate focus of individual identity. It is this gradual polarisation of interests with which this chapter is concerned.

The processes that will be described here relate to a more general field of inquiry that is emerging in the anthropological literature on Tibetan society: the dialectic between kinship-based and residence-based organisation of polities, ranging from the village (or nomadic group) up to the level of the state itself. We are still a long way from a synthetic picture: apart from a few pioneering works, the domain of Tibetan kinship has barely been touched; the early post-dynastic literature has not been read for its revelations concerning the political logic of marriage patterns; and the comparative study of lesser Tibetan principalities is still in its infancy. The field is only just being defined, and although comparisons between the material presented here and various recent studies could easily be made, this would serve little purpose other than to reveal interesting, but for now isolated, parallels.<sup>1</sup>



FIGURE 4.1. Khyungdzong Karpo, the “White Garuda Fortress” of Te, seen from Yul.

### Entering the Village

Te is situated half an hour’s walk to the east of Tshug on the southern side of the Narshing Khola. The simplest way for a traveller to reach the village is to follow the gravel bar of the valley floor beside the course of the river, which ranges from being a frozen thread in the winter months when the water is “bound,” as it is said, on the tops of the snow-mountains, to a dangerous black torrent when the summer melts the glaciers and even sheds a little monsoon rain on the lower slopes. A few minutes up the valley, at the edge of the gravel bar, is the Flower-Garden of Tshug, the enclosure where meetings of the five Shöyul are traditionally held. Above it, on a promontory to the south, are the ruins of a fortress that, apart from its defensive function, must have served as an important focal point of communication in the area. From the middle of its ruins it is possible to see, and therefore to send signals to, Tsele, Te, Taye, and the abandoned settlements of Tsumpag, to the west, and to Naudzong in the eastern hills beyond Te. The head of the Narshing valley is dominated by the craggy mountain called Gogpoden, on the western flank of which runs the north-south trade route extending from Tangkya to the upper Muktinath valley through the ruins of Aga, Naudzong, and Tshethang Dzong.

After the Flower Garden, the Narshing valley bends gently to the left, and Te comes clearly into view directly in front, framed above and below by Gog-

poden and the gravel bar, and on either side by towering cliffs. Ten minutes further on, the path reaches the boundary between Te and Tshug. On the left bank of the river, a short distance above the gravel bar, the boundary is marked by a low mound called Dö Khyawa, the point at which the Tepas cast an exorcistic effigy in the annual purification of the village. The boundary is marked in the middle of the gravel bed, some way upstream from Dö Khyawa, by two rocks piled on top of a large boulder and daubed with red clay. On the north bank of the river at this point stands the little settlement of Tshognam, three houses that straddle the territorial boundary. On the Tshug side of the boundary are two houses, Lower and Middle Tshognam, standing some 50 yards apart, and east of the boundary is Upper Tshognam, the residence and temple of the lamas of Te. While the three houses have relatively few fields beside them, the severity of the place is softened by trees: poplars, willows, peaches, apples, and apricots, colourful relief against the wild backcloth of cliffs and their empty caves. These caves, easily accessible from Tshug, saw a brief revival during the Tibetan resistance movement of the 1960s and 1970s, when an enterprising woman of Tshug occupied one of them as a tavern for guerrilla clients. But the movement disbanded in 1973, and the caves returned to their old silence.

By this point the walls of the valley, which began their ascent at the confluence near Tshug, have risen to a height of over 200 metres above the gravel bar, fragile grey walls cut into towers by water and wind. Those on the right bank, by Tshognam, rise almost directly above the river. Those on the left bank—the traveller's right—are set far back, separated from the river by the intervening fields of Te. These southern cliffs rise up to the plateau of Yathang, at the far end of which begins the territory of Taye and the trail to the upper Muktinath valley. A few hundred yards to the east of Tshognam, the field terraces of Te are cut by a gorge that joins the Narshing Khola from the south. On the far side of the entrance is a large rock some 10 feet high, standing on the very edge of the gravel bar. This is Molha Chutsen Nyenpo, a star who, long ago, came down to drink at the river and was caught there by the dawn. Too ashamed in the daylight to return to heaven, she remained at the river bank and is revered now as the mother-goddess of Te.

But the way into the village lies up the gorge. Straight ahead, high above the left bank of this little stream, is Yul, the southern half of Te, a densely packed block of whitewashed residences pervaded by a network of gullies and tunnels. Immediately to the left, towering over the right bank, is the Dzong, the old fortified section of Te. Between the Dzong and the gorge is the red-painted Lhanga (Tib. *lha khang*), the village temple.

A narrow trail, marked at its entrance by a pile of three stones that are red-washed once a year to signify the ceremonial closure of the village, leads from

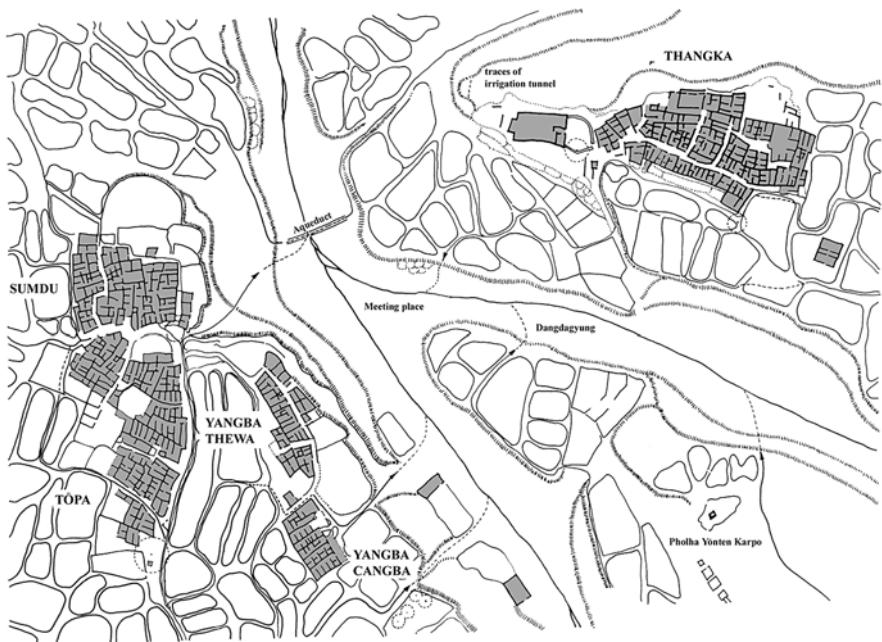


FIGURE 4.2. Site plan of Te's settlement area. (Drawing by Bijay Basukala and Niels Gutschow)

the floor of the gorge up to the Dzong. The trail winds between field terraces, past the gaping remains of what can only have once been an irrigation tunnel, and passes below the southern wall of the temple between the dry stone walls of little corrals where dzos are sometimes kept. It ascends a short flight of stone steps, dips under the covered passage formed by the Menkhang (Tib. *ma ni khang*), the prayer-wheel house, and a few yards further on reaches the Kyego (Tib. *skye sgo*), the main gateway of the Dzong.

## The Settlement and Its Divisions

### *The Dzong*

The Dzong covers a considerably smaller area of ground than Yul, but it is unquestionably one of the most impressive buildings in all Mustang. Ruins in other locations—neighbouring Taye is the nearest example—suggest that it represents a style of architecture that was more widespread in the past. The walls of the Dzong are made of *pisé*, rammed earth, built up layer by layer

inside a moveable wooden form, tapering inward toward the top in the manner of Tibetan fortified buildings.

The main entrance, the Kyego, has three parts, the outer, the middle and the inner, three wooden frames disposed in such a way as to bend the entrance into an obtuse L. The log that forms the main threshold has been entirely worn through by the passage of people and goats over time. Beyond the entrance is the *hrang* (Tib. *srang*), the main street of the Dzong. The street, actually an alley, is just wide enough for two people to pass with very little room to spare. The first houses on the left after one enters are derelict. This is the section where the house of the Önpo, the vanished priestly clan of Te, once stood. As the street continues, the walls rise intact on either side, and after a short distance the passage is altogether roofed over by the upper floors of houses. Two alleys to the left lead to sections of the Dzong where houses have collapsed—most recently, the northeast section, much of which fell down in 1996. The main street continues in relative darkness until it leaves the Dzong by the Sang-go (Tib. *gsang sgo*), the “Secret Door” at the eastern end. The Dzong itself contains thirty-five houses. The doors to these houses are disposed along the walls of the street or of the lateral alleys, and they may therefore be reached only by first entering the Dzong by the Main or the Secret Door. Here



FIGURE 4.3. Axonometric reconstruction of Thangka/Dzong. (Drawing Bijay Basukala)

is a description of Dzong by Niels Gutschow, an architect who has devoted some attention to construction styles in Te.

Apart from the access lanes, private open space does not exist. “Open space” is in fact something extremely rare: almost half of the 120 metres of access lanes, 110 to 190 cm wide, are still without access to daylight. The lanes turn into two- to three-metre high tunnels that seem to be carved out of the masses of those houses that are four storeys high. Uncovered stretches of the lanes serve as skylights, left open at random. The sun never touches the ground of the lanes, leaving a dim atmosphere throughout the year: effectively enclosed space that is forever deprived of light. The Dzong is so derelict and abandoned to such an extent that one can only assume that at least two thirds of all lanes were originally covered. . . . Although the plan of Dzong looks haphazardly organised at a first glance, plots are regularly lined up along the lanes. The houses are usually ten metres deep and the regular room measures 250 by 500 cm. Quite often the span of the rooms changes. In most cases the entrance room is 250 cm deep while in the following sector of the house the span of the beams is perpendicular to that direction. Alternate spans possibly ensure more rigidity to the entire structure which allows for little stiffness. The walls are not interlocked but end at the corner, where they stand flush against the adjacent wall. Only occasionally do the lifts overlap with each other alternately to provide a bond similar to the one used in masonry. Somehow, this system of construction works best in a cluster, where one house or structure leans against the neighbouring ones. Neighbouring walls are always shared—another essential factor of a cluster. (Gutschow 1996: 51)

Visiting someone in the Dzong can be a disconcerting experience. The ground floor of the house, called *tang* (SMT *ra*), is reserved for animals—normally, a few goats that are kept in the village away from the main herds. The light, already limited in the covered street, is very thick indeed on the ground floor. As one ascends a notched log ladder through a hole in the ceiling to the first floor, the light disappears altogether, and a visitor who has come unequipped with a torch or a lighter can spend a good deal of time fumbling in inky blackness for the ladder to the next floor, with a fair risk of falling through the hole to the ground floor. The first floor, called *lhong*, is a particularly poor place in which to lose one’s bearings. It serves as the latrine of the house, and the place where clay and ash are mixed with human ordure and ground-floor manure to be transported periodically to the fields.

The second floor is called *dim*, literally the “house,” typically containing one or two rooms where the family will sleep, cook, and eat in the cold months, and a small storeroom for food stocks and other valuables. The term *dim* is also used to designate a house in its entirety. Above the *dim* is the roof, called *be*, which, together with the open area in front of the *dim*, provides the scene of domestic activity such as spinning, weaving, and socialising with neighbours. A low parapet around the roof and the balcony serves for the storage of fire-wood. Passage from the roof of one house to another is unobstructed, and it is very probably true that, as Tepas often remark, access to any one house in the Dzong means access to them all.

To the extent that the complex was a defensive construction, the safety of the Dzong clearly depended on the security of its entrances. This principle is one of several features that make it difficult not to draw comparisons between the conception of the Dzong and the layout of certain cave systems that are to be found in the area; namely, a gallery of adjacent habitations reached by a single tunnel that can be blocked off to prevent access to the complex. The sheer walls of the Dzong itself and the dark chambers in the lower floors of the house further contribute to a feeling that the entire structure is an architectural simulacrum of the cave dwellings that were long ago excavated in the natural cliffs of Mustang.

The assimilation of nature and artifice is not only a figment of the Western observer’s imagination. The association is reinforced both by a common Tibetan convention and a particular Tepa conceit. To begin with, there is a genre of Tibetan literature consisting of “guidebooks” aimed at educating Buddhist or Bonpo pilgrims in the esoteric significance of holy mountains. Such mountains—of which there are a great many in Tibet and the Himalaya—are recognised as repositories of spiritual power originally generated by the activities of one or several saints. Whatever their individual histories and legends, holy mountains are represented in these guidebooks according to a more or less standard form. For those who have eyes to see, they are not merely desolate excrescences of rock and snow but three-dimensional mandalas, divine citadels built of precious substances and inhabited by one or another of the great tantric gods and his entourage. While the depiction of mountains as palaces is a rather common motif, there are also examples in which historical Tibetan palaces are idealised as natural—through admittedly somewhat fantastic—mountains. In short, Tibetan literature furnishes a well-established precedent for the use of mountains and palaces as pious similes of each other.

The Tepas have been unable to resist playing with this mirror-imagery. The name of Te’s Dzong—as given in a few documents from Te and Tshug, though it has little currency now—is Khyungdzong Karpo. Te’s *Chronicle* has its own

interpretation of the origin of this name, but since it is interesting for reasons other than its etymological credibility I shall not go into it here. Karpo, the Tibetan word for “white” (*dkar po*), is undoubtedly just an auspicious epithet that may have been justified by the pale natural colour of the walls or a coat of whitewash that it may once have worn—a section of it is in fact whitewashed today.

The dictionary definition of the word *dzung* (Tib. *rdzong*) is “castle, fortress” (Jäschke, Das) and, presumably by synecdochic association, “headquarters of a district magistrate and revenue officer” (Das). In modern Tibetan usage, the latter signification has been modified to cover the Chinese administrative unit of the *shen*. In Mustang—especially, it appears, in the southern Thakali-speaking area—*dzung* is used in certain circumstances to signify a “high place.” Thus the original settlement of the village of Marpha, now located in the floor of the Kali Gandaki an hour south of Jomsom, is called Marpha Dzong. This largely abandoned settlement bears no traces of any fortification, and its name seems to be justified solely by the fact that it stands several hours’ walk into the hills above the present site. The same is true of other villages such as Larjung, in Thak. This name, too (a Nepalicised form of Nardzong/ Lardzong), is explained by the fact that the first houses of this community were built on an elevated—though unfortified—ridge. North of Baragaon, in Lo itself, the term *dzung* has an even more precise signification. While some cave systems are modest affairs consisting of a row of hollows to which access was presumably obtained by means of some external earthworks or scaffolding, others are vastly more complex. There are a number of sites in which entire hills and ridges are penetrated by labyrinthine tunnels leading to tiers of galleries, giving an overall effect of a vast termite mound. In Lo, cave cliffs of this order are called *dzung*. The people to whom I have spoken denied that this appellation is in any sense secondary, based on a resemblance that such hills might bear to castles. Dzongs, I was told, are of two kinds: *khardzong* (Tib. *mkhar rdzong*), “palace castles” and *dragdzong* (Tib. *brag rdzong*), “cliff castles.”

In the *Chronicle*, the name Khyung is explicitly connected with the name Khyungpo, one of the founder clans of Te, and I would hesitate to dismiss the possibility of a link. But Khyungdzong was also quite a common name for fortresses in Tibet (see Ramble 1995). The name is very likely a further example of the assimilation of castles to mountains. The *khyung* (Tib. *khyung*) is a mythical serpent-eating eagle (corresponding to the Indian *garuda*) that is sometimes conflated with the magnificent Himalayan griffon vulture, the natural denizen of barren crags—and abandoned caves—par excellence. The Tepas have pressed to its logical conclusion the conceit that their man-made Dzong is a natural one. The ideal inhabitants of mountain *dzung* are the *khyung*. As it happens, the assertion is made very explicit in the *Complaint*, the

seventeenth-century document that was examined in chapter 3. At one point the text tells states: “The Tepas are like the proud royal vultures in the high caves of the upper cliffs”; and later, summarising the community’s dealings with old enemies: “The Tepas, like the great *khyung* in the sky, have destroyed the poisonous serpent at a stroke.” The association is not confined to an old document. It is actually dramatised once a year during the Lama Guru ceremony (see chapter 8), when the young men of the village perform a solemn dance with the ends of their shawls tucked through the rings of their fingers, and their arms outspread like the wings of griffons in majestic flight.

### *The Yul*

South of the Dzong the ground slopes away steeply into the gorge of the Dangdagyang, and on the opposite side stands the Yul. “Yul” (Tib. *yul*) in both Tibetan and Seke is the most general word for any definable political territory. It may, for example, be used to mean “nation” or “country” in situations where, say, a foreigner is being asked about his or her provenance. Since the political unit that has the greatest relevance to all aspects of social life in Mustang is the village, this is the usual designation of the term. But since Dzong and Yul are merely two residential areas of the territory, the *yul*, of Te, “Yul” is obviously being used here in a slightly different sense. Dzong, as I have discussed earlier, also has administrative connotations, suggesting an element in an organised network superseding individual villages. In a typical Tibetan situation, a *dzong* would have been an outpost of the state, and its principal inhabitant would not have been a local but someone sent by the central government (the verb *rdzong ba* in fact means “to send”) to represent it in the provinces. To this extent, the *dzong* is opposed to the *yul*, the village in or near which it stood, and whose concerns and inhabitants were, by contrast, essentially local. This is precisely the situation that seems to have prevailed in the five capitals of Baragaon, where a Tibetan-speaking elite, the representatives of the king of Lo, established themselves in *dzongs* in the territories of Seke-speakers. While there is no evidence that the Dzong of Te ever had such an alien, administrative character, the choice of the name Yul for the adjacent settlement area is entirely comprehensible in view of the fact that a *yul* is the type of habitation that is invariably paired with a *dzong*.

There is another possible explanation of the name Yul that, like the one just proposed, derives from an opposition to *dzong*. The opposition in this case is one of height. A *dzong*, as I have mentioned, is by definition something high. The dictionary definition of *yul* is “valley,” and “village” only by extension. Villages are, after all, not situated on hilltops but in valleys.

In either case, the name Yul is derived by opposition to the Dzong, whether as the village near the lord's castle or the valley below the hill; but it is likely that when the Tepas first began to use the name to designate the settlement taking shape on the south side of the Dangdaghyung, they framed it in imaginary inverted commas.

Unlike the Dzong, the Yul is not a single massive block but a far more heterogeneous accretion of houses. The entire group is subdivided into the following five named areas.

Yangba Thewa

Yangba Cangba

Sumdu

Töpa

Madang

These five units and the Dzong also form the basis of a fourfold sectoral organisation of the entire community that I shall explore in more detail. All these areas are built in essentially the same style, but Sumdu is the most complex. Gutschow again:

In the neighbouring [to Dzong] cluster of Sumdu the situation is even more extreme. Within a cluster of forty to thirty metres, comprising 25 built entities, only 25 square metres of skylights are equal to not more than two per cent. If the ratio between built space and openness serves as the most convincing factor that defines a cluster, those of Dzong and Sumdu have to be counted among the densest known in the history of architecture (1996: 51).

### Farmland, Wilderness, and Peripheral Dwellings

Te is the butt of a revealing joke that is current in Manang, the district immediately to the east of Mustang: the Tepas are mildly saddened by the death of a close relative, but are grieved to tears by the collapse of a wall. One of the most striking features about Te is the degree to which it is constructed. Quite apart from the complex and unusual architecture of the habitations themselves, the effort that has gone into the building and maintenance of field terraces, irrigation canals, threshing yards, and retaining walls is simply staggering. A feature of the irrigation system that is, I believe, unique in Mustang is the connection of certain areas of fields to arterial canals by subterranean aqueducts (*chigung*, < Tib. *chu khung* or *'chu khung*, “water tunnel” or “irri-

gation tunnel") that pass beneath intervening fields. These aqueducts have not been created by tunnelling, as in the case of Kog and Taye, for example, or the old canal below Te's own Dzong; they were first laid out—lined with flat stones and "roofed" with stone beams—and the fields built over them. One of the most arduous tasks in the agricultural cycle of the village is the transportation of tons of river silt to the cultivated land. The silt is collected in specially dug distributaries on the Narshing Khola, then mixed with household manure before being carried in baskets up to the fields. Thus while there is a constant, gradual erosion of the cultivated land, there is a complementary process of replenishment on the surface, and this constant addition of topsoil accounts for the considerable depth at which some of the stone aqueducts lie. The advantage of this system of irrigation is that the cultivable area of the fields through which the aqueducts pass is not reduced, as would be the case in an exposed canal. The single most impressive aqueduct of this sort is one that actually runs beneath a substantial section of the Yul: the Tepas evidently had sufficient confidence in their stonemasonry to build a cluster of houses over the canal, knowing that should any section of it collapse, the damage could not be repaired. Blockages are avoided by the simple expedient of a wooden grill at the point where the aqueduct passes underground.

While the very nature of this hydraulic engineering renders it visually unobtrusive, the retaining dry-stone walls of the fields and the sides of gorges are a conspicuous testimony to the labour of preserving the landscape from the entropy of erosion. Keenly aware of the great effort required to rebuild such walls if they collapse, the Tepas enforce strict rules concerned with their preservation. In nearly all villages, following the harvest, cattle are allowed into fields to graze the stubble and to fertilise the earth with their dung. In Te, livestock owners are forbidden to allow their animals into fields at any time of year on the grounds that they may destabilise the walls. The uprooting of shrubs growing in the walls is also strictly forbidden for the same reason. Both these regulation have, at different times, been written into the constitution of Te, as in chapter 9.

At the eastern end of the cultivated land is an area called Baza, meaning "potash" (Tib. *ba tshwa*), after the exudations that stain the earth with white patches. On this site stands a single large building, well apart from Dzong and Yul. This is Gau Gompa, a temple that, until 1996, was inhabited by a lama together with his wife, his mother, and his children. This lama is the half-brother of the lama of Tshognam, and their family has occupied Gau Gompa ever since the Tepas gave usufruct of the building and attached fields to their grandfather, after evicting the previous tenants. Gau Gompa is now empty. The fields around it are cracked and dry, and the peach trees are withering

from want of water. In 1993–94, the lama's family offended Te in a political argument, and the village responded by imposing the severest sanction—Gau Gompa was cut off from water. In 1996, the family abandoned the place and moved to a new house in Jomsom. In the low cliff behind Gau is Baza Ug, the "Caves of Baza." These are smaller and fewer in number than the "Homes of the Ancestors" in the high cliffs on the north side of the Narshing Khola. They are easily accessible, and are sometimes used by herders for shelter. The remains of religious motifs on the walls of some of these caves indicate that, though they may have been created as habitations, they were latterly used as anchoritages.

Standing on a promontory in the gorge to the eastern end of Yul is the god Pholha Yönten Karpo, represented by a large rock with a sheer face turned to the northwest. The rock is undecorated except for traces of the red clay wash that is replenished every year, but near the rock, along the path that leaves the village to the southeast, is a line of chortens and a wall of mani stones. Beside this path is the government school. On a high promontory to the southeast stands a cairn that dominates the entire village and its fields, almost invisible but for the crest of reed bamboo adorning its apex. This is Shartsenpa or, more fully, Jowo Shartsen Nyenpo, the single most important territorial god of Te.

The construction of houses, fields, irrigation systems, and walls and the erection of cairns or the daubing of rocks as the residences of divinities are all, in their different ways, methods of imposing order within a given territory. The process of ordering is carried further by means of naming. Each of the residential areas, as we have seen, has its own name, but identification of sites goes far beyond this. The agricultural land of Te is subdivided into five main areas, following the name of the particular canal by which it is—or used to be, because one has recently been abandoned—irrigated. But these areas are further subdivided into named clusters or, in a few cases, individual fields. There are more than one hundred field-names in Te. Nor are toponyms limited to fields and houses. Ravines, ridges, hillocks, trails (or sections of trails), threshing yards, and spaces between buildings, even certain individual rocks, also have their own names. As one might expect, the relevance of topographical detail indicated by the density of names is greater in the settlement and cultivated land than in the uncultivated pastures and crags that surround the village. But even though the area to which a given name applies may be quite large, the point is that every part of the territory is so covered. There is no patch of even the most desolate wilderness in the territory of Te that is not covered by a toponym.

In Te—as indeed everywhere in Baragaon and Lo—territory is divided into two categories. On the one hand there is the cultivated area, called *lu* (Tib.

*klungs*).<sup>2</sup> The houses of a village, though not actually part of the *lu*, are conceived as being situated within it, whether they in fact stand to the edge of it or, as in the case of Te, are completely surrounded by it. The *lu* is ritually marked out once a year in the course of a procession, when sacred texts and images are carried in a wide circle that takes in the fields and houses. This ceremony is variously known as *chökor* (Tib. *chos skor*), “scripture circuit,” or as *lukor* (Tib. *klungs skor*), “encircling the fields.” *Lu* is opposed to *rika* (Tib. *ri kha*), uncultivated space or wilderness. The second syllable of this word, *kha*, has the sense of “area” or “sector,” and is often attached to monosyllabic terms to create compounds related to space or territory. We have encountered this earlier in the case of the Tibetan names for Baragaon and Panchgaon, respectively, Yulkha Cunyi and Yulkhang. It is also, I suspect, present in disguised form in the last syllable of certain village names, such as Paha (Pa *kha*), Aga (A *kha*), Khyenga (Khyeng *kha*), Gyaga (Gya *kha*), and so on. The important component of the term *rikha* is *ri*. The word is defined in Tibetan dictionaries as “hill,” or “mountain,” but when it occurs in compounds it invariably has the sense of “wild.” Thus *ridag* (Tib. *ri dwags*), “wild animal” (normally herbivores); *riphag* (Tib. *ri phag*, lit. “hill pig”), “wild boar”; and so forth. Significantly, it is used in exactly the same way as the Nepali *jangal* (Ssk. *idem*), which, unlike the English adaptation of this term, does not mean dense forest but simply wilderness. It can be surprising, when one has heard the word *rika* used only of steep, barren hillsides, to discover that it is applied equally to, say, the flat, tropical forest of south Nepal, where there is not a hill in sight. While “hill” may be the primary meaning of the word *ri*, it has largely lost this sense in both Seke and the Tibetan dialects of Mustang, except insofar as whatever belongs to the hills and mountains is, ipso facto, wild.

While a number of the locations in the immediate vicinity of the inhabited area are nominally defined in terms of the everyday use to which they are put, they will be important in the following pages as the scene of different categories of ceremonial. Thus while Yangbanyü is the venue for certain dances and political and ritual gatherings and will recur a number of times in such contexts, it is primarily, like any other *nyü* in Te, a threshing yard. Places, and configurations of places, remain inconspicuous until highlighted by periodic extraordinary activity.

Many places on the periphery of the cultivated land have no particular use, or even distinctive morphology, as, say, ridges or gorges, but are merely names. They become special only when a small pile of stones is erected on them and perhaps daubed with red clay, during the ceremony for the circumambulation of the fields. While this degree of attention may be insufficient for them to qualify as sacred, it does at least make them extraordinary for a day. They do

not house any personified god, and they have no particular power, but they do occasionally rise to something more distinctive than toponyms for the brief duration of the ceremony that marks them out, before returning again to blend in with their undistinguished background. Place-gods are always special sites, but their salience is also a matter of occasion. A goatherd on the way to Naudzong will walk up the short path from the village to the shrine of Shartsenpa, pass within a few feet of it with scarcely a glance, and continue on his way up the hill. A village official on the way to make offerings to the god will approach the same cairn very differently—not least because the sacral character of his errand requires him to take an altogether different trail from the easier one he would follow if he were simply herding livestock.

### Descent and Marriage in Te

The main principles of descent and marriage are broadly similar to those of a number of Tibetan and closely related Tibeto-Burman groups of the Himalaya, and may be described briefly. The people of Te classify themselves according to a number of different social frameworks. Some of these frameworks are created temporarily for specific purposes, while others have a permanent, or very stable, character. These frameworks dovetail or clash with one another in a variety of ways that tell us a great deal about the changing bases of social cohesion, the trends that threaten it, and how these threats are dealt with by the community.

#### *Bone*

One of the most basic, and historically the most important, social categories is the patrilineal clan. The term for clan in Te is *gyupa* (Tib. *rgyud pa*, lit. “lineage” or “succession”). All the members of a clan have the same bone. The bone is transmitted from a father to his children, and any two people who share the same bone may not intermarry, however many generations may separate them from a common male ancestor. Not only are two opposite-sex members of the same bone forbidden to engage in sexual relations, they must also “be ashamed” in each other’s presence; that is, they may not engage in lewd joking or discuss salacious matters even with a third person. In SMT, *gyupa* has a dual meaning. On the one hand it denotes a patrilineal clan and on the other a caste or status group made up of a number of such clans. An unambiguous term for “patriclan” that is commonly used is *rütsa* (Tib. *rus rtswa*), literally “bone-root.” Tepas also have a system of internal stratification, but it is not referred to by the

term *gyupa*. *Gyupa* means only “patrilineal clan,” and the word *rütsa* does not exist. It is possible that the word *gyupa* has come to replace some such term as *phephe*, which survives in certain compounds and is cognate with current Thakali variants, such as *phobe*, *phabe*, and so on.

### *Flesh*

What a mother passes to her children is her flesh. The corporate identity of people who share the same flesh is more ephemeral than that of the clan. Marriageability between matrilineally related individuals is expressed in terms of an analogy with the hand, in which the generations that separate the descendants of two sisters are named according to the joints of the fingers. The term for joint is *chig* (< Tib. *tshigs*), and the three finger joints—beginning at the knuckles of the hand and moving outward—are, respectively, *chigpa*, *chig-chung*, and *chigsum*.<sup>3</sup> Matrilateral parallel cousins are regarded as siblings, and as such are part of the same “hand” (Sk. *ya* < Tib. *lag*). It is only in the fourth descending generation that two people who share the same flesh may marry, since they are no longer situated on any of the joints. (In the villages of southern Baragaon the rule is less stringent. I have never encountered the knuckle analogy there, but marriage is permissible between two people who are located on the last digit, as it were, of the hand from which they descended.)

### *Marriage*

Marriages in Baragaon are contracted in one of three ways: by arrangement between the couple’s parents; bride capture; and elopement (Schuler 1987; Ramble 1984). The usual form in Te is the first. I have heard of only one case of elopement (which I will describe) and none of capture. Another feature that distinguishes Tepa marriages from those of southern Baragaon is the marked absence of ceremony. Since most marriages are virilocal, I may briefly describe the main steps leading to such a “typical” alliance, and save discussion of some very significant exceptions for later in the chapter.

Let us say that household A chooses the daughter of household B as a bride for its son. A sends a middleman to B with a wooden flask of beer. The intermediary sits in front of the prospective bride’s parents, sets the flask on the ground between them, and asks for their daughter’s hand. In Baragaon, these preliminary discussions can be drawn out over several stages and involve much diplomatic activity and culturally sanctioned beating around the bush. In Te, the parents will usually give their assent immediately. If for some reason (such as ill-feeling toward household A) they do not, the intermediary ups and

leaves without further ado, taking his beer with him. If they agree, he pours beer for the parents and places a daub of butter from the rim of the flask on the girl's head as a sign of betrothal. There are no offerings of scarves to the bride's parents, no respectful prostrations, and no threshold chorus of "Orche, orche!" (Please, please!), all of which mark the corresponding rite in southern Baragaon.

The following day, the same intermediary visits the house again with another flask of beer and a small measure (*zoba*, around 2 litres) of barley. The same day or the next, the bride's parents visit the tantric priests of Tshognam (who feature in chapter 6) with a flask of beer and a request to find an auspicious day on which the marriage might be held. In southern Baragaon, it is the *groom's* parents who are responsible for requesting the astrological computation; the difference seems to be one of several indications that the relative superiority of bride-givers to bride-takers is less marked in Te than in other villages. Within a day or so, the lama will visit the future bride's house (B) and consult his almanacs, a service for which he is offered a meal and some beer. The date of the wedding is usually fixed between a week and ten days later.

On the day of the wedding, the intermediary goes to the bride's home, bearing a woollen shawl for the bride and a flask of beer for her parents. He drinks with the parents, talking pleasantly and reassuring them about the happy life their daughter is certain to enjoy among her in-laws. The intermediary is accompanied by two young women designated as the "friends" (Tk. *ando*) of the bride, who sit on either side of her during the meeting. By customary law these two friends are entitled to *steal anything* from the room while the parental heads are turned—kitchen utensils, clothing, footwear—and stuff them into their dresses. The parents are not allowed to check their bulging clothes when they leave, or demand later that purloined items be returned.

After a while, the groom's party departs with the bride. The parents give her two presents: a brass bowl filled with barley topped with a few lumps of rock salt; and a new sheepskin robe. There is no formal procession, no purification ceremony on entering the groom's house, no feast. The two "friends" hand over their spoils to the groom's parents.

That night, the bride's new mother-in-law leaves a deep wicker basket (Tk. *sendi*, SMT *komba*), containing a wicker pan (Tk. *da*, SMT *dogor*) and a small rake (Tk. *ciag*, SMT *cika*) in the latrine. These are the implements used for collecting river-sand and manure, and on rising the next morning the new bride finds them and immediately sets to work carrying these burdens between the river and the house. She only stops when her mother-in-law tells her she may—often enough, after just one token excursion. The full integration of the

bride into the new home takes around three years. During this time she works hard, and receives no gifts from her husband or his family; all her clothing is provided by her natal home, and it is there she must go for help with washing, oiling, and plaiting her hair.

In the event of an uxorilocal marriage, the procedure is exactly reversed. (I shall discuss the circumstances of such marriages further in the section on inheritance.) The type of work an inmarrying son-in-law does differs from that of a daughter-in-law (though both sexes carry dung and river-sand), but for several years his status in his new house will also be fairly wretched.

What determines the choice of marriage partners? Te's kinship terminology has symmetrical prescriptive features, and marriage between bilateral cross-cousins is permitted. But apart from the proscriptions mentioned earlier, the main criterion is sheer availability. This observation is further confirmed by the rather common phenomenon of child marriage, which, as far as I know, exists nowhere else in Baragaon. Two sets of parents may agree to the marriage of their children long before they have reached puberty. The deal is sometimes clinched by the inmarrying bride or groom immediately taking up residence in her or his in-laws' house. The child will be brought up as a member of the family, and a relationship between playmates will evolve into a marital union without any ceremony to mark the transition, given time and appropriate reinforcement from the rest of the family. My main informant, Kyikyab—who is now a grandfather—took up residence in his present home as a six-year-old son-in-law; the shift, he says, was not traumatic: after all, no house in Te is more than a few minutes' walk from any other.

Child marriage (more accurately, perhaps, child betrothal involving a change of residence) is a means of ensuring that a household has heirs who will themselves produce heirs, but it does not always work. In the mid-1980s, a young girl called Monlam was "adopted" as a future bride for a boy named Tenzin. At the age of eighteen—about the time, people said, when her marriage should have become "real"—she stunned the village by eloping with Gyatso, the heir of another household. Tenzin's family were, predictably enough, enraged by her departure. Pride had been wounded, a daughter-in-law lost, and a decade's expenditure on her upbringing (as the family saw it) gone to the four winds: they had reared a cuckoo. Most disputes between Tepas are solved within the community, but this one went to a local district court, and the matter was settled only on payment of a substantial indemnity to Tenzin's family by that of Gyatso, the successful suitor.

Even from the brief description given here, it will be apparent that marriage is not a part of social commerce between clans or other corporate groups, but a private affair between two households.

## Te's Clans and Their Origins

An interesting account of the provenance of Te's founding clans is contained in a document I have already referred to on a number of occasions (HMA/Te/Tib/01). This untitled and undated work—let us call it the *Chronicle*—is made up of forty lines of exceptionally clear (by comparison with other local documents) cursive script on a single sheet of paper, stored in the archives of Te. The origin of the community is covered in the following lines:

At the insistence of the ordinary people of Te, Önpo Ngawang Chömphel has set down in brief the manner in which the community came into being, and other such things. (ll. 33–34)

A brief account of the origins [of Te]. In the community called Kog there were three clans together: the Khyungpo clan, the Yangba clan, and the Paten clan. The Önpo Lama Biju of Cetong temple came to Kog with his sons, so that, with the Önpo clan, there were altogether four clans living there. They made their territory the extensive hills and valleys on the near side of Ribu, Phuserbog, and the Serla Pass—those three passes—and on the near side of the Tasola Pass. The gods and the people were glad. But after many years of blessed happiness had gone by—the lama knows!—the end of the wealth they had amassed came: they watched it disappear; the end of the sons who had been born to them came: they watched them die; the end of the castle they had built came: they watched it fall. And seeing the impermanence that marks the passage of time they grieved. For on the nineteenth day of the seventh month,<sup>4</sup> all of a sudden there came a violent torrential rainstorm, causing severe damage to the head of the irrigation canal. In spite of their efforts over the course of several years they were unable to restore the head of the canal, and in the end they had to leave. Half the community went to Nar, and half came to Te.

In the community of Te there settled the Cimden clan, led by Göndrugcang, from Naudzong; the Khyungpo clan, led by Dargye Tshering; and the Önpo clan, led by Dawa Chömphel. After spending a few years in Aga, the Yangba and Paten clans subsequently settled in Te. The Butra clan came here from the vicinity of Muga and settled in Te. Because Naudzong and the Khyungpo clan had settled first, the village was named Teyul Khyungdzong Karpo

[gTer yul khyung rdzong dkar po]: the Treasure Community, the White Garuda-Fortress.

The territorial boundaries of this community are as follows: the Roya La Pass; Gang Shuru; the Tawag La Pass; the Muya La Pass; and Phutshang Gang—the land that lies within these boundaries belongs to Te. (ll. 7–25)

The document continues with a description of the surrounding hillsides in terms of conventional Buddhist imagery, a list of the sacred sites of Te, and a note on its main annual festival—subjects I shall discuss in later chapters.

We do not need to take too literally the author's disclaimer about writing the piece under popular duress. Apologiae of this sort are conventional in didactic works (especially autobiographies) that may cast doubt on the humility of their author.

The text associates these clans very clearly with the settlements of the eastern hills, described in chapter 2. The Khyungpo, the Paten, the Yangba,

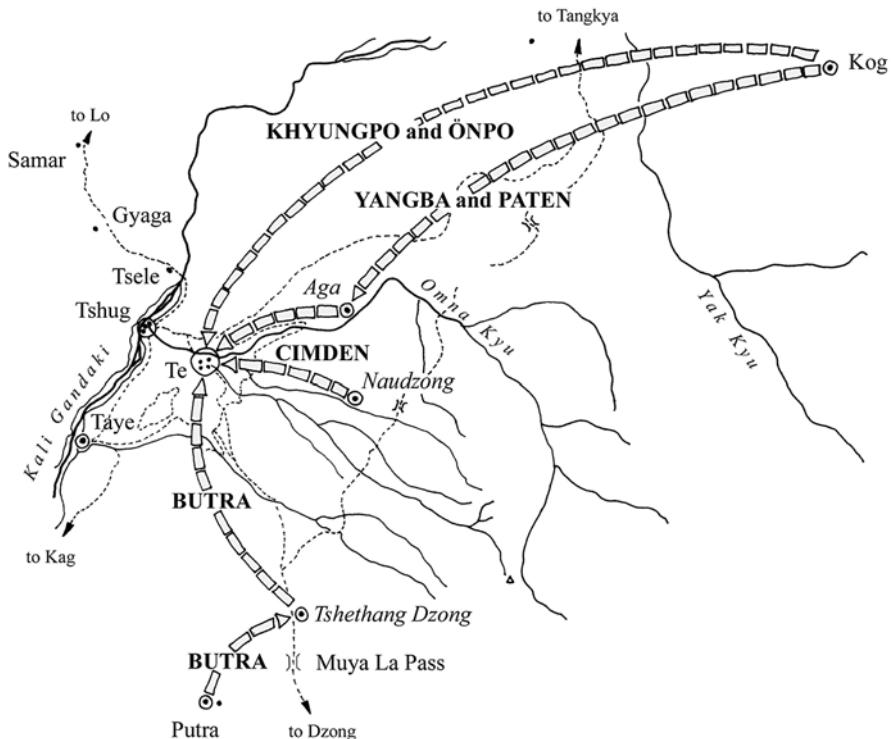


FIGURE 4.4. Map showing the provenance of Te's clans according to the *Chronicle*. (Drawing by Niels Gutschon)

and the vanished Önpo all came from Kog. Of these, the Khyungpo and the Önpo came directly to Te after the fall of Kog, while the Yangba and the Paten remained for an unspecified length of time in Aga before joining the others. The first wave of settlers—the Khyungpo and the Önpo—also included the Cimden, from Naudzong. As for the Butra clan, we are told simply that they “came here from the vicinity of Muga.” Oral tradition from Te and the Muktinath valley helps fill in the spaces left by this rather vague wave of the hand. Muga is the Seke name of the settlement of Dzong on the northern side of the Muktinath valley.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Dzong La, the Tibetan name of the pass from the upper Muktinath valley north into the territory of Te, is called the Muya (pleonastically Tibetanised in the text as Mu ya la,<sup>6</sup> the southern boundary of Te) in Seke. A well-known story in Baragaon has it that the original settlement of Butra was located on a hillside just to the west of present-day Putra, but that it was destroyed when the entire promontory on which it was built broke off and slid, upside-down, to the bottom of the valley.<sup>7</sup> A cock could be heard crowing in the buried village for a full fortnight before it, too, fell silent—an interesting detail because it also figures in village-burial stories from the west of Nepal. The site of the buried village may be identified by a recent plantation of willows and poplars on the northern bank of the Dzong Chu just west of Putra. A group of migrants, either refugees from this disaster or members of some earlier exodus—the story varies—crossed the Muya La and established a new village. This was Tshethang Dzong, the southernmost of the four eastern settlements. Tshethang Dzong was itself later abandoned for unspecified reasons, and its inhabitants came down to Te.

Supplementing lacunae in a text by recourse to oral tradition may seem an alarming way to write history; but it is clear that the *Chronicle* itself is not an entirely reliable document. As the introduction implies, the work seems to be based on an oral account, rather than other documents or on firsthand knowledge. It is history in the style of Herodotus or Thucydides, which derives its information from the testimonies of those who were on the scene, or stories that may already have been several generations old when they were committed to writing. That the six clans did come from these places is likely, because they are now within the territory of Te. Details such as the names of the clan leaders and the date of the collapse of Kog’s tunnel could have been invented to give the whole thing an air of credibility. On balance, I am inclined to think that the author did not invent them. The names of clan leaders—especially when they are the founders of communities—and the dates of traumatic events are the kind of thing that might be remembered and transmitted with accuracy; but while detail may be a common device that is used by European writers to achieve an impression of verisimilitude, it does not normally have the same

persuasive value in Tibetan historiography. The stamp of authenticity in this case is traditionally provided by the soteriological value a work is perceived to have, a fact certain Buddhist scholars have pointed out.<sup>8</sup> As it happens, the names of the clan chieftains matter to this study far less than the fact that the author thought it worthwhile to mention their existence, a point that I shall return to.

## Clans as Corporate Entities

### *Clan-Based Monastic Affiliation*

The clans of Te now have a very limited role in social organisation. The only manifestation of their corporate character is the regulation of marriage: while all clans may intermarry, two people of the same clan may not. However, it is quite certain that the clans once had a more distinct, coherent identity than they do at the present time. We have already seen a hint of this in the *Chronicle's* reference to clan leaders. It may well be that numbers of migrants to Te at the beginning were very small—one or two families from each clan, perhaps—and the “clan leader” in question was just a household head. Even if this were the case, it is nevertheless significant that the author of the text should have been thinking in terms of clans and clan leaders, rather than, say, headmen or other community hierarchs.

It is customary in Te, as in most of Baragaon, for the second of three or more sons to become a monk of the Sakyapa sect. The three main monasteries (Tib. *chos sde*) of Baragaon are situated in Kag, Dzar, and Dzong, and each of these recruits monks and receives revenue and tribute from the villages within its parish. Now Te was not in the parish of just one of the three monasteries, but was partitioned among all three on the basis of clan affiliation. Thus the Cimden clan was affiliated to Dzar, the Yanbga to Kag, and the Butra to Dzong. It is said that this system of apportionment was abandoned after an appeal by the Tepas to Kushog Zangpo Dorje (Zangdor for short), the lord of Baragaon, on the grounds that it entailed an inordinate amount of to-ing and fro-ing between monastery and village. We have already encountered Kushog Zangdor in chapter 3: it was he who succeeded in mediating the rescission of the Shöyul's traditional tax obligations to the king of Lo in 1910 and, if the story of his involvement here is true, he seems to have managed a similar dislocation of the Tepas from their monastic obligations in Baragaon. His name appears in official documents up to the second decade of the twentieth century, so it was probably at this time or earlier that Te's connections with the Sakyapa community of Baragaon ended. Unfortunately, my informants were able to tell me

nothing about the affiliation of the Khyungpo and Paten clans. I can offer no convincing explanation for this clan-specific monastic recruitment, but it is conceivable that the association may date from a period before the abandonment of the eastern settlements, and the clans carried with them to Te the affiliation they had borne in their original villages: after all, the three clans in question came from different places. Tshethang Dzong, reputedly the home of the Butra, is very close to Dzong, and the present-day village of Putra, on whose territory the site of Butra itself stands, is within the parish of Dzong monastery. But since we do not know for certain the dates either of the abandonment of the eastern settlements or the founding of the three monasteries, this idea must remain speculative.

Whatever the case, the point is that these three clans had a corporate identity in a domain other than the regulation of marriage.

### Clan Gatherings

Evidence from other villages in Baragaon and Panchgaon suggests that clan-based social organisation was both stronger and more widespread in the past than it is now. In neighbouring Taye, members of the same clan still meet annually to worship their own gods, and clan gatherings used to be an important part of the ritual calendar of Thini and Shang in Panchgaon (Vinding 1998). While similar conventions may once have been usual in Te, they were represented in recent times only as an adjunct to retirement ceremonies. These occasions, known as *tharchang* (Tib. *thar chang*), literally “exemption beer,” are an important event in individual life-cycles throughout Baragaon and Lo, for they mark the point at which a man or a woman retires from public life and ceases to be eligible for most civic duties. There is usually a considerable degree of flexibility in the timing of this ceremony, but in Te it must be held when a person is fifty-five years old. Traditionally, the first two days of a retirement ceremony would consist of the host providing food and drink to invited members of the community. This part was known as *memangchang*, which might be glossed here as “beer for the ordinary people.” The guests in turn would reciprocate with ceremonial scarves and small gifts of money (in fact these exchanges in Te used to have a particularly interesting form, and I shall have more to say about them later). The next two days were known as the *phephechang*, or “beer for the members of the patriclan.” Only members of the celebrant’s clan would be invited for feasting on these two days. This exclusivity was finally abandoned in 1992 following the periodical review by the community of their laws and customs (see chapter 9).

## Social Stratification

A rather curious template of social stratification has found its way into Te in relatively recent times. The resulting hierarchy does not pose a serious threat to village unity, but it is a constant irritant that has, among other things, probably helped to undermine clan identity.

Chapter 1 outlined Baragaon's system of social ranking, which places the villages of the Shöyul in a somewhat nebulous "Subcommoner" category, above the Artisans but below—or rather, apart from—the ordinary Commoners. There is also a custom of purifying the taint of commensual or sexual contact with Artisans and outcastes by drinking "gold water" and eating bran (see chapter 10). Throughout Baragaon, degree of inclusion in a status group is expressed in terms of two idioms: "row" (SMT, Tk. *dral*, < Tib. *gral*) and "mouth" (SMT, Tib. *kha*, Tk. *sung*). Full membership means that a person will be allocated a place in the row of men or women on the basis of his or her age, and will have the right to "share the cup" with the other members of the group. Certain factors, such as the doubtful antecedents of an inmarrying outsider—may result in only partial inclusion, which entails being granted "row" but not "mouth."

So far I have spoken of Te's five named clans, the sixth, the Önpo, having become extinct. Although the rule of endogamy has prevented other clans from *marrying in*, it has not been able to stop them from being *born in*. Romantic liaisons between Tepa women and outsiders have resulted in the irruption of two maverick lineages into the community. Illegitimacy in Te carries no great stigma for the child; the unmarried mother will probably not be severely censured but is unlikely to find a husband if the child survives; for the father, the penalty is not so harsh as to discourage him from admitting paternity: he pays 2 rupees to the mother, and that is the end of his responsibility. As far as the Tepas are concerned, the most serious possible consequence of illegitimacy is falsely attributed fatherhood, which raises the spectre of an unwittingly incestuous marriage in a future generation.

To bear the natural children of a non-Tepa father within the village is a far more serious matter. Of the two outsiders who fathered sons on unmarried women in the last century, one was a commoner from Lo and the other a nobleman from the Kyukar house of Purang, in the Muktinath valley. However elevated the status of the latter may have been in the Baragaon hierarchy, the Tepas denied the boys "mouth" on the grounds that they were outsiders. In spite of this, both boys found situations as in-marrying sons-in-law and produced children of their own, and these in their turn married into other households: the Tepas' anxiety about securing heirs to estates, described earlier,

overrode what seems to have been the rather unfamiliar notion of low birth. The two clans are now effectively extinct, since both are represented in the present generation only by women (who do not, of course, pass on their "bone" to their children); but since the contagion, so to speak, is spread by both marriage and descent—as well as "sharing the cup"—a number of lineages of "insider" clans are now also "without mouth" (Tk. *sung arewa*; SMT *kha megen*, < Tib. *kha med mkhan*). Today, twenty of Te's forty-six estates are "without mouth" and the remaining twenty-six are "with mouth" (Tk. *sung muwa*; SMT *kha yögen*, < Tib. *kha yod mkhan*). Both groups count among them members of *all* the clans.

Now "mouthlessness" is not absolute but a matter of degree. Certain people "without mouth" who were subsequently discovered to have had intimate relations with outsiders were reduced even further—as were those who shared the cup or intermarried with them—resulting in a three-tiered hierarchy. The "mouthless" group refracted into two subgroups, resulting in a more precise tripartite classification into "big mouth" (Tk. *sung thewa*), "middle mouth" (Tk. *sung pariwa*), and "little mouth" (Tk. *sung cangba*). Members of the "middle mouth" group may redeem their status by paying 100 rupees to the "big mouth" group. (The sum chosen may be in deliberate imitation of the statutory bridewealth payment of 100 rupees that a commoner groom makes to his noble bride in the unusual event of such hypogamous marriages in southern Baragaon.) But the offspring of these social climbers are pejoratively referred to as "bought mouths," in the same way that the descendants of men who have been ritually restored to their rank in Baragaon after failing with an outcaste are called "bran-eaters." Some lineages have lost and bought back their "mouth" in two successive generations; others refuse to flatter the "big mouths" by paying them the fee; and "small mouths" are altogether irredeemable.

No one is particularly happy with the situation. It is obviously disagreeable to have no "mouth"; but those "with mouth" are aware that, because of the limited marriage market in the village, some of their children or grandchildren, and perhaps the estate itself (since all members of a household are classed as cup-sharers), are bound to fall within their lifetime. Now as we have seen in earlier chapters, Tepas periodically turn to disinterested outsiders for help in resolving disputes. In the 1970s, a member of a prominent Thakali family that was well known to the Tepas offered an interesting suggestion about how they might disentangle themselves from their hierarchical cobwebs. As he astutely pointed out, it made not the least difference to the rest of the world whether a Tepa was with or without mouth. As far as everyone else was concerned, all Tepas were the same. Those without mouth might not easily be

given mouth, but if Tepas with mouth descended to the same level as those without, then the entire village could “share the cup,” and the net result would be exactly the same as if everyone had mouth. The Thakali proposed that a drinking-session be arranged in which all the men would “mix mouths” by drinking from the same bowl, and all the women would do likewise among themselves (since men and women do not ceremonially share the cup). The logic was incontrovertible. The men agreed to carry out the Thakali’s suggestion. But after long discussion, the women “with mouth” rejected the idea, and the plan was abandoned altogether.

So the hierarchy endures, continuing to stress the Tepas, and unless the aborted stratagem of sharing a levelling cup is adopted, may only end with the entropy that must follow several generations of endogamous marriage. The three tiers of mouths have certainly created social divisions in Te; but the divisions crosscut the clan groups, and their existence has undoubtedly contributed to the diminution of clan solidarity.

### Clan Land

The territories of all the eastern settlements were taken over by Te after their abandonment. It is not merely a question of one village ceding its land to another; the transfer is seen to have been accomplished by the mediation of migrant clans, who carried with them, as it were, the usufruct of the place they had left. It is precisely for this reason that the old territory of Kog is a subject of potential dispute: the Khyungpo clan settled not only in Te but also in Tshug, and the latter, too, therefore considers that it had rights to the land that was “brought” to the new community as the heritage of one of its component lineages. Te, in return, argues that it was the first place where the Khyungpo clan settled, and also that the Yangba, the Paten, and the Önpo, who were equally the heirs of Kog, never went as far as Tshug. But the dispute is only, as I have said, a potential one. Kog is so far away from both Tshug and Te that neither makes sufficient use of its pastures for conflicts to arise. Its slopes are grazed mainly by herds from Tangkyä, which, interestingly, regards Kog as part of its territory on a de facto basis. In any case, the question of ownership is likely to remain academic, unless a rashly conceived development project, using the possibilities of PVC piping, decides that it would be a good thing to irrigate and again bring prosperity to the barren acres of Kog.

Clans may be the vectors of uncultivated land, but they are never its owners—contrary to the case of other Nepalese ethnic groups such as the Rai. Ownership lies with the community, the *yul*, to which the clan belongs.

Cultivated land, by contrast, is for the most part privately owned, insofar as it is divided up into individual estates attached to households. In addition to these private plots of farmland, every village has a certain number of communally owned fields, the owners in this case being a variety of possible corporate entities. Thus fields may be owned by temples, monasteries, administrative sectors, or simply the village community. In Te, the only communal land there is belongs to the village corporation.

As it happens, there is evidence that there may once have been such a thing as clan-owned cultivated land. The evidence in question comes from a single Tibetan document in the Te archives (HMA/Te/Tib/06). It consists of twenty-four lines of cursive ('khyug) script on one sheet of paper, and although it is unfortunately undated, the handwriting and the condition of the paper both suggest that it is one of the older documents in the collection.

The declaration is addressed to "the precious lawlord, the supreme one of the two [sacred and secular] traditions," a standard formulation signifying whoever happens to be the legal arbiter in the event that the document is produced as evidence in an eventual dispute—effectively an elaborate way of saying "to whom it may concern." The text reads as follows.

Each [household of] the Cimden clan of Jumla<sup>9</sup> shall give one field to the community of Te. The size of the field is to be decided by the donors themselves. The water allocation for the fields that are given shall be one-eighth of an irrigation unit, and the fields are to be placed in the category of community fields. The Cimden clan may not use [the?] extra water. The community of Te may not object to the Cimden clan using village water. The people of the Cimden clan shall pay the community whatever rent they think appropriate on these fields, on the basis of their size. The Tepas in turn may not object to the quantity of rent that is paid, even if they think it is too little. If the Cimden clan should become extinct, these fields shall remain with the community of Te, and none of the Cimden people may object to this. The representatives of the Cimden clan express their agreement by placing their thumbprints (six prints seem to be distinguishable) on the same spot. The document is also signed by the three Headmen of Te, and the community expresses its consent by having passed the document from hand to hand. The scribe is the Kag monk Wangdu.

In fact it is impossible to tell from the text whether the land at issue is corporately owned by the Cimden clan or privately owned by its members. If the former is the case, then we should take the document to mean that the Cimden

clan should give the village one field of its collective property per household of its clan—six of them, to judge by the number of the signatories. Alternatively, it may mean that each household of the Cimden clan should give the village one of the fields from its own private estate. But if it is a question of individual property, it becomes very difficult to explain why the Cimden clan as a whole should have been singled out for this treatment, since the document is obviously aimed at curtailing the disproportionate wealth of the group. It is apparent that the problem can only be tackled if we know something about the relationship between clans and the inheritance of landed property.

### Categories of Households

Households in Te are, broadly, of two types, which I shall call estates and dependencies. The term for estate is *drongba* (Tib. *grong pa*), the usual term in Lo and Baragaon—and in much of Tibet—for this kind of household. An estate essentially consists of a house and a number of fields scattered through the agricultural land of the village. In addition, there may be one or more smaller buildings, not necessarily attached to the main house, a threshing yard or two, some fruit trees, and a stone corral for penning dzos in the central gorge—not to mention livestock and other moveable property that a house contains. There are forty-eight estates in Te, and have been for as long as anyone can remember. Two of the estates have no owners, and although their fields are apportioned out for use by other estates, they have nevertheless not been dissolved: they are village property, and can be “reactivated” as whole entities if the community so decides. In fact they have both recently been reactivated in a limited way, but I shall discuss the rather complex circumstances of their operation later.

A man becomes the head of his household after the withdrawal of his father from the position. This transition corresponds approximately to the latter's retirement ceremony, but is less rigidly enforced than the withdrawal from public life. A dynamic father whose son is a relatively weak character, or generally incompetent, may continue to function as the head of the estate well into old age. Marriages are mainly monogamous, but there are a few examples of fraternal polyandry. This system of marriage—very typical for much of Tibet and the Tibetan-speaking Himalaya—was once very common in Baragaon and Lo but is now increasingly rare. Estates are inherited in the male line, but they are never subdivided among a group of brothers. The normal pattern in Baragaon is that the eldest brother inherits and becomes the head of the household. If his younger brother or brothers wish to join him in a polyandrous

marriage, they may do so and may then claim the right to equal usufruct of the estate. If they wish to marry separately, they forfeit this right, and are then obliged to seek their fortunes alone by marrying into a household that has no male heir or by setting up a dependent household with a bought, leased, or borrowed (or newly built) house and fields. There are numerous kinds of dependent households, and their nomenclature, status, and operation vary in certain important respects from one village to another. Since a comparative perspective on this aspect of estates would contribute very little to this study, we need only know what the situation is in Te.

When a man has passed on to his son the mantle of household head, the role of "head woman" or "housemistress" is simultaneously ceded by his wife to his daughter-in-law. The retired couple (or marital group, in the case of a polyandrous arrangement) may continue to eat at the same hearth and share the household property; alternatively, they may establish their own hearth in one or two rooms of the house or in a separate house belonging to the estate. The new head will provide his parents with a few fields and animals for their maintenance. This type of dependency is known as the *gentshang* (Tib. *rgan tshang*), the "old-folks' home," and has certain entitlements—such as an allocation of firewood—that are not permitted to retired couples or groups who share the hearth of the main household. At the time of writing, there are only two *gentshang* in Te. One is occupied by the widow of the elder brother of the household head, and the other by the widow of the household head's paternal uncle.

The other category of dependent household in Te is called the *phorang-morang* (Tib. *pho rang mo rang*), literally "male-on-his-own, female-on-her-own." In some villages of Baragaon, the term denotes precisely that—an individual, usually an unmarried woman, who maintains his or her own hearth in a part of the main house or some subsidiary building. While a few examples in Te conform precisely to this model, the term covers a wider range of domestic configurations.

There are nine *phorang-morang* households in Te, and the majority of these appear to have originated either as a consequence of younger brothers preferring to marry outside a polyandrous union or as the hearths of unmarried women with illegitimate children. Significantly, all the heads of *phorang-morang* households, with one interesting exception, belong to the generation above that of the heads of estates. Their children have, for the most part, married into estates, while those who have not have moved to Pokhara. Furthermore, members of the present generation who would traditionally have established new *phorang-morang* units have also preferred to move to Pokhara rather than accept the slender lot of being a landless householder in the

village. No new households of this kind have been created in the present generation.

*Phorang-morang* are usually landless, and make their income by working for others, or by leasing fields from the village or from estates. Since the children are likely to move into an estate or away from the village at the earliest opportunity, the household is usually dissolved following the death of the occupants. However, there is nothing except poverty to prevent *phorang-morang* from buying land, and one of the nine does indeed very much resemble an ordinary estate. The household in question has been inherited by two brothers, who have continued their parents' policy of acquiring property. They have two separate houses (one of which is used for storage) and a number of their own fields. They are married (to one wife) and have two children, one of whom is very likely to want to inherit the household. (There was a similarly successful *phorang-morang* two generations ago, but the only son married into an estate, and after his parents' death the house and its fields were absorbed by the estate.) This type of household is more characteristic of the kind known as *khaldura* in southern Baragaon.<sup>10</sup> But in spite of its superficial resemblance, the household is not ranked as an estate: its members are not eligible for tenure of certain important village offices or the provision of certain taxes, and even though its house and land do not belong to anyone else, it is intrinsically dependent, to the extent that it has no irrigation rights but must rely on kindly neighbours to donate some of their water allowance for its fields. Unlike other dependencies, however, it has its own household gods.

*Khaldura*-type households in southern Baragaon are the result of an estate having split, usually because one brother did not wish to participate in a polyandrous marriage. Such splitting of an estate represents a situation in which the younger brother was required to forfeit his inheritance, but was given a house—or part of a single house—and about half the fields of the original estate. The two householders henceforth become separate economic units, and are inherited separately. However, the two *khaldura* households continue to be regarded as a single estate, with the same obligations and rights as the unit had prior to the separation: as a general rule, a village community deals only with estates, and while there may be general laws concerning the rights and limits of dependencies, such as "elders' quarters," these are implemented through the estates to which these lesser hearths are attached. Thus an estate may split into two parts without the village community having to become involved in the matter. If the headman of the village in question is normally recruited by rotation among the estates, two *khaldura* households making up a single estate will be required to provide only one incumbent per circuit, and in practice the heads of the households will alternate in holding

office. Similarly, the households will continue to enjoy the irrigation rights of only a single estate, and they will have to divide up this allocation of water in a way that is best suited to the particular system of irrigation management that operates in the community.

It sometimes happens that a village revises the classification of its houses and “upgrades” *khaldura* or *phorang-morang* to the dignity of full estates (*drongba*). This is precisely what happened in the village of Khyenga, in the Muktinath valley, some two decades ago, when it was decided, as a consequence of certain changes in the national administrative system, that the burden of providing incumbents for the new village offices would be better distributed among a larger number of candidates. Something of this sort appears to have happened in Te. We know that this is the case because several estates are referred to as being fractional households. There are nineteen half-estates; three quarter-estates; and six eighth-estates. These fractional estates are not like the *khaldura* households described earlier: *they are fractional in name only*, and each of them, whether classified as half, quarter, or eighth, has exactly the same duties and privileges as the twenty “whole” estates of Te. This said, the designation of the fractional households as such is not a fiction, since the provenance of the fractions is recognised. Sixteen of the half-estates are paired as follows. (Thangka, Yangba, and Töpa are three of the four sectors into which Te is divided. The number denotes the position of the estate in the roster of its sector. For the locations of the estates in the settlements, see fig. 4.9.)

- Thangka 8 and Thangka 7
- Thangka 5 and Thangka 6
- Thangka 3 and Yangba 11
- Yangba 9 and Yangba 8
- Yangba 7 and Yangba 6
- Töpa 11 and Töpa 10
- Töpa 9 and Töpa 4
- Töpa 2 and Töpa 1

If the original estate from which these half-estates were created is represented diagrammatically by a simple square, then the situation of, say, the last of these examples can be drawn as shown in figure 4.5.

Next, quarter- and eighth-estates are linked with half-estates to reveal the primordial estates from which they departed. Thus Thangka 11 and Thangka 10 are two quarter-estates that together form a half. Their opposite half is furnished by Thangka 9. The configuration may be represented as shown in figure 4.6.

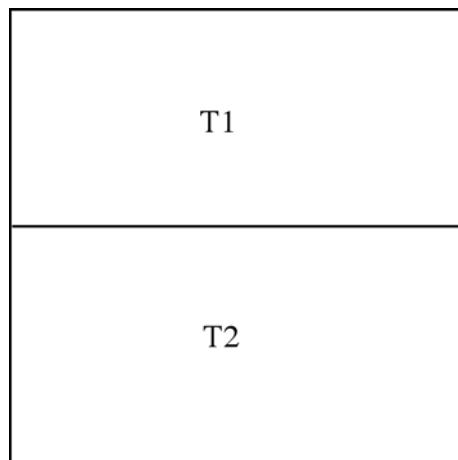


FIGURE 4.5. Bipartition of an estate into Töpa 1 and Töpa 2.

Two other original estates split further to produce combinations including eighth-estates (as shown in figure 4.7).

In this case, Sumdu 6 is a half-estate, and the other half is subdivided into one quarter (Yangba 3) and two eighths (Sumdu 4 and Sumdu 5). The final example of a subdividing household is the Saryangsa estate. This estate first split into two, each half being headed by two brothers, the elder Gyalo and the younger Chö Tshering. Gyalo had four sons, and his estate was subdivided into four parts, which were shared equally among them. These four sons—now

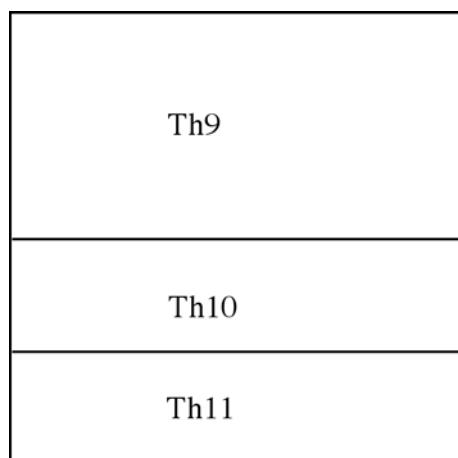


FIGURE 4.6. Bipartition of a half-estate to form the two quarter-estates Thangka 10 and Thangka 11.

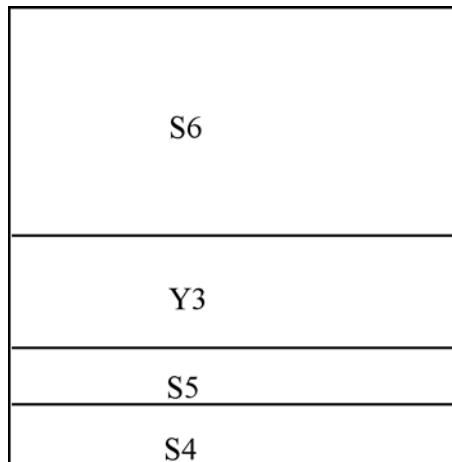


FIGURE 4.7. Bipartition of a quarter-estate to form the two eighth-estates Sumdu 4 and Sumdu 5.

all dead—were the grandfathers or great-uncles of the men who are now heads of these households. Because the four households were created by the quadripartition of a half-household, they were, and are now, rated as eighth-households (as shown in figure 4.8).

The half that was headed by the younger brother, Chö Tshering, does not figure in the roster of numbered estates because it is ownerless. It is one of the two estates in Te (the other being the Önpo Drongba) that are classified as *lungbe drongba* (Tib. *lung pa'i grong pa*), “community estates.” Why Chö Tshering, the last owner, had no heirs is not known. The fact that there is relatively little land attached to the estate suggests that he, or his predecessor, sold off many of its fields, rendering the holding unviable or at least highly unattractive as an economic proposition. After its abandonment it came to be known as the Chöpa Zhing-gi Drongba, “the estate with the community (lit. religious) fields,” and when the national cadastral survey reached Te in the early 1970s the land belonging to this estate and Önpo estate were officially registered as nontaxable “religious collective” (*dharma guṭhi*). After it had become community property, the estate was occupied on a caretaker basis by one Urgyen Norbu, the father of a certain Tshangdrug. In Tshangdrug’s time, the owner of Töpa II, Tshin Norbu, decided to leave Te and move to the little settlement of Yule, a satellite of Kag, and sold his estate to Tshangdrug for 16,000 rupees. Thus Tshangdrug became the owner of his own estate, and the community half of the Saryangsa estate again fell vacant. The following year (1992),

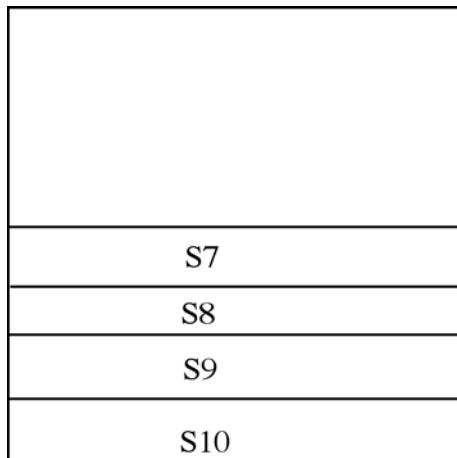


FIGURE 4.8. The Saryangsa estate, which now makes up one half-estate and four eighth-estates in the Sumdu sector.

Te decided that it would adopt the Luri lama as its community chaplain (in circumstances that I shall discuss later). According to the terms of the agreement, in exchange for various specified ritual services the lama was given tenancy of the house of the community Saryangsa estate and usufruct of the fields of *both* this estate *and* the Önpo estate (with the exception of two fields that remain in the hands of the previous tenants), as well as other community fields (*chöpazhing*).

The Saryangsa estate thus appears to have split into five estates in two steps: first, the bisection that left Gyalo and his brother Chö Tshering in charge of two halves, and a second division that refracted Gyalo's half into four eighths. In any event, it appears likely that the multiplication of estates took place over a relatively short period of time, and that the final number of forty-eight, far from being a matter of chance, was decided on as a good foursquare figure, appropriate to a fourfold sectoral division of the community. By simple arithmetic, it can be calculated that the twenty-eight fractional estates listed here emerged from eleven whole estates. This implies that there were, at one time, thirty-one estates in Te. While this is logically true, it is not at all sure—because we do not know whether the subdivision of households occurred at approximately the same time—whether the village ever operated with thirty-one estates. It is conceivable that, when the village found itself with an awkward, prime number of households, it designated that one of them should split in order to provide a manageable thirty-two.

But why would the village have wanted to increase the number of its estates from thirty-one or thirty-two to forty-eight? First, the fact that it did so without any of the new households suffering economic hardship suggests that the estates that did split may have had more agricultural land than was manageable, and second, a larger number of estates would have meant that duties for which estate-holders alone were eligible (for example, all the major village offices) could be distributed more widely. The latter would hold true even if in some cases the splitting of estates meant no more than the recognition, as estates, of existing households that were rated as *phorang-morang* dependencies. The policy may therefore have been partly intended to "mop up" these marginal households by according them the mixed blessings of full estatehood.

I said earlier that the fractional estates are fractional in name only. This is quite true insofar as an eighth-estate, say, has exactly the same rights and obligations as a full estate; the fractions do not, as in the case of the *khaldura* households described earlier, remain part of an institutionally recognised higher order estate. The process is not one of compartmentalisation but a sort of institutional mitosis, in which a parent household splits into two replicas of itself, and where these replicas may themselves "reproduce."

This said, in at least one case I am aware of the fact that the partition of the parent estate was not quite complete sustains the recollection of a common origin. The heads of the new estates were unable to agree on the allocation of certain valuable items, and these are still regarded as common property. Estates Töpa 1 and Töpa 4 share a sacred book and a brocade robe as well as certain other valuables, and demonstrate their common ownership by means of an alternating possession: every year, during the festival of the Lama Guru, the common property is ceremonially handed over by one estate to the other. It is interesting to note that while both Töpa 1 and Töpa 4 are half-estates, they are not regarded as having split from a single parent estate. Töpa 1 is paired with Töpa 2, and Töpa 4 with Töpa 9. The fact that Töpa 1 and Töpa 2 share property therefore strongly suggests that the parent estates, Töpa 1 plus Töpa 2 and Töpa 4 plus Töpa 9, were themselves the consequence of an earlier, otherwise unrecorded, split in an ancestral estate.

### The Inheritance Pattern

The relationship between marriage patterns and the inheritance of property in Te differs in a number of important respects from the usual situation in the rest of Baragaon. In both southern Baragaon and Te, marriage is mainly virilocal, and the oldest son inherits the property. His younger brothers have the

choice of participating in the marriage and in usufruct of the estate or living separately, with no share of the inheritance. In Baragaon, if a family has only daughters, at least one of the daughters remains at home to inherit the estate, and a husband marries into the household. The term for son-in-law, *magpa* (Tib. *mag pa*), has both a general meaning as “daughter’s husband” and a specific one as “groom who marries into a household.” If a family has neither sons nor daughters, the household is usually inherited by the nearest member of kin in the clan of the husband (or of the wife in the case of an uxorilocal *magpa* marriage)—for example, one of the father’s brother’s sons. Normally a childless couple or group will make provision for the succession before their deaths by adopting the prospective heir, who is accordingly designated a *butshab* (Tib. *bu tshab*)—“substitute son”—who reciprocates the recognition given him by his adoptive parents with filial piety, *zhabtog* (Tib. *zhabs tog*). In the unlikely event that there are no surviving members of the clan, an heir is usually sought among the matrilineal kin of the household head (or the housemistress, if the husband is a *magpa*).

The ideal hierarchy of choices of an heir as presented by the Tepas differs in one important respect. Traditionally, it is said, if a family had no sons but only daughters, these would not (contrary to the case in the rest of Baragaon), remain at home to inherit the estate but would marry into other estates. The reason given is unequivocal: the clan affiliation of a household should not change. If a daughter were to remain at home as an heiress, the man who married her would necessarily belong to a different clan, and any children they might have would also be members of that clan. In order to maintain the clan identity of an estate, the first option for a sonless family was to bring into the household a male heir who was a member of the appropriate clan and for whom a wife would then be sought from a third household. This, then, is presented as having been the ideal: *to keep the estate within the clan as far as possible*.

This state of affairs helps us to understand the significance of document HMA/Te/Tib/o6. It will be remembered that the uncertainty lay in whether the land demanded of the Cimden clan by the village was corporately owned clan land or private land belonging to estates of individual members of the Cimden. In the light of the clan-controlled system of estate inheritance, the difference between the categories private land and clan land does not disappear, but it does become significantly reduced. We do not know whether estate-holders had the right to sell land to members of other clans; if they did not, then the distinction is effectively meaningless. But even if they did, the totality of property owned by members of a clan could to a certain extent be regarded as a common inheritance, insofar as it remained within the group even on the death of individual owners.

The traditional inalienability of the estate from the clan is illustrated by the case of the Önpo, one of the six original clans of Te. The last member of the Önpo died long ago—probably in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Önpo estate was not inherited by any other clan but became communal property. This is one of the two “empty” estates that are still held intact by the community. The old association between clan and estate is still sustained in the continuing appellation of the group of fields and the now-derelict house in the north-western corner of Dzong as the “Önpo estate.”

A final observation may be made about document HMA/Te/Tib/o6 before I move on to consider other manifestations of clan integrity. For some reason, the Cimden clan is being required to give land to the village. Although we are not told about the exact circumstances of the request, the inevitable effect is to increase the resource base of the community as a whole at the expense of a particular clan.

The last generation or two has seen the abandonment of what appears to have been a rather strict regulation of inheritance by clan interests, and the consequences for the community are significant. To what extent was this ideal of clan priority in inheritance realised in practice? The short answer is that we do not know. There are no written records that could help us, and genealogical memory is too shallow to permit the emergence of a discernable pattern.

But let us see what the situation looks like now. There are forty-six occupied estates in Te. In thirty-seven cases, the present heads are the sons of the previous head. This leaves nine estates that had no sons. How have these solved the problem of inheritance?

(1) Töpa 6: Paten to Khyungpo

The old head was a Paten and his wife a Butra. They had one daughter (Paten), who married out into a Butra estate. The daughter of the same estate was brought in as the daughter-in-law of Töpa 6, and the son-in-law, her husband, is a Khyungpo.

(2) Töpa 7: Yangpa to Paten

The old head was a Yangba and his wife a Paten. None of their many children survived, and both a son-in-law (Paten) and daughter-in-law were brought in to inherit the estate.

(3) Töpa 12: Paten to Yangba

The daughter of the estate had no brothers. She remained at home, and her in-marrying husband is a Yangba.

(4) Sumdu 9: Yangba to Yangba

The old head was a Yangba. He had one daughter, who married into estate Sumdu 7 (Khyungpo). The daughter of Sumdu 7 came to Sumdu 9 as a

daughter-in-law, and a Yangba son-in-law was brought in as her husband. The estate has therefore remained in the Yangba clan.

(5) Sumdu 10: Khyungpo to Khyungpo

The old head, Sherab, was a member of the Khyungpo clan. The son-in-law and daughter-in-law who married into the estate are Khyungpo and Yangba, respectively.

(6) Yangba 1: Khyungpo to Yangpa

The old head was a Khyungpo who had one daughter. A son-in-law of the Yangba clan married in, but shortly afterward the daughter died. The son-in-law remarried. His present wife is a Butra.

(7) Yangba 9: Khyungpo to Paten

The daughter of the estate is unmarried but has an illegitimate son who will inherit the estate. The arrangement is not exactly planned, but the inheritance is not disputed. The clan membership of the household will change from Khyungpo (the daughter) to Paten (her son).

(8) Thangka 1: Yangba to Khyungpo

The old head was a Yangba, who had one daughter. She has remained at home. Her inmarrying husband is a Khyungpo.

(9) Thangka 3: Butra to Khyungpo

The old head was a Butra who had one daughter, who married out, and a son-in-law and daughter-in-law of the Khyungpo and Paten, respectively, were brought in to inherit the estate.

So much for the ideal of preserving the clan membership of estates. In only two of these nine sonless estates is the new head a member of the same clan as his predecessor. Three of the households have adopted the strategy that would typically have been followed in southern Baragaon, with the daughter remaining at home and taking an in-married *magpa* as a husband. Three other estates have taken what could have been the first step in assuring clan continuity—marrying their daughters out, as Sumdu 9 did—but the sons-in-law they have subsequently brought in are of a different clan.

The Tepas themselves explicitly contrast the traditional ideal with the attitude underlying present practice. It no longer matters that an estate changes from one clan to another, it is said, as they are all the same. What is meant by “the same,” of course, is that one’s own clan is not seen as taking precedence over any other as the beneficiary of a particular pattern of inheritance. The process of which the early stages are exemplified by document HMA/Te/Tib/06, the reduction of a clan’s corporate wealth in order to strengthen the resource base of the whole community, has achieved its culmination in an attitude: that people no longer regard their clan as a corporate group that

commands their loyalty in any way, or places on them any moral demands that are centrifugal from the non-clan-based interests of the community.

The peculiarly Tepa strategy of displacing one's daughters to make way for a male heir of the same clan, so alien to the rest of Baragaon, has, it seems, pushed this attitude a step further. A Baragaon couple may regret having no sons to inherit their estate, but there is real affective reassurance in seeing their daughters take over; or, failing daughters, at least some more distant member of the head's clan. Because the traditional emphasis on clan continuity meant that daughters were never in the first place an option as heirs, the abandonment of clan preference has resulted in the complete disappearance of a hierarchy of preferred heirs. Sons inherit because that is the default value, so to speak; but when it comes to finding heirs for sonless estates, *absolutely any Tepa will do*. The prevailing attitude is that a couple or group should enrich their household as much as possible during their lifetime and ensure that it is perpetuated after their death; but it does not matter in the least who perpetuates it. Whoever inherits will be a Tepa, because although a few people have married out of the village, no outsider has ever married into Te.

## Clan Gods

The priority of the estate has asserted itself in a number of other respects. One important development has been the appropriation of clan gods. The main house of every estate in Te contains a niche in one of the walls of the *dim*, the floor where the hearth is. The niche is about a foot long, 6 inches high, and 6 inches deep. Inside this niche are one or more small clay pots representing the household gods (*dimilha*). The mouth of the niche is sealed with clay and whitewashed over, so that people other than members of the house may not even know that it is there. The gods in each house may be one or more of the following six: Lama Suna Yeshe; Jowo Shartsen Nyenpo; Pholha Yönten Karpo; Namthohre; Patagen; Kyipcang. The first three are also territorial gods, and I will say more about them in chapter 6. Namthohre (Tib. Nam thos sras po) is a well-known divinity who is worshipped by both Buddhists and Bonpos as a god of wealth, and as such is associated with Dzambalha, the King of the North. The only occasion on which I have encountered him linked to a lineage is in a libation ceremony (*serkyem*, Tib. *gser skyems*) from Lo Monthang, in which he is associated with the Yangal (Tib. Ya ngal), an important clan of Bonpo priests that once flourished in Lo but now survive only in Dolpo. As far as I am aware, Patagen exists only as a household god in Te. Kyipcang is the jackal.<sup>11</sup> The jackal as a divinity may not be unique to Te, since there is some suggestion of

its presence—or that of the wolf—in certain rituals in Taye. The small pots used by the village priest in rituals to clan and territorial gods are called *pyangpu* (lit. “wolf-pots”).<sup>12</sup>

Could these have been clan gods? The fact that there are six gods and six original clans is the most obvious indication that this may have been the case. There is a close association between the Khyungpo clan and Shartsenpa in other parts of Mustang. The god is the most important territorial divinity of Tshug, where the clan also settled after migrating from Kog. Here, his public worship may be performed only by a male member of the Khyungpo clan. He is also found in Tangkya, to the northeast of Te, where there are a few Khyungpo households. (People of Tangkya claim that Shartsenpa once used to be worshipped with human sacrifices, an assertion that could be anything from Buddhist propaganda against pagan gods to the truth itself.) Somewhat surprisingly, Shartsenpa is also worshipped in Chongkhor, a community of Buddhist priests in the upper Muktinath valley. The apparent anomaly may be explained by the fact that the priestly clan in question, the Tsabgyepa (Tib. *rTswa ba brgyad pa*) also regards itself as belonging to a branch of the Khyungpo superclan that migrated from Tibet.

Lama Suna Yeshe is said to have originated in what is now the village of Khyenga in the Muktinath valley. Oral tradition has it that he was at once a tantric priest and a powerful temporal ruler, who is addressed by the priest of Khyenga as

Master of the three hundred households  
Master of the hundred horse-owners  
Master with the thousand tresses.

When he died, he became a harmful spirit of the kind known as *mishi tsenkye* (Tib. *mi shi btsan skyes*)—“one who dies a man and is born a warrior-demon”—until later, through a medium, he consented to serve the village as a protective god. Lama Suna Yeshe is also worshipped by the village priest of Dzar (see Ramble 1997). In view of his very local character (Lama Suna Yeshe is even said to have been born in Khyenga), how did he come to make the journey over the Muya La and into Te? A possible vector may have been the Butra clan, whose original settlement was a short distance from Khyenga and Dzar. Moreover, while Suna Yeshe’s residence in the territory of Te—a peak called Musha—lies a long distance to the east of the village, the place is relatively close to Tshethang Dzong, the abandoned settlement where the Butra are said to have lived in the course of their northward migration.

Namthohre—the only canonical god of the six, and one who, as we have already seen, was linked to a priestly clan (the Bonpo Yangal)—may have been

brought to Te by the vanished Önpo. One Tepa suggested to me that Patagen and Kyipcang were associated with the Paten and Cimden clans, respectively, although it is not clear whether his vagueness on the matter signified genuine uncertainty or the reluctance that all Tepas exhibit when speaking of household gods. Pholha Yönten Karpo would then be connected to the Yangba, although there is nothing to suggest such a link.

If all or some of these divinities were clan gods, as appears to have been the case, they have lost this character entirely in Te. Three of them—Pholha Yönten Karpo, Lama Suna Yeshe, and Shartsenpa—are also territorial gods, and as such are publicly worshipped as part of a fivefold constellation by the village priest, a member of the Khyungpo clan, and the village officials (a cult I shall discuss in chapter 6). Household gods are worshipped twice a year: first, within the first fifteen days of the second month, and second, within the first fifteen days of the eighth month. The occasions are explicitly related to the sprouting barley and buckwheat, respectively. The cavity is opened, and the small clay pots are given new decorations of butter—yak butter alone may be used—and the butter lamp that stands in front of them is lit again. The lamp itself is of metal—generally silver, brass, or copper. The opening of the cavity is then resealed. The rite itself is performed by the head of the estate. No one who is not a member of the household is permitted to enter the house while the gods are being worshipped. On the other hand, there is no restriction against women or girls approaching the open cavity, and indeed, the worship may be performed by a woman if the estate has no male head, or where the male head is a newcomer to the house. The nonexclusion of women from the worship of the *dimilha* stands in contrast to the public worship of these in their manifestation as territorial gods, when only men participate; and to the situation in other parts of the high Himalaya, such as Ladakh, where women may not even approach the rooftop shrine of the household god. The point is that the Tepas' household gods no longer bear the characteristics of "gods of the males," the *pholha* (Tib. *pho lha*). Above all, they are not replaced when the clan affiliation of the estate changes; on the contrary, it is the incoming groom who must modify his conduct to comply with the exigencies of his new gods. For example, members of the four households that worship Lama Suna Yeshe may not consume yak meat; any new recruit must observe this restriction, but whoever leaves the household for another that does not worship the god ceases to be subject to the prohibition. The fact that some households have two or three gods may be explained by the possibility that a new clan would install its own patron divinity beside the existing god, a practice that is known in other villages of Baragaon.

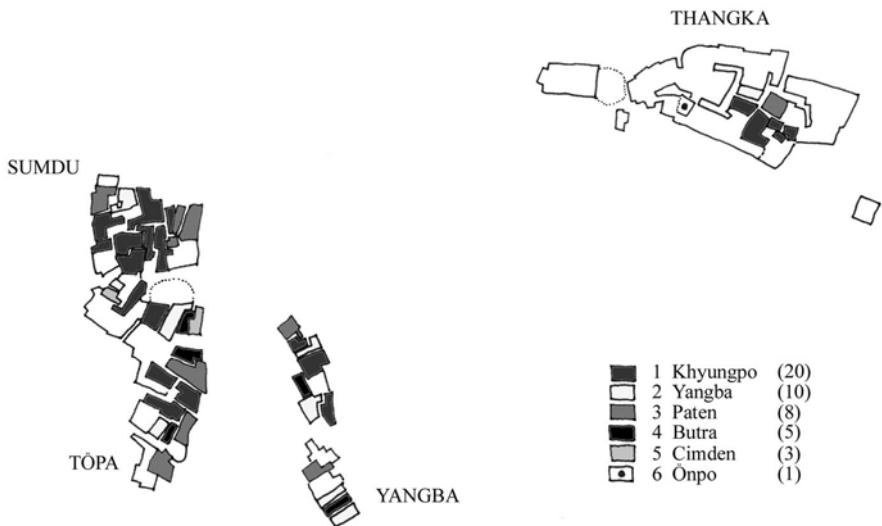


FIGURE 4.9. Clan affiliation of Te's estates. (Drawing by Niels Gutschow)

When an estate splits, the gods that are installed in the new house are the same as those of the parent household. The installation is simply a matter of making the appropriate number of new earthenware pots and decorating them with the butter ornamentation distinctive of the divinities in question.

The clans of Te once had a corporate character that has now been lost; the main operational subdivisions of the community are now based not on descent but on residence.

### The Four Sectors

Te, as we have seen, is divided into two main residential blocks: Dzong, "the fortress," and Yul, "the village." The two are further subdivided into six areas. The names of the areas, which have been listed earlier, and the number of estates in each are as follows.

Thangka	7
Yangba Thewa	7
Yangba Cangba	4
Madang	5
Töpa	12
Sumdu	11

The forty-six “active” estates of Te are grouped into four sectors, Thangka, Sumdu, Töpa, and Yangba, corresponding approximately to this residential arrangement. Two of the sectors, Töpa and Sumdu, contain twelve estates each, while Yangba and Thangka contain eleven each. If the two dormant estates should be reactivated at any time, they would be allocated to these two sectors. In order to divide up the estates in this way, the composition of the sectors is obviously not exactly the same as that of the residential areas of the same name. The apportionment of households has been effected as follows (see fig. 4.10).

Sector	Provenance (by residential area)
Thangka	Dzong—7
Sumdu—4	
Sumdu	Sumdu—10
Madang—2	
Töpa	Töpa—12
Yangba	Yangba Thewa—6
Madang—3	
Yangba Cangba—1	
Sumdu—1	

The term I have translated here as “sector” is *bartsho*. *Bar* is a Tibetan word meaning “middle” or “intermediate” (Tk. *par*). *Tsho* is the most frequently used word in Baragaon and Panchgaon for a division of this sort; I have already mentioned it as signifying a tax-paying unit that might be made up of one or more villages. Te, it will be remembered, is one of the very few villages in Baragaon to constitute a whole *tsho*. The term *bartsho* may originally have been coined to distinguish the divisions of the community from the tax-paying entity formed by the whole. *Tsho*, as I shall discuss, is also the term used for other, smaller, groupings of people that are formed temporarily in the course of certain official procedures.

Perhaps the single most important function of the sectors is to permit a recruitment of community officials and servants in such a way as to achieve the broadest possible *spatial* distribution of these roles throughout the community. While the three headmen are not chosen in this way, the four constables are. The term used in Te, as in the rest of the Shöyul and in Panchgaon, is *tshowa* (Tib. *tsho ba*), which may be glossed as something like “sectoral representative.” A new group of annually serving officials, called simply “the Four Men,” is also recruited in this way.

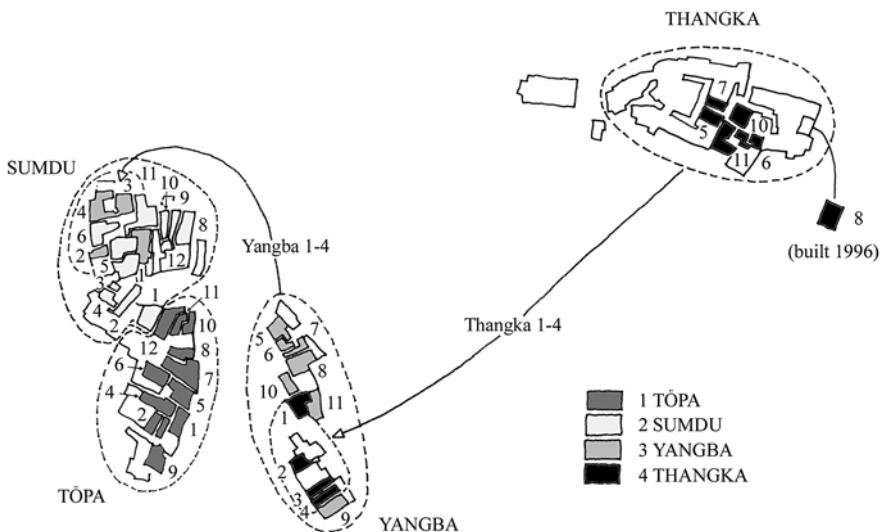


FIGURE 4.10. Location of the forty-eight estates of Te. The Töpa group forms an almost continuous cluster, adjoined by the Sumdu group, the houses of which describe an arc and bridge the passage between the two clusters. Yangba has only one estate located in Yangba Cangba, but four in the north-western corner of Sumdu. The Thangka group forms a dense cluster in the middle section; the first four estates have moved to Yangba, and one has been established at some distance for the existing five clusters. (Drawing by Niels Gutschow)

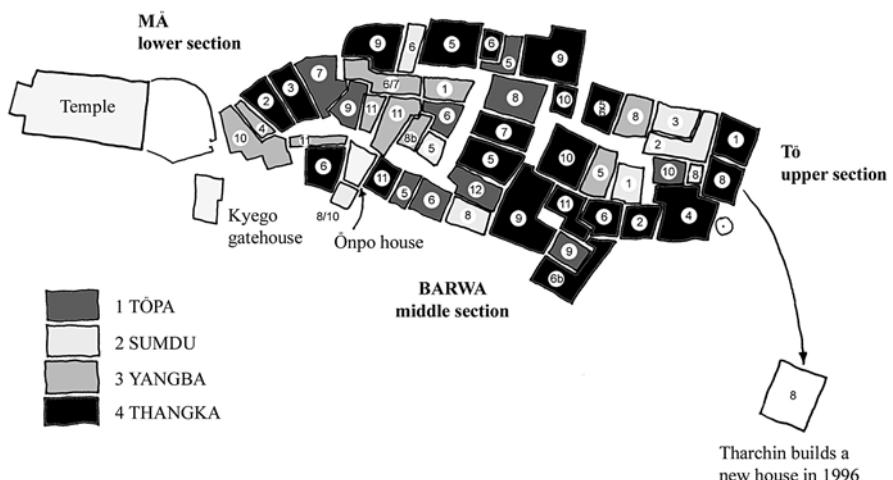


FIGURE 4.11. Ownership of the houses in Thangka/Dzong, showing the residential sector within which each estate is currently located. The numbers correspond to the place of each estate on the community roster. (Drawing by Niels Gutschow)

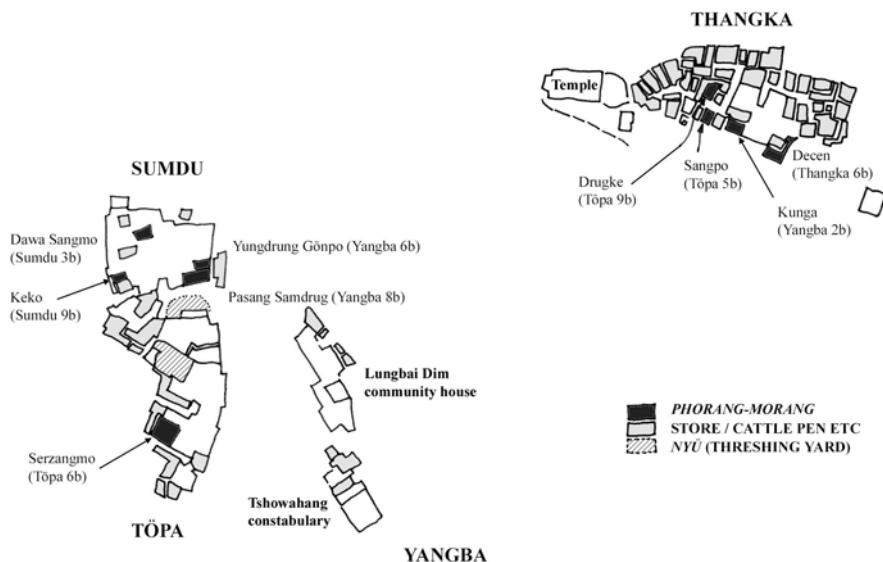


FIGURE 4.12. Location of the nine “solitary households” (*phorang-morang*), of which two are classified as “elders’ quarters.” (Drawing by Niels Gutschow)

The care of the community’s goats is organised on the basis of the sectors. For the sake of convenience in managing the very large number of goats in Te (an undated census, HMA/Te/Tib/12, gives a figure of around 18,000), the animals have been divided into two main herds, made up of the goats of Thangka and Yangba on the one hand and those of Töpa and Sumdu on the other. The two men who are in charge of these herds are themselves members of one or other of the two sectors that make up each pair.<sup>13</sup>

The four sectors also have a certain ceremonial and corporate character. Situated at the periphery of the cultivated area of Te are five protective devices known as Rigsum Gompo (Tib. *Rigs gsum mgon po*), “the protectors from the three Buddha-families.” The devices in question typically consist of three stupa-like constructions in a row, painted red, white, and black and usually interpreted as representing the three bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi. In Mustang, however, the colour schemes vary (especially grey and yellow in addition to the usual three). Thus all three components of the Rigsum Gompo may be painted uniformly or in a combination of dyes, and sometimes with a particular section of each component being coloured differently from the main body. It appears that the colour schemes for individual Rigsum Gompo are not subject to variation, and in certain communities (notably Samar) there are regulations concerning which colours may be

administered by men and by women. As is so often the case, we are at a loss to know whether this variety is the result of a fundamentally Buddhist motif having been subjected to local transformations, or whether the common red-white-black configuration is an effort to achieve consistency with the notion that the triple construction represents the three bodhisattvas.

There are five Rigsum Gombo in Te. Four of them are explicitly linked to the cardinal directions, and the annual reconsecration of each is the responsibility of one of the sectors, as follows.

West	Töpa
North	Sumdu
South	Yangba
East	Thangka

The reconsecration (*ramne*, Tib. *rab gnas*) must be carried out within the first ten days of the third month, but each of the sectors is at liberty to choose the particular day. The fifth Rigsum Gombo, located near the western boundary of Te's territory, is consecrated by the headmen and constables in the second month. Rigsum Gombo are designed to block the passage of whatever malign influences may approach a house or a village from the direction in which they are oriented, and the consecration of the fifth one takes place on the day after the annual casting-out of the community's ills toward the west. After they have performed the ceremony (which consists principally of repainting the Rigsum Gombo in question with the appropriate clays), the members of the component estates and their dependencies gather in the house of one of their number for feasting and drinking. Both men and women celebrate, in different rooms of the house, and the venue rotates annually among the estates. It may be possible to see in these festive assemblies a substitution for the clan gatherings that have recently become obsolete, though there is unfortunately no historical information to indicate conclusively that the development of the former corresponds to the waning of the latter.

## Conclusion

The prominence the household has in the Tepas' scale of values cannot be overemphasised. Institutions can be analysed or described, but attitudes are more intractable, and are sometimes best conveyed by anecdote. I shall confine myself to two. The first example was related to me by someone from another

village as a caricature of Tepa stinginess. If one Tepa were drinking beer in the house of another, he would try at all costs not to use the lavatory of his host, but would steel himself to hold on until he could return home and add precious nitrates to his own domestic midden-heap, rather than benefit a neighbour. I later asked a Tepa if the story was true. He thought about it and said that that is how things used to be in the past. And as for nowadays, he himself would not go to such extremes, but there were other people in the village who might.

The other example concerns a curious theft. A nonlocal schoolmaster had recently arrived in the village and set up home in one of the small classrooms. He did his own cooking, and kept his supplies of rice and flour in sacks near his room. He returned to his quarters one day to discover that his provisions had been stolen, and an inquiry was duly launched by the village assembly. In accordance with village law, everyone assembled in one place while the headmen and constables conducted a house-to-house search, but the stolen property was not found. A boy eventually confessed to the crime. The reason no one had found the flour and rice was that the boy had simply added them to the contents of the appropriate sacks in his own parents' household.

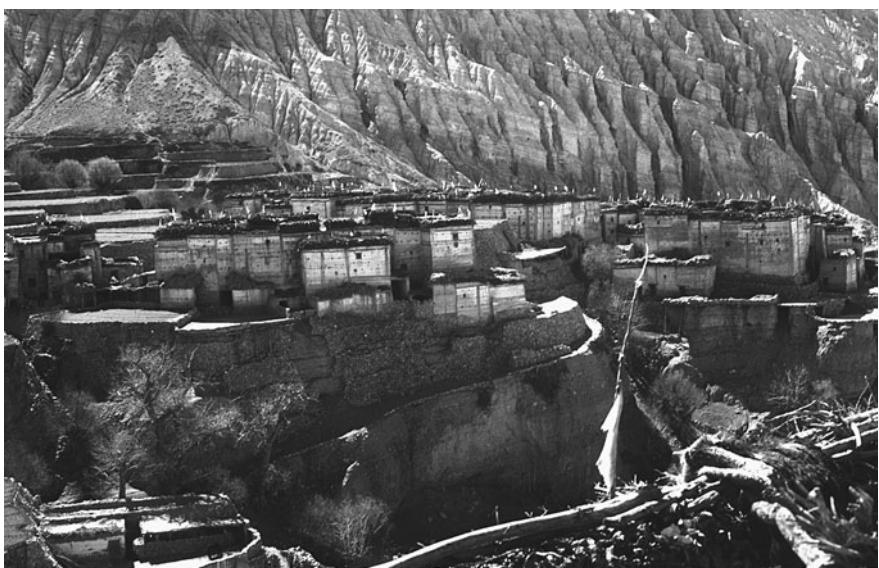


FIGURE 4.13. The Sumdu sector of Yul, seen from Dzong. "If the ratio between built space and openness serves as the most convincing factor that defines a cluster, those of Dzong and Sumdu have to be counted among the densest known in the history of architecture" (Gutschow 1996: 51).



FIGURE 4.14. Nyima Drandul on the Kog plain, above the break in the irrigation tunnel that caused the settlement to be abandoned.

I have known children to pilfer small accoutrements and even dried meat for their own use or consumption, and I have heard of adults stealing more substantial provisions. But this is the only case I know of in Baragaon where a child stole with the intention of enriching his household.

This chapter has begun to tackle the subject of the community by seeing its development in relation to other groupings, notably clans, residential groups, and households. What we are beginning to see as a consequence of the watering-down of clan identity is a polarisation of attitudes into individualism on the one hand and on the other, responsibility to the collectivity. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the tension between these two orientations is linked to manifestations of religion; but the relationship is by no means as straightforward as one might expect.

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# 5

## The Encounter with Buddhism

The idea of a confrontation of worldviews between Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions features in several ethnographies of culturally Tibetan communities, but most centrally, perhaps, in Stan Mumford's *Himalayan Dialogue* (1989). The book deals with the relationship between the Buddhist ideal of universal doctrinal dominance and a "shamanic" ideology of exchange, as represented in two neighbouring—one Tibetan and the other Gurung—communities in the Marsyangdi valley, adjacent to Mustang. Most critiques of the work (e.g. McGuckin 1993; Sørensen 1992–93) have been levelled at the top-heaviness of the theoretical superstructure that compromises its remarkable ethnographic value. A similar, though more oblique, objection has been raised by Sherry Ortner (1998) in the course of an article that questions the general validity of such polarised representations. Ortner tackles the subject by courageously putting on trial one of her own (unpublished) articles, in which she had opposed the "relational" character of shamanism to monastic individualism among the Sherpas. It requires only a slight definitional modification, as she demonstrates, for relationalism and individualism to switch sides and become associated with monks and shamans, respectively.

The simplification of religious pluralism to one-to-one opposition is not necessarily the result of the anthropologist's application of prefabricated categories; one has only to turn to the biographies of missionary lamas in the Himalayas to see that they, too, thought in such black-and-white terms—sometimes literally. To cite just one

example: when the Bonpo Lama Karu Druwang Tenzin Rinchen visited Lubra (in Baragaon) in the nineteenth century, the first question he asked the people was whether they were “Black” or “White” Bonpos, and on receiving the reply that they espoused both, set about prohibiting the blood-sacrifices that defined the former (*Autobiography of Karu*: 150).

It is largely a question of point of view. Both missionary lama and cornered shaman may wish to reduce such situations to diametrical oppositions; but for villagers whose position has not hardened into a conscious ideological alignment, the confrontation is likely to be a far more complex matter, and it is this complexity that I wish to examine here.

Tibetan Buddhism is rarely a unitary presence in its Himalayan setting, but tends to be represented by different schools that are themselves in competition for moral and material support from the lay populace; the picture may be further complicated by a third element, as in situations where there are representatives of two Buddhist schools and a local pagan priest, or two varieties of the latter and one of the former, and so on (see e.g. Holmberg 1989). Where two schools of Buddhism are present, it is commonly the case that one is distinguished by a more abstract, eschatological character, while the other bears an altogether more populist, down-to-earth stamp. It is the historical *pas de deux* of these two general orientations, “clerical” and “shamanic” Buddhism, respectively, that makes up the kernel of Geoffrey Samuel’s *Civilized Shamans* (1993). Te is the setting of a typically triangular relationship between two schools of Buddhism and a cult of autochthonous gods; but it will become apparent in the following chapters that the historical and ethnographic peculiarities of the community will not tolerate a reduction of Te’s religion to a straightforward three-way ideological stand-off.

Buddhism has been represented by various schools in Mustang. The Drukpa subsect of the Kagyupas was once influential in the northern areas, but its followers are now long gone. That they may have been represented in Te is suggested by the name of one Buddhist edifice, Kagyu Mendang, the “Kagyupa mani-wall,” but beyond that there are no records of which I am aware. The Bonpos, too, were very widespread. Until recently their presence had been reduced to the little village of Lubra, half a dozen households in Gelung, and a few families in Baragaon and Lo, but within the past few years there has been something of a revival throughout Mustang. As far as the Tepas are concerned, however, the most important sects have been the Sakyapas and the Nyingmapas, and it is with the legacy of these that I shall be principally concerned.

To reiterate a point I made in the introduction: Buddhism does not enter a community as an abstract ideology that is intellectually apprised, weighed, and accepted or rejected. It is mediated by institutions, and the structure of these

institutions as much as the particular doctrines they purvey will be responsible for the ways they are received and appropriated. Whatever the religious tenets of the protagonists may be, it is at least as important to concentrate on those things that would have been most visible to the Tepas, and this means, above all, the daily lives of their priesthood.

In the case of the Nyingmapas, we are particularly well served by a family archive that extends back at least as far as the early nineteenth century. It may be objected that the very nature of these documents casts the lamas in an unfavourable light and underrepresents their spiritual qualities: most history is, after all, the history of conflict, and peace goes largely unrecorded. Four points may be made by way of defence. First, none of the protagonists left autobiographies, and these archives are the only historical sources we have. Second, the records are by no means an unbroken litany of shabby worldliness: in spite of their subject matter, the fine qualities of some individuals do show through, while the material insecurity of others goes a long way toward mitigating their acquisitiveness. Third, it is likely that the worst scandals perpetrated by the priests passed unrecorded and were the stuff, as they are now, only of gossip. And finally, whatever preconceptions there may be about ideal Buddhist standards of behaviour, they are almost certainly not shared by the Tepas, who, if they did not set a high value on the services of their priests, or hold the priests themselves in veneration, would never have suffered them to live on their land.

## PART I: THE TANTRIC LAMAS OF TSHOGNAM

### The Clan of the Kings of Sikkim

While the Önpo clan was still represented in Te, another clan of priests came and settled across the river in Tshognam. (As I mentioned in chapter 2, Tshognam is a settlement of just three houses straddling the boundary of Te and Tshug.) The last male descendant died, without sons, in the 1970s. The name by which the family is referred to nowadays is Drenjong Gyalpö Gyupa (Tib. 'bras ljongs rgyal po'i brgyud pa), the Clan of the Kings of Sikkim, but I have found no documentary or oral elaboration of such a suggestive title. The first member of the clan to settle in Tshognam was a certain Lama Chöying (or Chönyi—the name varies in the documents) Rangdrol. I do not know when he arrived, and there are no documents from Te or Tshognam that mention him as a contemporary, but he is named in three later accounts that review the family's activities in Tshognam. Probably the earliest of these, dating from 1844, refers to a gift that was made to him by an unidentified king of Lo.

In the past, in the time of our ancestor Chönyi Rangdrol of Tshognam, [a member of] the line of Ayumpal, the religion-king of Lo, gave two yak-cows in perpetuity. These were to be in payment for the votive lamps in the temple of Sang-*ngag* Chöling [in Tshognam] for the worship of his clan god. These yaks were pastured with the herds of Angpo Samdrup and Könchog of the Eastern Nomads, and they annually gave 3 *zoba* of butter to Tshognam temple. In the meantime, for reasons unknown, the provision of butter ceased. Lama Rangjung Dorje therefore took to task the two nomads, as well as the nomad Orgyan Tshering. The two nomad households then provided two yak cows for the annual supply of 3 *zobas* of butter.  
(HMA/LTshognam/Tib/09)

Ayumpal (Tib. *A yum dpal*) is a name that appears to have been invented by an enthusiastic scribe to dignify Amepal/Amapal, the first king in the dynasty of Lo: *yum* is the honorific form for *ama* (Tib. *a ma*), “mother.” The Tibetan expression I have glossed here as “in perpetuity”—the condition on which the two yaks were given to Tshognam—might be translated more literally as “irrespective of birth or death.” This meant that the Eastern Nomads were given custody of the two animals; when they died they would have to be replaced by the nomads, while they were entitled to keep any calves that might be born. The two yaks were effectively the nonrepayable principal of an investment with a fixed annual interest of 3 *zoba* of butter. It goes without saying that the priests would keep a quantity of the butter for themselves, as long as there was enough set aside for the propitiation of the king’s gods.

Only one document says explicitly that the first member of the lineage in Tshognam was a certain Tshewang Angyal, who was “invited to move in on the strength of his excellent priestly qualities” because “the old temple and its residence had for a long time had no priestly occupant” (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/26). The descendants of Tshewang Angyal are said to be the heirs of Chönyi Rangdrol (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/06), but it is nowhere explicit that they actually belonged to the same lineage. For the time being, then, it must remain an open question whether the “Clan of the Kings of Sikkim” was preceded in Tshognam by another priestly family that died out. Thanks to a relative abundance of Nepali and Tibetan documents from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is possible to obtain a fairly clear picture of the generations that followed Tshewang Angyal. The main protagonists are represented in figure 5.1, which has been constructed on the basis of these archives. A number of other relatives are named in the documents, but since

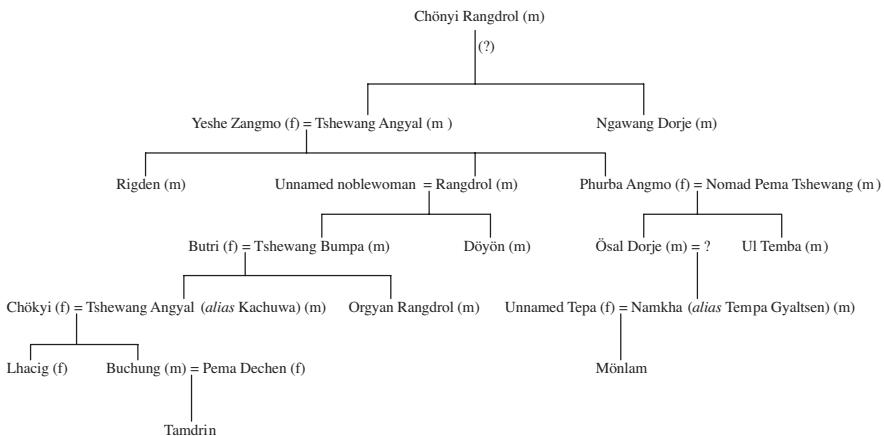


FIGURE 5.1. The priestly line of the “Clan of the Kings of Sikkim.”

it is nowhere clear just how they fit into the family, they have been omitted from the picture.

### A Rift in the Family

Tshewang Angyal had a younger brother called Ngawang Dorje, who, as is usual in the case of priestly families, did not undergo the religious training received by his senior. The brothers contracted a polyandrous marriage to Yeshe Angmo, who left her native village of Tshug to live with her husbands in Tshognam. Yeshe Angmo bore two sons, Rigden and Rangdrol, and a daughter, Phurba Angmo. Both Rigden and Rangdrol received a religious education, probably from their senior father (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/15; HMA/UTshognam/Tib/26). Tshewang Angyal, Ngawang Dorje, and Yeshe Angmo died while the children were still quite young, but before their death they willed that if the three got on well they should remain together, but if they did not they should divide the property up as follows: the [older] father's books and other property should go to the sons, while the mother's jewellery should go to Phurba Angmo. The estate—apparently two houses and some land—should be divided up among the three (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/27). Precisely how it was to be divided up became the subject of a dispute that was sorted out, amid much acrimony, only three generations later.

Rigden and Rangdrol did not marry polyandrously. Rigden, the elder brother, “became fed up of worldly life and went to live separately” (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/15) and remained unmarried until the end of his days. Rangdrol married a noblewoman from the Kyukar house in Purang, near Muktinath. The couple’s children included at least two boys: Tshewang Bumpa and Döyön. Lama Rigden lived in a house called Magön, the “mother temple,” a name that identifies it as the principal building of the estate. Rangdrol and his wife lived in Zurkhang, “the house on the edge,” which is said to have been carried away by the Narshing River about the middle of the 20th century. Phurba Angmo lived “apart” (*zur*), in a building that may once have been occupied by the younger of her two paternal grandfathers, Ngawang Dorje (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/26).

Rigden and Rangdrol were not on the best of terms. Either Rigden threatened to will the estate to someone other than his brother’s son, or else Rangdrol wanted to evict the hermit Rigden from the premises so that Tshewang Bumpa could occupy it before his uncle’s death. Whatever the case, the disagreement became public, and the matter had to be sorted out with the intervention of the lord of Baragaon. The judgment ran as follows.

Until his death, Lama Rigden shall himself be the master of the priestly estate of Tshognam. Lama Rangdrol, until the death of his elder brother, shall not utter a word of complaint about it. After Lama Rigden’s death, the priestly estate shall be given to the son of Lama Rangdrol. If Rigden says that he will give it to someone else, he shall pay a fine of 500 rupees [to Rangdrol or his son] and a fine of 200 rupees to Trithogpa, the judge, without complaining [Rigden signs]. If, before his elder brother’s death, Rangdrol speaks of seizing the estate or of dividing it into two with the aim of taking half, he shall pay a fine of 500 rupees [to Rigden] and a fine of [200] rupees to Trithogpa, the judge [Rangdrol signs]. (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/01)

The agreement is not dated, but we know from other documents that the lord of Baragaon named Trithogpa was active in the area during the first two decades of the nineteenth century (Schuh 1994: 44).

Before Phurba Angmo moved into her separate quarters, she was probably living under the same roof as her older brother Rigden, where she “rendered him service of water, fire, and wood”—in other words, kept house for him (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/15). What may have occasioned her moving into separate premises was her attachment to a nomad from northern Lo, a salt-trader by the name of Pema Tshewang. The nomad settled in Tshognam long enough

to father two sons on Phurba Angmo before abandoning her. He came from the highland region known as Naga Darchog, and to this day the priests of Upper Tshognam—who are genealogically quite unrelated to him—are sometimes slightly referred to by the Tepas as “Tshognam Darchog.”

Lama Rigden died in 1856 (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/05), and Lama Rangdrol and his son, Tshewang Bumpa, took possession of the entire estate, in accordance with the Trithogpa’s earlier ruling.

Lama Rigden’s death put Phurba Angmo in a difficult position. Her elder son, Ul Temba, had died, but she still had to look after his younger brother, Ösal Dorje:

Because he was the natural son of the woman of the priestly estate [Phurba Angmo], according to both traditional custom and Nepalese law he was not entitled to inherit the property. (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/15)

Phurba Angmo and her son were now at the mercy of the new master of the estate, her nephew Tshewang Bumpa, and his father, Lama Rangdrol. Immediately following the merit-making ceremony that would have been held around forty-nine days after Rigden’s funeral, a group of four men from Te and Tshug

came bringing a flask of beer and a ceremonial scarf to make a petition on behalf of Phurba Angmo. Phurba Angmo was grief-stricken at having no house in which to live, and had begged Lama Rangdrol and his son Tshewang Bumpa to lend her a house where she might remain until her death, but the lama and his son refused. The petitioners now begged them respectfully [to change their minds]. (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/05)

The lama and his son acquiesced, but laid down strict conditions for Phurba Angmo’s occupancy of her house:

Until Phurba Angmo’s death, the lama and his son may not turn her out of the house, forbidding her to live in it. If Phurba Angmo, for her part, sells any of her own property, old or new, large or small, she may sell it only to the father and son of the Tshognam priestly estate, and without first discussing the matter with them may not sell as much as a needle and thread. If, in violation of this agreement, she should sell something, whoever has purchased the items sold must return them. (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/05)

## The Rise of Lama Ösal Dorje

The tension between the two branches of the family continued seamlessly into the next generation. Phurba Angmo's son, Ösal Dorje, claimed that his late uncle had given him a field:

A dispute arose over this, and the Anchorite Ösal Dorje presented a legal case to His Majesty's Government at the court in Thak. The Anchorite Ösal Dorje may use the field until his death, whereupon it will revert to [the estate of] Lama Tshewang Bumpa. (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/05)

We see that by 1876, when this agreement was drawn up, Ösal Dorje was using the title of "Anchorite." This term, which translates the Tibetan *tshampa* (Tib. *mtshams pa*), signifies that the user has undergone a period of retreat lasting three years, three months, and three days. He was not taught by his uncle in Tshognam but by an unrelated lama at the temple of Luri, in eastern Lo (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/15). This remarkable and remote cave temple is under the wardenship of two nearby priestly settlements, Yara and Gara, and it was probably from someone in these communities that Ösal Dorje received his training. It is worth remarking that, although priesthood is something that usually runs in the male line, Ösal Dorje became a lama in spite of the fact that he belonged to a nonpriestly clan of northern nomads. The step was not too unusual, however, given the fact that he grew up in a priestly establishment, and it was also an astute career move in view of the general fragility of his prospects. He managed to secure the patronage of "one or two devoted Tepas," and through these contacts he was able to obtain a place to live in Te's territory—probably in Upper Tshognam (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/15).

While Ösal Dorje may have moved to Te, his mother, Phurba Angmo, remained in Tshognam. Did Ösal Dorje abandon his ageing mother? In later years, he would be accused of having failed to take care of her as a son should. Perhaps she, too, harboured doubts concerning her son's reliability as a provider. By 1890, the effort of running a household by herself was too much, and she gave her house and property to her son. However, she did not take it for granted that he would take care of her in her waning years, and drew up a deed in which she bequeathed to her son "the Lower House, from its foundations to the prayer-flag standing on top of it, together with the interior and exterior property attached to it, its land, and whatever credit and debts are accruing to it." She gave him the house on the condition that he provide her with a maintenance until her death. Along with the house he received two cattle pens;

one big and one small field; one female donkey; one teapot; one frying pan; one small copper vessel; one bronze beer-cup; two boxes; one iron tripod; four earthenware jars, and one small rake. The debts he inherited included salt, cash, buckwheat, fat, and barley owed to people from Te, Marpha, and Tukche. The credit he inherited amounted to a sum of 15 *tam* (seven and a half rupees) owed by someone from Lo Monthang who had hired the family donkey (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/11).

Does this deed tell us that Phurba Angmo was doubtful about her son, or does it merely reveal that the two of them were devious? Thirty-five years earlier, Phurba Angmo had been party to an agreement that she would live in the house and farm the land until her death, whereupon the property would revert to the main estate; and that the occupants of the estate—her brother's son—would be given first refusal on any personal property she might wish to sell. But here, in 1890, we find her bequeathing the same house and property to her son.

Whatever the case, Ösal Dorje certainly did not count on the house in Lower Tshognam as his sole source of security. As soon as he had accumulated sufficient capital—perhaps from his priestly activities in Te—he began to buy land. The first acquisition that can definitely be accredited to him consisted of four small fields he bought for six large bushels of grain. Thereafter all his purchases were made in cash. Between 1875 and 1914, he made about a dozen recorded purchases. All the fields except one were in Tshug, but it is clear from the deeds that a certain amount of this land had belonged to people in Te. The only land in Te itself that he bought was his very last purchase, in 1914, when a Tepa owner sold him a field near the riverbed, close to Tshognam itself. This is the only example we have of a Tepa selling land in Te to an outsider. Perhaps Ösal Dorje was regarded as being almost an insider, since he lived on Te's territory and may have been married to a Tepa woman. And besides, riverbed fields are notoriously vulnerable: all the cultivated land in this area was long ago carried away by the river.

The lama's commercial activities did not stop at purchasing fields. In 1890, he lent a range of provisions to nomads from the north of Lo (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/12); in 1898, two Tshugwas who had borrowed money from him declared that they were unable to repay their debt, and were obliged instead to give him a part of their land (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/15). The substitution of land for cash in repaying a debt was not always a satisfactory solution. On one occasion, Ösal Dorje lent money to Chökyab Dorje of Tshug, but because the latter was unable to repay the principal and interest over several years, he paid back the debt in the form of a field he had put up as security. However, Chökyab Dorje went on "unashamedly harvesting the fields

by force by night and making off with the crop." Not only was Ösal Dorje losing his harvest but also he had to pay land tax to Tshug, and decided to liquidise his assets. We do not know how the legal case he initiated was resolved (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/09).

Ösal Dorje was certainly capable of looking after his own. Some of the records do leave us with the suspicion that if he did manage to stay on the right side of the law, his acquisitiveness was sometimes on the very edge of decency. A document from 1909 records his dealings with an impoverished blacksmith from Panchgaon to whom he had once lent 10 rupees. The blacksmith gave the date of repayment as fifteen days thence, and his mother gave the lama seventeen coral beads and a rosary of black crystal as security. When the blacksmith came to repay the debt, however, the lama denied that he had these things in his house. The blacksmith brought a legal case against him, and the lama made a formal response to the effect that he had never been given the missing valuables. The matter was eventually settled, with the help of an intermediary, when the lama paid the blacksmith 18 rupees—hardly a vindication of his earlier insistence that the items were not in his possession (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/22).

Two years earlier, the lama had been involved in a more serious disagreement with someone from Dzar, in the Muktinath valley. The precise details of the dispute are unclear, because of damage to the relevant papers (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/18; HMA/UTshognam/Tib/20; Karmacharya n.d. 3.64). In short, the man in question, a certain Trogyal, accused Lama Ösal Dorje, his son, two nuns, and a Tepa of giving him a severe beating in Tshognam. They had seized him by the hair and legs, knocked him over, kicked him and punched him until he was unconscious, and robbed him of an assortment of jewellery and cash. Ösal Dorje had accused him of having poisoned someone—there were witnesses, said Trogyal, who would testify to this. Furthermore, as Trogyal was leaving Tshognam after his beating, his attackers had told him that between seven days and seven months from that moment all his relatives, property, and livestock would be annihilated—there were witnesses to this threat too. They had even taken some of his hair with which to perform the appropriate ritual. Trogyal maintained that there was no proof that he was a poisoner, and insisted that he had been falsely accused.

Ösal Dorje and the other four responded to the accusation with a strong denial. Trogyal had accosted a woman from the De-Tangkyia area, they said, and she had taken refuge in Tshognam. They had not, contrary to the accusation, beaten and kicked Trogyal until he was unconscious. They had been unable to get the better of him—he was the one who had done the hitting and hair-pulling. They had not taken his jewellery, and Lama Ösal Dorje, the

principal accused, denied that he had threatened him with black magic—denied, in fact, that he was even capable of performing such rituals. Nor had he accused Trogyl of being a poisoner. The witnesses produced by Trogyl were personal enemies of the lama, liars who had perjured themselves in supporting the accusation (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/20).

There is no record of how the case was resolved. Of course we do not know whether Ösal Dorje really did threaten Trogyl with black magic; but it is interesting to see that the lama was publicly accused of using resources that householder priests are reputed to possess and to exploit—resources that, as I shall discuss, are more closely associated with them in the popular imagination than the moral precepts of Buddhist ideology.

### Lamas' Privileges and Tax Liabilities

There were in the past many taxes and other obligations that the populace owed to the government and the nobility. These requirements were at times a burden, but at least there was never any ambiguity about them. The monasteries, too, had a variety of privileges and duties that were clearly defined. The social and fiscal status of the Tshognam priests, by contrast, was the subject of negotiations on a number of occasions.

In 1858, the “lama of Lower Tshognam”—probably Lama Rangdrol—“had four or five yak cows in the herd of the Eastern Nomad named Tshering.” Until now the lama had been allowed to graze his animals free of charge, but in this year the nomad demanded that the lama pay grazing fees. The lama waited until the king of Lo visited the area, and bearded him on the matter. From his lodgings in Tshug, the king wrote a letter to the people of Tangkya, “in our dominion,” on whose territory the lama’s yaks were being kept. He advised the people of Tangkya that on this occasion they should not demand grazing fees but should wait. He concluded with an assurance that in the future he would examine whether or not the lama ought to be eligible for the payment of such fees (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/11).

The royal family did not, however, always support Tshognam’s claims to exemption from payments to be made in the kingdom of Lo. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, members of the Shöyul who passed through Lo were required to pay trading tolls called *khurchang*. The Tshognam priesthood felt that they ought to be spared this burden, but the king and queen thought otherwise. In 1892, they sent a letter to Tshewang Bumpa, affirming that the inhabitants of the temple were eligible for paying *khurchang* on the grounds that “the temple has always belonged to Lo” (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/06).

The Tshognam priests have traditionally been exempt from certain duties that are incumbent on the other, nonpriestly inhabitants of Te and Tshug—duties such as the provision of labour for the periodic maintenance of the irrigation canals. In addition, they were entitled to services such as the supply of firewood by the villagers. Most of these rights were never set down on paper but formed part of the package of customary patronage that the priesthood enjoyed. The fact that they had no written, legal basis meant that they were liable to be called into question whenever relations between the lamas and their patrons took a turn for the worse.

One unwritten privilege the priests apparently enjoyed was that they did not have to pay village taxes. In 1888, Ösal Dorje lost a protracted case in which he had contested Tshug's demands that he pay government taxes on his fields. He drew up a lengthy list of the expenses he had incurred during the wrangle. Most of these were cash payments ranging from half a rupee to 10 rupees that had been made to people such as the police, the *subba*, and various others involved in the case. There were also costs for legal proceedings, as well as beer and food he had provided during meetings. The document concludes with the statement that he was returning sixteen years' worth of unpaid government taxes to the village of Tshug, and paying the rental fee for certain fields he had been leasing.

The matter of unpaid taxes arose again in the time of Ösal Dorje's son, Tempa Gyaltsen. Although the priests had been paying a category of taxes called "insiders' tax" (Tib. *nang khral*), they had not been paying "outsiders' tax" (Tib. *phyi khral*). The nature of these obsolete taxes is not clear, but the latter is presumably related to the fact that, insofar as Ösal Dorje and Tempa Gyaltsen were living on Te's territory and farming land in Tshug, they were considered "outsiders" and were perhaps therefore eligible for heavier taxation.<sup>1</sup> The requirement that they pay this tax was provoked by a conflict with Tshug. It seems highly likely that the conflict was escalated, if not actually initiated, by the parallel branch of the priestly family. Although Ösal Dorje's son and the rest of the family were residents of Te, it appears that they were still occupying the house in Lower Tshognam, which should, properly speaking, have been vacated following the death of Phurba Angmo, Ösal Dorje's mother. The legal position of the house in question at this time is far from clear. The available written evidence suggests that the house and its accompanying fields should have reverted to the main estate after the death of Phurba Angmo. However, a Nepali document from 1907 refers to a legal decision, made in 1875, in which the disputed field, at least, had been declared the property of Namkha, Phurba Angmo's grandson.

The dispute between the two branches of the family flourished in the generation after Tshewang Bumpa and Ösal Dorje. Their respective sons,

Orgyan Rangdrol and Namkha, never came to an amicable arrangement about the property. In 1907, Namkha lodged a formal complaint with the court in Kagbeni to the effect that Tshewang Angyal and members of his family "had forcibly opened his house in his absence and moved off with all the grain and material, including utensils, ornaments, etc." (Karmacharya n.d. 3.55). Further details about this incident are given in a Tibetan petition, undated but presumably also written in 1907, that Namkha and his sister presented to the Kag court. Namkha charged four residents of Tshognam with theft and damage to his house and property. The accused were Tshewang Angyal; his daughter Lhacig; his mother, Butri; and a resident of their house, the nun Cenga, who had acted in conspiracy with the people of Tshug. For two or three generations, Namkha's family had been paying "insiders' tax" in Tshug, but the Tshugpas were now claiming that they should pay "outsiders' tax." The four accused had stolen property from the house and locked the occupants out of it. Namkha maintained that he had done nothing wrong, but only administered medications and performed rituals for the people of Te and Tshug, services for which he had earned his patrons' respect. Now he and his family were being undeservedly evicted, and he requested that the accused be seized and punished severely, and that his own previous status be restored.

The document concludes with a list of property, presumably the belongings of the petitioners that were stolen from the house (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/27).

Namkha, it seems, was now fighting on two fronts. On the one hand, there was the perennial dispute with the neighbouring priests about the ownership of the house in Lower Tshognam. On the other, there were the Tshugwas, who were demanding that he pay "outsiders' taxes."

The matter lay dormant—at least on a legal level—for the next five years. In the meantime, Tshewang Angyal had his own difficulties with Tshug. For some reason that is not recorded, the villagers ceased to provide him with firewood, required that he should pay taxes, and may even have demanded that a member of the priestly household provide conscripted labour. This much can be deduced from the interesting and rather elegiac agreement that resolved the dispute—and in the wording of which, we are entitled to suspect, the lama himself may have had a hand.

We, the undersigned, say as follows. In a previous year, when Khamsum, the lord of Kag, was building his palace, everyone was required to contribute labour on the basis of one person per household, to fell and carry beams. From Tshognam, the woman Kunga was appointed. She refused to work and was taken into custody by the

nobles and villagers. She explained that it was not customary for her family to provide labour in this way, and the lord Khamsum accepted this.

Now you lamas and patrons [i.e., Tshognam and Tshug] have had a slight disagreement. But from the time of Chönyi Rangdrol down to the present the lamas have served to the best of their ability and their patrons have considered them as the Buddha, accepting their words and marvelling at their deeds, and were in a state of beatitude. The harvest was good, and there was more than enough to eat.

The people of Tshug should set down fifteen, twenty, forty, fifty, or however many loads of wood are required by the lamas for the summer supply and the winter supply. Furthermore, the past custom whereby the priests were exempt from taxation and not required to perform any labouring tasks for the community should be upheld.

(HMA/LTshognam/Tib/10)

The justification for the priests not providing a worker for Tshug's labour force was found in precedent—the fact that a nobleman had once accepted the claim that the family should be exempt. The entitlement of the priests to firewood and their tax-free status were also vindicated on the grounds of “past custom.” More generally, the privileged position of the priests is explained in terms of their spiritual, Buddha-like qualities, a turn of phrase that may have caused a few eyebrows to be raised among the villagers of Tshug. Following this mild hyperbole is the observation that “the harvest was good, and there was more than enough to eat.” This remark is also a favourable reflection on the capacities of the lamas, but it relates to a priestly function that is very different from the didactic saintliness that is also attributed to them. I shall discuss later the role of the lamas in assuring prosperity to the community they serve.

### The Resolution of the Conflict

In July 1912, Namkha reached an agreement with Tshug about his eligibility to cultivate land that had been farmed by his grandmother, Phurba Angmo. He had to pay outstanding “insiders’ tax” of three years, and agreed to pay a much steeper category of tax (called *töntral*, Tib. *ston khral*) in the future, but he seemed to be willing to shoulder this burden (Karmacharya n.d. 7.1.14).

If he had managed to settle his fiscal differences with Tshug, the enduring dispute with the other branch of the family was not so easily resolved. In the same month, Tshewang Angyal requested the Kagbeni court to reject Nam-

kha's complaint of 1907 concerning his temporary eviction from the house in Lower Tshognam. He also requested that the disputed house and land be recognised as his, Tshewang Angyal's, on the grounds that Phurba Angmo had been allowed to use them during her lifetime and not pass them on to her descendants (Karmacharya n.d. 3.34). The following year, Tshewang Angyal's brother, Orgyan Rangdrol, followed this request up with a complaint to the Baglung court that Namkha and his father, Ösal Dorje, had for the two preceding years harvested—stolen, as he put it—the crop on land that was not theirs. The land in question had, he added, been given to Phurba Angmo by her “uncle” (actually her brother) Rigden as *jivanbirta*—lifelong maintenance—because (and here came the barb) her sons and grandsons had not looked after her (Karmacharya n.d. 3.49). The following week, the Baglung court summoned Namkha to attend the proceedings (Karmacharya n.d. 3.18).

Nine months later, the court issued its verdict: Tshewang Angyal and his family were fined for taking what did not belong to them and for laying false claims to Namkha's land and property; Namkha was to be given a winner's certificate (Karmacharya n.d. 3.61). To judge by the Tibetan and Nepali records preserved in Tshognam, this was clearly a miscarriage of justice. Tshewang Angyal's brother, Orgyan Rangdrol, thought so, too. Immediately after the last verdict, he petitioned the Baglung court to review the case from its very beginnings (Karmacharya n.d. 3.73). On the basis of a more thorough examination, the Baglung court reversed its earlier decision and found in favour of Orgyan Rangdrol. The disputed house and land had, it was decided, been given to Phurba Angmo by her “uncle” only for her lifelong support “on account of her having been neglected and abandoned by her husband” (Karmacharya n.d. 3.17).

The three-generation war over the ownership of the house in Lower Tshognam had come to an end. The descendants of Phurba Angmo had lost their footing there and withdrew to Upper Tshognam and the secure patronage of Te. The main lineage of Lower Tshognam continued for only another two generations. Tshewang Angyal's son, Lama Buchung, died some time in the mid-1970s. He had several wives, but his only son, Tamdrin, by a woman named Pema Dechen of Chongkhor, was born in 1936. After his death in 1992, the male line of the “Clan of the King of Sikkim” came to an end. The families who patronised the lama—mainly in Tshug and Gyaga, though there were also some in Te—subsequently adopted a priest of Upper Tshognam as their chaplain. But by this time, Upper Tshognam had already been held by a different line of priests for three generations. In the following section I shall discuss how this happened.

### The Shari Pungita Lamas

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the headman of Dzar, in the Muktinath valley, was a man called Labnye of the Shari Pungita clan. The clan came into conflict with the aristocracy of Dzar, who succeeded in having them banished from the area. They are said to have left Mustang altogether and gone to settle in Ghandruk, a large Gurung village some three days' walk to the south. Today in Ghandruk is a clan called Pungi Lama, who may be the descendants of the exiles. The headman Labnye fathered a natural son in the priestly village of Chongkhor, a short distance from Dzar. The father, who had no legitimate children—he died unmarried—offered the boy, Tshewang, a choice: to inherit his estate in Dzar or to accept a settlement of 60 rupees and an additional 30 rupees with which to build or buy a house. He accepted the money in preference to the estate, bought a house in Chongkhor, and gradually set about accumulating land—in much the same way as we have seen was done by the illegitimate lama of Tshognam, Ösal Dorje. Tshewang, however, did not train as a priest but as a doctor—probably in the region of Nubri, to the east of Mustang—and for this reason he is remembered as *Amchi* (“the Physician”) Tshewang. He married a woman of Chongkhor and had three sons. The oldest and youngest sons, Zhönu and Khamsum, lived in the Chongkhor house with their separate wives until, in the course of time, both fell irrecoverably into debt and went to live in Tukche as servants of the Thakalis.

The middle son, Namgyal, studied Tibetan medicine under his father. It is said that at the age of thirteen he carried the *menkyal*, the doctor’s bag, as well as a stick with which he used to beat dogs and other children. His reputation

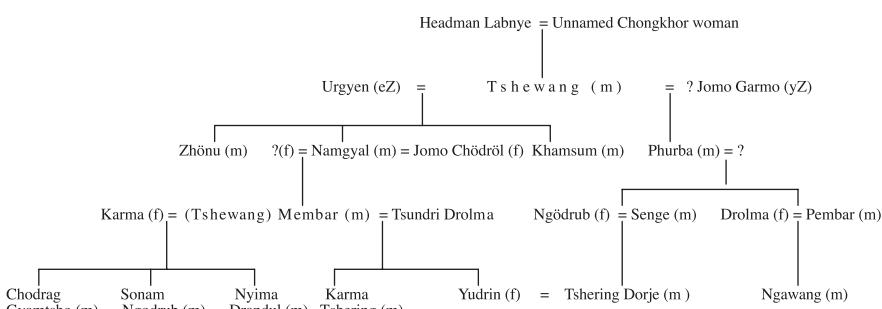


FIGURE 5.2. The priestly line of the Shari Pungita clan.

for thespian ferocity accompanied him into old age, and he is still best remembered by his nickname Amchi Trogrog, “Doctor Dandy.”<sup>2</sup> His father, Amchi Tshewang, sent him to Nubri to study as a priest, and during this time he went into retreat for the statutory three-year period that would entitle him to the sobriquet “Anchorite.” It is said that since he was too poor to pay for his studies, he earned the necessary money by collecting firewood in the intermissions of the preparatory phase of his retreat, when the neophyte has to perform one hundred thousand full-length prostrations. The system of ritual and meditation he learned in Nubri was the Compendium of the [Three] Precious Ones (Tib. *dKon mchog spyi 'dus*), a “hidden treasure” that was discovered in the early seventeenth century by Jatshön Nyingpo (1585–1656) and was later adopted by many Nyingma communities of the Himalayan highlands and middle hills. Anchorite Namgyal is said to have been a good scholar, and while in Nubri he supplemented his priestly training with further medical studies.

### The Clan Comes to Te

At the eastern end of Te, set apart from the main settlement area, stands a single large house. The house is empty, the fields around the building cracked and dry. Some time during the nineteenth century, the house had been occupied by a branch of the Tsabgyepa lineage, the priestly line of Chongkhor. The last occupant of the house, said to have been the recognised incarnation of a prominent lama, was an only son, and when he left Baza to marry into a family of neighbouring Taye, the house was left without an occupant. Some time after this, Amchi Tshewang, who had by now bought his house in Chongkhor, appeared on the scene. He obviously impressed the Tepas with his medical skills, because in 1893 they drew up an agreement that allowed him tenancy of the Baza house and fields on generous terms. The following is a paraphrase of the document in question.

The three Headmen of Te, Chokyab Phuntshog, Palden and Gyaldö, present this agreement to Amchi Tshewang following a general agreement in the assembly of Te.

Baza temple has long been without an occupant [lit. owner], and [tenancy of] the temple and its fields have now been given to the Amchi. There are certain conditions of tenancy that were not sorted out, but they have now been resolved by Zangdor, the lord of Dzar. As rent for his fields, the Amchi should pay one large bushel of

barley, as was the custom in the past [with the previous tenant of Baza]. The terms of the Amchi's rights to water with which to irrigate his fields have also been settled. After the villagers have arranged their own irrigation roster for the year by casting lots, the village Constables should inform the Baza lama that he may use the water for his fields for one whole day before the village irrigation cycle gets going. After all the villagers' fields have been irrigated, Baza should again be given a share. However many circuits the village can manage, Baza temple should always be first on the list.

As for taxes, the Amchi and his son may abide in Baza free of charge. The community of Te gives ownership of the temple and its fields to the Amchi and his son until the end of the Amchi's life.  
(HMA/UTshognam/Tib/41)

Anchorite Namgyal, however, is said not to have spent much time in Baza. Although he was a good scholar, his headstrong character brought him into conflict with his father. Their relationship was soured even further when Namgyal married a woman from the priestly family of Lower Tshognam, with which Amchi Tshewang was not on good terms. However, Namgyal found supporters in the village of Tshug, who made him the steward of their temple and provided him with a maintenance. His wife settled with him in Tshug and bore two sons. In addition to being the steward of the temple, Anchorite Namgyal continued his medical practice, until one day, in the course of his work, he treated a northern nomad who was suffering from smallpox. Before long he himself, and then his whole family, developed the disease. They were driven out of Tshug by the villagers and went to live in a cave in the cliff below Tsele, just half an hour's walk north of Tshug.

It is interesting that the only item in Tshognam's archive that refers to Namgyal's medical activities relates to an outbreak of smallpox. The short letter bears no date and the writer, who does not even give his name, was evidently in a hurry. It was sent from Kag and addressed to "the wise doctor Namgyal." The author says that he plans to send his younger daughter down to Pokhara in ten days' time. She is currently in Kag, and her garments are polluted, presumably by contact with her sister, and she requires a change of clothing. The writer asks Anchorite Namgyal to send some clothes for her, and adds that his older daughter has now been ill for thirteen days and is covered in spots (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/43).

We do not know whether this letter was written before or after Namgyal's banishment from Tshug. In any event, his wife and younger son succumbed to the disease. He buried the bodies by the river—victims of "visible" diseases

such as smallpox, measles, and leprosy may not be honoured with sky-burial or cremation—and stuffed their clothes into a cleft in the rocks. (The story adds that the clothes were collected by a passing trader who was unaware of their provenance, and he duly caught the disease himself.)

### The Indomitable Grandma Chödrol

Namgyal and his older son survived, and they went to live in Baza, apparently reconciled with his father, Amchi Tshewang, as a consequence of the tragedy. Namgyal soon remarried. His wife this time was Chödrol—now remembered as Iwi (“Grandma”) Chödrol—a woman with an even more formidable temperament than his own. Before she married him she had been a nun in Dzar, and the mistress of a nobleman. Some of the goods she brought with her to Baza were, she claimed, presents from the nobleman; the nobleman maintained that she had stolen them. One night, when she and her son were alone in Baza, a group of riders with soot-blackened faces crossed the Muyala pass from the Muktinath valley and descended on Te. They broke into the Baza house, tied Chödrol up, and made off with the items the nobleman claimed. Her son, who had been in hiding during the raid, untied his mother, and the two of them immediately set off on foot toward Muktinath. From a vantage point near the village of Dzong they saw the riders leaving nearby Putra on their way back to Dzar, and after their departure they accosted the villager in whose house, as she had suspected, the stolen—or reclaimed—goods had been concealed. Under her interrogation, the man admitted everything, and the affair was eventually brought to court in Kathmandu. For the duration of the dispute, the family moved to the capital, where Anchorite Namgyal made a living by practising Tibetan medicine, while his wife, Chödrol, supplemented this income by selling *dzimbu*, the wild highland chives that are greatly valued in Nepalese cooking. They eventually won the case, retrieved their property and additional compensation, and returned to live in Baza.

Chödrol was notoriously thrifty. People who remember her say that when the family were invited to eat meals in the houses of their patrons, she would remove the meat from the food and take it home to dry for future consumption. As a result of astute grain-lending, she contributed to the impoverishment of three Chongkhor households that were unable to repay the interest. The families went into debt-bondage for a period of eighteen years, during which time Baza was entitled to the labour and crops of the debtors.

On one occasion, at least, her acquisitiveness put her on the wrong side of the law. Among the Tshognam papers is a receipt from the Thak court of law

acknowledging the payment, by Chödrol, of 42 rupees and 17 paise as a fine for a theft from Namkha, the lama of Upper Tshognam. This episode may have been the beginning of a feud between the priests of Baza and those of Upper Tshognam that would result eventually in a victory for Chödrol and her family.

### The Saintly Lama Mönlam

Like his father, Ösal Dorje, Namkha married a woman from Te, and had a son who was named Mönlam. While the boy was still young, Namkha died, and Mönlam's priestly training was handed over to a lama, called Phurba, from Chongkhor. Phurba was the natural son of Amchi Tshewang by his wife's younger sister, and therefore the half-brother of Anchorite Namgyal. Why was Namgyal not charged with the education of young Mönlam? He was senior to Phurba, highly competent, and lived in nearby Baza, whereas Anchorite Phurba was residing in the Muktinath valley. The fact that Namgyal was not selected is very probably an indication of the poor state of relations between Baza and Upper Tshognam following the indictment of Chödrol for theft.

If there was ever a priest whom the people of Te took to their hearts, it was Anchorite Mönlam. He is not named in any of the documents of Tshognam, an absence that is itself indicative of both his youth and the fact that he never came into conflict with his neighbours. One thing that alarmed the Tepas, however, was his announcement, while still in his teens, that he did not expect to live long. The villagers pressed him to marry, so that at least his lineage might continue, but Mönlam declined on the grounds of the grief that he would cause his widow by his early death. And so indeed it turned out. By the age of twenty Anchorite Mönlam was dead, and Upper Tshognam was left without an heir.

As far as the Tepas were concerned, the obvious candidate was Phurba, the Chongkhor-born teacher of Anchorite Mönlam. But Chödrol, the wife of Anchorite Namgyal of Baza, had other ideas. While Mönlam was on his deathbed, she bribed a young Tepa goatherd by giving him a ball of roasted flour dough and butter, and told him to tell the Tepas the following story: that while he was watching his flock on the Yathang plateau south of Te he met Phurba on his way to Tshognam, and that Phurba had called the goatherd and asked him, "Is Anchorite Mönlam *still* not dead?" Satisfied with his bribe, the boy put the story about in Te, and the plan had the desired effect. The Tepas were enraged by Phurba's callous remark, and concluded that his attention to his late student had not been disinterested but motivated by the wish to acquire his inheritance.

Phurba was, in fact, allowed to occupy the Tshognam house for a short time after Mönlam's death, and lived here with his family for a few days. But the Tepas were bitterly divided on the subject, and the general feeling turned against him to the point where a large crowd of villagers descended on Tshognam and drove the family from the house with threats of violence. Fearing for his personal safety, Anchorite Phurba was obliged to leave the house by an upstairs back window and climb down an apricot tree. His wife and children remained inside to collect up a few things before leaving; and even before they had gone, it is remembered, Grandma Chödrol began moving her own family's belongings into the house.

Anchorite Namgyal's tenancy as the village chaplain was formalised in a deed that was drawn up in 1938:

Since the dissolution of . . . [lacuna] . . . into the *dharmadhātu* sphere there has been no lama to take care of the temple Sang-*ngag* Chöling. The following is an agreement between the villagers of Te, led by their three Headmen. . . . The Anchorite Namgyal and Tshewang Membar, father and son—only these two shall we accept as the chaplains of our land. They shall be in charge of the temple on the condition that they must return the property, listed below, to any future incarnation of the departed Mönlam. If there is no [incarnation], everything pertaining to Tshognam temple that is set out in the list—the monastic estate, the fields, the moveable property—shall be offered by the community to Anchorite Namgyal and his descendants as long as the world age and the sun and the moon endure. In the event of the lineage coming to an end the temple and its property must be returned to the community of Te. (HMA/Te/Tib/34)

This brief statement is followed by a long list of temple property. Te gave Upper Tshognam to Anchorite Namgyal, but it is clear that he and his family were the second choice. The Tepas' real preference is indicated in the clause that makes Namgyal's occupancy of the house conditional on there being no "future incarnation." The incarnation for which the Tepas were hoping was, of course, that of their beloved Anchorite Mönlam, who left them when he was far too young and has never yet returned.

### The Reconciliation of the Families

Phurba went back to Chongkhor, where he spent the rest of his days. His eldest son, Pembar, eventually settled in the little hamlet of Drumbag, near Thini in

Panchgaon. Relations between Phurba and Namgyal were irreparably damaged by Phurba's eviction from Tshognam, and there was no rapprochement between these two families even in the next generation. The son of Anchorite Namgyal, Anchorite Membar (after becoming an anchorite he dropped the "Tshewang" from his name), continued to occupy the two houses of Tshognam and Baza. In 1975, one of his daughters, Yudrin, married Tshering Dorje, a son of one of Anchorite Phurba's daughters, and it was only after this marriage that the two priestly branches of the Shari Pungita clan were reconciled.

Anchorite Membar's sons, by two wives, are the present-day priests of Te. The eldest brother, Chödrag Gyatsho, occupied the temple of Upper Tshognam until his death in 1998, when he was succeeded by his son. The third brother, Karma Tshering, took over Baza, but later moved to Jomsom following a dispute with the community. The second brother, Sonam Ngödrub, became a monk and now lives in a monastery at Pharping, near Kathmandu. The fourth and youngest—who, in a fit of pique against his older siblings, signed away his right to a part of the inheritance—is Nyima Drandul, whose remarkable story must be told somewhere else.

### The Acquisition of Priestcraft

One thing that will be evident from this brief history of the priesthood of Tshognam is that every generation devoted no small amount of time and energy to its material well-being. The priests never made any secret of their proprietary and commercial interests, and the Tepas consequently have never had any illusions about them as bloodless emblems of unworldly virtue. But this does not mean that the Tepas see their chaplains in terms of the familiar communist caricatures of parasitic Tibetan clergy. If Te holds its chaplains in high esteem and provides them with an income, it is because they perform services that are perceived as being indispensable to the community. The lamas of Tshognam and Baza are empowered, mainly by virtue of their special training, to deal with forces that impinge directly on the life of the village, forces that the ordinary villagers lack the wherewithal to control.

Before looking at the services the priests perform—and the tribute they receive in return from the laity—a few words should be said about the basis of this authority in handling the supernatural. Mention has already been made above of the importance of the "bone," the patrilineal principle that is commonly regarded as a primary ingredient of effective householder priesthood (Aziz 1974; Ramble 1984). In the case of Tshognam, patrilineal transmission

is more important as the vector of a professional tradition than as the medium of an essence. None of the lama lineages of Te—with the exception of the vanished Önpo—appears to have been priestly *ab origine*: the “Clan of the Kings of Sikkim” contains nothing in its name to attest to a priestly function; the Shari Pungita clan, which had both Noble and Commoner branches, became involved with religious activities only in the mid-nineteenth century because of an accident of birth; and the lamas who immediately preceded them in Upper Tshognam were descended from a northern nomad with no family identity beyond his geographical provenance.

More important than descent is training. The main term of education for a lama of Tshognam is the period of seclusion, or *tsham* (Tib. *mtshams*) that entitles the practitioner to the prestigious title of *tshampa* (Tib. *mtshams pa*), or Anchorite. Retreats are of varying duration, depending on the particular purpose for which they are carried out. There are, for example, relatively short periods of seclusion that are nevertheless exacting because of the conditions in which they are performed. Thus the Bonpo priests of Lubra, in southern Baragaon, occasionally (there has been only one successful essay in recent years) undertake a “dark retreat” (Tib. *mun mtshams*) for a period of forty-nine days, during which time the celebrant remains enclosed in a small cave, naked, in nearly total darkness; in Chongkhor, a priest may become the head of the religious community and earn the title of Lama only after undergoing a twenty-one-day retreat during which he may not shift from the lotus posture.

The “basic” retreat undertaken by neophytes in Tshognam or Baza ideally lasts three years, three months, and three days (in practice the duration is more flexible), but the circumstances are relatively undemanding. The seclusion is broken up into a series of activities that are also referred to as *tsham*. A great deal might be said about the different practices undertaken during these three years; but most of it goes on behind closed doors, and the nature of the activity remains hidden from the outside world—including Te. To this extent the details of a priest’s initiation would be out of place here, since we are concerned with the Tepas’ perception of the priesthood and the relationship between the priesthood and their patrons. It will be enough here simply to outline the main phases of training that mark the three-year retreat.

The neophyte begins his retreat with a preparatory exercise (Tib. *sngon 'gro*) that is described as the “foundation” (Tib. *gram*) of his education. This introduction entails above all the cultivation of proper attitude, in which the welfare of all living things is perceived as worthy of his dedicated activity to the extent that, in the long series of lives he has lived, they have all at one time or another been his parents. An important component of this preliminary

practice is the execution of a hundred thousand full-length prostrations, in which he purifies the sins he has committed in association with his body, speech, and mind (the three components of the personality). The prostrations are counted on the rosary, which contains 108 beads, but to ensure that no fewer than the requisite number are performed by mistake, each round of the chaplet is reckoned as accounting for one hundred, thereby leaving a safety margin of eight in each set. The student is not alone for the entire duration of the retreat, but receives periodic visits from his teacher. The venue for the seclusion of trainee priests in Tshognam or Baza is the temple in each of these houses. The family is therefore never very far away, and the student may even meet other members of the household on certain occasions. This is particularly the case at the conclusion of the preliminary practice, before embarking on the second phase. Anyone the student sees during this intermission is classified as “placed in his view” (*migwa la cug*, Tib. *dmigs pa la bcug*), and he may be visited by these people throughout his period of seclusion.

The second phase is the “Mandala retreat” (Tib. *mandal mtshams*), which involves the serial construction and dismantling of an emblem of the phenomenal world. On a cloth spread over his lap the student builds a model consisting of tiers of metal bands alternating with layers of grain. As soon as the model is completed (it takes just a few seconds to build) it is destroyed, and a new one is made again immediately afterward. As in the case of the prostrations, the neophyte must perform this exercise one hundred thousand times. The procedure is understood as ten myriad offerings of the world to the realm of the Buddhas.

The Mandala retreat is followed by the “hundred-letter seclusion” (Tib. *yig brgya mtshams*), in which the practitioner recites—again, one hundred thousand times—a certain sacred formula made up of one hundred letters.

On completing this stage, the student proceeds to a phase of meditation on the four mainstays of the tantric practitioner: the guru, the tutelary divinity (Tib. *yi dam*), the dakini (Tib. *mkha' gro ma*), and the protector (Tib. *chos skyong*), for each of which he must receive the appropriate empowerment (Tib. *dbang*) and instruction (Tib. *lung* and *khrid*) from his master. In the case of the Tshognam lamas, who follow the system of the Union of the Precious Ones, the tutelary divinity is a form of Padmasambhava called Guru Dragpo (Tib. *Gu ru drag po*); the dakini is Khandro Sengdongma (Tib. *mKha' gro Seng gdong ma*); and the protector is Gompo Maning (Tib. *mGon po ma ning*). The three Precious Ones are united in the form of Padmasambhava himself, who occupies the centre of the mandala (Tib. *dkyil khor*).<sup>3</sup>

The serial meditation on the three key figures is followed by initiation into certain other tantras.

## The Priests and Their Patrons

The Tshognam and Baza lamas perform specialised services for the community of Te as a whole, but they also have around thirty-five private patrons. Most of these patrons—altogether fourteen households—are in Te, while another ten are in Tshug. The remainder are scattered through Tsele, Gyaga, and the villages of southern Baragaon. When a prospective lama first embarks on his three-year retreat, his family receives from each of these patron households a type of tribute that is known as *dabgya* (Tib. *zla brgya*), “provisions for a month.” This consists of ten measures (*zoba*) of rice, ten measures of buckwheat flour, and ten measures of barley. In addition to this there is a dried goat leg as well as a quantity of salt, chilli, butter, and oil. As the name suggests, the offering made by each household is intended to cover the maintenance of the Anchorite for one month of his thirty-nine-month retreat, although the generous quantity ensures that there is a substantial surplus. This gift is offered once for each of the three years the Anchorite remains in retreat. (The last senior lama of Tshognam, Chödrag Gyatsho, was born and brought up in Baza, where he lived with his biological mother. In his later childhood, however, he was cared for particularly by his father’s junior wife, who lived in Tshognam. When the time came for him to go into retreat, the latter moved him from Baza to Tshognam. While there can be no doubt about the disinterested attachment felt for her husband’s eldest child, it is also true that, as a consequence of the move to Tshognam, the beneficiary of the patrons’ “monthly provisions” for the boy was her own household rather than that of her senior counterpart in Baza.)

In addition to the substantial “monthly provision,” the priests of Tshognam and Baza receive a smaller annual gift from all their patrons, who, including the “special” families mentioned earlier, number some eighty households. This gift is referred to as *khoso*, a south Mustang Tibetan word meaning simply “a meal,” and consists of a variable quantity of grain and butter. But it is the “provisions for the month” that lay the foundation for the relationship between the future Anchorite and the patrons he will inherit from his father or mentor: a lama is always paid in cash or kind—or both—for any service he performs for his clients, but it is this anticipatory tribute, it is said, that obliges a lama to rise from his bed on a freezing night and travel to the house of a patron where someone has fallen gravely ill, or has died.

## Public and Private Services

The services the Tshognam lamas perform for the Tepas may be grouped into two main categories: those intended for the benefit of the community as a whole, and those performed for private householders. Broadly speaking, the former are associated with regular calendrical events, while the latter deal with personal and domestic crises and other episodes linked to the individual life-cycle. One of the techniques the lamas are expected to master while in retreat is that of astrological computation. There are seven occasions in Te's calendar for which the community will ask its priests to determine an auspicious date. The calendar of ritual, political, and economic activities provides the general framework for the activities, but it is up to the lamas to pinpoint the most appropriate—and avoid the unluckiest—of, say, four or five possible days. The seven events are as follows.

1. The clearing of the irrigation reservoir (*cingsa karma*)
2. The appointment of the headmen (*ganpa karma*)
3. The recruitment of the constables (*tshowa köpe karma*)
4. The barley planting (*bruza karma*) (in autumn)
5. The fumigation (*lhabsang*)
6. Sending the dzos (i.e., yak-cow crossbreeds) up to the pastures
7. The planting of the turnips (*molesa tabken karma*)

The last three calculations are performed at the same time during the main exorcism ceremony, the Zatönse, at the end of the second Te month. The Tepas do not plant turnips in significant quantities, and it is likely that the name of the occasion is an archaism that has been retained in relation to the planting of the buckwheat, the second main crop that is grown annually in Te.

Apart from these astrological calculations, there are only five rites of any importance that the lamas of Tshognam perform for the community as a whole. The first of these is the Divine Fumigation (Tib. *lha bsang*), which is carried out over the course of two days in the spring for the benefit of four of the main territorial divinities of Te. On the first day, the rite is performed twice at the site of Shartsenpa and subsequently at that of Pholha Yönten Karpo. On the second day the two gods to be venerated are the mother-goddess, Molha Chutsen Nyenmo, in the riverbed, and also the temple. (I discuss the status of the village temple as a place-god in chapter 6.)

In addition to this propitiation of the village temple itself, the Tshognam lamas perform two ceremonies within the building during the course of the

year. One of these is held at the beginning of the sixth Te month. It is called Tshechog (Tib. *tshe chog*) and is intended as a fortification of the lives of the villagers and the protection of the barley crop that is close to ripening. The performance of the ceremony coincides with the occasion when all able-bodied Tepas between the age of eighteen and sixty-five are spending several days in the highlands east of the village to clear an important watercourse.

A complementary ceremony, called the Kangso (Tib. *bskang gso*), is performed when the buckwheat is in flower. During this period, too, the village is “closed” from the second day of the ninth Te month until the harvest, somewhat over a month later. The Kangso, which is performed from the twenty-first to the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, is essentially a propitiation of the territorial gods and various Buddhist protective divinities.

The Tshechog and the Kangso ceremonies were not originally within the repertoire of the Tshognam lamas. They used to be celebrated by a Tibetan monk, remembered as the Drurampa (Tib. *sgrub rim pa?*), who lived in the neighbouring village of Taye. After his death some time in the early 1970s, the celebration of the rituals was taken over by Tshognam.

Every year, around January, shortly before the great Lama Guru ceremony, the lamas carry out an exorcism for the benefit of the whole community. The main components of the ceremony are the offering of a “ransom” (Tib. *glud*), succeeded, on the following day, by a ritual belonging to the category known as *dö* (Tib. *mdos*). This particular *dö* is called the “Three-Headed Black One” (Tib. *mi* [or *gto*] *nag ngo gsum*), since the principal effigy bears three theriomorphic heads. Because the rite is performed in Tshognam, and not Te itself, the lamas are not fed and reimbursed directly by the community. The conclusion of the *dö* does, however, mark the occasion for an exchange of tribute and hospitality between Tshognam and Te. When the ritual is over, the priests are visited by a representative of every house—both full estates and subsidiary households—who brings an offering of one measure of barley and one of buckwheat. The bearer in turn is given tea, beer, and a simple meal of buckwheat porridge by the priestly family.

Seven estates of Te do not send barley on this occasion but rice, which is both more valuable and more prestigious. These seven households are the principal patrons of the Tshognam lamas, and are included in the set of fourteen households that make the category of offerings called “monthly provisions” to the young anchorites.

Until recently, an annual *dö* ceremony (in this case, too, the Three-Headed Black One) was also performed by the lamas of Baza, somewhat before the Tshognam occasion; but this came to an end—for reasons I shall discuss—in the early 1990s.

The last, and perhaps most interesting, of the rites performed by Tshognam for Te is the annual rain-making ceremony. Tantric techniques for controlling the weather are nothing unusual in the Tibetan tradition: weather-makers were even employed by the Lhasa government to ensure rain at appropriate times and to keep hail off vulnerable sites. The technique used by the senior lama of Tshognam, however, does not belong to the usual Tibetan repertoire but was assimilated by his grandfather, "Doctor Dandy," from the "outsiders' religion" (Tib. *phyi pa'i chos*)—specifically, from Hinduism: he learned it, it is said, from a mendicant Indian pilgrim. The ritual is performed in the summer, with the intention of ensuring that the pastures are well watered and that the snow-melt that irrigates the buckwheat crop is supplemented with rain. The procedure, briefly, is as follows. Two hollow wax models of frogs are made. Through a hole in the back, the frogs are filled with various ingredients, including the excrement of a black dog and magical formulae written on slips of paper, and the holes are sealed with a wax lid. One of the frogs is stuffed into the mouth of one of the springs to the east of Te, and the other is burned at a three-way crossroads. The principle of this method is apparently to pollute the subterranean serpent-spirits and the sky gods, and induce them to wash away the contagion by producing water from the earth and the heavens.

These, then, are the main occasions on which the lamas of Tshognam intervene on behalf of the community of Te. All five of the ceremonies are concerned primarily with the general physical protection and prosperity of the village. There is nothing in these rituals to suggest any particular interest on the part of the Tepas with the more abstract preoccupations that are generally associated with Buddhist endeavour—such as the accumulation of merit or the attainment of a more agreeable incarnation in the future. The Tepas value their lamas not for the unworldly principles of service to the welfare of all living beings that frame the cultivation of supernatural power during their training, but for their mastery of techniques that have a palpable bearing on their immediate environment.

Nor do the lamas adopt a position of moral didacticism with regard to their private patrons. The rituals that are performed periodically in the latter's houses are also of the exorcistic and protective variety, and also feature the *dö* of the Three-Headed Black One.

### Cheating and Compromise

It will become increasingly apparent that the role of the Tshognam lamas in the community of Te represents a compromise that has been struck between

the—admittedly wide-ranging and tolerant—Buddhist scheme of things on the one hand and a fundamentally pagan worldview on the other. Where the differences are irreconcilable, one side or the other has been compelled to concede. I shall discuss examples of such reciprocal concessions later. But there are a number of cases where a working arrangement has been reached to the satisfaction of both sides.

The Nyingmapa lamas of Tshognam have not, in any case, shown as much missionary enthusiasm as other representatives of Buddhism in forcing the Tepas to abandon traditions that are incompatible with Buddhist tenets; the Tepas in turn make certain compromises that illustrate their respect for the priests' alien package of propositions about the nature of the world. This adjustment is particularly well illustrated in the case of funerals. The lamas have an uncommonly important role to play in the death-rites of their clients to the extent that they do not share their sacerdotal function with any other category of priests. This monopoly is in stark contrast to the villages of the Muktinath valley, where ritual labour at funerals is divided between the householder-priests of Chongkhor, the monks of one or other of the Sakyapa monasteries, and (to a lesser degree in recent years) the nuns of a convent near Muktinath. Even if one of their own number dies, the Chongkhor tantrists are required to engage a monk to perform the all-important *phowa*, or "transference of consciousness" (Tib. *pho ba*) ritual; the lamas' dependency on the monks for executing this rite has in fact enabled the latter to increase their religious authority in the region by threatening Chongkhor with excommunication if it failed to meet certain demands, and raising the intolerable spectre of improperly conducted funeral rites for their dead.

One of the techniques that the Tshognam lamas must master in the latter stages of their initiatory thirty-nine-month retreat is, precisely, the *phowa*, the process of liberating the consciousness of the dead person from his or her body. The niceties of this may be lost on the Tepas, but they are aware that the lamas are competent to handle funerals without additional help, and value this fact immensely. This is not the place to discuss death-rites in detail, but the lamas' handling of funerals is visibly competent and dedicated—from the performance of the *cö* (Tib. *gcod*) dance beside the corpse through the passage out of the village up to the cemetery, when the lama leads the procession trailing a white cloth to "show the way" to the deceased, the supervision of the body's dismemberment for the birds, and the subsequent reading of the appropriate scriptures over many days.

When a person dies, a member of the bereaved family immediately summons the lama. The lama may never refuse to come even when he is summoned from the depth of his sleep, and it is axiomatic that most people die at

night. Tepas, like most people in Mustang, do not like to leave a dead body unattended because of the terrifying possibility of the “rising corpse,” the *rolang* (Tib. *ro langs*), a sort of malevolent zombie. The idea of spending the night in a room with a dead body is, however, appalling, and usually one of the first tasks of the priest is to sleep beside the corpse and keep an eye on it. The day the body is removed from the house and taken to the cemetery (which is on a high promontory to the southwest of the village) is determined by an astrological calculation performed by the lama. Removing a body from a house on a particularly inauspicious day can result in misfortune and death throughout the community, and the villagers of southern Baragaon will wait up to three days before removing a corpse. The Tepas, however, have an aversion to keeping a dead body at home that is stronger than the comfort provided by the presence of the lama, or his assurance that the corpse might safely be removed three days thence without any harm befalling the household or the rest of the community. As far as the Tepas are concerned, when a member of the household dies he or she becomes the enemy, a hostile, polluting presence that must be got rid of as soon as possible. Let us suppose that, according to the priests’ calculations, the coming day is going to be highly inauspicious, and so, too, is the day after. Such a combination is unusual but not unknown; there are degrees of inauspiciousness, and in most cases—both in Te as elsewhere in Baragaon—potential evil consequences can be distracted by “shadowing” (Tib. *sgrib pa*) the corpse: this entails carrying in front of it to the cemetery a dough effigy of an animal prescribed by the text, such as a crow or a bull. But occasionally even “shadowing” will not suffice, and the corpse must remain at home for a few days. What the Tepas will do in such a case is—translated literally—to “steal the crack” (SMT, Tk *sang ku*, Tib. *gseng rku*). Between two consecutive days, somewhere before the first cock-crow (reckoned to be around three o’clock in the morning) of the second day, is a narrow space or crack (Tib. *gseng*) that does not properly belong to either. It is at this moment between two unlucky days that the Tepas will hastily slip a corpse out the house. Once the critical act of removal has been achieved, the body can be taken up for disposal at any time during the day.

In historical terms, the astrological techniques used by the priests may be no more intrinsic to Buddhism than, say, the weather-making rite of the wax frog, but for centuries they have been an important component of Tibetan sacerdotal craft, and form a standard part of the stock in trade of the Tshognam priests. The classification of what is auspicious and nefarious according to these astrological principles nevertheless clashes with the Tepas’ view of things; the priests may maintain that it is fine to keep a corpse at home for three days, but for the Tepas the prospect is intolerable. The priests cannot change what

is written on the charts and in the scriptures, and the Tepas in turn are unconvinced by their assurances. But here, as so often, the Buddhist scheme contains certain escape clauses that enable the Tepas to act according to the demands of custom without challenging and undermining the authority of the priests.

This is an example of accommodation between the priests' and the villagers' view of the world; now I shall discuss some examples of encounters where no such adjustment was possible.

### The Luri Lama

The thirty-nine-month retreat undertaken by the priests equips them with the basic moral and magical fortitude to handle specific, and sometimes dangerous, techniques. (No ordinary villager in his or her right mind would heap dirt on the serpent-spirits or the sky gods.) The secret of these spells is closely guarded by their possessors, who do not give them out freely for two reasons: first, because their exploitation may prove harmful to a user who has not been through a suitable basic training, and second, because such secrets are the tools of the priests' livelihood, and it makes no sense to share them with potential competitors. Thus the senior lama of Tshognam, Chödrag Gyatsho, was known to hold the regional monopoly on a few important spells; one of these is a formula for the treatment of epilepsy that he learned from a lama of Nubri. One precious device that was not in his repertoire, however, was the spell for getting rid of caterpillars. Every summer, both the barley and the buckwheat crops in much of Mustang are assaulted by hordes of red-headed, black-bodied caterpillars. The only person who knows effectively how to deal with them is the lama of Luri, a famous cave-temple in eastern Lo that is taken care of by the householder priests of two nearby villages, Yara and Gara. During the summer the Luri lama, a native of Gara, does the rounds of most of the villages in Lo and Baragaon—including Te—to pronounce the magical formulae that will make the caterpillars leave the fields. Up to the time of writing, as far as I know, he has not passed this secret on to anyone else.

Since the early 1990s the Luri lama has become an increasingly important figure in Te. The Tepas are, as we have seen, willing to make certain adjustments to the priest's requirements, as long as these are not regarded as detrimental to the interests of the community. Any act of betrayal against the village is, however, unpardonable. We have already seen how ruthlessly the Tepas dealt with Anchorite Phurba, whom they considered to have been unduly insensitive to their favourite priest, Anchorite Mönlam, shortly before the

latter's death. In 1992 an election was held to decide the chairman of the Village Development Committee (the post-1990 administrative successor to the panchayat) that includes the five Shöyul and Samar. The two main rival candidates were from Te and from Tshug. When the votes were counted, it was found that the latter had won by just two votes. It later emerged that the priests of Baza and Tshognam, and their families, had voted for the winning candidate from Tshug. To make matters worse, the loser had been a member of one of the fourteen households that customarily give "monthly provisions" to neophyte priests.

In the early 1970s, when the national cadastral survey reached Te, the question arose concerning the category of ownership within which the houses and fields of Upper Tshognam and Baza should be registered. The Tepas decided that it would be most appropriate to place them under communal ownership, as they actually did in the case of two abandoned estates. At this point Nyima Drandul, the youngest of the four priestly brothers, intervened, and argued that it would be best if they were registered as the private property of his family. The Tepas were reluctant, but Nyima Drandul insisted that they put the matter to a vote, and that he should be present at the ballot so that each householder could look him in the face. The strategy paid off. The Tepas were unwilling to be seen individually to be challenging the priests' wishes, and duly voted for the privatisation of Tshognam and Baza.

Two decades later, when the priests were seen to have undermined the Tepas' political aspirations, the village assembled to discuss what reprisals to take. Because the two estates had been legally registered as the property of the priests, they could not be forcibly evicted. However, the water with which Baza's land was irrigated belonged to Te; the greater part of the deed, paraphrased earlier, in which the lama's ancestors had been granted tenancy a century earlier, is concerned with Baza's water-rights. Now the villagers decided to make life intolerable for the inhabitants by withdrawing these rights. Tshognam was more difficult: although the house stands on Te's territory, the irrigation water belongs to Tshug, and the Tepas could therefore not restrict access to it. They therefore applied the severest of the sanctions a community usually imposes on an offending household: they declared Tshognam "cut off from fire and water" (Tib. *chu bcad me bcad*). This means, literally, that no one may give the offending household—or receive from it—either fire or water. The withholding of fire is no longer a particular problem in the age of gas-lighters and matches; but within living memory it was usual to "beg fire" (Tib. *me slong*) at a neighbour's house from which smoke was seen to be issuing, rather than struggle tediously with flint and steel. In practice, when a household has been cut off from fire and water, other members of the community

may not give them anything to eat or drink, or receive anything from them, on pain of paying a fine. In the case of the Tshognam house, this boycott was supplemented with a refusal to collect fuel for the priests as well as a few other restrictions that I will mention in later chapters.

The priest of Baza remonstrated with the villagers and, as his younger brother had done two decades earlier, insisted that the council vote on the issue in his presence. Under his critical eye, the Tepas all placed their stones on the pile that signified that his irrigation supply should *not* be cut off. But in spite of this public display of acquiescence, the water was never reconnected. In 1995, the lama eventually gave up the struggle against the protean community, whose members continued to assure him individually of their support for his case, and moved with his family down to Jomsom.

Shortly after the Tepas had cold-shouldered their priests, they invited the Luri lama, who was already well known to the community, to come and fill the resulting void. Because they could not lodge him in Baza or Tshognam, they offered him the tenancy of a house that had been vacant for several years. The house was one of four fractional estates that had originally constituted a major estate known as the Saryangsa Drongba (the details about which were given in chapter 4). Because this estate had very little land attached to it, the Luri lama was also given usufruct of the fields belonging to another abandoned estate, the Önpo Drongba, which had belonged to Te's own priestly clan, the Önpo, until the extinction of the line. Furthermore, he was given the right to collect, as fuel, the dung of all non-Tepa-owned livestock that passed through the village. In exchange for these tributes, he was required to be the steward (*konyer*) of the village temple and to sponsor the annual reading of the *Yum*: the *Prajñāparamitā* in sixteen volumes that hitherto had been the rotating responsibility of Te's estates.

The Luri lama and the Tepas drew up a written agreement to this effect for a period of twelve years. But substituting the new priest for the senior lama of Tshognam was not such a straightforward affair. The Luri lama was good at removing caterpillars, but he could not replace the Tshognam priest as a weather-maker, astrologer, and doctor. On certain occasions—such as funerals—the two would collaborate, but the fact that they were trained within slightly different sacerdotal traditions meant that their ritual procedures and the tunes of the chants did not match. Then a few people began to grumble that the Luri lama's wife was collecting the dung not only of outsiders' animals but also of Te's livestock itself. Someone offered the lama usufruct of part of an estate in Tshug, a village he found more congenial as a place to live, and he began to spend more of his time here. His sponsorship of the *Yum*-reading ceased, and he stopped farming the land he had been given in Te. The lama of

Tshognam, meanwhile, remained indispensable to Te, and his status as “cut off from fire and water” was tacitly relaxed.

## PART 2: MONKS AND NUNS

### The Decline of Monasticism in Te

There is an inverse relationship between the power of a Buddhist school and the degree to which it is obliged to compromise its tenets with the pagan inclinations of the laity that hosts it. Power can have a variety of bases, ranging from the charismatic authority of an individual missionary to the association of the school in question with the structures of the polity itself. Since the fifteenth century, thanks to the patronage of the kings of Lo, the single most important sect in Baragaon and Lo has been the Sakyapa school. To the extent that they were generously patronised by the ruling family, some of whose members have been among its most prominent luminaries, the Sakyapas acquired a position reminiscent of a state church within the kingdom.

In Baragaon, the Sakyapas are represented by three monasteries, or *chöde* (Tib. *chos sde*). These are located in the villages of Dzar, Dzong, and Kag, while the remaining settlements all belong to the parish of one or another of the three monasteries. Recruitment to the monastic communities occurs within the respective parish, and the candidates are, in accordance with established Tibetan practice, the second of three sons. A few weeks after the birth of a third son, a family will be visited by a small delegation of monks who present a ball of boiled rice and some other edibles, and claim the second son as a future novice.

Te, too, once lay within the parish of the Muktinath valley monasteries. Interestingly, Te’s monks were recruited by not one but all three, according to their clan membership. I discussed the possible reasons for this fragmentation in chapter 4. But the Muktinath valley is several hours’ walk from Te, and the frequent journeys the monks’ obligations entailed made this arrangement very inconvenient. Some time around the beginning of the twentieth century, the village requested the ruler of Baragaon to release them from this affiliation, and the ruler agreed. Why he should have consented to such a weakening of the Sakyapa monastic tradition is an interesting question. The lord at that time was Kushog Zangdor of Dzar, who appears in a number of documents in benevolent association with Te. In spite of the fact that he was once arraigned, while he was one of the three assistants (another of whom was a Tepa) of the old lord Kushog Bhelpo, for having levied double taxes from Baragaon (see

chapter 10), he is remembered today as having been helpful to the ordinary populace. However, this particular instance of consideration for the hardship of the Tepa monks may be explained by his family connections. Kushog Zangdor's wife was the sister of Dzar's headman, Gempa Labnye. The latter, it may be remembered, was the father of the illegitimate Tshewang of Chong-khor, who later took up residence in Te and founded the lineage of the Shari Pungita priests. Furthermore, it was Kushog Zangdor who negotiated with the Tepas the terms on which Amchi Tshewang took up residence in Baza (see earlier, HMA/UTshognam/Tib/41). It is not inconceivable that Amchi Tshewang himself interceded with his aunt's husband in order to have the Tepas released from their monastic obligations.

The Tepas did go on to produce serious monks well after the official break from Dzardzong—one or two are still remembered in the village—and they even continued to visit Tibet for training in Sakyapa monasteries. The only remaining documents that speak of a relationship between Te and the Sakyapa centres are two undated slips of paper from Tshognam. One is from the monastery of Ngor Khangsar—the nucleus of the Ngorpa subsect of the Sakyapas—and the other is from its abbot. Both relate to the death of one of the Tshognam lamas I discussed earlier, Tshewang Bumpa, probably some time in the late nineteenth century. The monastery and the abbot acknowledge receipt of, respectively, an assortment of jewellery and one *srang* (a denomination in the obsolete Tibetan currency) as a fee for the dedication of merit (Tib. *bsngo rten*) on behalf of the recently deceased lama. The two indulgences assure the bereaved family that “whatever sins, defilements, and moral offences he may have accumulated have been purified,” thanks to the Ngorpas’ intercession (HMA/LTshognam/Tib/14; HMA/LTshognam/Tib/13).

The present-day Tepas do not tell stories about a golden past when the village produced illustrious monks, and there is little evidence of the premium on monastic scholasticism that is encountered in many other villages. One of the few anecdotes I have heard about Tepa monks in Tibet offers a nice illustration of the preferability of parochialism and sheer cunning over Buddhist learning. The story is certainly apocryphal but it is a good one. A Tepa monk studying in one of the Sakyapa monasteries in Tibet was once engaged in philosophical debate with another monk. This type of debate, which is practised by a number of Tibetan schools, is a public and rather athletic affair in which one contestant puts quick-fire propositions and questions in the arcane (to laypersons) language of philosophical discourse, and the opponent makes an immediate riposte. The Tepa, who was putting propositions, found himself being badly worsted in the exchange, and resorted to desperate measures:

Putsunen dang gcig  
 gyampa udu dang gnyis  
 karu sampe pog dang gsum  
 gang yin pa'i phyir

First—Putsunen

Second—Gyampa Udu

Third—Karu sampe pog

How does this follow?

The opponent stared vacantly as his allotted time ran out, and the Tepa was declared the winner of the bout. As for the mysterious propositions, Putsunen and Gyampa Udu are the names of two locations near the village of Te. *Karu sampe pog* is a Seke term meaning “fresh roasted barley.”

### The Last Nun

Before I explore further the status of Buddhist renunciation in Te, I should address the subject of the community’s nuns. Like monks, nuns are recruited in the Muktinath valley, and on the same basis: a family that has just produced a third daughter will be approached by the local convent and asked formally for the second one to be designated a future nun. Unlike the monks, however, nuns of southern Baragaon are not Sakyapa but Nyingmapa (with the exception of Lubra, which is entirely Bonpo), and the area is apportioned out between the parishes of two, not three, convents. The nuns of the Shöyul were traditionally attached to a now-abandoned temple situated above the west bank of the Kali Gandaki, opposite Tshug. The proper name of this temple is Kunzang Chöling (Tib. Kun bzang chos gling), but it is popularly referred to as simply Gompa Gang, the “temple ridge.”

The story of the abandonment of the temple by the nuns of Taye has been told earlier, in chapter 2: after one of the nuns had been swept to her death while crossing the Kali Gandaki, the Tayepas decided that it would be safer to stay on their side of the river, and built a nunnery within the village. The Tepa nuns withdrew from Gompa Gang at the beginning of the twentieth century. The only information we have is contained in a brief document from Tshognam, dated 1906, in which the nuns of Te and the lama of Upper Tshognam agree that, thenceforth, the nuns should be associated with his temple and put under his tutelage. To judge from the number of signatories, there were seven nuns in Te at the time. As for the circumstances of their departure from Gompa Gang, it seems not to have been of their own volition, as in the case of

Taye's nuns. There must have been some fracas between them and the rest of the community, but we don't know what it was. The preamble to the document tells us only that "the nuns of Te have been dragged out of the Tshug convent and told, 'You need not come back'" (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/28).

Recruitment to Tshognam's convent may have been less than enthusiastic, and nuns were casual about abandoning their vows. Lama Namkha (*alias* Tempe Gyaltsen) must have complained to the Tepas about the situation, because the community signed an agreement, in 1916, that assured the lama of its commitment to the institution. The agreement says that as soon as the second of three daughters reaches the age of sixteen she should be ordained as a nun. If she should become a laywoman (presumably either before or subsequent to her induction), she may do so on payment of 500 rupees to the government authority and 100 rupees to the "local lord" (*yul dpon*) (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/24).

However sincerely the Tepas meant this undertaking at the time, their good intentions were soon forgotten, and the severe pecuniary penalty was probably never imposed. By 1927—the date of the last document we have concerning the nuns—the ritual organisation of the convent had to be changed because of declining membership. The families of the nuns had previously taken it in turn to sponsor the monthly ceremony. Now, however, because the community had dwindled to just three members, it was decided that the senior nun (*bla ma gshags*)<sup>4</sup> should sponsor four months' worth of ceremonies and the other two shoulder the burden of the remaining eight months. If the number of nuns should increase—specifically, if the daughter of a certain Tagla decided to become a nun—then the four members of the religious community would be responsible for three months each (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/31). The uncertainty over whether Tagla's daughter would become a nun suggests that recruitment to the community was by now a very doubtful affair, and that the Tshognam temple was no longer in a position to bring pressure to bear on Te's households.

The older Tepas remember that there was a nun in the village during their lifetime. She was proud of being literate, and even used to turn up at community gatherings with a bamboo pen tucked behind her ear to remind people of her achievement. But that was a long time ago, and after her death the institution came to an end.

### The Tepa Adaptation of Celibacy

Until 1992, the institution of monasticism in Te continued to thrive, but in a very unorthodox form. When a family had three sons, the second one was

automatically considered to be a monk. The monks took no vows, did not wear robes, attended no religious ceremonies, and did not even learn to read or write. They were not permitted to marry, but chastity was not enjoined on them. But a monk was an enormous asset to a household: monks belong to a category of people in Te (of which I shall say more later) who are not required to participate in public duties, such as village meetings, communal labour, or tenure of official positions. Monks were therefore free to devote their energies to the prosperity of the household, either working on the land or trading, without the obligation to be present in the village for the sake of civic responsibilities. There was also no stipulation that it should be the second son who became the monk. In one of Te's families there were four sons. As is usual, the second one (who in Tibetan literature is in fact usually designated "the middle one") became a monk. The third one subsequently left the household to marry separately. The age gap between the oldest and the youngest was such that they were ill matched to form a polyandrous pair, and the status of monk was therefore renounced by the "middle" one and taken over by the youngest. The institution was effectively understood to mean that each household of three or more brothers was entitled to have one member who was



FIGURE 5.3. Karma Tshering, the last lama of Baza, performs the exorcistic ritual called "the Three-Headed Black One."

exempt from civic duties. This modified version of monastic custom is one of several examples of the adaptation of Buddhist institutions for entirely local purposes. I shall examine this in a later chapter. First, however, I need to explain something of the cult of autochthonous deities with which the representatives of Buddhism have been confronted in Te.

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# 6

## The Wild Gods of Te

### The Dismembered Demoness

The boundary between what is and what is not Buddhist in nominally Buddhist communities is not as easy to define as might at first appear. This is especially true of Tibetan Buddhism, whose protean character makes it more accommodating, by comparison with other forms of the religion, toward popular beliefs and practices without head-on confrontation. To the extent that Buddhism has a universal scheme, the absorption of such local phenomena nevertheless requires their modification into an approximation congenial to the categories available within the framework. One of the domains in which this process of transformation is most conspicuously seen is the Buddhist representation of landscape, and the supernatural entities that inhabit it. Landscapes that are singled out for particular attention are those associated with sites (most commonly, mountains, but valleys and lakes as well) that are blessed by the agency of Buddhist saints or gods, and acquire popularity as places of pilgrimage. The sacred representation of such places emerges—usually in several stages—as the consequence of visiting lamas recording their visions in “guidebooks” that set out the terms in which the topography should really, if not ordinarily, be seen. The most highly evolved representations of this sort deprive the landscape concerned of its natural chaos and order it in a variety of different ways: typically, the shape of the place is simplified to the quincunx of a mandala; the census of

its streams, caves, lakes, and other features is standardised to auspicious numbers—seven, thirteen (in the case of Bonpo sites), 108, and so on; rocks are reported to be composed of precious substances or are attributed with a variety of shapes from the stock of imagery favoured by the convention—usually religious instruments and animals; place-gods of entirely local significance are pulled into the periphery of the mandala as minor protectors, and major tantric divinities are set at the centre.

The appropriation of Te by Buddhist representation has been a very piece-meal and haphazard affair, and the few examples of this process can be enumerated briefly. According to a well-known story, the land of Tibet was conceived of by the Chinese wife of King Songtsen Gampo, the seventh-century unifier of the nation, as a hostile demoness. According to the queen's geomantic analysis, the demoness had to be immobilised by constructing Buddhist temples at various points on her spread-eagled form.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly cognate with this story is a myth according to which certain topographical features in Mustang are seen as testimonies of a missionary sortie by Guru Rinpoche, an eighth-century figure who is generally represented as one of the main agents of Tibet's conversion. The myth revolves around an epic duel between Guru Rinpoche and the Balmo, a demoness who resisted the propagation of Buddhism in the land. A few examples: Guru Rinpoche brought with him from Tibet a quantity of salt, which he deposited a couple of hours' walk upstream from Te by the Narshing Khola, at the place called Tshaurong; this is the source of the salt that was for a long time mined at the site and is now obtained by collecting saline exudations in a series of pools where the solute is evaporated off.<sup>2</sup> In the roof of a shallow cave near the site is a sacred impress of the head of Guru Rinpoche. The myth also provides an opportunity to dignify certain toponyms with a Tibetan etymology: the village of Kag is so named because it stands on a huge rock that the demoness set there as a block (Tib. *bkag*) against the advance of Guru Rinpoche.

The saint of course won the battle and eviscerated his opponent: a three-hundred-yard-long wall of prayer-stones north of the town of Gemi is said to mark the site of her drawn entrails; the blue cliffs to the east of the wall and the red cliffs nearby to the northeast, above the village of Drakmar (which in fact means "red crags") are the places where her liver and blood were, respectively, diffused. (A small blue rock off the trail between Te and the Muya La pass, near three black stones that were once the demoness's cooking tripod, is also said to be a fragment of the liver). Local documents usually spell the name Te as "gTer," meaning "treasure," and other sources have *sTod*, *bTad*, *sTed*, and so forth (see Snellgrove 1989 [1961]: 109). According to one account, however, the complete subjection of the Balmo required that Guru Rinpoche pin her down

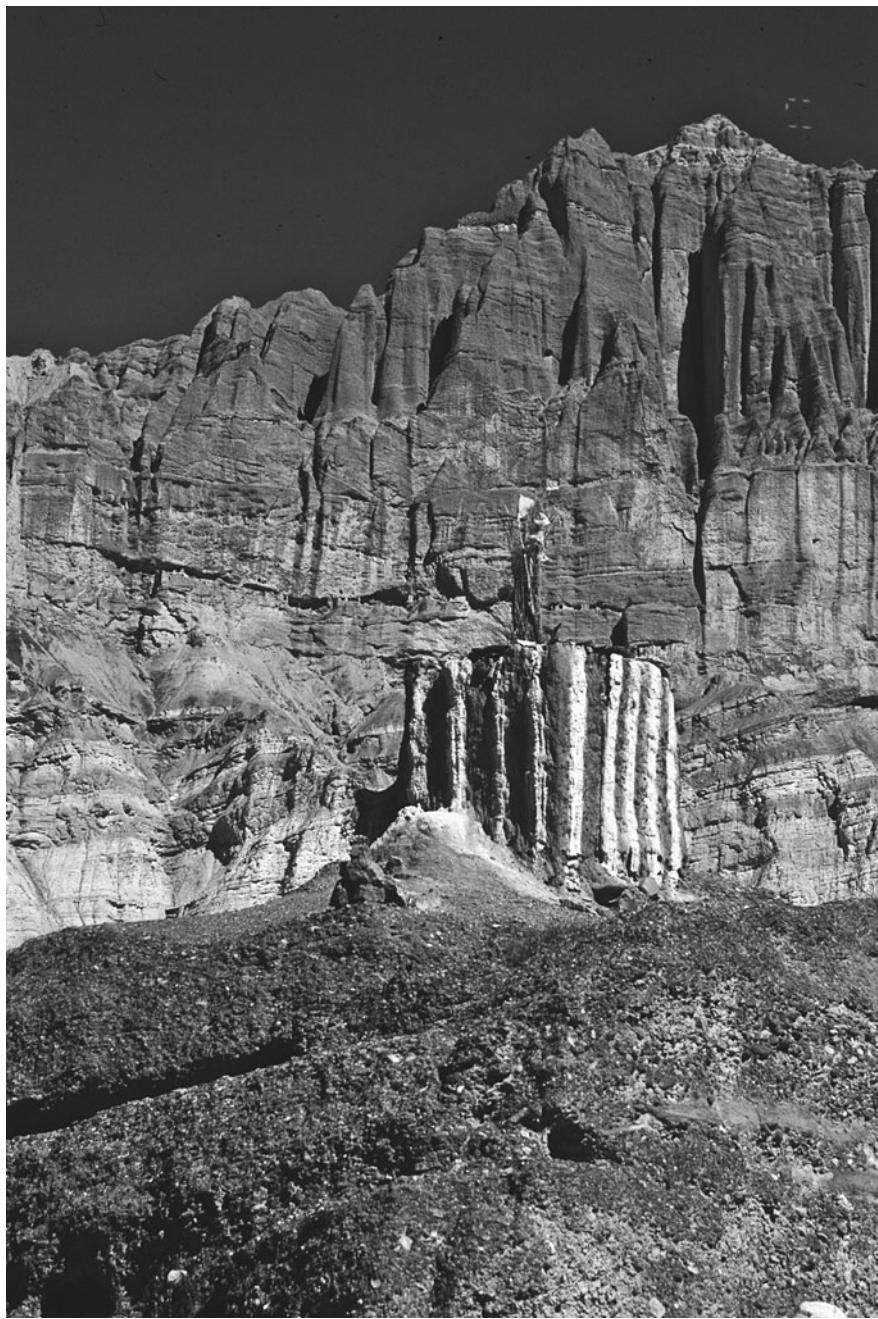


FIGURE 6.1. “Pholha Yönten Karpo, dwelling at the top of the village: may our auspicious prayers for the ripening of the crops at the proper time be fulfilled!” The dark line in the cliff to the immediate top left of this shrine is the location of the abandoned cave settlement known as “the Homes of the Ancestors” (see chapter 3).

by building Buddhist edifices at key points of her prostrate body. These included the construction of a stupa at a place called Tewethang. The text's spelling of this name (lTe ba'i thang) indicates that the author understood the toponym "Tetang" to signify the "Plateau [*thang*] of [the Demoness's] Navel [lTe ba]."<sup>3</sup>

The priestly author of *The Chronicle*, the short work discussed in chapter 4, follows his account of the origins of Te's clans with a description of the settlement's natural surroundings:

In the Eastern Pasturelands there is [a rock resembling] the elephant [god] Ganesh, facing downhill; in the Southern Pasturelands is a [rock] resembling an Indian tiger leaping toward the west; in the Western Pasturelands [there are rocks] that look like the seated forms of the goddesses of offerings that please the senses. In the Northern Pasturelands is a red cliff having the appearance of a blazing fire mountain, with an assembly of crimson harmful and obstructive sprites. [Or possibly: a blazing fire mountain that subjugates the crimson harmful and obstructive sprites]. In the upper part of the valley is a secret cave of the Guru [i.e. Padmasambhava], and an inexhaustible salt mine, and at its foot runs the gentle stream from which the sweet music of the serpent-spirits plays without pause. In the upper part of this valley, that is blessed by heroes and dakinis, stands Pholha Shartsen Nyenpo; in the middle is Yul-lha Yönten Karpo, and in the valley floor is Molha Chugyal Nyenpo. Above the settlement is a soul-lake, while below it is a soul tree. In that excellent settlement are [representations of] the *dharmakāya*, the *sambhogakāya*, and the *nirmānakāya* as supports of the body; volumes of the *Prajñāpāramitā* as supports of speech, and, as supports of the mind, two sets of stupas.

The imagery in which the first paragraph describes the topography of the uncultivated wilderness (*ri*, which I have translated here simply as "hills") surrounding Te belongs squarely to the conventions of Buddhist literature on sacred landscape. (Ganesh, by the way, like a number of other major gods from the Hindu pantheon, has been appropriated by Buddhism as a minor protector.) "The Secret Cave of the Guru" is the name of an important pilgrimage place on the eastern flanks of Dhaulagiri, some two days to the south, but it is common enough for lesser localities to be conceived of as a "substitute" for major sites.

As for the third paragraph, soul-lakes and soul-trees are pagan ideas that have been incorporated into Tibetan Buddhist orthodoxy. The former refers to

Te's irrigation reservoir (which is important for the Tepas both ceremonially and materially, but is nevertheless not regarded as a "soul lake" by the villagers), and the "soul tree" probably signifies the trees growing at the site called Mugkyu, near the village spring.

If there are cases in literature or oral tradition other than the examples cited here, in which Te is represented in the idioms of Buddhist sacred geography, I do not know about them. These representations are not substantial enough to turn Te into the kind of power-place that presses everything in its field into the service of Buddhism. This much is clear from the second paragraph, which names three place-gods of Te without implying that they are in any way protectors of the faith: indeed they are not. From the point of view of the Buddhist ideology of taming, these gods are wild.

I suggested earlier that Shartsenpa and Yönten Karpo were originally clan divinities—respectively, of the Khyungpo and Yangba clans—who subsequently obtained a supplementary identity as place-gods. Certain divergences between the nomenclature given in the *Chronicle* and that of contemporary usage may be worth mentioning. Shartsen Nyenpo is described here as a Pholha, literally a "god of the males." While this term properly denotes a patrilineal clan god, it is also often used of territorial divinities. Shartsenpa nowadays is usually designated by the title Jowo, "the lord." But the term Pholha of the text is still appropriate, to the extent that he and the Molha are regarded as a couple, the lord and his lady. Yönten Karpo, who bears the title Yul-lha—"territorial divinity"—is nowadays called Pholha. I do not think that too much significance need be read into these changes of title. All three of these gods are in any case regarded as "territorial divinities," as indeed they seem to have been at the time the *Chronicle* was composed.

The name of the mother-goddess is interesting. In present-day Te she is called "Chutsen Nyenpo," "Fierce *tsen* spirit of the water," while the *Chronicle* calls her "Chugyal Nyenpo," literally "Fierce ruler of the water." I shall discuss the possible significance of the latter name later.

### Putting Te on the Map

Tantric lamas such as the priests of Tshognam precede almost all the rituals they perform with a libation to the gods of place. There are various libation ceremonies of this sort, but the one most commonly used is the *Degye Serkyem* (*sDe brgyad gser skyems*). This work is dealt with in some detail by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956: 253). It consists of invocations to six groups of divinities, each making up "eight sets" (the *sde brgyad* of the title). The last of these groups

is designated *snang srid sde brygad*, the “eight sets [of gods] of the visible world.” The sixth set in this group is entitled “all the place-gods of this territory” (Tib. *yul 'di'i gzhi bdag thams cad*).

The advance of Buddhism in the Muktinath valley has resulted in—among other things—the replacement of locally specific forms of libation ceremonies by the *Degye Serkyem*. One of the distinguishing features of the locally specific variety is that the territorial gods being propitiated were invoked in the company of the *genii loci* of the surrounding region, who were invited by name to receive the offerings prepared for them at the celebrant’s altar. Territorial gods, in other words, were given a territorial setting. Where the *Degye Serkyem* has been introduced, the numina are no longer summoned individually; the personal attention given them in the past has been rendered redundant by the ritual’s general, impersonal invocation to “all the place-gods of this territory.” No names or locations for them are specified, and they remain an unindividuated category, one of forty-eight sets of *drekpa* (Tib. *dregs pa*)—“a general appellation of the multitude of gods and goddesses occupying a lower rank” (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1959: 253)—that otherwise have little or nothing to do with place.

The Buddification of these propitiatory rites has resulted in a displacement of territorial gods away from the surrounding territory and into a more abstract realm of divinities unrelated to place. While Buddhism may have this effect on local ceremonies it does not *always* do so, and the libation ceremonies of the Tshognam priests are an example of the retention of a geographical context for territorial gods. The Tshognam lamas do indeed recite the *Degye Serkyem*, but this is preceded by an invocation to the numina of the region within which Te is situated.

The recitation does not exist in written form but is transmitted orally within this priestly lineage. To facilitate my comprehension of the text, however, Chödrag Gyatsho, the senior lama, kindly undertook to transcribe it for me.

The text is divided into eight main sections, each one naming a group of places in conjunction with a number of named and unspecified divinities connected with each.

The first part is made up of

the three divisions of Tö Ngari [western Tibet]; the six snow-mountains of Mä Dokham [eastern Tibet]; the four horns of Ütsang in the middle; and Nyangpo, Dwags po, and Kong po, those three, in the south; Kashmir in the barbarous lowlands; the white snow-mountain Kailash; the New and the Old Tsari; and Lapchi Chuwar.

Tsari and Lapchi Chuwar are important pilgrimage sites on the Tibetan border with, respectively, India and Nepal.

This set is followed by a list of named protectors and the unnamed hosts of supernatural beings under them (Tib. *lha, klu, btsan, bdud, ma mo, rgyal po, gza', gnyan*, and *sa bdag*).

The second part focuses on Upper Lo, naming the principal temples and the main protective divinity of each; and then invokes the (unnamed) gods, serpent-spirits, and other supernatural entities of the kingdom's palaces, monasteries, and nunneries, which are also left unnamed.

The third part brings us to southern Lo. The first sites to be mentioned, but not individually identified, are the monasteries, nunneries, and palaces; the sacred site of Congzhi Rangjung, on the territory of Gelung (a site that is associated with Guru Rinpoche); and the main territorial gods of four settlements to the north of Tshognam: Samar, Gyaga, Tsele, and Zamoche (on the territory of Gelung).

The fourth part concentrates on the village of Tshug. The range of divinities invoked here is considerably expanded: there are not only the three chief territorial gods of the community but also the principal divinities contained in two of its temples, including the five Buddha families (Tib. *rigs lnga*).

At this point, instead of moving directly eastward up the Narshing Chu to Tshognam, the recitation veers away to the west. This fifth part is made up of a set of sacred sites—temples, caves, and other locations—the sequence of which describes an anticlockwise arc through Dolpo, down to the Thak Khola, across the Kali Gandaki, and up the east side to end in Muktinath, a short distance to the south of the Narshing Chu.

The sixth part follows a roughly similar trajectory to the fifth, but in this case the loci are the surrounding snow-mountains: Mulegang (Dhaulagiri) to the south, on the west side of the Kali Gandaki; Siri Gangmoche (Nilgiri) on the east; Chumig-gang to the east of Muktinath (Chumig Gyartsa); and, moving northward, three peaks on the eastern boundary of Lower Lo—Gang Zhurpo: Pholha Shelkyung Karpo with his lady Zora Yangkyi, their son Legpe Don-drub, and the minister Khamtrug Karpo, accompanied by cavalry and other minions.

In the seventh part the recitation finally reaches Te:

Lama Suna Yeshe who dwells on Yatsog Ridge; Pholha Shartsen Gyalpo; Pholha Yönten Karpo; Molha Chugyal Nyenpo; the Temple and the Prayer-Wheel House; the natural medicinal spring [of Budu-budu], and the natural salt water [of Tshaurong]; the caves of Baza; and the gods of Gau temple.

In the eighth and final part, the recitation reaches the temple of Tshognam, invoking its main protectors and, as in each of the previous parts, the different classes of supernatural beings.

The progressive detail in the recitation is proportional to the greater proximate relevance of the next site. For this reason, it is interesting that the narrative does not pass directly from Tshug—a short hop up the valley to Te—but veers off to describe a wide circle before returning to the Narshing. The installation of Tshug on a separate loop has the effect of fixing it in an outer circle of intimacy with Te. Interestingly enough, the last of the places to be visited before Te is Gang Zhurpo. This mountain is invisible from Te, but it dominates the southern perspective from Kog, the now-abandoned settlement from which four of Te's clans originated. The obvious implication is that, although geographically more remote, Kog (because the divinities living on Gang Zhurpo were certainly its territorial protectors) is *affectively* closer than Tshug to Te.

Now, after each set of places and accompanying gods has been invoked, the celebrant addresses them as follows.

You are the hosts, and we are the guests: abide by your promise of hospitality! Establish [with us] an auspicious relationship of teacher and student. We pray you, provide your abundant help with activities to be accomplished according to the wishes of the devout. When we go forth, be our escort, and receive us when we return; if we follow you, be our companions on the way; if we go onto the crags, be our steps and ladders; if we pass through water, be our bridges; if we walk on the trails, be our props; if we travel in darkness, be our lamps; kill our enemies who are hostile to us; subdue the obstructive demons who harm us; reverse the misfortunes caused by hindrances.<sup>4</sup>

One of the significant features about this address for my purposes is the difference it reveals between the qualities for which the sites are invoked here and those attributed to them when cast in the role of Buddhist (or Bon) holy mountains, or *neri* (Tib. *gnas ri*). The same may be said about some of the temple divinities cited here, such as the Buddha families. The mountains are not envisioned as mandalas or crystal stupas, and the hosts of tantric gods that populate them in their sacred “guidebooks” are not mentioned. What is demanded of them, moreover, is not the healing, blessing, and salvation that are routinely bestowed by *neri*, but something closer to straightforward civility. The protection they are asked to provide relates largely to mishaps that are liable to occur as a direct consequence of the landscape. In short, the attributes of the gods in this case are not very far removed from the natural characteristics of the landscape they inhabit.

The importance of Tise, Tsari, and Dhaulagiri in this recitation is not primarily that they are *neri*, distinguished by all the qualities usually attributed to these mountains. They are above all landmarks that serve to put the temple of Tshognam on the map. The effect is not to delineate a political entity but to locate the terminal point, where the speaker himself resides, in the sacred-geographical setting to which it belongs, “zooming in,” as it were, from the main sections of the Tibetan plateau and the lands beyond its frontiers, passing through stages to the valley where the temple stands. This is particularly noticeable when the narrative reaches the environs of Te itself. Listed with the territorial divinities are certain places that are both manmade and natural: the temple and the prayer-wheel house, the mineral spring of Budu-budu and the saline water of Tshaurong, as well as the caves and temple of Baza.

A principle that underlies many ritual strategies for healing, protecting, or otherwise acting on the phenomenal world involves merging the phenomenal world with an ideal, which may be a myth, a divine realm, or some more abstract notion, such as the Void; then performing various transformations in this more malleable sphere and thereby affecting the desired changes in the material world that has been harnessed to it. A given territory is often conceived of as having such a subtle counterpart. The form of this invisible landscape varies considerably within the Tibetan tradition, but at its simplest consists of the divinities that people the landscape and settlements.

There is unquestionably something more logical in trying to achieve the safety or fertility of an area by enlisting the help of an indigenous population of supernatural entities than in appealing to a lifeless landscape. Nevertheless, it is above all the very act of defining a space that is of primary importance: the divine character of a place evolves out of the significance these places have for the communities with which they are associated. Important places have names, and the most salient name landmarks take on the character of the sacred. The nomina, as Evans-Pritchard put it, become numina. The emergence of the sacred from the mundane is something I will explore further in later chapters. For now I shall examine more closely the cult of Te’s territorial gods.

### Blood-Offerings and Sacred Geometry

In the libation ceremony, the place-gods who are invoked are besought above all for their protection. The places are not invoked in isolation but as part of a series, and this series forms a particular pattern: a set of concentric circles. (The Tshognam rite is not an unusual example. Libation rites from other areas and similar ceremonies from different Tibeto-Burman groups tend to trace the

pattern of a spiral or of concentric rings.) The areas represented are disposed along a horizontal axis. Many of the sites are intrinsically vertical—cliffs, mountains, and so on—but the overall effect of the recitation is to draw a ground plan. It is the construction of this horizontal plan itself, rather than the individual sites on it, that defines a given territory and assures its safety.

But it is not only in this grand territorial plan that Te's gods are invoked. On certain occasions in the year, they are the focus of narrow attention on the part of the villagers. One of these occasions is the Lama Guru festival, which forms the subject of chapter 8. During the course of this weeklong ceremony, the villagers assemble and sing a song called "At the Peak of the Snow-Mountains":

Jowo Shartsen Gyalpo  
 Dwelling at the peak of the snow-mountains,  
 May our auspicious prayers  
 For timely rain be fulfilled;  
 May our auspicious prayers  
 For the eternal health of our cattle be fulfilled.

Pholha Yönten Karpo  
 Dwelling at the top of the village  
 [or: (Dwelling) in front of our blessed village],  
 May our auspicious prayers  
 For the ripening of the crops at the proper time be fulfilled;  
 May our auspicious prayers  
 For stopping the recurrence of illness among people and cattle  
 be fulfilled.

Molha Chutsen Nyenpo  
 Dwelling on the bank of the river,  
 If our enemy, the demonic Lord of Death  
 Does not come, it will be good;  
 If we do not see demonic evil people, the black ones,  
 It will be good.

O Door-god, whom our houses hold,  
 Dwelling in the inner room of the house,  
 We have prayed to you in the past;  
 Look upon us now, too, with compassion.

Blessed village,  
 Prosperous village  
 May our auspicious prayers  
 For an abundance of people, cattle, and happiness be fulfilled,  
 May our auspicious prayers  
 For abundant food, wealth, and cattle be fulfilled.

The water from the slate crags, and the water from the high  
 meadows  
 Flows into the irrigation channels;  
 These green shoots  
 Sprout from the spaces behind the sacred vessels of our ears.<sup>5</sup>

The last sentence is a reference to the participants' practice, at the festival during which this song is sung, of tucking barley sprouts behind one ear. It is uncertain whether the "sacred vessel" is meant to be an epithet of the barley or, more logically, of the wearers' ears. There are further verses, eulogising the willow and apricot trees of the village, and so forth, but they need not be considered here.

Unlike the libation, which is concerned above all with protection, the song cited here is preoccupied with rainfall, fertility, prosperity, and longevity. Te's gods, in short, have a dual function: to ensure on the one hand the security of their territory and on the other its abundance. The critical difference in the circumstances under which they are invoked lies in their geometrical configuration. As defenders, they are part of a horizontal plan; as guarantors of wealth, they are explicitly disposed along a vertical axis. Again, Te is not exceptional in this regard. Throughout Mustang there are examples of ceremonies in which vertically placed territorial gods are entreated for community fertility and wealth. Precipitation, the ultimate source of prosperity, moves downward: from the sky, to the snow-mountains, across hillsides, into streams and canals, and ultimately to the settlement. The individual identity of place-gods in Mustang varies from one village to another (though certain names recur with considerable frequency); and while "mother-goddesses" do figure within these constellations, they are not always near water, or even at the lowest elevation. The important thing about such a god in these rites is not its name or category but the geometric form created by its association.

The territorial gods of Te are propitiated by the lamas of Tshognam with offerings belonging to the category known as "white," consisting of beer and grain. (As we have seen, the white offerings they receive as household gods

also include milk and butter.) These gods, it was said earlier, are “wild,” to the extent that they have not been allocated a role within the orbit of Tibetan Buddhism, or even, for that matter, subjected to the constraints of Buddhist tenets. Their savage nature is demonstrated most conspicuously by the fact that in addition to the white offerings that they receive, they must also be propitiated with blood-sacrifices.

The task of making “red” offerings to Te’s gods falls to a special priest called the *lhawen* (Tib. *lha bon*). This is the only office in Te that is hereditary: it passes from father to son—usually the eldest, although in theory any one of several sons will do. For obvious reasons, as well as certain less obvious ones I shall discuss, the position may not be held by a monk. The *lhawen* of Te belongs to the Khyungpo clan.

There are very few villages in Baragaon that do not have a *lhawen* who is responsible for the propitiation of local gods. In southern Mustang—Panchgaon and Thak—the comparable village priest is known variously as *aya* (Tib. *a ya*) or *drom*. The term *drom* almost certainly corresponds to the word *dom*, which probably derives from Ssk. *dombha*, and finds its way into several north Indian languages to denote wandering bards.<sup>6</sup>

The term *aya* appears in a number of old Tibetan works with reference to a type of priest associated with western Tibet. There are a few practising *aya* even now in Central Tibet, and their ritual repertoire includes animal sacrifice. There is some evidence to suggest that the term *aya* may once have been more widespread in Mustang, but has been supplanted in the south by the Indian word *drom* and in the north by the Tibetan *lhawen*. Thus the priest of Marpha, in Panchgaon, is now referred to as a *drom*; the priest of Taye, Te’s nearest neighbour to the south, is called a *lhawen*. The *lhawen* has in his possession a manuscript, written in cursive Tibetan script, in which his main ritual recitation—a combination of Tibetan and Seke—is recorded. The author of the manuscript was his great-grandfather. Near the end of the text, the writer refers to himself as “the *aya* Phurbu Chökyab.”

The repertoires and performances of the village priests of Mustang vary considerably from one place to another. The ceremonies they perform differ in complexity and duration, and in certain cases (mainly in southern Mustang) include spirit-mediumship. Possibly the sparsest performances by any village priest of Mustang are those of the *lhawen* of Te. His activity is limited to intercession on the few occasions when the gods receive blood-sacrifices, and even then his role is a modest one. Six animals are sacrificed annually in ceremonies celebrated by the *lhawen*. In all cases, the procedure is basically the same. The *lhawen* is accompanied to the site of the sacrifice by two assistants: the youngest of the four constables and the youngest member of the *yupa*, the

assembly of estates. A purifying fire of juniper branches is lit, the *lhawen* makes a brief invocation, and the sacrifice is then performed by the two assistants: a knife-cut is made below the animal's sternum, and the heart is pulled out and placed on a stone, where it continues to beat for a little while. There are two occasions when blood-offerings are made. The first is during the second month, at the conclusion of the Zatönse ceremony. On the twenty-ninth day, a kid in its first year (most goats are born shortly before the time of this ceremony) is offered, in the way just described, at the site of Pholha Yönten Karpo. The following day, the last day of the month, two further animals are killed. The first is another kid, and the second a young male goat in its second year.

The location of the sacrifices in this case is in the floor of the Narshing River valley—but not, however, near Molha Chutsen Nyenpo. The site is a place called Shagtangra, the “enclosure (Tib. *ra*) on the dry riverbed” (Tk., SMT *shagtang*), a few hundred yards downstream of the Molha. It consists of nothing more than a small bay in the lowest fields. There is no particular divinity residing at the place, nor even any kind of marker to indicate that it is in any way special.

The second occasion is in the fifth month, at the time when the villagers go to clear the irrigation canals in the eastern upland area called Nari. On the day they return to the village, two animals are sacrificed at the place called Mushag, a short distance to the west of Naudzong. The animals in this case are a young kid and a sheep, and the beneficiary of the offering is said to be Lama Suna Yeshe, who lives further up the hill at Mutsogang. On the following day, a yearling goat is sacrificed in the Narshing valley floor, at Shagtangra.

In all cases, the carcasses of the sacrificed animals are divided up on the day after they are killed. The *lhawen* receives the head and the four feet (in the quotidian, nonritual division of a slaughtered animal, whoever buys the head gets the feet as a complement), the right foreleg, the hide, the trachea, one kidney, and the heart. The rest of the meat is divided up so that each of the estates receives a small portion.

There are a few curious aspects of these sacrifices that are worth considering. The Teke term for a goat in its first year is *ratsa*, and in South Mustang Tibetan *rib* (< Tib. *ri'u*). In the context of the sacrifice, however, the kids that are sacrificed to the Pholha in the second month and to Lama Suna Yeshe in the fifth month are referred to as *yak thewa*; the kid that is sacrificed in the valley floor in the second month is called *yak cangba*. In Teke, *yak thewa* and *yak cangba* mean, respectively, “the big yak” and “the little yak.” Tradition has it that before living memory, the sacrificial animals were indeed yaks, but because of the unaffordable prices traders began to charge for these animals, kids

were eventually substituted. I shall discuss the retention of the inappropriate names later.

The householders who are to provide the sacrificial kids are selected by lot—only black, unblemished kids are eligible for sacrifice. The requirement for sacrificial victims is one of the reasons for the Tepa rule that kids may not be castrated, or their ears clipped or split, until the second sacrifice of the year has been performed. There is another reason for the prohibition that is worth mentioning because of certain parallels with animal sacrifice. Every year, two kids are selected as future breeding stock. During the late spring, all the male kids in the village are collected in the vicinity of the Pholha, and two men, the youngest constable and the youngest of the assembly of estates, select a group of the finest looking animals (the reason for the selectors being the youngest officials is the fact that the procedure requires a certain athleticism). From this short list they then pick out the two best specimens, which are to be spared from castration or slaughter to become breeding bucks (Tk. *yang gog*). The selection has important consequences for the ownership of the animals. The tip of one ear is clipped and put near the Pholha, and the animals are honoured by being daubed with butter and fed with beer. They are regarded as live offerings to the territorial gods, and are henceforth the collective property of the village. Significantly—for reasons I shall make clear later—the responsibility of caring for them lies with the village steward, the main attendant of Te's gods, and when the animals are not with the herds they are corralled in a special pen near the temple.

As we have seen, there are six actual sacrifices performed on four different days, but these are reducible to two events: the conclusion of the Zatönse exorcism and the end of the highland irrigation work. On each occasion, there are two sacrifices to a divinity located uphill—respectively, at the Pholha and at Musha, for Lama Suna Yeshe—followed, on the next day, by a sacrifice in the valley floor. The identity of the divine beneficiaries of the hillside sacrifices is clear enough. But to which divinity is Te offering a goat in the valley floor? If it were Molha Chutsen Nyenpo, one might expect the site of the sacrifice to be at or near her rock. The Tepas themselves, in any case, deny that the offering is for the goddess but do not, for all that, regard it as being a sacrifice to any of the other members of the local pantheon.

Let us examine the circumstances of the two sets of sacrifices. The Zatönse is the major annual exorcism of the Tepas, and I shall discuss it in some detail in chapter 7. The climax of the exorcism takes place on the night of the twenty-ninth, when an effigy is carried out of the village. The community is then pure, and its protection from incursions by alien evils is reinforced the following day. On the edges of the settlement are five constructions known as

Rigsum Gombo, “protectors from the three [Buddha] families,” whose significance I have discussed. While the maintenance and consecration of four of these are the responsibility of the four sectors, one is under the general management of the village and is accordingly looked after by the headmen or constables. The first four are reconsecrated annually within the first ten days of the third month, but the ceremony for the last takes place on the thirtieth day of the second month, on the day after the exorcism and the dual sacrifice to the Pholha. The casting-out of the exorcistic effigy and the consecration of the community’s “triple protector” represent the purging of the village and the fortification of its spiritual defences against the exterior. The offerings that are made to the Pholha on this day are an inducement for him to provide rain and prosperity. The sacrifice of the following day is offered to no god in particular.

The significant point about this rite is, I believe, its geometry: it changes a point (the Pholha) to a vertical line. The main value of the sacrifice in the valley floor is not that it honours a particular place-god but that it turns an ordinary place into a special one: the lower point that makes possible the creation of a vertical axis. The order of the offerings, too, is significant: the temporal order suggests a movement from top to bottom, from the mountain crests where the gods live, through the sites where they are represented in the village, and eventually to the river, in a community that has been prepared by purification from within and protection against the outside.

The topological suggestiveness of the second annual sacrifice is even more apparent. The *memang*, the assembly of all the able-bodied men and women between the ages of eighteen and sixty, go up to the high eastern pastures in the fifth month to clear Yemen and Yeren, two arterial conduits of snow-melt that are vital for the irrigation of Te’s fields. The day they depart is also the beginning of the period of the summer cloistering of the village. The form this practice takes in Te is similar to the cloistering of other villages in Mustang and may be described briefly. Small cairns consisting of three stones piled on top of one another are erected at various points around the perimeter of the cultivated area and daubed with red clay. Such constructions, known as *tho* (Tib. *tho*) are employed in a variety of contexts to signify closure or restriction: a *tho* is set up at the door of an anchorite to show that the inmate is in retreat; the claimant of a disputed field may erect a *tho* on the land in question to indicate that it may not be farmed by anyone else until the matter of ownership has been settled, and so on. The usual term for the cloistering of a village is *tshö damgen*. This expression, which may be glossed as “dyeing restriction,” refers to one of the quotidian practices that are forbidden during the period: wool may not be dyed, because of the evil smell released during the process. Other banned activities include whistling, playing musical instruments, and sky-burials (and, in other

villages, cremations, which are not customarily performed in Te). The crops are at a vulnerable stage, and these practices are regarded as liable to offend the gods, who might then visit various disasters on the community.

The *memang* spend one night in the highlands, and after the canals have been cleared, they return to the village. It is on the day of their return that the dual blood-offering is made at *Musha* for *Lama Suna Yeshe*, and on the following day the kid is sacrificed in the valley floor. To summarise, then, what I believe to be the main aspects of this occasion: the community and its growing crops are placed under protection; the physical access of water from the glaciers to the village is established; *Lama Suna Yeshe* is besought for water and prosperity, and the highland site of *Musha* (itself the source of a spring) is vitalised with two blood-offerings; and finally, the vertical axis is fixed by the sanctification of a place near the river.

I suggested earlier that some of the territorial gods of Te might have been brought to the area by association with the clans, although prior to this they are likely to have been linked to other settlements. The functions accorded to the gods are reflected in the diversity of the titles by which they are known. The association with clans is made explicit in the case of two of them: the prefix *pholha* ("god of the males") is now explicitly applied to *Yönten Karpo*, but we have seen earlier that it is sometimes also used of *Shartsenpa*. When they are worshipped as household divinities, they are referred to as "gods of the house" (Tk. *dimilha*). In their capacity as territorial gods, they are known as *yuka*. The latter term is particularly interesting because it implies nothing of divinity: *yuka* (< SMT *yulkha*) is the usual Teke term for "community," "village," or "country." (This is comparable to the term *yulsa*, Tib. *yul sa*, meaning "village land," that is used of territorial gods in much of Mustang and certain parts of Tibet.)

Instead of making too much of the pedestrian implication of this terminology (namely, that the territorial gods are the personification of the territory, a convenient anthropomorphism that enables Te to communicate with a projection of its own collective self), I wish to concentrate on the way the manipulation of the immanence and transcendence of the gods is effected.

## Creating Space

The gods are, in an important sense, the place itself. The villagers live in the place ("you are the hosts and we are the guests"). And yet the presence of the gods is not the same as the presence of the place: among other things, the gods have the counterintuitive property of being invisible; they have position but no substance. Here, as in other situations, which I shall discuss, the quality

of being simultaneously present and absent is expressed through the special inflexion of everyday concepts, namely of time and space. In the case of the place-gods of Te, the fact of their simultaneous nearness and intangibility is expressed through the creation of imaginary distance.

As we saw in chapter 3, some of the place-gods are present in the Tepas' houses as domestic gods, *dimilha*, represented as receptacles immured in an alcove that is broken open for the biannual cult. Although the gods are permanently there, they might also be somewhere else, and this fact must be taken into consideration when they are being worshipped. A certain estate-holder invokes Lama Suna Yeshe, one of his two household gods, in the following lines.

*Sabö ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are sojourning on Sabö, receive these offerings!

*Golen ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are on Golen, receive these offerings!

*Tsin-ga phodong ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are in the hollow of Tsin-ga, receive these offerings!

*Yatsog thang ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are on the plain of Yatsog, receive these offerings!

*Nartong-gi me ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are in the lower part of Nartong, receive these offerings!

*Lhe sera ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are at Sera corral, receive these offerings!

*Kyu kar nag ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are at the black and white streams,

receive these offerings!

*Pyanglong ngephu ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are Pyanglong Ngephu, receive these offerings!

*Pyang-nge chugu ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are the spring of Pyang-nge, receive these offerings!

*Pyang-nge lhe ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are at Pyang-nge corral, receive these offerings!

*Lhezubzi ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are at [one or other of] the four sides of the corral, receive these offerings!

*Pyang-nge dim ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you have entered the house at Pyang-nge, receive these offerings!

*Dim ri dar cog ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are on the prayer-flag of [my] house, receive these offerings!

*Dim ku dab ri den chag tse muli chö chö*

If you are at my hearth, receive these offerings!

Now this recitation bears certain similarities to others that have already been discussed. First, it resembles the invocations of several Baragaon *lhawen* (though not that of Te) to the gods of the territory with which they are concerned—or for that matter, the libation rite of the Tshognam priests discussed earlier. The undifferentiated numina of a set of places are invited to the presence of the priest to be feasted.

Quite often, the totality of the place is expressed by subdividing it into sixteen or eighteen named components. The invocation to Lama Suna Yeshe cited earlier has sixteen places (one almost suspects that Pyang-nge corral has been broken down into a quincunx, rather than being left as a single point, in order to make up the requisite number). In this case, though, the topographic entirety that stretches from the crest of Yatsog-gang—the palace of Lama Suna Yeshe—to the celebrant's hearth is not expressed as the dwelling place of sixteen different sets of numina but as the customary itinerary of one god. The places are invoked not in the commoner semantic framework of "you and you and you . . ." but "whether . . . or." The point is that both kinds of invocation provide an opportunity to *name* places, and that is what matters.

Following the invocation to Lama Suna Yeshe, the same estate-holder turns his attention to Jowo Shartsenpa. The god is summoned with exactly the same set of lines. Shartsenpa's shrine is at the top of a hill immediately to the east of Te, and he does not have a recognised locus further uphill. When I asked the householder why he began his search for Shartsenpa in the haunts of Lama Suna Yeshe, he replied simply that the two of them "belonged to the same encampment" (*gurtsog gig* < Tib. *gur tshogs gcig*), together with Te's other gods. In addition to having fixed locations, Te's place-gods are also conceived of as something akin to a band of nomadic lords.

The introduction into the invocation of the idea of extensive space and uncertainty of location has the important effect of making the gods present as gods ought to be present: that is to say, neither entirely absent nor as ordinarily present as, say, little clay pots in a hole in the wall. The technique of re-configuring space in order to bring the divine closer to hand is employed in other aspects of the cult of Te's gods.

Once a month, Shartsenpa must be worshipped at his usual shrine with purifying juniper smoke and a few small offerings. The site is located on the main trail up to the eastern pastures, a trail that is travelled daily by people on a variety of everyday chores. There are two trails between the village and Shartsenpa. One of these, called Gyamsampa (the "New Road") presents no physical difficulty. This is the path that is followed by people on ordinary business. The trail is met, near Shartsenpa, by another that also extends from the village but on a more northerly arc. This second trail is called Sang Tepe Gyam, the Fumigation Road, because this is the route that must be taken by the officials who visit Shartsenpa once a month to worship him. The way is longer than Gyam Sampa, and the upper section of it consists of a nerve-wracking climb up an almost sheer cliff. The officials are, nevertheless, obliged to take this trail on pain of being fined by the village constables. There are two things that should be said about the obligation to follow the Fumigation Road.

First, the name of the everyday trail, "New Road," suggests that there is also, somewhere, an old road. In the absence of any other candidates, it is quite likely that the Fumigation Road is the old, ordinary road that was abandoned because of its degeneration to the point of being impassable for livestock, if not for humans. I shall not develop the matter here, but the fact that this road continues to be used for ritual purposes will be discussed later as an instance of the sacred character of that which is pragmatically obsolete.

For the sake of this discussion, the relevant point is that the Fumigation Trail is geographically different, longer, and physically more arduous than the New Road. Although they both lead to Shartsenpa, the Shartsenpa that is reached via the Fumigation Road is different from the one that is arrived at by the New Road. The former leads to the presence of the god, and the second to a topographical marker.

### The Descent of the Gods

Lama Suna Yeshe sometimes becomes present to the Tepas through a human medium. Through his vehicle he speaks to the Tepas, admonishes and encourages them, and hears their requests. The man who was usually chosen as the vehicle, until his death in the late 1970s, was a certain Dodrag, a huge man whose remarkable physical strength and courage are now the stuff of legend. He would corner snow leopards in their caves and kill them with a spear; at the annual trial of strength for the young men, which consists of hefting a large spherical rock that most people can barely lift off the ground, he could easily raise the rock above his head and roll it from one shoulder to another; on one occasion, a small herd of dzos had stranded itself on a hill after jumping off a low cliff that they were then unable to reascend. An alternative route was cut by a narrow ravine they could not jump. Dodrag stretched himself across this gap, and the animals were driven over the bridge formed by his body.

Dodrag would become possessed while he was drinking beer—but not necessarily drunk. He would immediately utter a loud cry—KI-HI-HI-HI—so loud that it echoed off the cliffs around Te and could even be heard in Tshug. He would remove all his clothes and go to bathe: in the warm weather he would bathe at the little spring between Yul and Dzong, called Mugkyu. In the winter, when the spring was frozen, he would go down to the Narshing Khola at a point near the mother-goddess, and bathe in the river, even if it meant breaking the ice in order to do so. After this, he would return up the hill and sit at Mugkyu. The temple steward, in the meanwhile, would have prepared a fire of juniper branches and set it in front of the medium, who would let its purifying smoke

billow around him while he ate handfuls of the bitter leaves. The steward was obliged to attend to the god during his visit, but the other people—the whole village would turn out for these occasions—would keep a respectful distance. The gods are notoriously tetchy, the possession was spectacular, and the vehicle of the gods had the reputation of being the strongest man in Mustang. In any case, the god did not tolerate women in his presence. He is remembered to have said, on a number of occasions:

*Nagmo ha la gyug ah ah ah*

Ah, keep away, you female black ones!<sup>7</sup>

The steward would put questions to the god on behalf of the village, and the god in turn would reply and volunteer additional unsolicited information as well, usually concerning something the villagers were doing that irked him.

Since Dodrag's death, the usual medium has been one Chime Anyal, who is now about sixty years old. But at the time of writing there has been no visitation for the past three years or so.

Lama Suna Yeshe is the author of all the oracular statements and the ultimate recipient of the villagers' entreaties, but he is not the first to enter the medium. When the call of the descending god resounds through the village, the word goes around that "the Gola has come." When the medium has bathed and taken his place at Mugkyu, he calls out "Shartsen Gyalpo sen-no, sen-no." ("Shartsen Gyalpo, listen, listen!") The medium then sits in an attitude of listening, waiting for the reply of Shartsenpa, who, it is understood, has gone to call Lama Suna Yeshe from his mountain palace. It sometimes happens that, after a period of listening, the medium comes out of trance; Shartsenpa has informed the Gola that Lama Suna Yeshe is not at home, and the Gola departs from the medium. Alternatively, Shartsenpa finds Lama Suna Yeshe, who then enters the medium and begins to make his pronouncements in a rhythmic and fearful voice. The Tepas, always at a respectful distance, make prostrations to him, and the steward, speaking in Seke, begs him for prosperity, timely rain, and an abundant harvest. Lama Suna Yeshe, speaking in Tibetan, usually assures the people of his continuing protection:

*Gyasho gogpo thang la yug mi ong ah ah ah*

*Gyasho gogpo dungngal gö mi ong ah ah ah*

Ah, I shall not abandon the ragged sheepskins on the plain!

Ah, the ragged sheepskins need not grieve!

In winter the Tepas wear full-length sheepskin robes, called *chawu* in Teke, and in Tibetan either *gyasho* or *logpa*. In Mustang, the garment is now rarely

seen, and is regarded as distinctive of the Tepas. The “ragged sheepskins” is Lama Suna Yeshe’s usual, apparently affectionate, term for his villagers.

After a while Lama Suna Yeshe departs, and the Gola reoccupies the medium. The medium then gets up, and the Gola ends the seance by saying:

*Chibpa karo shog shog*

Come, come my white mount!

The medium mimes the act of climbing onto an animal, and at this point collapses on the ground, free of the Gola (who has ridden off) and oblivious of all that has happened during the possession.

The term *Gola* (Tib. *sgo lha* or *'go lha*) is used in certain circumstances to denote any of the territorial gods. In this case, however, it refers to the mysterious figure who lives in the village temple. His attendant is the steward, who must light the votive lamp and make offerings in the temple every day. When the Gola departs, his invisible “white mount” is not a horse but a goat. The breeding buck goats that have been dedicated to the gods are housed in a pen in the temple compound, and their care is the responsibility of the steward. According to the Tepas, mediums have been known to straddle one of these goats at Mugkyu and ride it back to the temple before coming out of trance. What the Gola does is to provide access to communication with the major, higher gods. He relays the invitation to Lama Suna Yeshe up the hill via Shartsenpa.

To repeat the main point I wish to make: the physical markers of the gods—a shrine, a medium, clay pots in a wall—are immediately accessible and tangible to anyone who would reach out and touch. Obtaining access to the divine world that they represent is possible *only by crossing a greater distance within a constant physical space*, and this greater distance must somehow be simulated.

### The Oath of Office

The final example of this strategy that I wish to consider is to a great extent an acting-out of the alignment implicit in the procedures of possession. (The ceremony I describe here was abandoned in 1992, but I shall nevertheless use the “ethnographic present” for the sake of simplicity.)

At the end of their one-year term of office, the three headmen and four constables of Te have to swear a number of oaths concerning the honesty and efficiency with which they took care of the village. More will be said about this reckoning in chapter 10, but for now I wish to concentrate on the procedures

involved in the Nama Jagpa, the main oath of office taken by the leaders. There are three groups of mediators who may be mentioned briefly: the new constables, who have already been recruited but have not yet taken office; the six Headmen of the Yield; three Intermediaries of the Dispute. The titles and other functions of these officials are not of concern here.

The protocol for the oath sworn by the constables is as follows. The three Intermediaries of the Dispute stand in the threshing yard called Nyönpnyü, looking toward the rock of Pholha Yönten Karpo. Above them stand three of the Headmen of the Yield, not in a cluster but spaced at intervals of 30 feet or so up the hill toward the Pholha. Between the Pholha and the topmost of the Headmen of the Yield is a rock that is said to be the Acolyte (Tib. *zhabs phyi*) of the Pholha. In front of this rock, facing south, with their backs toward the Dzong, stand the four outgoing constables. On the ground between the constables and the Acolyte are a copy of the *rDo rje gcod pa*, a *yangdze* (Tib. *g.yang rdzas*, in this case a brass drinking bowl filled with beer and rimmed with butter decorations), and a fire of juniper branches. The objects are placed here by the Manipa, the steward of the temple, but the *yangdze* is made by whoever in the village is skilled at the job.

The four constables link hands in a line, by means of each interlocking the third finger of his right hand with that his neighbour's left. From the threshing yard of Nyönpnyü, the three Intermediaries of the Dispute call up, in unison:

*Tshowadza lagtre lai ma-e*

Have the Constables linked hands?

The call is immediately repeated, verbatim, by the lowest of the three Headmen of the Yield, who shouts it up to the Headman of the Yield immediately above him, and the highest of the three relays it directly to the four constables. When they have received the message, the constables reply in unison:

*La jim-o, la jim*

We have, we have

On hearing this confirmation, the Intermediaries of the Dispute call the gods to witness:

*Jowo Shartsen Nyenpo*  
*Pholha Yönten Karpo*  
*Molha Chutsen Nyenpo*  
*napangra phe-i-o*

Jowo Shartsen Nyenpo  
 Pholha Yönten Karpo  
 Molha Chutsen Nyenpo:  
 come and be witnesses to the oath!

This message is also relayed up the hill by each of the Headmen of the Yield. When the topmost of them has finished speaking, the Intermediaries of the Dispute call out:

*Yatsora yabpi du ma*  
*Mi zhü*  
*Lache zhug*  
*Citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*Dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

When they went to Yatso  
 If they took care with the allocation [of village duties],  
 If they took care to check [that the proper] tools [were used  
 in communal labour],  
 If they behaved as they ought to have done, may they be blessed;  
 If they did not do these things, may the three territorial gods  
 punish them!

The stanza is at once conveyed up the hill by each of the Headmen of the Yield calling it out in turn. The Intermediaries of the Dispute then call out the second stanza:

*Yemen ra yabpi du ma*  
*Mi zhü*  
*Lache zhug*  
*Citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*Dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

When they went to Yemen [irrigation canal]  
 If they took care with the allocation [of village duties],  
 If they took care to check [that the proper] tools [were used in  
 communal labour],  
 If they behaved as they ought to have done, may they be blessed;  
 If they did not do these things, may the three territorial gods  
 punish them!

This message, too, is passed up the hill.  
 Then comes the third stanza:

*Musha ri yabpi du ma*  
*Mi zhü*  
*Lache zhug*  
*Citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*Dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

When they went to *Musha*  
 If they took care with the allocation [of village duties],  
 If they took care to check [that the proper] tools [were used in  
 communal labour],  
 If they behaved as they ought to have done, may they be blessed;  
 If they did not do these things, may the three territorial gods  
 punish them!

After this message has reached the top of the chain, the gods are respectfully dismissed from the place. The Intermediaries of the Dispute say:

*Jowo Shartsen Nyenpo*  
*Pholha Yönten Karpo*  
*Molha Chutsen Nyenpo*  
*Rang gyagri shag-so pheb-so*

*Jowo Shartsen Nyenpo*  
*Pholha Yönten Karpo*  
*Molha Chutsen Nyenpo*  
 Return to your respective dwellings!

When this final utterance has been called out by the last of the Headmen of the Yield, the three gods hear the message and depart.

### The Oath of the Outgoing Headmen

The oath for the headmen is sworn in the gorge called *Dangdagyung*. Facing the three headmen are the other three of the six Headmen of the Yield. The intermediaries, who administer the oath, stand some thirty yards or so from the group, further down the gorge. They then call the gods to witness.

The first three stanzas are identical to those that are recited in the case of the constables, but a fourth is added:

*Cing ra yabpi du ma*  
*Mi zhü*  
*Lache zhug*

*Citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*Dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

When they went to the reservoir  
 If they took care with the allocation [of village duties],  
 If they took care to check [that the proper] tools [were used  
 in communal labour],  
 If they behaved as they ought to have done, may they be blessed;  
 If they did not do these things, may the three territorial gods  
 punish them!

In each of these stanzas, at the conclusion of the first line, *yabpi du ma*, the Headmen of the Yield drop a stone into the cupped hands of the headman directly in front, and a second stone at the conclusion of the last line, *chepa jero* ("may they be destroyed").

By the end of the fourth stanza, then, eight stones have been passed to each headman. The Intermediaries then call out:

*Rekyang zurtsog*

The knotted scarf!

and the Headmen of the Yield put the last stone in the headmen's hands.

Up to this point, the headmen must retain all the stones. Allowing any to pass through their grasp signifies a refusal of the oath (something that does occasionally happen in the case of deficient and god-fearing incumbents). After the last line, however, they open their hands and release all eight stones, an act that betokens the solemnisation of the oath.

The "knotted scarf" refers to a *khata*, a ceremonial scarf tied in an elaborate knot that was previously held by one of the officials and used to confirm the oath. The scarf is still kept in the village store, but is no longer produced for ceremonies: pronouncing its name is sufficient.

## Conclusion

The wild gods of Te have a multiple identity as clan gods, house gods, and territorial divinities, and it is the third manifestation that this chapter has primarily considered. The ill-defined individual personalities of the gods are overshadowed by the effect of the way they are combined in their rituals. The commonest association of divinities in the Tibetan landscape is the dyad formed by a male mountain who rises above a body of water—usually a lake,

but sometimes a river—that is regarded as his female consort. Gendering of the landscape may be a common idiom in which the notion of downward-bearing fertility is expressed, but it is not the only one. The ethnography of Mustang contains examples of female divinities occupying a higher position than their male counterparts in the topography of their villages. Most frequently, in fact, the lowest divinity is identified as Chögyal (Tib. Chos rgyal), who always stands near or overlooking a river. Chögyal, “Religious Ruler,” is the epithet of Shinje (Tib. gShin rje, Ssk. Yama), the Lord of the Dead. In Te, the corresponding position is occupied by a mother-goddess who is named in at least two texts as Chugyal (Tib. Chu rgyal), “Water Ruler.” The obvious conclusion is that either an autochthonous goddess called “Water Ruler” has been converted into a similarly-pronounced canonical male Buddhist god in most villages except Te; or that Chögyal has been transformed in Te to accord with a culturally familiar male-female model. But the instability of gender and nomenclature in the ethnographic record are a distraction created by too close

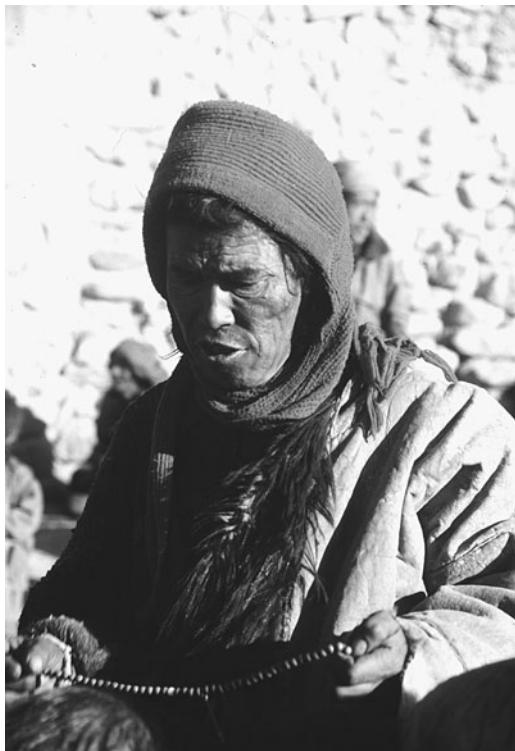


FIGURE 6.2. “Ah, I shall not abandon the ragged sheepskins on the plain!” Kyikyab of the Khyungpo clan in winter clothing.

a focus on the identities of individual divinities at the expense of the configurations they form.

Descending fertility may be commonly expressed in images where—in Anthony Burgess's famous line—the Pentecostal sperm comes hissing down; but it is reducible to the more abstract idea of verticality. Chögyal is not just the king of the dead but the lord of the underworld—the base of a vertical axis. Whatever else they may be, place-gods are hypertrophied places, and while the sacrifices they receive are seen as offerings, they are also a way of vitalising loci and joining them up to make a pattern. This is most dramatically revealed in the sacrificial complex of Te, where the base of the axis is not a god but merely a named place.

The recitation of the Tshognam priests is an oral map, insofar as it locates Te in the geography of Tibet and the Himalayas. The sequence in which the places are named implies a distortion of distances, but the map is nevertheless far more informative than, say, a modern cartographic representation of the same area. The point can be made more clearly with reference to Alfred Gell's discussion of the uses of process-related as opposed to metric indicators of time:

To say, “I've been waiting here for ages” is much more informative, in context, than to say, “I've been waiting here for 11 minutes and 36 seconds,” since the intended message is about the relationship between the expected waiting time and the time actually spent waiting, not about the duration of the wait itself. (1992: 107)

A topographical map would reveal that Tshug is a twenty-minute stroll from Te, while Kog is a hard day's slog over rough ground. But the structure of the invocation tells us that affectively, Kog is just next door while Tshug is separated from Te by a barrier of Himalayan proportions.

The choreography of oaths and the use of the “Fumigation Road” to reach Shartsenpa are further examples of the disjunction between Euclidian and affective space. The spatial manipulation entailed in these procedures distinguishes the terrestrial marker of a god from the coterminous location where it may actually be encountered face to face. More generally, the idea of distance and impaired accessibility is one that will assume greater importance in later chapters as an essential component in the development of civil religion.

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# 7

## Buddhists or Pagans?

### Confrontation and Syncretism

Are the Tepas Buddhists or pagans?<sup>1</sup> From the evidence presented in the last two chapters, we could reasonably conclude that, as in most of the high Himalayan area, the religion of Te is a syncretic blend of Buddhist belief and cults of territorial gods, and leave the matter at that. But this tells us nothing, since the lazy sobriquet of syncretism leaves unexplored the principles underlying the selection of elements from Buddhism and their integration—or confrontation—with pagan interests.

The fact that Tibetan Buddhism incorporates so much from the store of indigenous, or at least popular, belief and practice has not dispelled a fundamentally dualistic perspective on religion. The most conspicuous boundary marker between what is and what is not Buddhist is the practice of animal sacrifice. If this compartmentalisation is characteristic of much Western writing, it is even more true of the principal exponents of Buddhism: one of the recurring motifs in the autobiographies of lamas is their efforts to suppress the tradition of blood-offerings in the barbarous regions they visited. Do the Tepas themselves really see the situation in terms of such a polarisation of ideologies? It may be instructive to examine a few specific examples of what appear to be religious confrontation, and submit them to a closer scrutiny.

A number of documents in Te's archive are merely incomprehensible. There are a few that are fascinating precisely because of their ambiguity; their deadpan delivery seems to conceal something of far greater significance than the particular episode or banality with which they are ostensibly concerned. The meaning of these vignettes seems at first to be clear; but on reconsideration it becomes apparent that they are susceptible to a very different reading. I shall give five examples of such ambiguous statements, accompanied by the interpretation I had originally given them. I shall then reexamine them in an attempt to discover what they might be able to tell us about religious confrontation in Te. Four of the examples are documents from the archives, and one is an anecdote.

### The Butcher-Monk

This example, together with the following one, seems to indicate an effort on the Tepas' part to maintain certain standards of discipline among their Buddhist clergy.

Male Earth Tiger year, second month, twenty-third day. I, the novice monk Phuntshog Dorje, have submitted this petition to the judicial assembly of Te, consisting of the Headmen and community. It is also true that I have, in the past, butchered two goats belonging to my household. I later went to the house of Trinle Nyima, and when I went to take a doe from the goat-pen of Ani Jomo, Trinle Nyima said to me, "Two [of her] does have been put in [my] pen. Take one of them." I therefore looked to see which were fat and which thin; I took a fat one to Ani Jomo's goat-pen and butchered it, and then carried it to the roof of her house. But while I was on my way, my mother told me that everyone involved in the Tenth-Day ceremony of Tshognam temple had already departed. "You should go," she said. And so I asked Hrithar Wangdi to take care of [the carcass] for me, and after leaving it with him I set off. Later, during the investigation of the case by the Headmen and community, Hrithar Wangdi said that I, Phuntshog Dorje, had indeed slaughtered the goat, taken it to the roof, and entrusted it to him. Later, Ani Jomo told me to skin it and give it to her, and I therefore skinned it and gave it to her. The novice monk Phuntshog Dorje sets his thumbprint to confirm that he will not deviate from this account. (HMA/Te/Tib/24)

Butchering animals is sinful. Throughout Mustang, in fact, the term for sin, *digpa* (Tib. *sdig pa*), is used as a synonym for butchery. A friendly householder

might say to a visitor, "When you come through on your way down stay with me. I'll lay in some *arak* and commit a sin," meaning that he will slaughter a goat or sheep for the party. In many villages, butchery is left to an outcaste or an indigent member of the community who is willing to accept the karmic consequences in exchange for material recompense. In short, it would be a serious matter (not to mention a violation of vows) for a monk to butcher a animal.

### The Chaplain and His Drink

This document, too, apparently relates to measures that were taken to bring Te's clergy into line with Buddhist orthodoxy.

Iron Dragon year. The chaplain spoke to the Gola at the request of the people and Headmen of Te, and this written agreement was accordingly drawn up: this is an agreement to the effect that, henceforth, there should be no drunkenness [on the part of the chaplain]. He may not buy beer to drink, nor may he make beer to drink. If the community of Te needs to perform a [Buddhist] ceremony he should not become jealous and envious [at the sight of people drinking beer]. During the [annual] changeover of the Constables, when the villages are divided into three sectors, he may not come. The income from the [Temple] of the Great Compassion should be collected by the Headmen but should not be given to the chaplain. If the chaplain needs [beer] he may brew it only after asking the Headmen. If he should violate this, he shall pay a fine of 50 [rupees] to [whoever is the relevant] legal authority.

The people of Te may not, in their own private houses, serve beer to the chaplain. [It is all right for them to drink] if they so wish, but they may not offer him any. If this is violated [sentence incomplete]. If this agreement is violated a fine of one *zho* [i.e. 8 rupees] must be paid. (HMA/Te/Tib/20)

### The Cracked Roof-Beam

In contrast with the first two examples, the next three cases seem to indicate an antipathy on the part of the village of Te toward Buddhist institutions. The first of these is a story that is often told in the village about an eminent lama who

once visited the area. The identity of the lama is not known. Some people identified him with the famous Shangba Rinpoche who came from Tibet to northern Nepal in the late 1950s. Others maintain that it was another, earlier lama, whose name has been forgotten. One of the places the lama went was Te, where he was invited to perform a ceremony in the temple. While inside the temple he asked to be shown a turquoise vase he had heard was contained in the treasury. As the vase was taken out of its box and shown to him, a loud crack was heard from above. One of the main beams of the storeroom (*nyer-tshang*), the room directly above the temple in which the property is stored, had split. And at the same time, the wailing of the Balmo was heard.

An account of some of the activities of the Shangba Rinpoche in Mustang and surrounding areas, together with an impression of his influential character, is given by the British scholar David Snellgrove, who also happened to be travelling through the area at the time (Snellgrove 1989 [1981]: esp. 219–37). From the Buddhist point of view, one of the lama's most successful achievements was to persuade the villagers of Mustang to abandon animal sacrifices to their territorial gods. Te was one of the few villages that did not undertake to end the practice. Even if the lama in this story were not the Shangba Rinpoche, the protagonist is also likely to have been a focus of ideological opposition to Te's blood-offerings. The village temple, it will be remembered, is the dwelling of the Gola, and the Gola is something of a mediator between gods and men. Stories of beams cracking in temples are not uncommon, and they are always indicative of wrath on the part of the protective gods. The anger in this case was clearly directed against the lama, and the crying of the Balmo, the demoness who lost her body in the attempt to prevent Padmasambhava from converting the area to Buddhism (see chapter 6), reminds us that Te's protectors are not defenders of the doctrine but wild place-gods. They had caused the beam to crack as an indication of displeasure at the lama's missionary activity on their territory.

### Travel Restrictions on Monks and Nuns

A small piece of paper contained in the Te archives makes a very curious stipulation. The item bears only nine lines, and much of the text is illegible owing to poor handwriting, crossings-out, and damage. To judge from what can be read, the document is a list of rules concerning what villagers may or may not do. The first sentence, for example, says that “wherever house-mistresses may go, [for example] to the pasturelands for the collection of fodder or wood, they are nevertheless not exempt from village duties.” All that is given

by way of a date is "Monkey year," which does not help us much, but we know that it must have been written before the end of the nineteenth century because one clause says that monks may visit their parents in Te, but may not spend the night in the house: Te's association with the monasteries of the Muktinath valley ended around the turn of the century. The clause that is of special interest here is the second one in the document. It says simply: "Monks and nuns may not travel via Kope or Yathang" (HMA/Te/Tib/04).

Kope and Yathang are the names of two places immediately to the south of Te, on the route to the upper Muktinath valley via the Muyala pass. For anyone travelling to, say, the monasteries of Dzong or Dzar, or the nunneries of Muktinath or Purang, this way is considerably shorter than the alternative route down the Kali Gandaki to Kag and then up the Muktinath valley. And yet the monks and nuns of Te were not permitted the luxury of this short cut. Why? The route down the Narshing Khola and the Kali Gandaki leaves Te's territory almost immediately. The shortcut remains on Te's pastureland all the way until the Muyala Pass, and takes a traveller under the very eyes, as it were, of three of Te's territorial gods: Pholha Yönten Karpo, who is between the village and Ko; Shartsenpa, immediately above Ko and overlooking Yathang; and Lama Suna Yeshe, who stands above the highest part of the trail before the Muyala.

This little fragment of paper is one of the most intriguing I have encountered. It seems to be saying that monks and nuns should not cross Te's uncultivated land lest they cause offence to the wild gods. And then a few lines later it seems to express a concern for standards of monastic discipline: monks may visit their parents in the village, but they must return to their institutions in the Muktinath valley for the night.

## The Burning

Finally, another remarkable document. This short note is dated only "Bird year," but the mention of the Trithob Dorje Thog-gyal, who is mentioned in other documents from 1849 and 1850 (Schuh 1994: 44), help us to place it around the middle of the nineteenth century. In any case, the priestly Önpo clan of Te was still flourishing at the time of writing:

From the Trithob Dorje Thog-gyal. Concerning the fact that the people of Te, acting out of ignorance, burned all the sacred objects [lit. supports of body, speech, and mind] as well as the religious books of Dondrub and Dargye of the Önpo clan: [the compensation of]

45 rupees has been received and the matter is completely settled. This sealed document to the effect that no one, whether high or low, mighty or humble, may say anything or raise any complaint about this matter, has been issued on the eighteenth day of the second month in a Bird year. (HMA/Te/Tib/25)

The Tepas destroyed the scriptures and ritual objects of their own lamas. What clearer evidence do we need of antipathy toward Buddhist institutions?

### Reconsidering the Evidence

The examples cited here leave us with a very mixed picture of the Tepas' position toward Buddhism. On the one hand, they seem to have a very curatorial attitude toward their clergy, as their stern response to alcohol drinking and butchery seem to show. On the other hand, there are signs of hostility toward monks and priests *qua* Buddhists. Let us reexamine these cases, beginning with the butcher-monk.

At first glance, and also partly because of our notions about how a novice monk might be expected to behave, it looks as if Phuntshog Dorje is being brought to book for killing a goat in violation of his vows. The document appears to be an admission of guilt, with the accused throwing himself on the mercy of his judges. A closer reading reveals that this is not the case; Phuntshog Dorje is defending himself not against a charge of goat-slaughter, but of the *theft* of the animal he butchered. The opening statement is not a request for his previous crimes to be taken into consideration but an assertion that he is an experienced goat-killer and that it would have been quite normal for his aunt to ask him to slaughter one of her animals, since this is something women do not customarily do. The problem seems to be that Phuntshog Dorje picked the wrong animal out of the flock: one belonging not to his aunt but to Trinle Nyima, and his depositing the carcass with his neighbour while he went off to a ceremony was misconstrued (he claims) as his *hiding* it there. The important thing from our point of view is not only that a novice monk in Te did slaughter goats, but that the village apparently thought nothing of it. This puts a very different complexion on the situation. The Tepas are not concerned about the lapse from virtue of a novice monk, but about the possibility that a theft may have taken place in the community: what Phuntshog Dorje did with his vows was of not the least interest to them.

The prohibition on drinking is deceptive for two reasons. First, it does not specify whether "chaplain" is singular or plural. There is only one signatory,

but he might have been acting as a representative. Second, it is not clear who the chaplain is. Assuming that the document was referring to a plurality, and that “chaplains” denoted either the lamas of Tshognam or the village monks, I took the document to be an attempt to uphold the opposition to alcohol consumption that distinguishes stricter positions of Buddhist orthodoxy. But the candidacy of both the Tepa monks and the Tshognam priests as the target of this piece is problematic.

Drinking alcohol is not something that is disapproved of within the sphere of village custom: the production of beer for community gatherings is in fact an obligation that is incumbent on all households. Nor is abstinence from drink particularly associated with Buddhist observance in Mustang. The Sakyapa monasteries of Mustang go through different phases of strictness regarding their attitude to beer-drinking by monks, while the tantric householder-lamas of Tshognam and Baza are, with few exceptions (such as the last resident of the latter, who is teetotal), most impressive drinkers. The Tepas, in fact, have a nickname for their priests: “*Tshognam lama gyangnang drin*,” “The thirty-measure twenty-measure Tshognam lamas,”<sup>2</sup> meaning that the priests daily consume the amount of beer that is brewed from 50 measures (around 100 litres) of barley. (The claim is, of course, something of an exaggeration.)

It would be conceivable that the village might intervene to prevent drinking among monks; but the use of the term “chaplain” to designate the monks would be surprising; and yet it is even more astonishing to think of the Tshognam lamas being browbeaten into temperance. And furthermore, in all the archival material from Tshognam, we have encountered no one by the name of Ngawang Trinle.

It is almost certain that the term “chaplain” denotes neither the monks nor the lamas. It refers, rather, to the Manipa, the steward whose duty it is to take care of the village temple. The clearest indication in the document that this is the case comes at the very beginning: “the Gola spoke to the villagers and Headmen of Te at the request of the chaplain.” As we saw earlier in this chapter, when the village medium becomes possessed, the person who attends to the god and puts questions to him is the temple steward, an ordinary layman who holds this office by rotation. Mustang’s archives do contain several written undertakings by villagers to give up drinking alcohol, but the reason for abstinence is usually the deteriorating health of the signatory or an irrepressible tendency to fight when drunk. In this case, however, the chaplain’s conversion to temperance has nothing voluntary about it, and there is no indication even that he had a drink problem. The Gola has demanded that he desist from drinking, *tout court*, and the entire community is enjoined to make sure that he can never have access to alcohol. This is clearly something of a blow for him,

because the text even takes the trouble to express the hope that he will not be driven to distraction by the sight of the other villagers soaking up the customary volumes of beer that accompany Buddhist rituals in the same temple.

But why should the Gola have stipulated that his representative abstain from drinking alcohol? Because it is polluting, according to the canon of purity relating to the cult of territorial gods. We have already seen that members of estates that number Lama Suna Yeshe among their household gods may not eat yak-meat. The particular restrictions associated with pagan gods vary from one divinity to another and from place to place. The different *lhawen* of the villages in other parts of Baragaon take great care with the maintenance of their ritual purity, especially prior to propitiatory ceremonies. *Lhawen* in general should not eat garlic or certain types of meat, or come into contact with dead people and horses. These restrictions, it may be noted, are in contrast with the principles of tantra, which makes use of a variety of human body parts in its rituals. The preoccupation with purity is something that is shared by Hinduism and early Bon, and we should not rule out the possibility of a genealogical link. The term *aya*, which appears to have been replaced in most of Mustang by the Tibetan *lhawen* (Tib. *lha bon*), is probably derived from the Sanskrit *ārya*, and even in the Muktinath valley, where all the village priests are known as *lhawen*, their practices are sometimes referred to as “religion of the *ārya*” (Tib. *ar ya'i* [sic] *chos*). The prohibition on drinking alcohol is something I have not encountered among any *lhawen*, but it is consonant with abstinence from yak-meat. Yaks are considered by Hindus to be taxonomically related to cows, and their meat—like alcohol—is regarded as polluting.<sup>3</sup> The insistence by the Gola of Te that his attendant stop drinking has therefore nothing to do with monkish principles: alcohol is being forbidden not because it is an intoxicant, but a pollutant.

In the anecdote about the cracking beam, there is no denying that there was an expression of hostility by the Gola toward the visiting lama. What we can be less sure of is that the anger was *ideologically* motivated. The gods’ dramatic gesture of displeasure was not made as soon as the lama entered the premises, nor did it happen when, say, he was reciting prayers and reading scriptures. What specifically infuriated the gods was the fact that the Tepas showed the lama a valuable item of property that was kept in the village treasury. All households in Mustang—including Te—have a storeroom containing foodstuffs, money, and other valuables. This room, which is usually situated at the very back of the house, toward the left, is called the *bug* or *dzibug* (Tib. *mdzod phug*), the “treasury.” In the gendered division of domestic space, the treasury is preeminently feminine, and the keys are customarily kept by the principal woman of the family. People other than members of the household

do not enter this room without a very good reason. From the householders' point of view, such an intrusion constitutes not only a violation of privacy but also a direct threat to the prosperity of the household. The mechanism of vulnerability is not expressed in a standard form, in terms of, say, the evil eye or the appropriation of the *yang* (Tib. *g.yang*), the propensity to good fortune; explanations along these lines certainly do come up—thus a Saturday, a day on which one should if possible avoid spending money, is considered a particularly bad occasion to have one's domestic treasury encroached on by an outsider—but the sentiment is rather more diffuse. For whatever technical reason, the prosperity of a household is threatened by the penetration of an outsider into its most private place.

The cracking of the temple beam is, I think, to be understood in terms of violation of secrecy. The Tepas have a very strong sense of community privacy that, as I shall discuss, is formalised in terms of binding laws and oaths. The visiting lama, for all the respect and homage the Tepas may have shown him, was an outsider, and the village permitted him to see the most valuable treasure from the community's most private store. The Gola are above all the wardens of the prosperity and security of Te, and the splitting of a beam in the treasure above the temple was a protest at the villagers' incautious treatment of the community's integrity to gratify the curiosity of a charismatic alien.

The travel restriction on monks and nuns looks like an attempt to avoid antagonising territorial gods by keeping blatant Buddhists out of the wilderness. There are two other explanations that are worth considering. The first does indeed have to do with the offensiveness of monks, but not because of their religious proclivities.

During the course of a visit I once made to a certain village in the Muktinath valley, I learned that the annual propitiation of the main territorial divinity was due to take place the following day. Since I had recorded a number of such rituals in the communities of Baragaon and was interested to observe another version, I asked the village priest, the *lhawen*, if I might stay and watch the proceedings. The request made the priest uncomfortable, and after a few moments' hesitation he answered that women and monks were not allowed to attend. Logically, of course, I could have pressed the matter, but women and monks were obviously metonymic for a larger category of people (that included Englishmen and presumably others, too) who might not participate in the ceremony. First, women: we have already seen that Lama Suna Yeshe does not like women to come too close to him when he is possessing his human medium. ("Keep away you female black ones!") It is not only Lama Suna Yeshe whom women must treat with circumspection. When women go near the shrine of Shartsenpa, they tie up the ends of their long underwear or tuck them into their boots or socks. One of the

types of pollution that the *lhawen* of the Muktinath valley list during the recitation that accompanies their purifying fumigation rite is *bangdrib* (Tib. *'bangs grib*). While this literally means “birth pollution,” it is understood as the defilement of anything that has a recent uterine provenance, including menstrual blood. While restrictions on menstruating women are far less elaborate in Tibetan society than among, say, Hindus, there are certain nominally Buddhist cults in Tibet that reveal a concern with the inherent impurity of women. One of these is the pilgrimage of Mount Tsari, in the eastern Himalayan borderland, in which women are traditionally forbidden access to the most sacred area of the mountain (Huber 1994).

It is significant that the travel restrictions cited in the document apply to monks and nuns but not to the lamas of Tshognam, who may go wherever they wish. One of the most obvious differences between monks and tantric lamas is that the latter have long hair, while monks have none (or very little). Up to 1962, it was forbidden for Tepas other than monks and nuns to cut their hair. Until this time, the men used to wear their hair in topknots, of a style described in chapter 2, or, latterly, in braids in the Tibetan style. One of the items that used in the past to be traded along the Kali Gandaki was chewing tobacco, which exists nowadays only in the macerated and scented form known as *khaini*. Records from Kag list the customs duties that were to be paid on tobacco. The Tepas were inveterate consumers until the habit was supplanted by cigarette smoking. There is even a document in Te’s archives concerning an acerbic dispute over a quid of chewing tobacco, which one villager had promised to give another in exchange for a favour, but according to the plaintiff, never did (HMA/Te/Tib/22). Chewing tobacco was one of the items that Tepa traders used to transport north from the Indian border every year. Once, in around the 1940s, a Tepa called Sonam went to Neliphug (probably Bahirahawa) to buy tobacco. Finding the heat intolerable, and admiring the short hair of the southern Nepalese, he decided to cut his own hair. When they are far enough away from home, and especially overseas, traders from Baragaon and Lo violate all sorts of restrictions (such as dietary codes) that they are meticulous about observing in the village. Most of these violations leave no give-away traces, but trader Sonam, who had probably not thought too much about the consequences of his experiment, was unable to conceal the evidence. Nothing was done about his condition until the second month, when men and women must dance, bareheaded, in front of the temple and at the shrine of Pholha Yönten Karpo. Short hair, at that time, was considered to be offensive to the territorial gods, and Sonam improvised a wig for himself by tressing yak-hair into the remnants of his own. The headmen, however, did not accept his remedy, and he was punished with a fine.<sup>4</sup>

He had, nevertheless, begun a trend. Short hair was becoming increasingly common in Mustang at this time, and more and more Tepas began to cut their hair, with impunity. As a result of this trend, the de facto abandonment of the old rule was later formalised. The only written evidence of this agreement is a note in the margin of a Nepali document, written in 1962, concerned with herding regulations. Among a number of minor new rules, this note lifts restrictions on cutting hair and breeding chickens in the village (Karmacharya n.d. 5.22).

According to this explanation, then, monks and nuns were offensive to the territorial gods of Te not because they were Buddhists but simply because they had no hair. More time could be spent in debating the virtues of this conclusion—for example, might long hair not be desirable to the gods precisely because it is unmonkish?—but there is just one other suggestion why monks, women, and Englishmen belong to a category of people who may not attend the propitiation of place-gods. I suggested in chapter 3 that Te's gods might originally have been clan gods. The term for clan gods is *pholha* (Tib. *pho lha*), which means, literally, “male god” or “god of the males.” If the cult of these gods were to be restricted, it would be understandable to limit attendance to people who perpetuate the clan. Women give birth but contribute to a child its flesh, whereas the bone, the vector of the clan, comes from the father; outsiders produce more outsiders, and monks perpetuate nothing.

The second explanation for placing certain areas out of bounds to monks and nuns has nothing to do with territorial gods. The discussion of monasticism in Te concluded with an assessment of the situation as it was until recently. Monks were, essentially, laymen who were not required to participate in community obligations. This situation was revised in 1992, and men who are only nominal monks no longer enjoy exemption (the circumstances of this change are discussed in chapter 10); the corollary to this stipulation is that anyone who does no work on behalf of the community may not work for his or her private estate either. It may be that a similar rule applied to monks and nuns in the past. The first clause in document HMA/Te/Tib/04 specifies that going out to collect firewood is not an acceptable excuse for absence from village duties. The prohibition of monks and nuns from certain areas of pastureland may be simply to prevent them from collecting fuel for their family estates: if they are exempt from community tasks, they should not contribute in any way to the prosperity of their household either. This interpretation would also explain the prevention of monks from staying with their families overnight: who knows what kind of domestic chores they might be able to accomplish during a protracted stay? The economic explanation has more in its favour than may at first appear—something that will become increasingly apparent in due course.

If, as seems to be the case, the Buddhist–pagan opposition is a red herring, why did the villagers of Te burn the ritual paraphernalia of their priests? Could it be because these things caused offence to the Gola, who then demanded their destruction? I do not think so. The only other story of book-burning of which I am aware concerns a priestly family in a now-ruined temple in the Muktinath valley. The villagers of Dzar, it is said, attacked the temple in force and burned its store of scriptures and sacred objects. The reason for the attack was not ideological opposition to the temple priest by Dzar's place-gods or even a hostile sect, but the fact that the priest had been accused of performing destructive magic.

How likely is it that the Önpo of Te might have been associated with such practices? Very likely, as it happens. As we have seen, the tantric lamas of Mustang are regarded less as vectors of Buddhist spirituality than as technicians who specialise in propitiating supernatural forces or coercing them into desired forms of behaviour. The repertoire of these priests usually extends to dealing with ghosts, witches, vampires, and the like on behalf of private or collective clients, but the same techniques of coercion and destruction can also be used against human targets, either on behalf of a client or in the practitioner's personal interests. Public accusations of black magic are rare. The only documentary evidence we have seen of such a case is the allegation made against Ösal Dorje of Tshognam in 1907 (see chapter 5). But people talk. One of the lamas in this area is widely suspected of having wrought the death of a personal enemy by magical means. The suspicion was once voiced in the course of an angry exchange, but generally such rumours are kept quiet, since it does not do to make personal enemies of lamas (any more than it does to antagonise Tibetan doctors, who are reputed to be as deft with poison as they are with medicine).

### Sorcerers and Priests

Stories about magical battles between tantric lamas of Mustang, living and dead, could quite literally fill a book (examples of a few such stories are given in Kretschmar 1985). Instead of heaping up a mass of circumstantial evidence concerning popular attitudes to such lamas, it would be more economical to take just one story that deals with the Önpo clan itself. The figure who is regarded as the founder of the Önpo clan is a certain Bichuwa Lama, who is reported in one quasi-historical document (the *Chronicle*) to have been the first member of the clan to go to Kog. About an hour's walk to the southeast of Tangkya, not far off the route to Kog, is a solitary ruined building called Gompa Gang, the "temple ridge"—not to be confused with the abandoned nunnery of

the same name near Tshug. This Gompa Gang, it is said in Tangkya, was where Lama Bichuwa used to live. The *Chronicle* says that he came to Kog from a place called Cetong, but if this name once referred to the vicinity of Gompa Gang, it has been forgotten. According to a story told in Te, Bichuwa Lama was patronised by Tangkya until the arrival, from Tibet, of another lama called Tragten. The people of Tangkya were impressed by the latter and shifted their patronage to him. Thus deprived of his livelihood, Bichuwa Lama had no option but to leave, and went to settle in Kog. Before leaving, however, he pronounced a curse on the community that had rejected him:

*gtsang chu mang la yur chu dkon /  
sngon mo nas kyi 'byon lam de la med /  
rdza ri mang la spang ri dkon /  
gro can rta pho'i rgyug sa de na med /*

Let the river water be abundant but irrigation-water scarce;  
May there be no way for the green barley to sprout;  
Let slate hills be abundant and grassy hills few;  
May there be nowhere for the swiftly-trotting horses to run.

Tangkya is a small, and very beautiful, village on the eastern side of the Upper Kali Gandaki. Below the cliffs at the northern end of the present settlement are a few derelict buildings and mounds of conglomerate. The people of Tangkya do not build on this area or even dig the ground, because of the likelihood of turning up human bones. This, it is said, is the site of the old village that was wiped away by the torrential rain and ensuing landslide provoked by Bichuwa Lama's parting curse.

The name Bichuwa deserves some attention. In Tibetan pronunciation, the second syllable in a word tends to lose voicing and aspiration, so it is just as likely that the phoneme I have rendered arbitrarily as *chu* stands for the un-aspirated *cu* or the voiced *ju*.<sup>5</sup> The *Chronicle*, the only text I know in which the name appears in writing, spells it as *bhi byu* (*biju*). The orthography of the first syllable suggests that the author did not take the name to be Tibetan. Superficially, the name bears a resemblance to the Prakrit forms (*bhicchu* etc.) of the Sanskrit *bhikshu*, meaning monk. The etymology is tempting, but, I think, unlikely. First, Önpo Bichuwa was not a monk but a tantric priest, as his clan name indicates. Perhaps he was a monk turned tantrist? Nowadays it sometimes happens that monks who have renounced their vows continue to be referred to with the prefix "monk" for the rest of their lives. But Tibetan has a word for monk, *drawa* (Tib. *grwa pa*), and at the present time, at least, the word *bhicchu* is never used.

The pronunciation of the name approximates even more closely the Nepali term *bijuwā*, for which Turner gives the definition “a Jimdār *dhāmi*, sorcerer.” (“Jimdār” denotes one or other of the groups of Rai of eastern Nepal, such as the Mewahang, while *dhāmi* is a common word for spirit-medium.) As far as I am aware, the word *bijuwā* is not used in western Nepal, and I have never encountered it even in the Kali Gandaki. It is possible that it is cognate with a Tibetan term that has puzzled several scholars.

One of the individuals primarily responsible for restoring Buddhism to Tibet following the collapse of the empire in the ninth century was Lha Lama Yeshe Ö. A descendant of the Tibetan royal house, he ruled in western Tibet during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. He was troubled by the practices that were flourishing in Tibet in the name of Buddhism—necromancy, sexual rites, animal and human sacrifice—and by the dissolute behaviour of different categories of priests, and he issued an ordinance (Tib. *bka' shog*) in which he demanded appropriate reforms. One group of practitioners was singled out in the following lines.

You, who practise the religion of the non-Buddhists, the 'Ba' ji ba,  
 And say “we are Buddhists . . .”  
 . . . this advice sent to you, 'Ba' ji ba, means  
 You should not abandon the practice of Mahāyāna, but keep  
 it close. (Karmay 1998b: 10–13)

Who are the 'Ba' ji ba? (The term would be pronounced *bajawa*.) Karmay refers to variations on these forms that occur in another Tibetan work (the 'Ba' *bzhet*), but beyond the fact that they refer to a category of tantric practitioner, the derivation of the name remains obscure. Per Kvaerne has suggested that 'ba' *ji* may be related to an Indo-Aryan idiomatic form *bājila* that appears in the *Caryāgītikosā*, and is itself derived from Sanskrit *vajrin*. A related term *bājira* appears in Tibetan translation as *rdo rje sems dpa'*, that is, Sanskrit *vajrasattva*.<sup>6</sup> Dan Martin has argued—equally persuasively—that 'ba' *ji* may be derived from the name Mani, the founder of Manichaeism.<sup>7</sup>

This may be an appropriate place to suggest a third, tentative, hypothesis: that 'ba' *ji* [ba] might be cognate with the Nepalese term *bijuwā*. *Bijuwā* may denote a sorcerer, but it is probably derived from the Sanskrit term *vaidya*, meaning “a learned man” or “a doctor,” and in contemporary usage in Nepal it most commonly has the latter sense. But *vaidya* itself may have a dual derivation, from Sanskrit *vidyā*, meaning “knowledge,” and also from *veda* (Monier-Williams). A *vaidya*, therefore, may be not only a learned doctor but “a follower of the Vedas or one well versed in them” (Monier-Williams). Now *Veda* is a different thing from tantra, but certain common practices (such as

animal sacrifices) give them a superficial resemblance, and indeed certain Tibetan scholars themselves allude to the presence of Vedic cults in Tibet (Martin 2001: 191). A more literal rendering of the first line cited earlier would be: “you practitioners of the heretical *bajiwa* religion . . .” The Tibetan term “heretical,” *mu stegs* (Ssk. *tīrthika*), most commonly denotes Hinduism.

Whether it is cognate with the Nepali *bijuwā* or the Tibetan form *'ba'ji* [*ba*], the name Bichuwa suggests that its bearer, the founder of Te’s Önpo clan, was associated with magical and religious practices that lay beyond the pale of orthodoxy.

That tantric lamas in general and members of the Önpo clan in particular should be suspected of performing rites that might be harmful to either individuals or entire communities, is far from improbable. If the Tepas once burned the books of the family, the most likely reason is not an ideological antipathy toward Buddhist doctrine but a need to punish or preempt some unsavoury thaumaturgy of which the priests were suspected.

### The Destruction of Kog

There is a Tepa story that is worth relating because it seems to summarise Te’s attitude to Buddhism and Buddhist lamas, while at the same time giving us a clue to the direction in which we should look to pursue the subject of religion in the community.

The story concerns the abandonment of Kog, the settlement from which three of Te’s clans migrated to the present site. We have already seen the matter-of-fact version of events as it is preserved, in literary form, in the *Chronicle*, but the unwritten account that is told by villagers adds a number of interesting details. This is a paraphrase (rather than a translation) of a version I recorded in 1992.

A long time ago the people of Kog were very rich. But in spite of their great prosperity all they could think about was accumulating even more wealth, and they would not even come to attend funeral rites. There came Lama Bichuwa [who has just, earlier in the narrative, destroyed Tangkya], and the villagers of Kog asked him to destroy their settlement, too, since impoverishment was the only way they could be brought back to participating in funeral rites. In spite of their entreaties Bichuwa Lama demurred, saying that it was really not such a bad thing to be wealthy, and continued on his way to the Narshing Khola. On arriving in the upper reaches of this valley he

took the horn of a dzo and filled it with seeds of mustard [SMT, Tk. *tshug*], sealed the opening, and threw it into the river, announcing that wherever the seed banked and sprouted he would settle. The horn came to rest at the confluence of the Narshing Khola and the Kali Gandaki, and here the lama founded a settlement that, because of its mustard-seed origins, was called Tshug. Bichuwa Lama was supported by three main patrons from Tshug, the ancestors of Khangtö Palden, Jiwa Pema Samdrup, and Duli Tshewang. Later on, Bichuwa Lama moved uphill to Te, where he established a ceremony called the Zatönse.

Since Bichuwa Lama had refused to destroy Kog, the villagers turned instead to Lama Tragten, the new priest of Tangkya. Lama Tragten's reaction was much the same as that of Lama Bichuwa: he, too, suggested that it was really quite good to be rich. But the villagers continued to entreat him until eventually he gave in. The lama poured some milk into a skull cup and kept it in his temple, and, at his instructions, all the villagers went up to the source of the irrigation tunnel. The men went carrying swords, bows, and other weapons, while the women carried the wooden blades of their looms. They went whistling and shouting, saying *ha ha* and *ki ki* to offend the serpent spirits living at the water source. They then returned to the village and asked the lama to examine the contents of his skull cup. [The way milk is transformed in the course of ceremonies is one of several techniques of divination used to gauge the efficacy of rites.] The milk had curdled, a bad—or in this case good—sign that did not augur well for the prosperity of the village. But the people were still not satisfied and demanded immediate results. Then the lama took the cup of milk in his hand and flung it upside-down to the ground. In that same instant a section of the cliff through which the irrigation tunnel ran collapsed.

The people continued to live for a few more years on their supplies, and when these ran out, went to fix the broken canal. The young men and women went onto the cliff-face to try and create an aqueduct where the tunnel had disappeared, and the younger children were set on watch to warn them if a landslide looked imminent. "There are stones coming," the children shouted, and the workers immediately ran to safety. But nothing happened, so they returned to the cliff face. "There are stones coming," said the children again, and the team hurried from the site, only to return a third time. This time the workers stayed because they didn't believe the children, and a land-

slide came and swept them all into the gorge. After this, the old and young people who were left abandoned Kog. Some went to Nar, and some came to Te.

This account differs in a number of significant aspects from the written version presented in chapter 4. To begin with, as we might expect, it bears all the hallmarks of folklorisation, right down to the development of narrative tension with the motif of the children who cry “wolf.” But two features are worth particular attention. The first is the characterisation of the two lamas, which accords with much that emerged in the historical review of the Tshognam priests given in chapter 5. Neither Tragten Lama nor Önpo Bichuwa is distinguished by unworldly spirituality; their activities consist primarily of competition with each other for the patronage of villagers; performing divinations; increasing the amount of water in the irrigation canal by provoking the serpent spirits; casting destructive spells. Neither of them is impressed by the virtues of poverty: the desire of the wealthy people of Kog to be brought low for religious reasons is not something that either regards as a particularly sensible attitude.

These “religious reasons” deserve closer attention. The main theme of the story is an ideological conflict: individualistic prosperity versus collective virtue. People’s obsession with wealth keeps them from attending funeral feasts. These funeral feasts are ideally held forty-nine days after someone’s death, a period that marks the end of the passage of the departed consciousness to rebirth. The family of the deceased invite all the members of the community to eat and drink, and the merit that is accumulated in this way is credited to their late relative. It is for this reason that the funeral feasts are referred to as *gewa* (Tib. *dge ba*), a term that properly means “virtue” but is used in many Himalayan regions as a synonym for *sönam* (Tib. *bsod nams*), “merit.” *Gewa* is opposed to *digpa* (Tib. *sdig pa*), meaning “demerit” or, more loosely, “sin.” Now the term *gewa* has little currency in Te; the Tepa form of the *gewa-digpa* opposition is *digpa-midigpa*, “sin and nonsin.” The story can be seen to have two quite different morals. If *gewa* is taken to be Buddhist virtue or merit, then Kog is simply a city sick of sin, a sort of Nineveh with an expiatory death wish. The *gewa* of the story may well have been understood as “merit” when it first acquired currency, but although the word has been retained, the narrator’s understanding of it has changed. *Gewa*, funeral feasts, are above all community affairs. The participants make a consolatory offering to the bereaved family and in return receive food and drink that they share with all the other members of the village. A *gewa* is a collective act of non-profit-making exchange.

This is surely the real point of the story. Material prosperity is an individualistic pursuit that is opposed to the interests of the collectivity. The village

is impoverished, most of its members die, and the settlement is abandoned; but the implication is that this pass is preferable to the alternative. The community lives on in Nar and Te, whereas the rifts created by prosperity would have resulted in the annihilation of the group.

### Conclusion

There is, in short, no clear evidence of a clash between two ideologies: on the one hand a religion based on the cult of territorial divinities to which the community of Te subscribes, and on the other a soteriological creed that forbids blood-sacrifice, encourages monachism, and relegates gods such as the Gola to minor protectors of the faith. Aspects of each of these systems are certainly incompatible, but there is obviously a process of selection that determines what is to be incorporated into custom and what rejected. Naturally enough, we are apt to think of paganism and Buddhism in terms of integrated packages of religious beliefs and practices that may be undone and dismantled only with difficulty. The Tepas, it seems, do not struggle with the problem of irreconcilable systems, but deal with the component fragments of these systems according to whether they are beneficial, harmful, salient, or irrelevant. The following chapter will make a closer examination of this process of selection with reference to the main annual ceremony of Te.

# 8

## Agedness of Error

When men began to have itching ears, then, not contented with the plentiful and wholesome fountains of the gospel, they began after their own lusts to heap to themselves teachers, and, as if the divine scripture wanted a supplement and were to be eked out, they cannot think any doubt resolved and any doctrine confirmed, unless they run to that indigested heap and fry of authors which they call antiquity. Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of blind chance, hath drawn down of old to this present in her huge drag-net, whether fish or seaweed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, those are the fathers.

—John Milton, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*

### The Festive Season

Buddhism, then, is kept at arm's length by the Tepas, who are highly selective about which aspects of the religion are permitted to have a bearing on the community. Rituals that are regarded as public services—for assuring protection, prosperity, and rainfall, and for taking care of the dead—are welcomed, while Buddhist tenets that are seen as inimical to village tradition are rejected. But Te has village ceremonies that unquestionably have Buddhist antecedents. This chapter will examine two of the main festivals to see how these, too, have brought Buddhism into the service of the community.<sup>1</sup>



FIGURE 8.1. Pema Chödrol wearing the ceremonial dress of the Lama Guru ceremony.

In the village calendar, it is the second month that is most densely packed with ceremonies of different sorts. The accumulation of long, late hours, the winter cold (much of what goes on takes place outside, at night), and the high consumption of alcohol over a protracted period take their toll. Nyima Drandul, the youngest of the brothers who form the present generation of Tshognam priests, performed death-rites for the Tepas for the first time when he was twenty-one years old. This was during the second month, when nine people had died in the course of the Lama Guru ceremony, and the senior lamas could not keep up with the work. All the victims died from "colds"—probably influenza or pneumonia—which were blamed principally on the noxious smoke produced by deep-frying bread for festive snacks, exacerbated by the freezing temperatures and the dust thrown up by dancing. Ever since then there has been a ban on frying bread during this festival.

The main events of the month may be summarised briefly as follows.

1. The Cingza: the Day (*za*, Tib. *gza'*) [for the cleaning] of the Irrigation Reservoir (*cing*, < Tib. *rdzing* [bu]). This procedure takes two days, and is accompanied by singing, dancing, archery, and beer-drinking.
2. The rites for the end of office for the outgoing headmen, and the appointment of the new headmen.
3. The Lama Guru. The dates of the first two events are flexible, since they depend on astrological calculations made by the Tshognam priests, but the Lama Guru must begin on the tenth day of the month.
4. The week-long archery festival and the partridge hunt.
5. The Zatönse, the two-day ceremony that concludes the month.

The second month, then, is one of almost unbroken feasting, and until recent changes in the village rules it was followed, in the first week of the third month, by the retirement ceremonies (*tharchang*, Tib. *thar chang*) of anyone entering his or her fifty-fifth year.

In this chapter, I shall concentrate on two of these ceremonies: the Lama Guru and the Zatönse (I shall discuss the appointment of the headmen and the partridge hunt in chapter 10). Following a description of the procedures involved in each, I shall assess their composition and significance as “community” rituals.

## The Lama Guru

### *The Dance of the Few Young Women*

The first day of the Lama Guru receives its name from its principal event, the Dance of the Few Young Women (Tk. *Tshame Tumtum Shawa*). The term *tshame*, which normally designates any woman between adolescence and about thirty, here refers specifically to unmarried women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. This narrow age range also happens to be the period when most women marry, and consequently there are no more than a handful—say, seven or eight—in any given year who meet the specification, whence the designation *tumtum*—“few.”

In the morning, the two youngest girls of the group go to collect berries from a plant known as *marshing* (SMT *kyirkyashing*), the sole specimens of which in the vicinity of Te grow on the bank of the Narshing River near Tshaurong. The stems of this plant bear fruit long after the leaves have fallen, indeed when everything is barren save the evergreen junipers. The girls carry

back berry-laden branches of this plant and hide them somewhere near the mineral spring of Budubudu before returning to the village.

In the afternoon, all the Young Women assemble at the Pholha, wearing ceremonial dress. The principal item of clothing they wear is the *maram guram*, an elaborate pleated skirt made of tightly woven wool and decorated with geometrical designs. A similar dress is worn on certain ceremonial occasions by women of a few villages in southern Baragaon, where it is known as *thigdral*, “rows of patterns.” The South Mustang Tibetan word *thigma* refers to the crosses and other patterns that decorate the dress (< Tib. *thig*: “line”); *dral* (Tib. *gral*) means “row.” The lower part of the *maram guram* is covered by a skirt, and a shawl of white silk or wool is also worn. The Few Young Women must also wear their hair in a particular style known as *kradampa* (Tk. *kra* < Tib. *skra*: “hair”; *dampa* < Tib. *bsdams pa*: “bound up”), which is quite different from the single plait that all women ordinarily wear. Here the hair is divided into two loose bunches that are wound around the head in opposite directions and tied at the front. The point at which it is fastened is marked by three daubs of butter (Tk. and SMT *yar*), which are put there by the women’s mothers. A final obligatory item of dress is a broad choker, called *sumji*, consisting of rows of small corals and a stone known as *ulug* or *mumen*.

The Few Young Women perform a triple prostration to Pholha and sing the song called Tanglho, “The Gods on High” (< Tib. *sTeng lha*):

Praise to the gods on high  
 Go to the land of the gods on high  
 Offer a libation  
 To Indra and the divine assembly

Praise to the *tsen* in the middle  
 Go to the land of the *tsen* in the middle  
 Offer a libation  
 To the *tsen* Yumo Gyalchen and his host

Praise to the serpent-spirits below  
 Go to the land of the serpent-spirits below  
 Offer a libation  
 To the serpent-spirit Suna Rinchen and his host

This is followed by three more verses in which the singers “offer a flower-garden” to each of the categories of divinities in turn.

While singing the song, they descend to the Narshing riverbed, between Dzong and Kargyu Mendang Gyung, and continue to walk in a large clockwise circle around Dzong. The two youngest girls leave the group in order to collect

the *marshing* berries hidden at Budubudu in the morning and rejoin their companions at the threshing yard called Tsapkyenyü. Here the girls mark their foreheads with the dark-red juice of the berries and tuck some sprigs of the plant behind their ears and into their chokers. They then process down to Dzong and from there until they reach the great peach tree some 100 yards or so below it they move in a dance-step and sing the song called "Lungbade" (Tib. *lung pa bde*), "The Peaceful Village":

At the top of the peaceful village  
 Is there the blue-green sandalwood tree?  
 There stands the tree  
 I, the sandalwood tree, am the head-ornament  
 I, the tree, am the head-ornament  
 On top of the sandalwood tree  
 Is there a bird?  
 There sits the cuckoo  
 I, the bird, shall not stay but depart  
 I, the cuckoo shall not stay but depart

At the waist of the peaceful village  
 Is there the divine tree?  
 There stands the divine blue-green juniper  
 I, the divine tree, am the head-ornament  
 I, the juniper, am the head-ornament  
 Is there the divine bird?  
 There sits the snowcock  
 I, the divine bird, shall not stay but depart  
 I, the snowcock, shall not stay but depart.

At the foot of the peaceful village  
 Is there the water-tree?  
 There stands the tamarisk  
 I, the water-tree, am the head-ornament,  
 I, the tamarisk, am the head-ornament  
 On the tamarisk, the water-tree, is there the water-bird?  
 There sits the goose  
 I, the water-bird, shall not stay but depart,  
 I, the goose, shall not stay but depart.

Between the peach tree and the threshing yard called Lhanganyü (the Temple Threshing Yard) they may dance and sing another song, or if they choose, simply walk down in silence. As they walk through the southern

half of the yard, they must exclaim “Sho!”<sup>2</sup> three times, and then form a line, facing the temple, with the eldest girl to the left and the youngest at the right.

Here they perform a slow dance of the genre known as *shawa* (SMT *gartse* < Tib. *gar rtseg*) and sing a song called “Yiram” (possibly < Tib. *yid rangs*, Rejoicing). It is this particular performance of *shawa* from which the name of the day is derived. The gist of the text is that the yak-cows are heavy with milk, and the milk is to be churned into butter as an offering to the Jowo of Lhasa (an image of the Buddha that represents the apex of sanctity in Tibetan popular culture); in the second verse it is the ewes that are full of milk, and in the third the does. The beneficiary of the butter in the second verse is the Jowo of Kyirong—a companion-image to the Lhasa Jowo that now resides in India—and in the third verse it is again the Lhasa Jowo.

After the dance, the Few Young Women turn toward the left, so that their right shoulders are presented to the temple. The Young Women are in age order, with the eldest at the front, and at this point each undoes the hair of the one in front. (The hair of the last Young Woman is loosened in turn by the one immediately in front of her.) They then say “Sho!” three more times and perform a dance of the genre called *shabdrung* (SMT *shari*; both terms are probably cognate with Tib. *zhabs bro*), a less solemn form than the *shawa*. During this dance, they sing “Thola Yangtö” (Tib. *mTho la yang stod*), “Far up on High” the song with which all occasions of song and dance in Te must be opened. The four (or, in the extended version, seven) verses of the song list the successive levels of the landscape, from the snow peaks to the rivers, and extol the representative denizens of each region, from the mythical snow lion at the top to the fishes down below.

Far up, on high, is the exalted snow-mountain.  
From within this high place comes  
The great snow lion, who rejoices in this place.

Far up, on high, are the exalted crags.  
From within this high place there comes  
The vulture who rejoices in this place.

Far up, on high, are the exalted slates.  
From within this high place there comes  
The wild yak who rejoices in this place.

And so on, with only the place and its particular denizen changing in each verse, as follows:

High meadows: deer

Forest: tigress<sup>3</sup>

Flat ground (at the foot of the mountain): wild ass

River: fish

Occupying only the southern half of the threshing yard, the Few Young Women continue to sing songs and dance until the goats come home from pasture.

### *The Sixteen Secret Songs*

The ceremonies of the tenth day are resumed after nightfall, when the Few Young Women are joined by the Young Men. The latter are known as the *bön*, a term that denotes all the unmarried men of Te between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. Like *tshame*, the masculine *bön* has a less specific meaning in everyday usage and may also be applied to married individuals. The expression *bön-tshame* is the term that designates the category of “young men and young women” of the village.<sup>4</sup>

Each of the four sectors possesses a drum, and after nightfall the four representatives—the eldest Young Man from each sector—assemble, with their drums, at Sumdu Deyang. From here they proceed to Lhanganyü in silence, and on the way are met by the Few Young Women and the remaining Young Men. The Young Women have by now doffed their earlier ceremonial dress and wear everyday clothing. The Young Men must wear a gown (Tk. *kön*, SMT *gö*, Tib. *gos*) and the red-and-white striped shawl (Tk., SMT *ertig*, Tib. *ar ti*) that is worn by tantric and village priests. The group sings and dances a *shawa* in the northern half (the southern half was used in the morning) of the threshing yard. During this dance, the Young Men, with the exception of the four drummers, drape their shawls across their shoulders with the upper corners pushed under rings worn on either hand, and move slowly with arms outstretched so that, as the Tepas say, their movements resemble the flight of vultures.

At the end of the dance, they proceed toward the temple. Each Young Man carries a dried leg of sheep or goat in the folds of his gown; the drummers carry theirs tucked into the leather webbing of their drums. At the entrance to the temple, the Few Young Women are met by women of their families, who give them each a quantity of bread and a cup of radish pickle.

The meat and bread are intended to sustain the company during the vigil that lies ahead. To cut the meat, each of the Young Men carries a smaller knife than is usually worn by Tepas, since no one is permitted to carry a large knife between the tenth and fifteenth days. (It is also forbidden to whistle during this

entire period. This prohibition is characteristic of the cloistering that the village periodically undergoes; see chapter 6.)

Inside the temple, the Young Women sit in the “left” or “female” line, that is, with their left shoulders toward the altar, and the Young Men in a similar line opposite them. The members of each line are disposed in age order, from the altar downward. The proceedings are supervised by three “watchmen” (*donyerpa*).<sup>5</sup> Under the supervision of the watchmen, the group proceeds to sing a cycle of sixteen songs known as the Bötsho. The name also designates the ceremony itself.

The possible origin and meaning of these songs I shall discuss presently. The most striking feature about them is that the words belong to no recognizable language, and the Tepas themselves do not understand their meaning. Nevertheless, strict measures are taken to ensure that the text undergoes no change. The villagers are forbidden, on pain of heavy fines, to sing them in everyday life as they would other songs. Indeed, there is only one other occasion in the year at which the songs are sung, a similarly restricted gathering several months before the Lama Guru when they are rehearsed by the Few Young Women and Young Men who are to perform them.

The watchmen are vigilant for any mistakes the singers make, and in the event of someone making a slip, the singers must recommence the song. Furthermore, if anyone is seen to be falling asleep, the watchmen will throw a cup of water over him or her. It is not unusual for the exhausted company to be retained in the temple until the dawn of the following day.

### *Day Two: The Eleventh Day*

After leaving the temple, the watchmen go home to sleep, and the Few Young Women and the Young Men make their way to Sumdü Deyang, and, to the accompaniment of the four drums, sing “The Peaceful Village.” The drums are then hung on the projecting roof-beams of a nearby house, and the group proceed to dance *shabro* and sing folk songs, the first of which must, as always, be “Far up on High.” Since the rest of the village is sleeping, the dancers have no audience, but the headmen and constables are meant to listen from their houses to ensure that the singing continues and to investigate—and punish—protracted silences. The dancing and singing must continue until shortly after daybreak, when the goats are taken from their enclosure to browse on the hillsides, and the singers may then retire to bed.

The festivities begin again in the afternoon, and are substantially similar to those of the tenth day. The main difference is that the Few Young Women

are no longer alone but are accompanied by the Young Men. Both parties congregate at Pholha in the afternoon before circumambulating the village together, and now the two youngest boys and the two youngest girls leave the group to recover the *marshing* berries that were hidden near Budubudu the previous day. Each party makes a good-natured attempt to discover and raid the other's cache of berries.

As before, the group descends from Pholha to Dzong and then proceeds slowly, in dance-steps, to the peach tree, singing "The Peaceful Village." The Young Men fix the ends of their shawls in their rings and spread the arms to form vultures' wings. As they leave Dzong, the watchmen fire three musket-shots, and then a further three when the dancers arrive at the peach tree.

The three exclamations of "Sho!" are made as on the previous day, but today the timing of the utterances is controlled by the drummers. Shortly before reaching the Lhanganyü, a complex sixteen-beat phrase is beaten out in unison on the four drums, and the "Sho!" is called out on the last beat. The phrase is repeated twice more, and the watchmen fire a further three shots, setting light to the powder in the pans each time the dancers exclaim. On reaching the northern half of Lhanganyü, the group remains in a column so that the temple is on its right and, to the accompaniment of slow dance movements, sings a three-verse song called "O-la-o." The lyrics of this song are very similar to those of "At the Peak of the Snow-Mountains" (see chapter 6).

After the song, the Young Women remain in place while the Young Men continue clockwise around the threshing yard into the southern half, moving slowly to the same sixteen-beat phrase with the exclamation of "Sho!" at either end of each of three cycles. On this occasion the matchlocks are not fired. At the end of the three phrases, the Young men are still in the southern part of the yard, and here they form a circle and begin immediately to dance a *shawa* and to sing the song "Suna Angase." The title derives from what is probably a semantically meaningless chorus, but the lyrics contain passages in which the singers make various offerings to Padmasambhava.

The Few Young Women, who are still in the northern section, simultaneously begin to sing "Yiram," exactly as on the previous day, with the same treatment of one another's hair, and the watchmen fire three musket-shots.

On the completion of "Yiram," the Few Young Women file into the southern half of the yard, where they enter the Young Men's circle and join the *shawa* dance. By now most of the village will have turned out to watch the dancing, and cluster around the threshing yard and on top of the nearby roofs. The patrons of the Lama Guru—of whom I shall say more later—enter the circle and offer beer to the dancers.

As soon as the Few Young Women have joined the Young Men, the vacated northern half of Lhanganyü is filled by married couples who are heads of estates. They form a large circle—there are, of course, many more of them than of Few Young Women and Young Men—and proceed to dance *shabdrung*, beginning their dance with the obligatory rendering of “The Exalted Place.” The Few Young Women and Young Men continue for a while—about a quarter of an hour—to dance *shawa*; then the drums are set aside, the Young Men detach the “wings” of their shawls from their fingers and fasten them around their bodies, and this group, too, lapses into *shabdrung*.

The dancing and singing—and beer drinking—continue in the two halves of the threshing yard until the return of the goats brings this part of the festivities to a close. The Young Men and Few Young Women sing another eulogy of the village, “Trashi Lungbe Bugtu” (Tib. *bKra shis lung pa'i sbug tu*), “Inside the Blessed Village,” with which the *shabdrung* is concluded every evening.

The Young Men again form “wings” with their shawls, and with their drums, they and the Few Young Women walk clockwise around the temple and stop on the opposite side, near the windows of the Menkhang, the prayer-wheel house, through which the muskets are fired. All the villagers gather around them, and the entire group says in unison:

*bangba no are*  
*thogwa no are*  
*rang gya ri shag so*  
*rang gya ri pheb so*

There is no quarrel  
 There is no dispute  
 Let [the women] return to their homes  
 Let [the men] return to their homes<sup>6</sup>

As the gathering breaks up, the Few Young Women and Young Men enter the temple, as on the previous night, to sing the sixteen songs of the Bötsho.

### *Day Three: The Twelfth Day*

This is a rest day for the Few Young Women and the Young Men. The procedures of the eleventh day are repeated by the married heads of the estates—that is, the circumambulation of the village in the afternoon and processing to the Lhanganyü threshing ground.

### Day Four: The Thirteenth Day

The name of this day is “Memang,” a term I have mentioned earlier as the designation of a type of village assembly. It is very probably a local pronunciation of the Tibetan *mi dmangs*, meaning something like “the general populace,” and referring to the extension of the range of participants in the festivities to include the entire village.

The events of the morning are exactly the same as those of the previous day. In the evening, the village gathers at Lhanganyü, while the Few Young Women and Young Women perform *shawa*, to the accompaniment of drums, in the southern half of the threshing yard. They then process into the temple and continue their dancing, and after a while conclude the *shawa* with a triple exclamation of “Sho!” They are replaced by the estate-head couples, who also dance *shawa*.

On this day, many people will have come from the surrounding villages to watch the dancing, and they mingle with the Tepas at the edge of the threshing yard and on the surrounding rooftops. Once inside the temple, however, the majority of the Tepas sit within the circle of dancers, while non-Tepa spectators look on from a separate location, near the entrance. The only Tepas who are not within the circle are the Lama Guru patrons, who are engaged in the preparation of food and the distribution of beer to everyone.

The interior of the temple is relatively large for a village temple, and its roof is supported by twelve pillars (Tk. *dagpa*). Near the altar end is a pillar called *ganpadag*, the “headmen’s pillar,” since the headmen and constables sit there on this occasion. Two other pillars located nearer the centre of the temple acquire special significance during the ceremony, although they have no particular name. As the Few Young Women and Young Men are entering the temple, a gathering is held in the Lhanganyü. This consists of one man or boy from each estate, not necessarily the head. Each person rolls a pair of dice, and the two with the best score subsequently occupy a privileged position next to these pillars when the villagers take their seats in the temple. The special privilege accorded these two winners is that, like the headmen, they may taste the beer of each of the several huge jars that have been prepared for the ceremony, and select the finest. Unlike the other villagers, who drink a mixture of the various qualities, the two men may drink the beer of their chosen jar alone, and drink it to repletion—that is, inebriation. The beer that they receive as their prize for winning at dice is known as *dagpe pag*—the “beer of the pillar.”

During the dancing that follows, the young children and the herders, who do not usually get a chance to dance during the Lama Guru, are allowed to take part in *shabrubung* dances with the estate heads. This opportunity is particularly

beneficial for the children, who are thereby able to learn the steps. When everyone has gone home, the Young Men and Few Young Women must again remain behind in the temple to sing the Bötsho.

### *Day Five: The Fourteenth Day*

The day begins, as usual, with the Few Young Women and Young Men singing and dancing at Pholha after leaving the temple. After the goats have been taken to pasture and the concluding song, "The Peaceful Village," has been sung, the village begins a day of feasting.

The men and women celebrate this separately. The women have small feasting groups known as *dapa*,<sup>7</sup> consisting of about five members, who pool the necessary resources from their respective houses and gather in the house of one of their number. The men, on the other hand, have no such organised gatherings, but may invite one or two friends to eat and drink. The entire day is spent in consuming "festive" food, such as *momos* (meat ravioli) made with fresh meat, fried bread, beer, and distilled alcohol.

The night of the fourteenth is again spent by the Young Men and Few Young Women in singing the songs of the Botshö. The rendition of "The Peaceful Village" early the next morning represents the end of the "formal" proceedings of the Lama Guru. The remainder of the fifteenth day is again spent in feasting.

### Day Seven, the Sixteenth Day: The Archery Contest

On the morning of the sixteenth, all the men of the village assemble at Yangpanyü. The headmen appoint two individuals who are over twenty-five years of age (and therefore not classifiable as Young Men) as Masters of the Archery (*dapön*, Tib. *mda' dpon*).<sup>8</sup>

The meeting disperses, and the Young Men—which in this case refers to *all* the men aged between eighteen and twenty-five—reassemble in the gorge between Yul and Dzong. Two targets, wooden planks about five feet in height, are erected about 30 yards apart on opposite sides of the gorge. Near the top of each plank is a simple bull's-eye, consisting of a circle some 3 inches in diameter.

The Young Men, who must all wear robes and shawls, begin the proceedings by singing "O-la-o," and the women's feasting-groups between them provide two flasks of beer that are offered to all the participants before the archery begins. After taking up position near one of the targets, each of the archers in turn shoots an arrow at the opposite target, and when everyone has

had a turn, the group crosses the gorge to repeat the process from that side. If someone hits the target, he is lifted into the air with accompanying exclamations of “*She! She!*” by his companions, who then wind his shawl around his head like a turban and insert sprigs of juniper in it or in other parts of his clothing. Each time he shoots an arrow successfully, he is lifted up by the waist and acclaimed with calls of “*She! She!*” and more greenery is added to his clothing.<sup>9</sup>

The archery commences in the midafternoon and continues until the goats are brought down from pasture. The duty of the Masters of the Archery is to ensure that all the Young Men—and only they—participate, on pain of being fined. It is performed at the same time every day up to, and including, the twenty-first.

### The Partridge Hunt

During the ten days between the eleventh and the twenty-first, on a day decided arbitrarily by the headmen, the entire village spends a morning in catching partridges (Tk. *tangdzok*; SMT *hrakpa*, Tib. *srag pa*). Early in the morning, the constables summon all the boys and men aged between thirteen and fifty-five, and they spread out on the slopes around the village. Three of the constables occupy strategic positions within the circle of beaters: at Kutsogang, Bogsang-gang, and Samogang, locations that enable them to have a clear view of the people and the partridges, hence to direct the chase. By means of shouting and throwing stones, the men send up the birds, which do not normally fly high and will not cross the line of beaters unless there is a wide enough gap in the ring to give them the necessary courage. Instead, the birds fly about within the circle, and the aim of the villagers is to keep them in the air without respite until they drop dead from sheer exhaustion, frequently with a trickle of blood issuing from the beak, or remain immobile long enough to be caught and killed. If a villager is lax in shouting or throwing stones and permits a partridge to escape beyond the circle, he is summarily fined by the constables.

Five partridges are considered to make up a reasonable bag, and these are later prepared for and eaten by the three headmen alone.

### The Zatönse Ceremony

The Zatönse begins after dark on the twenty-ninth day. The villagers will have spent most of the daylight hours reconsecrating various sacred sites by repainting them with red and white clay. While the ordinary villagers are

preoccupied with minor stupas and mani walls, the headmen and constables alone may decorate the three most sacred locations: Pholha, the Lhanga, and Kagyu Mendang. The village prayer-flags are changed on this occasion only once every three years.

After dark, a *yupa* (estate-holders') village meeting is convened at Pholha. The men form a circle and sing "Tanglho" and then proceed down to Khamgyanyü, in Yul, singing "At the Peak of the Snow-Mountains."

They form a line in the eastern half of Khamgyanyü, with their backs to the temple, and sing songs of the *shawa* genre. After a while, the group leaves the threshing yard to collect bunches of young wheat shoots (Tk. *jangbō*, SMT *jangba*, Tib. *ljang pa*) from the nearby fields, and wind these around their heads. They then return to the same section of the threshing yard, where, instead of standing in a line, they form a circle before resuming their singing and dancing.

The headmen appoint two people to fire muskets into the air continually—about a hundred times each—during this section of the ceremony. The other men of the village take up an assortment of arms: the *yupa* dancers carry staves, while most of the remainder collect swords and rhinoceros-hide shields that are normally attached to pillars in their homes. The swordsmen stand inside the *yupa*'s circle, but instead of singing, they emit shrill whistles and strike their swords against their shields.

There then follows an interlude known as Mönke Gyubpa (< Tib. *mon skad bsgyur pa*), "Translating Nepali," in which the sword-bearers at the centre utter menacing expressions in Nepali.

Following this part of the ceremony, one of the constables sets a large conical basket (Tk. *mindza*, SMT *bagtang*) near the sacred rock in Sumdü Deyang. The sacristans (*maniwa*) will have prepared a male and female exorcistic effigy (*pholü* and *molü*),<sup>10</sup> and these are placed together in the basket. The villagers take lumps of dough of bitter buckwheat and rub these gently over their own bodies, as well as the bodies of infants and even domestic animals, to extract any lurking noxious qualities, and then throw these into the basket.

On top of the sacred rock of Sumdü Deyang are piled a series of flat rocks over which red clay is poured. The basket is placed beside the rock. Also near the rock, the villagers set a slab of stone roughly the size and proportions of a low Tibetan table. Such stone slabs are the usual substitute for low wooden tables in outdoor gatherings held by the Tepas. On this stone is set a plate of consecrated barley (Tib. *gzhi nas*) containing a number of sacred objects: a *vajra* (Tib. *rdo rje*), a ceremonial bell (Tib. *dril bu*), and a volume of sutras (Tib. *mDo mang*). Behind this slab, on a cushion, sits one of the constables to guard the objects and prevent them from being knocked over.

The group of dancers, carrying either swords and shields or staves, surround the basket containing the effigies, while the village looks on. Now it is the staff-bearers who whistle loudly, while the others beat their swords against their shields and, when a rhythm has been established, exclaim "Za-tön-se" in unison, a total of nine times.

With the completion of this utterance, the procedure for the disposal of the effigies begins. The three stone markers in the Narshing valley floor that indicate the boundary between the territory of Tshug and Te have been painted with a red clay wash by the constables earlier in the day. Any two men and the youngest constable pick up the basket and carry it down the Narshing valley toward the boundary. They are followed by all the swordsmen and staff-bearers, who brandish their weapons while exclaiming "O-ho! O-ho!"

It may be said here that this procedure is standard practice in any such Tibetan exorcism, and the number of people following the effigy and the size of the weapons they carry is proportionate to the magnitude of the effigy's power. In relatively minor domestic exorcisms, such measures are considered unnecessary, and one or two knife-bearing men will suffice.

It will be remembered that when Lama Bichuwa came to the region, his first patrons were three householders from the village of Tshug, of whom the most important one was a member of the house called Khangtö. The disposal of the exorcistic effigy from the Te Zatönse was originally their responsibility—and this obligation was handed on to their successors, until the practice came to an end at some unspecified period before living memory. For carrying the effigy out of Te, the Khangtö householder and his two companions each used to be given one and a half measures (*zoba*) of rice, apparently as a private payment, by the Te constables. Nowadays, the two appointed bearers and the youngest constable each receive this payment of rice, which is presented by all four of the constables (so that the youngest one benefits by just three-eighths of a measure).

However, the original procedure is still recalled in the subsequent stages of the disposal. The sword- and staff-bearers stop a short distance short of the village boundary, while the three bearers continue on to the very limit of Tshug's territory, the site called Dö Khyawa, "[The place where] the Dö is cast." Here they set down the basket and cry out loudly toward Tshug:

*Khangtö Palden lü kyin ba ri kha-e*

Khangtö Palden [the estate-holder at the time of writing], come  
and take the ransom!

The armed escort then call out to their three fellow-villagers, who are invisible in the darkness:

*Kha ji la-e*

Have they come?

No one stirs from Tshug, but the three bearers reply to the escort:

*Kha ji-e kha ji-e*

They have come, they have come!

The escort then approaches the basket, and the staffs and wheat-sprout crowns are thrown into it. The company then returns to Sumdū Deyang, singing and beating drums. The stone table containing the ritual objects is removed, and the pile of flat stones atop the rock of Sumdū Deyang is scattered. *Shabdrung* dancing is held in the threshing yard, for anyone who wishes to participate, until late into the night.

The animal sacrifices that are performed on the occasion of the Zatönse are discussed in chapter 6.

### Buddhist Residues

The two ceremonies just described have certainly evolved into their present form over the course of time. The *Chronicle* attributes the establishment of the Lama Guru to a joint enterprise on the part of members of the Önpo clan, primarily one Lhundrub Gyatsho. Beyond this, we have no way of knowing what the performances originally looked like, although certain components are recognisable vestiges of Tibetan Buddhist rituals. The name “Lama Guru” suggests that this ceremony may have started life as a rite focussed on *Padmasambhava* (most commonly referred to in Tibetan as *Guru Rinpoche*), the patron saint of the Nyingmapa school, of which the Önpo clan were adherents. Given the central position of the Bötsho, the performance of the secret songs, I once thought “Lama Guru” might have been a corruption of some such expression as *lame gurlu* (Tib. *bla ma'i mgur glu*), the “sacred songs of the lama”; however, the subsequent discovery of the *Chronicle* gave me cause to revise this idea. A document of that relative vintage, composed by a descendant of the priest who created the ceremony, is unlikely to have coined or perpetuated the name Lama Guru (*bla ma gu ru*) as an error, and I am again inclined to the *Padmasambhava* hypothesis. Two indications that support it are the fact that it begins on the tenth day of the month, which is sacred to *Padmasambhava*, and the prominence of the song “Yiram,” which contains several references to “Urgyan Jowo,” the “Lord of Oddiyana”—an epithet of the saint.

The etymology of Zatönse is more problematic. The name bears no resemblance to that of any Buddhist ritual with which I am familiar, but for want of a more convincing explanation I would hazard the suggestion that the first two syllables might be a derivation of the Tibetan *gza' bton*, “removing negative astral influences,” or *gza' non* (Tib. *non pa*: “to suppress”). In any case, the creation of an effigy called a *dö* and its removal beyond the village boundary places the ceremony in a well-known category of Tibetan apotropaic rites known by the same name, *dö* (Tib. *mdos*).

Liturgical Buddhist ceremonies that are performed not behind the closed doors of a monastery but in a village setting inevitably take on a distinctive local colour. As long as the priestly tradition remains coherent, the “folk” component is likely to provide the interstitial decoration of the rite or its festive conclusion—numerous examples of this sort could be cited. In Te, the disappearance of priestly and monastic institutions has resulted in the performances of the laity growing into the resulting gaps and developing a form independent of its original ritual structure. This, of course, is only a hypothesis to suggest how the present form of the Lama Guru might have emerged from a more orthodox Buddhist starting point.

### The Social Structure of the Lama Guru

In any event, if the present-day celebration has no explicit meaning, it does have a visible form. Let us begin by examining the participants.

Day one, daytime: the young unmarried women.

Day one, night: the young unmarried men join the “Few Young Women”; the four sectors are represented by their drums.

Day two: the Young Women and the Young Men together; later in the day, the estate-holders perform informal dances separately from the young people.

Day three: the estate-holders process through the village and sing sacred songs.

Day four: the “general populace” assembles; the young people and the estate-holders dance, and the children and herders join them.

Nondancers watch the proceedings.

Day five: the whole village feasts.

A word should be said about nonparticipants on the successive days. Non-participation does not mean that those who are not dancing may come along and watch the fun if they wish. They *must* come and watch; those who do not

dance and sing belong to *an official category of spectators*. This is even laid down in the written laws of Te, which are discussed in chapter 9. The second sub-clause of clause 24 says: "During the Lama Guru, everyone over thirteen and under sixty-five must come to the spectacle from the tenth day. Anyone who does not attend will be fined 20 rupees."

An important aspect of the worship of gods in Tibetan tantra is the recitation of their attributes. (Analytic descriptions of this sort are of course not limited to Buddhism.) Such texts typically take the form of a litany of the details that make up the general picture: the colour of the god in question, the number of his limbs, heads, and eyes, the magical paraphernalia he carries, the nature and appearance of his mount, the composition of his entourage, and so on. The whole is worshipped through the piecemeal display of components. I think it is something like this that we see in the structure of the Lama Guru. The ceremony isolates the main social groups that make up the community, and puts them on display for a moment before adding them to the emerging whole. While the quadripartite sectoral division of the community is implied by the presence of the four drums, it is interesting to see that the distinctiveness of the clans is given little emphasis. There is only one clan-song, and that is about the Paten clan. It is said that there were songs about the other clans, too, but that they have been forgotten. (The survival of the Paten song may be thanks to the fact that Duli, who is reputed to have the largest repertoire of any singer in Mustang, is a member of the Paten clan.) This obsolescence is not surprising: clan corporateness, as we saw in chapter 4, is something that was considered inimical to the coherence of the village. Moreover, the picture has a bold outline. The priests of Tshognam are feasted during the proceedings. But they are cast in the role of guests, and guests are, by definition, outsiders.

The songs that are sung in the course of the festival are, for the most part, straightforward panegyrics of Te or hymns of praise to its territorial gods. Gestures are often more difficult to interpret than words, but they should not be ignored for all that. Some performances remain opaque—what the loosening and retying of the young women's hair on the first day might mean is anybody's guess—but the significance of others is more apparent. When the young men fix the ends of their shawls to each hand and dance with outspread arms, their explicit imitation of vultures in flight reminds us of the Tepas' use of the vulture analogy to proclaim their own dignity and splendour in the seventeenth-century *Complaint* (see chapter 3). More generally, the measured processions around Te are an evocation of the village land itself. The nodes of the peregrinations include all the main public sites—Pholha Yönten Karpo, the temple and its forecourt, and the principal meeting places. These focal

points are animated by the subsidiary rituals that are performed in them, and linked by the processional lines trodden out between them. The community of the Tepas is not an abstract concatenation of social categories; it has a definite terrestrial location, and as in the case of the community, the territory itself is extolled by the same method of serially highlighting its most significant components. Here, too, there is a bold outline: the boundary—or rather the single most important section of the boundary—is drawn on the penultimate day of the Zatönse by the reconsecration of the three stone markers.

### The Loss of Utility

Religious people of an intellectual bent frequently express their bewilderment both at the fickleness of the unenlightened in changing their faith overnight (I give examples in chapter 9) as well as their attribution of sacred authority on the grounds of sheer antiquity. Milton's tirade (quoted in the epigraph to this chapter) against what he calls "this vain foraging after straw" is surely one of the most eloquent expressions of such scholarly despair and contempt. Elsewhere he makes the same complaint more succinctly when he cites Cyprian, one of the church fathers: "Neither ought custom to hinder that truth should not prevail; for custom without truth is but agedness of error."<sup>11</sup> An educated Buddhist who witnessed the Lama Guru and the Zatönse would probably react in much the same way. Why do the Tepas so carefully preserve their aged errors?

I shall tackle this question by examining four events that occur in the course of the ceremonies described here. The examples deserve special attention for two reasons: first, because they tell us something about the dimension of time within these two festivals, and second—although their relevance in this regard will become apparent only in later chapters—because they help to illustrate the construction of what may provisionally be called a transcendent community. The four episodes in question are as follows.

- The Bötsho, the sixteen songs sung in secret during the Lama Guru
- The display of ritual objects during the Zatönse
- The Mönke Gyubpa, the speaking of Nepali during the Zatönse
- The summoning of the Khangtö household at the conclusion of the exorcism

All these episodes may, I think, be classed as belonging to a single type of performance. The essential features of the class are most easily identifiable in the second episode. Until a few decades ago, a lama from a neighbouring village used to officiate at the ceremony; he would read appropriate passages

from a text and make ritual gestures with the bell and the *vajra*. I do not know what the text was—probably not the *mDo mang* that is placed on the table now, but rather the cycle of one or other of the major tantric tutelary gods. Whatever the case, the text was there to be read, and the ritual objects to be held and moved in a certain way. All three items were functional, with the function in question being specified by the religious tradition that produced them. In Buddhist tantric convention, the bell (Tib. *dril bu*) represents wisdom, the female principle, while the *vajra* (Tib. *rdo rje*) stands for the male principle, which is method. Wielding the two in the designated way, with the accompaniment of appropriate visualisation and magical formulae, helps to achieve the efficacy of the ceremony being performed. To put it another way: within the terms of Tibetan Buddhism, the book, the bell, and the *vajra* have a primarily utilitarian value.

As they figure in the Zatönse today, the three items have no such practical value, because there is no lama to use them as they should be used, and no Buddhist rite that they might make effective. They are, in a word, objects. But although they have no more Buddhist functional value, they obviously have a certain importance for the Tepas, who put them on display and set someone to guard them. What is the basis of their value? Let us defer the answer for a moment and turn to the secret songs of the Bötsho.

It was said earlier that the sixteen songs are in no recognisable language. That is not entirely true. With a certain amount of interpretative latitude, it is possible to make sense of the text. The language is a corrupt form of classical Tibetan, something that could be demonstrated by setting down a phonetic transcription of the text as it is sung with a parallel amended reading. The subject matter of the songs, so translated, emerges as an assemblage of Buddhist aphorisms, extolling virtuous behaviour and the like, and more or less elaborate expressions of dedication to the doctrine. It is likely that the songs were composed by the Önpo lama who is said to have established the Lama Guru ceremony, or perhaps borrowed by him from some other source. In any case, when they were first sung they are likely to have been word-perfect, and their meaning was clear.

Most Tepas can understand at least simple formulations in classical Tibetan—such as the songs that are sung in public during the Lama Guru as well as popular songs. The language of the Bötsho songs, however, is more complex, and there is correspondingly little semantic comprehension on the part of the young singers to ensure preservation of phonetic form. Most folk songs in Mustang (as anywhere else, of course) can be heard in a number of musical and textual allotropes, a normal consequence of casual transmission in everyday life. There is a rule in Te that forbids people to sing the Bötsho songs except on two occasions: once during the Lama Guru itself and once in

the course of a formal rehearsal some months earlier. One of the explicit aims of this restriction is to prevent variations creeping into the songs. But the original text was undoubtedly hard to understand, and in spite of the effort to preserve the original form, minor errors must have crept into each performance and been preserved to produce the present, more or less garbled, form, as in an ancient game of Chinese Whispers.

The songs were created as a Buddhist act of worship. The text was once coherent, and it was primarily for the meaning contained in the words that they were sung. Since this meaning has now been lost, what is the point of continuing to sing them, and why should such pains be taken to preserve an obviously erroneous form?

Let us now look at the Mönke Gyubpa, the episode in the Zatönse when the participants speak Nepali. To begin with, it should be said that the insertion of entertaining theatrical interludes into liturgical ceremonies is quite a common occurrence in village settings. During the Dögyab (Tib. *mDoś rgyab*), the week-long ceremony that marks the end of the old year in the Baragaon village of Lubra, the solemn temple dances ('cham) are punctuated by brief episodes of this sort. At one point, a pair of villagers, masked and dressed as Tibetan beggars, enter the temple and importune the priests for alms; communication during this grotesque parody is carried on in the dialect of Central Tibet. At another juncture, the priests are visited by someone wearing a mask representing an Indian yogi and suitably smeared with ash. He, too, begs for food and money and asks directions to the celebrated Hindu shrine of Muktinath (Indian pilgrims on the way to the shrine frequently take the wrong trail and wind up in Lubra). The language in which the priests and the "yogi" converse is Hindi. Mendicant Tibetans and Hindus are part of the more picturesque traffic that passes through Lubra, and even Western trekkers are sometimes parodied during festivals. (Tibetan beggars are less common than they were during the years following the exodus from Tibet in 1959.)

The "Nepali-translating" interlude of Te's Zatönse is probably a similar dramatisation of an encounter with outsiders; but who might the interlocutors have been? The tone of the piece is distinctly aggressive; the speakers' heads and faces are swathed in big turbans, and they brandish their swords angrily as they speak: "*mārnu parchā; boksi haṭānu parchā*"; "We must kill them; we must drive out the witches"; and so forth. The type of exorcism that follows the Nepali-translation—the casting out of an effigy beyond the village boundary—would normally, within a Buddhist ritual, be preceded by the reading of some appropriate text such as a *dogpa* (Tib. *zlog pa*), a "repulsion" of the evil that is the focus of attention. It may be that the drama emerged as a substitute for an abandoned liturgy. But why should the participants speak in Nepali?

The mention of witches clearly accords with other indications that the rite has to do with the driving out of supernatural menaces. But the passage is also, I think, a brief historical martial play. The participants in the Zatönse are the assembly of warriors, the Magkhyu, all the men between the ages of thirteen and sixty. The outside circle is comprised by the *yupa*, the assembly of estate-holders; the inner circle, who make the threatening exclamations, are the *bön*, the eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds, who make up the *flos ac robur* of Te's military capacity. *Mönke* is the language, *ke* (Tib. *skad*), of Mön, and while Mön may theoretically denote any Nepali-speaking areas, the only Mönpa—people of Mön—preserved in Te's annals are the Nepali-speaking invaders who caused so much hardship and suffering between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Encounters with the armies of Jumla ended over two hundred years ago, but the number of stories and anecdotes—most of them undoubtedly apocryphal—that are still recounted in Baragaon in connection with these conflicts are witness to the lasting impact they had on the area. The drama of Te's young warriors, dressed for battle and speaking aggressively of “killing” and “driving out” in the language of Jumla, is very probably a theatrical equivalent of these narratives. The Zatönse has not preserved the historical context that is the likely source of the Nepali-speaking interlude—there is no mention of Jumla or any other type of Mönpas; the only enemies are the invisible evils that are concentrated in the exorcistic effigy. All that has been retained is the martial paraphernalia and posturing with which the Tepas went to war, and the language in which they waged it.

And finally, the casting out of the effigy: the effigy has not been collected and borne away by the Tshugwa patrons of Te's priesthood within living memory, and the brief exchange at the village boundary (“Have they come?”/“Yes, they have come”) perpetuates a fiction. Everyone knows that the Tshugwas do not come, so the purpose of the assertion that they do is obviously not to use the cover of darkness to fool the community into thinking that the old patron–priest relationship is still alive. So why sustain the myth?

Let us return to the first example, and phrase the same question in more general terms. When functional artefacts have lost their utility, they sometimes acquire a new, far greater, value as objects to be exhibited. Why? This question has been asked by the historian Krzysztof Pomian in his study of collections and collectors. The phenomenon of collecting in industrialised societies may be interpreted in terms of the usual gamut of more or less banal impulses: psychological reasons relating to acquisitive instincts; the gratification of an aesthetic sense or awareness of historical value; economic astuteness; socially motivated considerations of prestige; and so on. These are all insufficient as explanations, says Pomian, because they merely defer the problem: what is it

that creates historical, aesthetic, social, or economic value in the first place? (As for the latter, while artefacts in collections lose their utilitarian worth, their exchange-value is both retained and greatly increased.) He suggests that an answer to the problem may be found by examining the nature of collections “in societies other than our own,” in places other than museums and the hoards of private connoisseurs. The examples cited include funerary objects interred with the dead; accumulations of offerings in shrines and temples; the spoils of war, which are often (as in ancient Rome) exhibited to the populace by the returning victor; sacred relics; and the treasure-houses of kings and princes. These “princely treasures” were usually

shut up in chests or cupboards that were in turn placed in well-guarded chambers. They were taken out especially on the occasion of ceremonies and festivals. Following the king’s death, these *regalia* were paraded in funeral processions. . . . It may be concluded . . . that the treasures were placed on view, and that this was their main purpose (Pomian 1987: 29–30, emphasis added; my translation).

The true value of such objects is most obvious in the case of offerings:

While remaining intermediaries between the here-and-now and the beyond, between the profane and the sacred, offerings may therefore be present within the profane world itself as objects that represent what is far away, hidden or absent.

And this, he concludes, is the essential feature of all collections: “They are intermediaries between the observer and the invisible realm from which they come” (32).

That which is invisible may be so for a variety of reasons, but most obviously in two ways: by being very far distant, and from having happened long ago. Pomian gives other conditions of being invisible, in particular

that which lies beyond all physical space and dimensions, or else is located within a space with a very particular structure. It is also situated in a *sui generis* temporality, or beyond the passage of time: in eternity. This may sometimes entail a different physical or material nature from that of the elements of the visible world. (35)

And so on. Perhaps so, but this takes us onto shakier ground. And in any case, in the examples that concern us here, the invisibility of the otherworldly is expressed through imagery of distorted space and time.

The invisible with which the *vajra*, bell, and book mediate is the past. This past is not a very distant one, and it has nothing in it of a mythic epoch and

heroic beings who might have lived *in illo tempore*; but the items do establish a link between the present and, via the Drurampa of Taye, to the period when the Önpo lineage of Bichuwa Lama used to officiate at the ceremony. The bell and the vajra displayed at the Zatönse are said to have belonged to the Önpo (the Drurampa probably had his own ritual paraphernalia); even if the book, too, were his, I doubt that it is the one used in the ceremony. But for the purposes of this display, the content does not matter; after all, museums, too, are packed with replicas.

Pomian extends his arguments beyond objects to include institutions and certain forms of social behaviour, which are also capable of losing their utility and becoming “semiphores” (“objects that convey meaning”). While it is not necessary to extend the ambit of the idea as far as he does, I think there are reasonable grounds for interpreting the other three examples from Te in a similar light.

For the priest who created the Lama Guru, the main justification for incorporating into the ceremony the songs of the Bötsho would have been their semantic significance, the Buddhist sentiments they conveyed. This, we may say, was the function for which they were designed. The purpose for which they are performed now is clearly not the expression of religious homilies. What counts now is the performance itself, a form that has lost its original purpose but continues to be brought out and exhibited on appropriate occasions. The songs are very beautiful, but it is not for the sake of entertainment that they are sung: there is, after all, no audience. Above all, the secret recital creates a bridge with the time in which they were first sung and makes the past present. The fact that the exhibition is not open to the public does not invalidate the argument. After all, collections of funerary objects are not seen by the living; the objects are intermediaries, and their presentation to the gaze of the dead is “the admission of virtual spectators situated in another temporal or spatial domain.” And in the case of the Bötsho, there is no real secret; it may be that the songs are sung by only a small group of young people, but everyone in the village knows that, when the temple doors close on the gathering, something important is about to happen. Besides, the other adults in the village have all been there before.

The summoning of the Khangtö estate-holders from Tshug also once served a practical purpose—to get the people in question to come and collect the exorcistic effigy. The make-believe that is staged at the village boundary now is the recollection of a vanished time when Te’s priests were flourishing and the most prestigious family of Tshug honoured them with its patronage.

The interlude of the Nepali-speaking is also—if my guess is correct—a brief, formalised sample of a type of behaviour that had a real function in



FIGURE 8.2. The Dance of the Few Young Women. (Photo by Nyima Drandul)

securing Te's survival at a time when the very existence of the community was threatened. The past is made not only of good times but traumatic experiences, too. The enemy in the case of the Zatönse is not the Mönpa army of two centuries ago, but the hosts of noxious influences that live in Te. Access to the territorial gods—who are also present and invisible—is, as we have seen, achieved by protracting distance within a relatively small space. Time can be used in the same way: that which is present but invisible can be got at by being treated as if it were located either far away or long ago.

### Conclusion

Whatever the Buddhist origins of the Lama Guru and the Zatönse may have been, the doctrinal framework has been replaced by an exhibition of the structure of the community itself. The main identifiable constituents of the community so represented are the component social groups; the territory it inhabits; the place-gods who protect it and assure its stability; the past from which it came.

Ceremonial displays of the kind described here have the twofold effect of reifying and glorifying the institution that is being celebrated, and this is as



FIGURE 8.3. "We must kill them; we must drive out the witches!" Dancing with swords and knives during the Zatönse. (Photo by Nyima Drandul)

true of the village festivals described here as of, say, a modern military parade. But isolated formations are not an indication of how the institution works, any more than the orderly defile of tanks, infantry, cavalry, and aircraft bear a resemblance to war.

The examples described here present the community as something whole and integrated. Individual people are important only insofar as they are anonymous members of subsidiary collectivities or interchangeable participants in set pieces. The Lama Guru and the Zatönse are Te painted in a few bold and colourful strokes, and obviously do not tell the whole story. The fact of the community as something distinct from the aggregation of its members is not in doubt. What needs to be examined is the relationship between the community and the individuals who produce and maintain it, and it is this I shall explore in the next chapter.

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# 9

## Community Law

*The Creation of a Collectivity*

Despotism may govern without faith, but liberty cannot. Religion is much more necessary in the republic which they set forth in glowing colors than in the monarchy which they attack; it is more needed in democratic republics than in any others. How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed? And what can be done with a people who are their own masters if they are not submissive to the Deity?

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

“How do you know they are spies?”

“The Party knows. The Party knows more about people than they know themselves. Haven’t you been told that?”

—John Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold*

### Democracy and Civil Society

In the previous two chapters, I have attempted to show that the community of Te is something other than just the agglomeration of its component households or individuals. It is both perceived and represented as a superordinate entity, associated with ideals that are

at odds with the equally prized values of domestic prosperity. The quest for private enrichment is not regarded as selfish or antisocial; quite the contrary: it is one of the hallmarks of a responsible, well-adjusted householder. And yet, as the story of the abandonment of Kog reveals, these private ends are inimical to the cohesion of the community, which must be preserved even at the cost of destitution. How are these two conflicting ideals reconciled? To put the question another way, what is the relationship between the Tepas and their community?

As I shall discuss in chapter 10, the various forms of royal government in Mustang were superimposed on a substratum of local democratic structures, which enabled villages to organise themselves—sometimes even against their nominal rulers—without the benefit of centralised coordination. There was, then, a discontinuity in the form of local and regional (and later, national) government. Since the end of the Rana regime in 1951, every government Nepal has had has claimed to be democratic. Even King Tribhuwan, the first ruler during the “Shah Restoration,” “was obliged to recognize a growing popular movement and expressed his intention to act as constitutional monarch and to create an advisory board to draw up a new constitution for Nepal along democratic lines” (Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon 1980: 40).

The constitution that was drafted in 1959 under King Mahendra, Tribhuvan’s son and successor, “provided for a monarchy with residual and emergency powers, but allowed for a parliamentary system of government with party representation” (Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon 1980: 41). Elections held in the same year resulted in victory for the Nepali Congress Party and the country’s first popularly elected government. The reforms planned by the new government caused anxiety among the traditional elite, who feared the further erosion of their privileges, and in 1960 the king dissolved the government, revoked the constitution, and imprisoned the prime minister on grounds of corruption and misrule. While Mahendra condemned democracy as an alien concept inappropriate to Nepalese culture, he justified the system with which he replaced it as “a more suitable form of democracy” (43). This “guided democracy,” as it was euphemistically called, was the Partyless Panchayat System. It was legislated in 1962, and structured as follows.

Village panchayats, or assemblies, which were supposedly, although questionably, based upon similar previous Nepali institutions, were to be elected by members of the local community. This village assembly then elected representatives to one of seventy-five district assemblies, which then elected representatives to one of fourteen zonal panchayats. The zonal panchayats then elected members to the highest official policy-making body, the *Rashtriya Panchayat*

(National Assembly). Twenty per cent of the assembly's members were nominated by the king, and four members were elected by the Graduates' Constituency—that is, by the small number of Nepalis who held a bachelors or Sanskrit degree. Thus, with the exception of the village councils, this four-tier structure was indirectly elected. . . . The executive, legislative and judicial branches of the state were simply avenues for the execution of sovereign powers which emanated solely from the king.<sup>1</sup>

The revolution of 1990 and the reintroduction of multiparty democracy were greeted with general euphoria by both the majority of Nepalese citizens and foreign observers. This is obviously not the place to assess the benefits the changes have brought to the country, but the conclusions drawn by T. Louise Brown are probably a representative analysis:

Democratic Nepal differs only superficially from panchayat Nepal. Despite the hyperbole surrounding the 1990 Revolution there has been no clear break with the past. Instead, democracy has disguised the continued influence of Nepal's traditional elites and has re-legitimised their power because the inequalitarian social and economic system is now sanctioned through the ballot box. (211)

The implementation of the Panchayat System in 1962 resulted in the disappearance of local political structures in many parts of the country. Traditional rural elites (such as clan chiefs and hereditary headmen) were either sidelined into ceremonial functions or retained their power by securing offices within the new regime. In some areas—such as south Mustang—these more archaic local forms survived and even retained more relevance with regard to everyday affairs than either the panchayats or (since 1990) the village development committees (VDCs). Every village in Mustang therefore has two parallel political structures: on the one hand a group of five people representing the VDC and on the other a body of local officials who have no structural relationship to the corresponding officials of any other village. The relative importance of each varies from place to place. In Te, the VDC structure is little more than nominal, a situation I shall examine further in chapter 11.

While it is possible to speak of "local democracy" in describing village-level politics in the royal and Rana periods, in the context of the era after 1962 the term obviously carries a certain ambiguity. The local political organisation I am concerned with here is discontinuous with the edifice of national democracy, of which the panchayat and VDC are its atrophied extremities. In the following discussion of Te's internal organisation, I shall abandon the term "local

democracy" in favour of "civil society." Adam Seligman, to whose work this discussion owes a great deal, argues that "democracy" and "civil society" are really different names for the same thing, and that the popularity of the latter in eastern European countries since the disintegration of the Soviet State is due in large part to the totalitarian taint that the notion of democracy has acquired in these countries (1992: 204). While it would be possible to invoke similar grounds here, two more concrete reasons may be cited: first, the community of Te has no national political aspirations, and is a sphere whose members are concerned to exclude the influence of the state—a feature of civil society in its classical "Anglo-Saxon" manifestation. Second, the premises of civil society in Te differ in certain important respects from those of the various forms national democracy has taken in Nepal. Above all, while absolute monarchy and corrupt elitism in Nepal have claimed legitimacy in terms of a fictional democracy, Te's civil society is a true democracy that legitimises itself in the idiom of make-believe kingship.

The position of the state in theories of civil society is worth reviewing briefly. In its modern—that is to say, post-Reformation—form, the idea of civil society has bifurcated into two schools of thought that differ primarily with respect to the perceived role of the state. One strand culminated in Marx's vision of "a twofold life, a heavenly and an earthly life," in which the earthly life was represented by civil society, where man "acts as a private individual, regards other men as a mean, degrades himself into a means and becomes a plaything of alien powers." The "heavenly life" corresponded to "the political community, in which [man] considers himself a communal being." The political sphere of the future state is a realm of freedom into which the egoistic condition that is characteristic of civil society would be raised and dissolved (Seligman 1992: 53–58, citing Marx, *The Jewish Question*).

This Marxist vision has little bearing on this discussion, for two reasons. First, it is prescriptive rather than descriptive and therefore has little analytic value, and second, the state is in any case only incidentally relevant in Te's internal affairs. If we were to allocate to the community of Te the role of state, that would of course be a different matter, but this would undoubtedly be a distortion of Marx's more messianic perspective.

The other strand goes back more directly to the thinkers of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, from which perspective the Marxist interpretation is generally regarded as an unfortunate digression (see e.g. Harding 1992). The basis for the humanistic approach adopted by its principal figures—notably Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and their predecessors; Francis Hutcheson; and the earl of Shaftesbury—had been laid in the seventeenth century by post-Reformation figures, of whom Hobbes and Locke were only the most

prominent. None of them can be considered secular in a strict sense, but the nominalism of their position is evident. This is particularly true of Hobbes, in whose writings “the word God is really but a symbol of the philosopher’s fatigue. In his quest for truth the investigator at last reaches the limits of human capacity; then in sheer weariness, he gives over and says ‘God’” (Willey 1934: 114–15).

It was the Scottish Enlightenment, however, that was largely responsible for transposing the moral order, the basis of civil society, from a transcendental sphere into the domain of human interaction. For this school, society was a “self-regulating realm, the ultimate repository of individual rights and liberties, and a body that must be protected against incursions by the State” (Seligman 1992: 11). The cohesive force of civil society was a “natural sympathy” among people. “Men,” according to Ferguson, “are united by instinct, and they act in society from affections of kindness and friendship” (cited at 27). The position of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers—for whom this brief quotation from Ferguson may serve as a manifesto—was radically opposed by their contemporary, David Hume. Hume argued that far from being founded on mutual sympathy, human action was determined by self-interest circumscribed by jural limits. People follow rules not because they subscribe to some notion of universal good but because it is to their advantage to do so.

The historical context of civil society extends a long way on either side of this period, and the theoretical ramifications are of course far more complex than this brief outline suggests; but I have focussed on these groups of thinkers—the Scottish Enlightenment, their seventeenth-century predecessors, and Hume—because the differences in their positions represent two issues in the concept of civil society that are central to our understanding of the relationship between the Tepas and their community.

The first is the rejection of the transcendent as a useful point of reference in the consideration of human society. Historically, the notion of a transcendent source for a moral human order has taken a number of forms. Among the church fathers, for example, divine law was postulated as the remote authority for natural law, which had enjoyed a kind of secular autonomy since its formalisation by the Stoics; and much later, the “natural sympathy” that underpinned Ferguson’s civil society was displaced by Kant’s “transcendental reason.” From here it was a relatively short step to Marx’s transcendent state—“transcendent” because it existed in a mythic, metahistorical future.

The second issue is the one exemplified by Hume’s criticism of the moral philosophy of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Is human behaviour fundamentally self-seeking or directed toward the general good? (Essentially the same debate resurfaces among later writers—notably in Durkheim’s criticism of

utilitarianism.) The opposed camps are often presented by commentators in starker terms than their own writings merit. For example, for both Ferguson and Smith, natural sympathy was not an abstraction but founded on the desire of men to be appreciated by their fellows (Seligman 1992: 32–35), while Herbert Spencer's methodological individualism was itself dependent on "sympathy" and "altruism" (Lukes 1973: 142 n. 18).

A number of more recent works have attempted to reduce further the distance between the two positions along the general lines that altruism is itself a diffuse form of self-interest.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence I have examined from Te strongly suggests that such a compromise solution must fail to address the complexity of a situation where *both* selfish (household-oriented) *and* altruistic (community-oriented) action are represented as ideals, albeit conflicting ones. Here, at least, the opposition has to be tackled at an institutional level, and it is precisely through the deft manipulation of the quality of transcendence that the incompatible ideals are reconciled.

### That Which Goes without Saying

In a well-known essay, Maurice Bloch (1992) proposes an approach to writing—or rather rewriting—ethnography from the point of view of the subjects themselves. The starting point of such a work would be those aspects of social activity that are so ordinary and obvious to any member of the society that they would seem to him or her to be scarcely worth mentioning. These are the things that are the most unlikely to be written down because there is no need to record them. They simply go without saying.

Although it is an interesting challenge, such an approach would be impossible in a work such as this, which has so much to say about vanished places, people, and institutions that have little obvious currency in everyday life. This said, it may not always be necessary for an alien ethnographer to intervene in setting out at least certain aspects of the society in terms of a sort of mandala centred on familiarity and moving out in rings of increasing uncertainty. This chapter will examine how the Tepas themselves represent this hierarchy in the domains of obligations and prohibitions—which of course make up much the greatest part of any society.

This approach makes it possible to see just what does go without saying in Te and, more specifically, what needs to be said, and how. But it also enables me to explore two other phenomena. The first of these is a direct development of the subject of chapter 8: the composition of Tepa society. I shall discuss how

the people of Te structure and restructure their community against the threat of entropy posed by the emergence of the individual estate (as opposed to the clan) as the focus of affective and economic interest. Second, I shall be in a position to make some general observations about the value of literature in an essentially nonliterate society.

Most social life is made up of activities and forms of behaviour that no one would think of writing down because everyone knows what they are. To know whether or not a certain act is forbidden does not require consultation with an expert on the matter. The seriousness of violating a prohibition obviously varies according to the nature of the transgression, but the sense of wrongness is still of the same kind; that is to say, visceral rather than intellectual. To address a senior fellow-villager by name without the conventional prefix of the appropriate kinship term is not a serious fault, but anyone present would cringe at the boorishness of it. I have never even heard a child infringe this convention: it is acquired with language, and everyone knows the rules. Similarly, but more seriously, no one is in any doubt that it is wrong to sleep with a member of the same clan: the prohibition on incest is enforced not as a legal clause but through behavioural conventions that prevent two people between whom sexual relations are forbidden from making even mildly lewd jokes.

Within this entire sphere of prohibitions that go without saying there are some activities that are less self-evidently wrong than others, and in which transgressors can reasonably plead ignorance in mitigation of their offence. One such rule is the traditional prohibition against taking internal disputes to government courts unless attempts at resolution within the community fail. In some places—such as Thini, in Panchgaon—the restriction is actually spelled out in a document. In Te, it was something that everyone knew. Not quite everyone, as it happens. A document from the community archives records the violation of this rule by a villager in 1911.

While Kemi Serki was irrigating his fields, the water ran into the community house, and [an unspecified number of] his female goats were seized as a punishment. In violation of his fine and customary village law he [went to Kag, where he] received a [favourable] judgment from the government office. However, when the issue was later debated as a matter of internal rules, *because he did not know that he had violated village law* in going [to Kag], the fine of 100 *tam* (50 rupees) [that had been imposed on him by Te] was reduced to 50 *tam*, and he offered this to the village with his excuses, and the village accepted his apologies. (HMA/Tib/Te/23)

The mediator in the dispute was Kushog Zangpo Dorje. It is interesting that although he was the lord of Baragaon and closely connected to the courthouse in Kag where Kemi Serki had taken his case, he upheld the principle that villages had the right to solve their internal problems themselves.

A villager who is attempting to avoid becoming the object of painful retaliation in the course of a dispute is likely to take refuge in someone else's house until tempers have cooled and mediators can be appointed. The more powerful the host, the less likely it is that the persecutors will invade the refuge: one would be much better off throwing oneself on the mercy of a headman than, say, a widow. The safest place in Te as a refuge from spontaneous reprisals is the temple, which in this regard has a status akin to that of a church in many Christian countries. That the sanctity of the temple as a safe haven may not be violated is not written down anywhere because this is something everyone knows—or ought to know. The archives of the village contain a set of testimonies from which it is possible to reconstruct the main events in a tangled dispute dating from the winter of 1897. To cut a long and quite poignant story short, a married man called Gara Chökyab once fell in love with a young woman named Ngachog Butri. Although she initially resisted his advances, his endearments and assurances of a handsome settlement in the event of a separation won her over, and she "became passionately aroused and let her body go." When she later discovered that she was pregnant, the couple decided to elope, and locked themselves into the temple in the hope of negotiating a settlement from behind the safety of its walls.

But the sanctity of the refuge was violated by four women: Gara Chökyab's wife, his elder sister, his mother-in-law, and his mother. His mother, Sangye Butri, was especially vehement in attacking the door, and at the inquest that followed she pleaded for leniency in the following terms.

The matter for which I, Sangye Butri, who have placed my thumbprint below, submit this written confession [is as follows]. Because my son behaved stupidly I became as mad as someone who has lost her cattle; and *not knowing how to act in accordance with royal law and village custom*, I opened the door of the Great Compassionate One [the village temple] and struck the door of the place [that is protected by] law with adze, pickaxe, and khukuri, and in this I was indeed at fault. I beg you, in the seat of judgment on high, without asking you not to punish me, to dispense whatever judgment you will, and to this I, Sangye Butri, set my thumbprint of my own free will. (HMA/Te/Tib/28)<sup>3</sup>

The claim that the attack on the temple door was a violation of national ("royal") law (*an* < Nep. *ain*) is something of an exaggeration, except insofar as

the National Code did allow a certain autonomy to local customary law (Höfer 1979: 40). But according to the latter, the status of the village temple is sacrosanct, and the only thing that might explain the defendant's attack on the door with an impressive range of implements is ignorance of the law provoked by the loss of her wits.

These, then, are two examples of certain types of proscribed behaviour that everyone should know about without being reminded. A fact worth emphasising at this point is that there is no clear distinction among the spheres of etiquette, custom, and law. With reference to national Nepalese law, the documents most often use some Tibetanised rendering of the Nepali word *ain*. As far as village law goes, however, there is an indiscriminate use of words such as "law" (Tib. *khrims*), "internal rules" (Tib. *nang grigs*), and "custom" or "usage" (Tib. *srol*). I mentioned failing to use an honorific prefix in addressing an elder as a mildly offensive breach of etiquette. We may not think of the habit of politeness as legally binding, but rudeness can cross a line into the category of libel, and there are indeed certain personal slurs in Te that are (as I shall discuss) punishable by both divine retribution and pecuniary fines. Whether something is written or not is not the issue: in the two cases cited here, people were fined for breaching unwritten conventions. There is indeed a difference between the written and the unwritten, a difference I will examine at the end of this chapter, but punishability has nothing to do with it.

### The Oath of Secrecy

Apart from the category of that which is generally known, there are certain proscriptions and injunctions of which the community is annually reminded in circumstances of great solemnity. There are various sets of oaths (we are now back to the ethnographic present that ended in 1992) that different categories of people in the community are obliged to swear every year. In chapter 6, I gave a description of the oaths sworn annually by the outgoing headmen and constables. In ancient Tibet, the solemnisation of agreements is reported to have been effected by the participants anointing their bodies or their lips with the blood of slaughtered animals (Stein 1972: 200). One of Te's oaths also involves the killing of an animal. The occasion is known as the Magkhyugen, a name that derives from the term *magkhyu* (Tib. *dmag khyu*), literally "war company," that is used in many parts of Mustang to denote the category of men aged between thirteen and about sixty. On the occasion of the Magkhyugen, a goat is killed in the gorge called Dangdaghyung. The killing is not regarded as a sacrifice: the goat is a castrated buck—something that would not be

countenanced as a divine offering—and the method of killing is not the ritual technique of pulling out the beating heart but the everyday procedure of inserting a needle between the ribs and causing a fatal haemorrhage. The skin is spread out on the ground; the head is placed on it, with the tongue protruding between the teeth; and a Buddhist text—the *rDo rje gcod pa*—is set on top of the head. The liver is cut up into small pieces that are then distributed to the company. Each man wipes his piece of liver on the text and then on the goat's tongue before eating it. The company then swears the following oath.

*Chitam nangri bawa thamce trashi na  
Nangtam phiri kyawa dzara yuka sombai chepa je ro*

All those who bring into the inside intelligence from the outside  
are blessed;

May all those who take information from the inside to the outside  
be punished by the territorial gods.

### The Community Oath

The same undertaking features in a more general oath, the Sanyor Chewa, that is sworn annually by all Tepas, men and women alike, between the ages of thirteen and sixty. On the occasion, everyone assembles at the edge of the village in the dry riverbed of the Narshing Khola. The constables stand above the gathering on the vantage point of the fields, from where they can supervise the proceedings and ensure that everyone performs the gestures that will commit him or her to the terms of the oath. Each person must bring at least three stones—white, black, and red—to the meeting. The headmen then summon the triad of Te's territorial gods—Shartsenpa, the Pholha, and the Molha—to be present as witnesses:

*Gola sompa nabora phebyo*

You three Gola, come to the oath!

They then lead the gathering in reciting the following sixteen verses.

1. *Nyertsangi ale gyacu gyaggicpa akhuwa thamce trashi na  
Khuwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
2. *Nyertsangi ale sumcu sodrugpa akhuwa thamce trashi na  
Sumcu sodrugpa khuwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*

3. *Nawo la lug akhuwa thamce trashi na*  
*Khuwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
4. *Tangtsakhu'i jabcog akhuwa thamce trashi na*  
*Jabcog khuwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
5. *Cingi jabcog akhuwa thamce trashi na*  
*Cingi khuwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
6. *Lungba'i yangkog setse atsawa thamce trashi na*  
*Lungba'i yangkog tsawa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
7. *Tsakam thogkam alawa thamce trashi na*  
*Tsakam thogkam lawa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
8. *Chulam ri mrag akhyawa thamce trashi na*  
*Chulam ri khyawawa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
9. *Shabpara sham biwa thamce trashi na*  
*Ashabpara sham biwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
10. *Yul nangri tshong nyitshong alawa thamce trashi na*  
*Tshong nyitshong lawa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
11. *Kumu nangchamri apirpa thamce trashi na*  
*Kumu nangchamri pirpa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
12. *Kumu khuwara khum biwa thamce trashi na*  
*Akhuwara khum biwa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
13. *Tsangpo detse thabzang angön pa thamce trashi na*  
*Thabsang ngönpa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
14. *Phayi phagri kyawa lagtog atsawa thamce trashi na*  
*Atsawa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
15. *Tsangpo de tse mencu khata ashorpa thamce trashi na*  
*Tsangpo detse mencu khata shorpa thamce yuka sombai chepa je ro*
16. *Chitam nangri bawa thamce trashi na*  
*Nangtam phiri kyawa dzara yuka sombai chepa je ro*

1. All those who do not steal the 81 rupees from the stewards' hall are blessed;  
 May all those who do steal it be punished by the three territorial gods.

2. All those who do not steal the 36 rupees from the stewards' hall are blessed;  
May all those who do steal the 36 rupees be punished by the territorial gods.
3. All those who do not steal dung from Nawo are blessed;  
May all those who steal dung from Nawo be punished by the territorial gods.
4. All those who do not steal fodder grass from Tangtsakhu are blessed;  
May all those who do steal fodder grass [from here] be punished by the territorial gods.
5. All those who do not steal fodder grass from the reservoir are blessed;  
May all those who do steal fodder grass from the reservoir be punished by the territorial gods.
6. All those who do not kill and eat the community's breeding buck are blessed;  
May all those who do eat the community's breeding buck be punished by the territorial gods.
7. All those who do not grab hay and crops are blessed;  
May all those who do grab hay and crops be punished by the territorial gods.
8. All those who do not throw weeds into the irrigation system are blessed;  
May all those who throw [weeds] into the irrigation system be punished by the territorial gods.
9. All those who say that one who is a witch is a witch are blessed;  
May all those who say that one who is not a witch is a witch be punished by the territorial gods.
10. All those who do not apply double price standards in their business dealings are blessed;  
May all those who do apply double price standards in their business dealings be punished by the territorial gods.
11. All those who do not let thieves go after making a private settlement with them are blessed;

May all those who let thieves go after making a private settlement be punished by the territorial gods.

12. All those who say that one who steals is a thief are blessed; May all those who say that one who does not steal is a thief be punished by the territorial gods.
13. All those who do not lend copper cooking pots beyond the river are blessed; May all those who lend copper cooking pots beyond the river be punished by the territorial gods.
14. All those who do not take an extra spatulaful behind their husbands' backs be blessed; May all those who take one be punished by the territorial gods.
15. All those who do not part with a ceremonial scarf beyond the river are blessed; May all those who do part with a ceremonial scarf beyond the river be punished by the territorial gods.
16. All those who bring into the inside intelligence from the outside are blessed; May all those who take information from the inside to the outside be punished by the territorial gods.

When the last clause has been uttered, each person places his or her collection of pebbles on the rocky ground and, taking a large stone, smashes them to fragments in confirmation of the oath.

A few words may be said about each of the clauses before some more general observations concerning the oath.

(1, 2) The stewards' hall: this is a community room, located on the upper floor of the temple, in which various items of communal property and the village funds are kept.

(3) Nawo is Nawodzong, the old settlement to the east of Te. Below the ruins is a large natural cave that goatherds use as a shelter.

(4) Tangtsakhu is a meadow situated a few hundred yards to the north of Shartsenpa. The "fodder grass" in question is actually a variety of vetch that in the Dzardzong dialect is called *hrenza nyönpa* (< Tib. *sran rtsa smyon pa*), literally "mad pea-grass" but perhaps better glossed as "fool's peas."

(6) The "breeding buck" goats, which are appropriated from private owners by the community, were discussed in chapter 6.

(7) The phrase *tsakam thogkam lawa* is a stock expression. Its literal meaning is something like "to wrench out" or "tear up" hay or grass (*tsa*) and crops (*thog*), and it denotes the furtive, untidy theft of private or public resources.

(8) If one is on particularly bad terms with the members of another household, an effective way of spoiling their summer is to throw a few handfuls of weeds into the canals that irrigate its fields. One can then delight in the prospect of watching one's enemies weeding the resulting jungle.

(9) Witchcraft in Te, as elsewhere in Mustang, is a property that is transmitted bilaterally (though mainly matrilineally) and, to a certain extent, between affines. It may even be transferred to unrelated people in the form of a worm that leaves the body of a sleeping witch through her (or his) nose and enters that of another person sleeping nearby. Witchcraft is essentially understood as the power to cause physical harm through pure malice, but the effectiveness of the malice may be increased through the use of fairly simple rituals and curses. To call someone a witch in Te has, at face value, much the same affective weight as in English, where it is generally a character slur redolent of malicious manipulativeness. But the implication is also that the accused has the tried capacity to harm and kill, and when interpreted in this way the insult may culminate in legal proceedings by the offended party in order to clear his or her name.

(10) A trader who brings any commodity back to the village is entitled to sell it at a profit, but he should not vary the price in order to exploit economically less astute members of the community.

(11) If I catch a thief in my house, I can turn the situation to my advantage by threatening to expose him to the community as a thief, unless he buys my silence at a handsome price.

(12) The potential for social tensions arising from unsubstantiated accusations of thieving are much the same as those provoked by false denunciation for witchcraft.

(13) "Beyond the river" in fact signifies any community other than Te, including Tshug, which is actually reached without fording any rivers. In Te (as in Tibet) "lending one's copper cooking pot" is an oblique way of referring to a woman's sexual favours. Women should not bring into the village transmissible ritual pollution contracted by sleeping with outsiders; or even worse, bear natural children by non-Tepa men.

(14) The staple food in Baragaon is a kind of thick porridge made by stirring buckwheat flour into hot water. It is stirred and served with a wooden spatula, and the normal serving consists of a large lump of mush topped with a smaller one. The clause is meant to ensure marital fidelity among women. The "extra

spatulaful" signifies an adulterous lover that a woman might be tempted to take.

(15) The verb I have translated here as "part with" is *shorpa* (< Tib. 'chor ba), which has the sense of "to lose" or "to be deprived of." The clause therefore does not prohibit the voluntary offering of scarves to, say, lamas or dignitaries in neighbouring settlements, but the obligatory presentation of a scarf that normally accompanies formal apologies. Tepas should not get themselves into situations (brawling, stealing, womanising, and suchlike) where they are compelled to abase themselves, and thereby bring humiliation to the community of Te, by having to beg forgiveness of outsiders.

While these clauses deal with various internal threats to the cohesion of the community, clauses 13, 14, and 16 are concerned with the matter of Te's integrity with respect to the outside world. Unquestionably, the most important of these, and indeed, of all sixteen clauses, as seen by the Tepas, is the last. It appears—in exactly the same form—in certain other oaths such as that of the "Military company" mentioned earlier; we have seen in chapter 2 that an oath to this effect was sworn by the confederation of the five Shöyul against the rest of the world, and that other villages in Mustang also once protected themselves with similar undertakings of vigilant secrecy.

It is worth speculating that this might originally have been the only clause in this oath. It is the only one of the sixteen in which the structure is not that of a straightforward opposition between doing and not doing something. Both lines refer to positive actions, one affirmative and one negative, and the form of the other clauses may have been manufactured in order to resemble as closely as possible this structure.

All the clauses discussed so far make good sense; they all deal with forms of behaviour that can be seen to have a bearing on the harmony, and even survival, of the community. Some clauses, on the other hand, seem entirely incongruous; why should the villagers swear a solemn oath not to collect a variety of leguminous plant near the reservoir and on Tangtsakhu meadow? The reason for the prohibition cannot be the special sanctity of the places; there are certain ceremonies focussed on the reservoir, but Tangtsakhu is a stretch of uncultivated ground like any other. And besides, there are patches of the same species of vetch growing in other locations around Te. People are not allowed to collect the plant from these places, either, yet they are not specifically named in the oath as being prohibited. Why are the reservoir and Tangtsakhu singled out for special attention?

The answer, I think, can be found in the first two clauses. A significant feature of the grammar of all the clauses is that, in each case, the verb relating

to the prescription gives no indication of time. A more literal translation of, say, clause 9 would be:

All sayers of “witch” to a witch are blessed;  
May all sayers of “witch” to a nonwitch be punished by the territorial gods.

And of clause 1:

All nonstealers of the 81 rupees from the communal hall are blessed;  
May all stealers be punished by the territorial gods.

Clauses 1 and 2 are, very obviously, references to particular incidents that took place in the past. The sums of money are too specific for the case to be otherwise, and moreover the figures are accompanied in the text by a suffix (*pa*), represented in the translation by the definite article, which emphasises their specificity.

We saw, in the case of the Namajagpa, that the oath taken by the headmen and constables is sworn at *the end* of their term of office. People in positions of responsibility do not make promises about the unimpeachability of their future conduct at the time of their assumption of authority. But they know that, at the end of their incumbency, they will be brought face to face with the gods and made to accept responsibility for their failings. This seems to be a feature of oaths, at least in Baragaon and Panchgaon. One-off oaths that accompany treaties and settlements are (obviously) sworn in order to make the terms of the agreement binding. (See, for example, the oath I mentioned in chapter 3 concerning the pasture boundary settlement between Te and its neighbours.) Periodic oaths relating to temporary office, and other forms of civic responsibility, are taken at the end of the relevant term.

The theft and slaughter of one of the breeding bucks also refers to a specific incident—Nyima Drandul recalls his father saying that he witnessed the slaughter behind the Baza temple, but he seems not to have betrayed the culprits—and so, we are also entitled to suspect, was the theft of public vetch from two locations. What is significant is that they have retained this particularity in the wording of the oath instead of being generalised in the form of principles (“May all those who misappropriate public property for private ends . . .”).

On a pragmatic level, the first two clauses, at least, are effectively redundant. The literal implication is that anyone who steals a sum of money other than 81 rupees from the village coffers will not incur divine retribution.

The Sanyor Chewa is sworn by all Tepas of working age, and all its clauses relate to incidents or forms of behaviour that have a bearing on the commu-

nity. It is one of several public occasions that explicitly reaffirm the integrity of the community against the dual threat of the outside world and the private interests of its own constituent members. The ceremonial preservation of historical details is consonant with what we have already noted in chapter 8: past events of a traumatic or otherwise salient nature are preserved, in spite of their obviously anachronistic character, as eternally present occurrences. In the *Lama Guru* and the *Zatönse* ceremonies, past episodes are treated as objects that are put on display after being reproduced through dramatisation. In the case of the *Sanyor Chewa*, events from Te's history are made eternally present by being expressed in sentences that contain no indication of time.

Oaths such as the *Sanyor Chewa* are obviously something other than an effective legal code. The first eight clauses refer to violations that would be punishable with fines; violations of clauses 9–16 would probably not be so punished (though in the case of clause 16 the particular circumstances would matter greatly). We might wonder whether the second group was an original set to which a number of specific incidents (this could have been the case with any of the first eight) were added in order to make up the magic number of sixteen, a figure that, as we have seen, is associated with territorial and community integrity. This much is speculative; but what is sure is that the *Sanyor Chewa* has the status of dogma rather than law. Half the clauses refer to legal violations, and all, insofar as they are punishable by the gods, are moral offences, too. They all belong to the sphere of that which goes without saying—but not quite; contrary to the case of, say, incest or breach of etiquette in addressing an elder, all these violations are highly likely to occur in Te. Everyone knows that the acts proscribed in the clauses are wrong, and the *Sanyor Chewa* warns the community that they ought not to occur, while at the same time reminding people that they sometimes actually do. The oath is therefore partly pragmatic—because it aims to prevent people from committing certain popular offences to the detriment of the community—and partly redundant, because people know that the acts prohibited are wrong.

One important result of the offences being classed as moral issues is that the oath cannot be easily modified. These crimes against the community are, by definition, abhorrent to the gods, and are therefore out of range of negotiation by people. While the rightness of custom and the subject matter of the oaths are beyond question, there are a number of behavioural prescriptions that are not obvious, and are subject to dispute. This brings us to the third category of regulation in Te: that which is not part of the stock of common knowledge and does *not* go without saying, and therefore has to be set down in writing.

## An Old Constitution

The village archives contain a number of documents in which odd regulations have been written down. The earliest evidence that such regulations were assembled and codified is contained in a small booklet of seventeen pages bearing no title other than the date, the Female Wood Pig year (probably 1815; HMA/Te/Tib/02). The first page of the work says (or rather, seems to say) that the document lists forty points and that the arbiter in any disputes will be the lord. The exact number of points is far from clear, but additions to the original set of regulations have been made in entries from subsequent years. I do not propose to make a detailed study of this work here—the idiosyncrasies of the orthography and grammar, not to mention the obscurity of much of the subject matter, would make this a cumbersome exercise. A brief summary follows of some of the issues the work deals with.

- The geographical ranges of responsibility and remuneration allocated to the different categories of messengers
- Beer allocations for the ceremony to mark the end of office for the constables, and additional beer allocations to accompany the swearing of oaths
- Prohibition on keeping certain types of livestock within the settlement area at specified times of year
- Exemption from normal village duties for anyone who has been assigned a special task by the headmen
- An oath to be sworn by brewers about the quality of beer provided on ceremonial occasions
- Partial tax exemption for monks and nuns
- Tax-exempt status of people over the age of fifty-five, and rules regarding retirement ceremonies
- Restrictions on collection of firewood and dung by non-estate households
- Obligation to carry out any task assigned by the headmen
- Illegality of appointing underage substitutes to represent one in village meetings
- Rules concerning the collection of grass from the meadows
- Prohibition on allowing cattle, donkeys, and goats to graze on the stubble of the harvested fields
- Conditions for the inheritance of estates by sons whose fathers have died

- Conditions for keeping goats in the settlement area and collecting the dung
- Conditions of use for certain grazing areas
- Property rights of the wife of a polyandrous marriage when one husband dies and she becomes divorced from his brother (she keeps half and the surviving husband the other half)
- Property rights of widows (they keep the entire estate)

A concluding remark offers a fascinating clue about the circumstances in which these regulations—or at least the various addenda—might have come to be between the covers of a single booklet. The last two items, concerning widows' property-rights, appear in an addendum dated Male Water Monkey year (1872?). The entry is followed by the statement "As a consequence of the Headmen and stewards having lost the documents, this has been written down anew" (HMA/Te/Tib/02: 34).

The remark may refer only to the last entry, but it is clear from the variety of hands in which many other passages are written that the booklet was not compiled all at one time. It is a compendium of regulations that were set down as contentious issues arose and were resolved. In other communities, such as Thini, specific episodes were often the precedent for more general formulations (rather as in the case of English law), but the resolutions were always kept as discrete agreements and never compiled as a legal code (as in Marpha, for example). In the case of Te, accidental loss seems to have contributed to the process of compilation.

One of the difficulties presented by a collection of this sort is that of desuetude. New rules may be added to a list *ad infinitum*, but existing laws may need to be revised. What is to be done if, for example, the range of the long-distance messengers ceases to extend into Tibet, as specified in the first entry of the law book, because the Nepal-China border is suddenly closed (something that actually happened in the early 1960s)? And what if it is decided that the condition of the pastures is such that the regulations concerning their use must be modified? Is it sufficient merely to delete the old rule and add an amended version to the end of the list? And is it reasonable that any of the existing laws can be called into question at any time? Who has the right to make and unmake these laws?

## The New Constitution

Throughout the course of this book, I have made frequent reference to "the community" of Te: as in, for example, the interests of the community as

opposed to those of its members. The impression given is that the community is independent of the individuals who make it up. The discourse of the Tepas themselves contributes to an impression of the ontological autonomy of the collectivity: the Tepas refused to acquiesce in the Shangpa Rinpoche's demands that they end the practice of blood-offerings; as one man, who was present at the time, told me, he knew it was all very sinful to sacrifice animals, but the community (*lungba*) would not listen to the lama. When (as we saw in chapter 5) the water supply of the priest of Baza was cut off, he canvassed all the individual voters, and a large majority of them assured him of their private support; nevertheless, the community did not reconnect the water.

We can begin to address this question by examining the development of Te's written constitution. After what seems to have been the first, or at least a quite early, essay in compiling a set of rules, the process of legislation and periodical revision was refined into the form in which it exists today. This is how the system works.

Every twelve years, in a Monkey year, the Tepas hold a meeting to examine their existing written constitution. The meeting is called the Gö Sogwa. Gö, which in Tibetan means "necessity" or "use" (Tib. *dgos*), is the usual term in Te (though only rarely in written documents) for "law," and as such corresponds to the Tibetan word *trim* (Tib. *khrims*). *Sogwa* is a Seke verb meaning to "invert" or "turn upside down" (< Tib. *slog pa?*). The Gö Sogwa, then, is literally "The Turning Upside Down of the Law." The meeting continues for about two weeks, and during this period the assembly decides what is to be set down in the new constitution. The assembly in question is the *yupa* gathering, that is, the senior male member of each of the forty-six active estates. Each of the issues is raised in turn, and after a period of discussion the matter is put to a vote. Under the supervision of the headmen and constables (who, as estate-holders, also vote), each person places a stone in the pile that signifies either support or opposition. The stones are counted, and if the majority votes against the prospective rule, the matter is closed; if a majority is in favour, the rule is written into the new constitution by whichever priest of Tshognam or Baza happens to be acting as scribe.

Once the constitution has been compiled, the old one is destroyed (unfortunately for the social historian) and the new document is placed in the care of the steward. The last Monkey year before the time of writing fell in 1992, and a new constitution was duly drawn up. The document is worth examining in detail, since it is the clearest formal expression there is about what the Tepas regarded as being worth recording as legally binding at that time. The lack of any real distinction, mentioned earlier, between the concepts of "law" and "custom" is revealed on the title page of the booklet, which advertises its con-

tents as “the new customs of the village of Te.” Many of the thirty-five clauses in the document are elliptical to the extent that they refer to institutions with which the Tepas are very familiar. While their significance may be obvious to the villagers themselves, a certain amount of explanation is in order here. In the following treatment, the translated clauses are numbered as in the original text, while subclauses are identified by letters I have added for the sake of convenience. My commentary follows each clause. In certain cases, full discussion of institutions referred to here is deferred to chapter 11.<sup>4</sup> The constitution has an introduction:

Contained herein is a document containing the revised version of the customs of the community of Te. Saturday, the third day in the sixth month of the Tibetan Farmers’ Water Monkey year (1992).

This document has been written after revising the customs of the community of Te following an agreement on the basis of a vote by the Headmen, officials, and [the rest of] the village.

1. The communal fields: these shall be kept as they are, according to their previous distribution without there being any changes.

The “religious fields” (*chöpazhing*, Tib. *chos pa zhing*) are the fields attached to the Önpo Drongba, one of the two “dormant” estates of Te. Their characterisation as “religious” derives from the fact that the now-extinct Önpo clan were the hereditary Nyingmapa lamas of Te. At the time of the cadastral survey, these fields were registered as *dharma guṭhi*, “religious collective” land, a category for which land taxes need not be paid to the government. “Religious fields” are found in several villages of Baragaon. The monastery of Kag, for example, holds land both in Kag itself as well as in certain neighbouring villages. Much of this land was acquired as a result of a custom whereby estates would bequeath a field to the monastery following a bereavement. (Lately, bequests of this sort have been replaced by pecuniary offerings.)

The terms on which “religious land” is leased vary from village to village, and in some places a range of possible lease agreements may obtain. The commonest system consists of the lessees providing their own seed and labour and contributing half of the yield to the lessor, whether the lessor be a public institution or a private estate. In Te, the fee for the lease of the religious fields is a quantity of grain equal to the seed capacity of the land in question. Although there are two crops per year—barley and buckwheat—the lease is paid only in barley.

In places such as Kag, where the institution to which religious fields are attached is still functioning, the revenue from the land goes toward the upkeep

of the monastery and the financing of ceremonies. In other places, such as Te, where the institution has dissolved, the grain is paid to the village fund and is later converted into cash for community expenses (the sponsorship of public works and ceremonies, legal costs incurred in disputes with neighbouring villages, and so on). In Baragaon, communal fields are usually leased to poorer members of the community who can thereby supplement the yield of their own meagre landholdings. The consensus that such fields are for the use of the poor—it would be considered both exploitative and demeaning for a wealthy estate to farm them—is generally unwritten, but occasionally one encounters documents that make this charitable aspect explicit.

In an old land tax register from Kag, for example, there is a clause that deals with the protection of the rights of indigent members of the community. The clause concerns an area of communal land known as the Yartung fields. The lease fee—probably half the yield—was committed not to the funding of a religious ceremony but to make up the annual salary of the landless village blacksmith. In the first part of the clause, lessees are sternly warned against cheating the blacksmith of his annual due by mixing inferior grain with their payment of good barley, and the second part guarantees the continuing usufruct of the religious fields to the people who have traditionally leased them:

If there are even a few grains of inferior barley mixed in with the superior barley, [the blacksmith] shall receive 2.5 bushels of grain [i.e., an additional 5 *zoba*]. Neither may villagers seize the fields from the present lessees, nor may those who plant the fields abandon them.

We might therefore be forgiven for thinking that the first clause in the constitution of Te was written in a similar spirit of protectiveness toward the lessees of public land. In fact, this is not the case. Usufruct of some of the religious fields has been allocated to the Luri lama. Many years earlier, the remaining fields had been distributed to a score of Tepa estates, none of them particularly poor, as allocations (Tk. *phothog*, < Tib. *phog thog*?).

Most of the grain paid as lease fees for the religious fields is put toward making the beer for the great Lama Guru festival. The remainder—some 200 *pathis*—is converted into cash for the village fund. The excerpt from the Kag land tax register protects the lessees, but it also assures the continuity of the lease payments by obliging them to retain tenure—“nor may those who plant the fields abandon them.” This is the point of the first clause of Te’s constitution. Some years ago, a huge retaining wall carrying an aqueduct to an area of fields on Thangka collapsed, and the fields became unusable. The worst affected was a large religious field that was being leased by a certain Gyaltsen. Without water the field produces nothing, but since the lease fee in Te is based

on seed capacity, not yield, Gyaltsen is still obliged to pay the fee. Since he is the only one who is losing out under the terms of the arrangement, it is in his interest that the retaining wall be repaired. The purpose of the clause, then, is to ensure that Gyaltsen cannot return the field to the community but must keep paying the lease fee. It is entirely for him to choose between the two evils of leaving the field unproductive or incurring the considerable expense of engaging labourers to help him repair the collapsed wall. Either way, the community will receive its annual fee.

2. Concerning the collection of firewood. The monasteries of Tshognam and Gau may collect five man-loads each of firewood three days after the community of Te has collected its wood, and they may collect five man-loads [of wood and dung] three days after [the community] has collected its wood and dung.

Fuel in Te is scarce. It consists for the most part of thorn bushes gathered at some distance from the settlement. As I will show, certain overexploited areas near the village have been declared out of bounds for wood collection. Firewood is used extremely sparingly, since the allowance of five bundles must last a whole year. Tepas are uncommonly adept at controlling the size of a flame in a hearth, and are punctilious about extinguishing a fire once it has done its culinary work.

Wood is supplemented by dung. The term for dung used in the clause is *dug shing*, a neologism the scribe apparently coined by combining the Seke word for dung (*dug*) with the Tibetan (or Seke) term for wood (*shing*). Other rules concerning the collection of dung are given later.

The intention behind allowing the two temples to collect their fuel three days after the period allotted the community itself is simply that villagers should be available to gather wood and dung on behalf of the priests in return for the usual payment of beer and food. It would be regarded as demeaning for members of the priestly households to carry out these tasks themselves.

3. At the Lama Guru festival, those aged between eighteen and twenty-five should perform the Young Peoples' singing and dancing; those between the ages of twenty-six and thirty should perform the Householders' singing and dancing; and those between the ages of thirty-one and thirty-five should dance on one day in the daytime. If anyone does not come for the dancing and singing he or she shall be fined 100 rupees per day, and no excuses.

“Young People,” *na gzhon* (i.e. *na so gzhon pa*) is a Tibetan translation of the Tepa category *bön-tshame*, “Young Men–Young Women.” The implication of

this entry is that *all* those between eighteen and twenty-five should participate whether married or not. Previously, only unmarried *bön-tshame* were obliged to take part in this episode of the Lama Guru. In the second group (twenty-six to thirty), nothing seems to have changed. The inclusion of the third group (thirty-one to thirty-five) is an innovation—this age group was not required to dance in the past. Under the terms of the new constitution, they are obliged to join the category of the estate-holders for one day. Tepas attributed this modification to the fact that a number of younger people have left the village to live in Pokhara or Kathmandu, and that this part of the ceremony accordingly needs to be bolstered up.

4. Whoever, whether an outsider or a member of the community, relinquishes his tax liabilities may remain in the village for no more than one month. If he stays one day more than one month, 1,000 rupees must be paid by the master of whichever house he has lodged in. Should he later revisit the village, he may come to the village only after staying somewhere else for one month.

If, later on, he should miss [his home] and would like to live in the village [again] as a taxpayer, and requests the community for full membership, he will be permitted to remain only if he pays 20,000 rupees to the community of Te.

The policy that is being adopted here resembles the terms on which foreigners may obtain tourist visas in many countries, notably Nepal itself, whereby periods of residence are alternated with obligatory absences of specified minimum duration. If the original inspiration for the scheme was indeed found in the notion of tourist visas, it is more likely to have reached Te via Dzong, where a similar policy (a week of residence followed by a minimum absence of a single day) had already been in effect for some years.

We have already seen in chapter 4 that a number of villagers belonging to the *phorang-morang* category have left the community to settle in Jomsom or southern Nepal—about a dozen people in the last decade. The expression that has been translated here as “relinquishes his tax liabilities,” literally “tax-exit” (Tib. *khral 'thon*), signifies cutting oneself off from all formal links with the community. Te has been far less severely affected than the rest of Baragaon by the haemorrhage of its citizenry—there are, for example, more Tayepas living permanently outside Taye than in their village—but the trend in these surrounding communities is a cause for some concern. Nothing can be done to prevent people from leaving the village. They can, however, be made to think twice about doing so, and this clause is, among other things, a means

of impressing on would-be emigrants that the decision is not one to be taken lightly.

The inclusion of the term “outsider” in the first line is a purely rhetorical formula, since outsiders do not pay taxes to Te. The term I have translated as “full membership” is *kyidug* (Tib. *skyid sdug*), literally “happiness-hardship.” The expression is sometimes employed to denote mutual-aid societies among Tibetans (Miller 1956), but here it is clearly being used in its most general sense of community life, that is, accepting thick and thin.

5. Only if the monks and nuns frequent their monasteries and are properly literate in both Nepali and Tibetan and act like religious people will they be exempted from duties as monks and nuns. If monks or nuns should abandon their vows they must perform any kind of task, like ordinary people.

“Properly literate . . . like religious people” reads literally “only if they do Tibetan religion and lowland religion and so forth, religion as religion [should be done].” The Tibetan word *chö* (Tib. *chos*), “religion,” has a secondary meaning throughout Lo and Baragaon: “literacy” or simply “book.” The Tibetan word for book, *deb*, does not exist, though people do sometimes use Nepali or even English terms for, say, school exercise books, hospital registers, and suchlike. Thus the term I have translated here as “to be literate in Nepali” might also mean “to follow the Hindu religion.” In either case it is entirely decorative, since literacy in Nepali or adherence to Hinduism are both irrelevant as criteria of qualification as a proper monk or nun.

As we have seen in chapter 6, monks and nuns are exempt from the performance of communal tasks and from holding civil office. The clause is a sharp redefinition of who may legitimately avoid village duties on grounds of religious status.

6. Concerning village meetings, only people of the highest rank should join the assembly: a son should never come while the father remains [at home], nor a younger brother while the elder brother remains at home.

There are three categories of village assemblies in Te, as follows.

- *Memang* (probably < Tib. *mi dmangs*): everyone of both sexes between the ages of thirteen and fifty-four. *Memang* gatherings are convened mainly for the purpose of carrying out public labour, such as the repair of collapsed irrigation canals.

- *Lungba*: the entire village, with the exception of people who are physically incapable of leaving their houses. Meetings of this sort are called only on rare occasions, for example as a prelude to a house-to-house search by the headmen and constables in the event of a theft.
- *Yupa* (probably < Tib. *yul pa*): the type of village meeting with which this clause is concerned; it consists of only one representative from each of the forty-six active estates.

The *yupa* representatives meet to discuss and decide on issues that may have important consequences for the village, which is why representation is confined to the most competent member of the household. Since there is no convenient set of criteria for defining competence, it can at least be assured that an estate provides a representative who has the greatest experience of civic affairs and dealings with the outside world, and it is the heads of estates who, as a category, are most likely to embody these qualities. If the head of an estate happens to be absent from the village when a meeting is called, the household may be represented by the oldest available man below the age of retirement.

It is the assembly of the *yupa* that provides the incumbents for the main village offices, such as headmen and constables. Under normal circumstances tenure of these positions, and membership of the *yupa*, is restricted to men over the age of eighteen. However, in the absence of older male relatives, office may be held by a boy over the age of thirteen. This is the case of one of the estates at the time of writing. The head of estate Thangka 5 has left his wife and family and is living in an undisclosed location outside the village. Since he has not formally “withdrawn from taxes” (see clause 4), he may return to his home at any time without paying the specified penalty of 20,000 rupees. Since he is still officially a resident of the community, however, his estate is obliged to pay fines for his absence from village labouring duties. He has a son who was only ten years old at the time of his departure, and if it had happened that the role of headman or constable had fallen to his estate, his failure to assume the responsibility would have occasioned a fine of 6,000 rupees against his estate. As it happens, just before he left his family the rotating duty of steward fell to his estate. The office of steward (*nyerwa*, Tib. *gnyer pa*), which is held by two estates at a time, involves the longest term of service of all rotational offices—six years—and is held to the exclusion of other civic positions. Moreover, unlike the headmen and constables, the duties of stewardship may be performed by a woman—in this case, Trinle’s wife. Since his absence, therefore, Trinle’s estate has not been eligible for the provision of other offices. By the time the stewardship expires, his son will have reached the age of thirteen and will therefore be eligible to serve as a headman or constable.

An estate without any male over the age of thirteen to assume responsibilities or, as in the case of Trinle's household, an eligible man whose absence can be compensated for with fines, is called *domagpa*, and is exempted from office. A *domagpa* estate is not represented at the *yupa* council.

7. Ephedra may not be uprooted anywhere on uncultivated or on cultivated ground. Anyone [who] is seen carrying [even] one ephedra plant will be fined 100 rupees and no excuses. If there is any ephedra [exposed by] a field wall that has collapsed, it may be taken home only after requesting the permission of the Headmen and Constables.

Ephedra (*tshe*, Tib. *mtshe*), a type of gymnosperm that grows fairly abundantly in Mustang, is used to feed goats that are penned at home. The roots can be dried for firewood. Although it grows abundantly on the hillsides, it may be collected only with permission. The main reason given for the prohibition is the impossibility of proving the alleged provenance of an uprooted plant. Ephedra grows thickly on the faces of field terrace walls and helps to stabilise them. It would be very easy to tug a plant out of someone else's wall and later claim, when challenged, that it had been collected on the high pastures. The rule is, therefore, designed to protect the field walls.

8. Concerning the harvest: if there are people who must harvest their fields before the appointed day has arrived, if they present the community with 8 rupees and a white scarf, and ask permission, they may harvest their fields in advance.

Unlike other villages, which decide the date of their harvest on the basis of the weather, Te's harvest begins a fixed number of days from the date of planting. In the case of buckwheat, this is one hundred days. Not all fields receive the same amount of sunshine, but even though the crops in certain patches ripen before the official opening of the harvest had arrived, the owners were, until this constitutional change, obliged to watch them wither in the fields. I will say more in chapters 10 and 11 about this curious standardisation of harvest-time and the significance of its relaxation.

9a. If a household has any bereaved people as a consequence of the death of a father, mother, spouse, or whoever, in the nature of impermanence, its members may not remain in mourning for more than forty-nine days.

The expression "remain in mourning" literally means "to carry grief" (Tib. *sdug 'khur*). The South Mustang Tibetan term for mourner, *dug phogkhen* (Tib. *sdug phog mkhan*), literally "one smitten by suffering," is also used of broody

hens because of their tatty appearance. Following a death in the household, people would go into mourning for months on end, even for as long as a year. The condition of mourning is demonstrated by not washing, being ungroomed and unadorned, and wearing old clothes. Bereavement is legitimate grounds for exemption from village labour, and it was felt, with some justification, that protracted periods of mourning were being used by the bereaved as an excuse to devote time and energy to their own households at the expense of public works.

9b. Sixty days after planting the fields [with buckwheat], for a period of three days the quitch grass in the fields may be [collected], but only by pulling with bare hands, not by cutting with sickles.

To judge by its subject matter, this subclause was probably omitted by oversight from clause 8. That the planting refers to buckwheat (the second crop) rather than barley can be inferred from two facts: first, that quitch grass on field borders is still too short when the first crop is growing, and second, the period when the buckwheat is ripening is also the time when thunderstorms are most frequent. The use of sickles is believed to attract hailstorms (as well as plagues of caterpillars). The restriction of grass collection to three days is aimed at preventing theft of grass from the margins of fields other than one's own, as the activity is overseen by the officialdom as well as the collectors themselves.

10. Animal fodder may be given to trading partners, friends and relatives, and travellers on their way up or down only if they stay in the village itself, but not once they have crossed the river. Anyone who gives fodder to a guest shall pay a fine of 5 rupees per bundle of fodder.

“Trading partner,” *gnas tshang* (pronounced *netshang*) is not actually a partner but a person at whose house one may conventionally stay free of charge for three days while travelling—a reciprocal arrangement. The same term may be translated as “guest” when it is clearly being used in a more general sense. In northern Lo, people use *netshang* not just to mean trading partner but also as a term of address to any stranger or person not close enough to be addressed by name or by a kinship term.

The river (Tib. *gtsang po*) in this case is the Narshing Chu, not the Kali Gandaki. The reason Tepas give for this rule is to ensure that the dung of animals fed free of charge on hay produced in the village should not leave the village. The fact that while hay may not be given to people on the wrong side of the river but may be sold for private profit suggests that this rule may have been motivated by considerations other than the retention of manure for the benefit

of the fields. The chaplains of Te live in Upper Tshognam, on the opposite side of the Narshing River. Among the services these priests were entitled to was the provision of free hay and straw for their own and their guests' horses. The dispute between the villagers and the chaplains mentioned in chapter 5 has led to the withdrawal by the Tepas of certain privileges. This clause means that, among other things, the Tshognam lamas are no longer entitled to free animal fodder.

11. People who make cuttings from willows or poplars or whatever may do so from no trees other than their own. Anyone who needs to take a cutting may not do so except in the presence of the head-men and constables.

Willow and poplar trees in Te are privately owned. They are pollarded periodically for firewood, and the timber of poplars is also used in construction. The trees are propagated by means of cuttings. The requirement that branches be taken only under official supervision is intended simply to prevent villagers from stealing wood.

12. If the Yurchu [irrigation canal] should carry away the [gabions by the] tunnel through which it passes, it has been decided that the whole populace over the age of thirteen and below the age of sixty-five should repair it up to the beginning of the sluices at the water mill. If it is necessary to carry out repairs between the water mill sluices and the Tentsa[zur] sluices, the work shall be done by the ninety-five members of the irrigation roster.

If the river carries away the Yurchu canal from its foundations, if someone fails to come after the messengers have been sent [to summon everyone] below the Kore pass and above Drong-goce, and on this side of the pass into Nyeshang, it has been decided that he or she shall pay a fine of 500 rupees.

“Yurchu” is a compound name combining the Tibetan words *yur ba* (irrigation canal) and *chu* (water). There are two main sources of irrigation water in Te: the reservoir, which is fed by streams from the south-eastern hills and serves the upper fields, and the Narshing River, which flows to the north of the village from east to west. The Narshing River is trained along two routes for the purposes of irrigation. One of these routes branches off toward the lowest fields from a point in the riverbed itself, and the cultivated area is accordingly known as the Gravel-Bar Fields (Shagtang Zhing). The other branch leaves the river further upstream and runs along a canal to a higher area of fields, called Mangtse. This canal is the Yurchu. The junction between the river and the

canal is possible only thanks to a huge dyke at the point where the river emerges from the long, narrow gorge that leads to the salt-mine of Tshaurong. Rocks borne by the current cause this dam to collapse with depressing regularity—several times in a season. Because the cultivation of a large area of land depends on its existence, it must be repaired as soon as possible. The workforce for this task is comprised by the *memang*, that is, everyone in the community above the age of thirteen, with the exception of one person who remains at each home to “guard the hearth.” Normally the *memang* category excludes villagers over fifty-five years old, the age when people officially retire from public life. Until this ruling, the upper age limit for this kind of work was sixty, not sixty-five. The particular urgency of certain tasks related to irrigation requires that, exceptionally, the labour of even those who are ten years past the age of retirement be enlisted.

It is important to note that the community is responsible only for the section of the canal from the mole “up to the watermill sluices.” The stretch from this point up to the place called Tenzazur covers the entire area of Tongdze, the section of agricultural land that is irrigated by the Yurchu canal.

As for “The 95 members of the irrigation roster,” the complexities of Te’s system of irrigation management are analysed elsewhere (*Tibetan Sources*, vol. 1, introduction). Here it is sufficient to understand that the maintenance of the section of canal between the watermills and Tenzazur is the responsibility of the individuals whose fields lie along it—not of the community as a whole. “Below the Kore La pass . . . the pass into Nyeshang” is a formula whose variants turn up quite frequently in local documents and territorial rituals. The area so defined corresponds roughly to Mustang District, and probably to the original dimensions of the kingdom of Lo. (The Kore La pass lies on the northern boundary between Lo and Tibet. Drong-goce is the Tibetan name of Narjang, a big Magar settlement just to the north of Tatopani.) The “messengers” (called *bang mi* in the document) are the official couriers of Te. There are several categories of these, each concerned with carrying messages within a designated radius of the village.

13. When, according to past custom, people aged between eighteen and sixty go to Nari, they may play [cards] only on the evening they go there, not on the following day. The day after [they arrive], everyone between eighteen and sixty must go to Yadzog Gang, and the day after that everyone must go to Yemen.

If there are people from the village who have gone even to another country of the world, if they are not on time to go to the

irrigation canals with everyone they shall pay 2 *zoba* of grain and 50 rupees each without making excuses.

In the daytime of the twelfth day of the third month, the day on which those aged between eighteen and sixty should go to Nari, anyone from the village who does not go shall be fined 50 rupees.

This rule is a response to the drastic water shortage in Te, and aims to ensure that the digging of the irrigation canals is properly carried out. Nari is the site of a kind of base camp from which the Tepas go out on successive days to repair the high canals. Yadzog, the source of the canal called Yeren, is located near Yagawa mountain at an altitude of around 6,000 metres. Yemen and Mushag are high-altitude springs. The last sentence presumably belongs nearer the beginning of the entry.

“The following day” (Tib. *snga 'gro*, pronounced *ngedro*), in the dialect of Lo (but not usually of Baragaon), means not morning but “tomorrow,” or “the following day.” The distinction being made in this rule is between the first day and subsequent days, not between morning and evening (since card playing is forbidden even on subsequent evenings).

The narrower age range required for this task than that specified for the repair of the Yurchu dyke is due to the difficulty of the work. The water that is directed along this canal to the village comes from snow-melt, and the volume of snow on the mountains has decreased noticeably in recent years. The declining water supply means that the rather casual approach to excavating the canal that traditionally marked this annual outing to Nari is no longer tenable, and the surest way to ensure earnest labour on the part of the workers is to suppress the recreational component of the excursion—hence the restriction on playing cards.

14a. Concerning the appointment of the Headmen: the community shall be divided into three groups according to age, and each group shall cast lots to decide one of the Headmen. If, on the astrologically appropriate day for choosing the Headmen, someone does not come, he shall be fined 3,000 rupees, and no excuses. If [one of the new incumbents] is seized by illness or whatever [away from Te] and is unable to attend, the pillar of his house shall be dressed with a white scarf in place of the Headman himself.

14b. The Constables too shall be chosen by lot, one by each of the four sectors.

14c. For calling meetings the four Constables shall summon people from within their respective streets. No one shall be accepted as

substitutes for the Headmen and Constables. If someone does not come for the selection of the Headmen he shall pay a fine of 3,000 rupees.

14d. Moreover, one of the Headmen and two of the Constables may not leave the village and go anywhere for even one day; if they do go away they shall pay a fine of 100 rupees each.

14e. Substitutes [for the Constables] over the age of thirteen shall be acceptable for watching the village [fields] and managing the irrigation circuit and so on. However many Headmen and Constables are in the village should walk around the fields twice a day to check them, once at ten in the morning and once at four in the evening. If someone does not fully accomplish his patrol of the fields he will be fined 50 rupees per day.

14f. There shall be only two Taka fields for making beer, one big and one small.

All the subsections of this clause are concerned, more or less directly, with the recruitment and duties of the headmen and constables of Te. I shall discuss the extraordinarily complicated system of recruitment, and the significance of the changes prescribed by this clause, at some length in chapter 10. Here a few brief explanatory remarks on each of the points will be enough.

(14a) Until this constitution came into effect, the three headmen were recruited by means of a strategy involving the chance coincidence of nominations. Henceforth they are to be selected in the same way as the constables, by a lottery involving specially notched sticks.

(14b) A reaffirmation of a system that has already been in force for some time.

(14c) Until now, the method for summoning the village to a gathering involved the headmen and constables standing at the place called Puyungzur and calling out loudly in a stylised way. According to this new rule, the general summons must be preceded by a local one; the constables walk through the streets and alleys of their respective sectors (each of the constables is recruited from one of the four sectors) and announce the imminent meeting.

(14d) Headmen and constables may leave Te for a few days at a time—lengthy trading trips are forbidden—but a minimum “skeleton staff” of at least two constables and one headman must always be on hand in case of emergencies.

(14e) This rule is in the same spirit as clause 6, which emphasises the importance of competence in the performance of duties. Until now, it has been possible for constables to engage substitutes to represent them at village

meetings; even if the representative in question might be too young to contribute usefully to discussions, he was, at least, a token physical presence to stand in for the constable. Henceforth, adolescent substitutes are acceptable only for menial tasks such as the two that are specified, namely, periodically checking the head of the irrigation canals in the autumn to ensure that they are not iced up, and making the daily tour of the fields to check that no animals have entered or terrace walls collapsed.

15. If a dispute [with a neighbouring community] should arise over pastureland, the expenses shall be covered by payments of a ratio of three to one, animals to people.

The expenses in question are legal costs. Even people without livestock must pay something toward this, because it is for the common good, but livestock owners must pay proportionately more because they have a greater vested interest. I discussed the strategy of raising funds for legal costs in chapter 2 in relation to the confederation of the Shöyul seeking the rescission of its traditional corvée obligations to the king of Lo in the first decade of this century. On that occasion, only dzos were taken into consideration in the computation of financial responsibility, but according to the terms of clause 15 here (although it is not explicitly stated), all animals are considered. Goats are usually reckoned as one-fourth of larger animals, such as dzos and horses. The system works simply as follows. Let us say, for example, that the village needs 4,000 rupees. Of this sum, 1,000 rupees will be raised by a peremptory poll tax and the remaining 3,000 rupees by livestock owners according to the number of animals they have.

16. The pens where livestock stay shall be repaired and houses shall be built in Tshethang, Kyuden, and Dangda. Manure and goat dung shall be divided up among all the houses.

Tshethang is situated a short distance from the Muya La pass that leads to the Muktinath valley (see chapter 1). Kyuden lies between Te and the ruins of Naudzong (this is not the abandoned settlement of the same name, situated between Tsele and Samar, that I described in chapter 2). Dangda is the gorge between the Yul and the Dzong in the village itself. (In fact, *dangda*—written *dang ra* in the text—is the Teke word for corral—Tib. *ra*, “enclosure.”) In view of the proximity of Dangda, it is not intended—in spite of the phrasing of the clause—that lodges for herders be built here, but only in Kyuden and Tshethang. There are livestock pens (in various states of repair) in all three locations, but no houses for the herders. As to the dividing up of the dung: dung is measured out periodically in baskets *in situ*, so that each house gets an exactly

equal amount irrespective of whether it has animals or not. The phrase “[cattle] manure and goat dung” is not strictly accurate, since there is only goat dung there anyway. Collection of dung on these three pastures is regulated because they lie so close to the village; on all other pastures, people may help themselves freely.

17. Concerning the Headmen and Constables: four men shall be appointed to supervise their honesty and truthfulness. Furthermore, these Four Men shall check the accounts during a monthly meeting of the community. If the Headmen and Constables have been biased or deceitful and so forth, and have not been honest and truthful, they should repay in double whatever fines they have levied.

Every month the four men shall be given beer by the community: 4 *zoba* of fermented grain each. At retirement celebrations, merit-making memorial rites, and so on, the Four Men should be given as much beer as they would drink. No substitutes will be accepted for the Four Men. The Four Men must be present until meetings of the people are over. If, after people have been drinking beer, an argument should break out and there are people shouting loudly, if they do not obey the Constables after one warning, they shall pay a fine of 50 rupees without excuses.

This law has been implemented in response to the change in procedure for selecting headmen. Before now, the annual term of office of the headmen and constables ended with a public trial at which their performance was assessed. Now, however, a new category of official has been created—the Four Men—whose task it is to supervise the headmen and constables and submit them to a kind of continual assessment. I will analyse the significance of this clause when I discuss the role of the headmen in chapter 11.

18. With regard to firewood: elderly men and women shall receive “elders’ wood” only after they have entered their retirement quarters.

This is apparently an appendix to clause 2. Once members of the older generation have ceased to live with their children and moved into a separate apartment with its own hearth, they are entitled to a quantity of firewood in addition to the entitlement of the main household. If they are still sharing the main hearth, they are not entitled to the firewood.

19. People must be able to hold their retirement ceremonies between the beginning of the seventh month [of the Te calendar] and the end of the eighth month. If one is held later than the eighth month,

there shall be a fine of 5 *zoba* of grain. Moreover, the retirement ceremonies shall be held in the daytime.

As an auspicious gesture, every hearth shall present the host of the retirement ceremony with no less than 8 rupees and a clean, new, stainless white scarf.

For eating oil porridge at retirement ceremonies one woman from each hearth shall be invited, and one man invited from each hearth to the men's beer-drinking.

The people of Tshug have a joke to the effect that the Tepas are a shy lot, because they hold their retirement ceremonies at night. As far as I know, Te is the only village in Mustang to do so. Until now, moreover, the ceremonies were customarily held only after the Zatönse festival—around January—a cold and cheerless time of year, when many people are likely to have gone down to the south for winter trading. The decision to hold the celebrations during the seventh and eighth month—late summer—and during the daytime is consistent with a conscious effort, evident in other clauses, to make community events more spectacular and agreeable.

Retirement ceremonies are held by a man or a woman who has reached the age of fifty-five, and the ceremony may be held no earlier or later than at this age. The strictness of the rule is atypical of Baragaon, where people organise their retirement feasts at any time between about fifty and sixty-five.

The third part of this clause is an explicit part of the policy, discussed earlier, of dissolving the corporate existence of clans. Until now, the protocol at retirement ceremonies has been as follows. On the first two days, the host would receive visits from representatives of the households that formed part of this network of reciprocity. They would present white scarves (which, as I will show in chapter 10, were in many cases neither particularly white nor entire) and a small, but predetermined, sum of money, and be served in return with beer. From the third day of the ceremony, the gathering was confined to people belonging to the same clan as the host. This is the occasion known as *phepechang* (*phe phed chang* in the text). The Teke term *phepa* corresponds to SMT *phepe*, which both designate any group of agnatically related men spanning more than one generation. Thus a father and two sons (or daughters), or a man and his father and paternal uncle, would be referred to as “three *phephe/phepa*.” In the dialects of Panchgaon, the term appears as *phabe phobe*, and has a more formal meaning than in Baragaon as “patrilineal clan.”

It is possible that the compound *phepechang* preserves a similarly formal connotation of *phepe* as patriclan, a concept that, as I have mentioned, is now rendered by the Tibetan term *gyupa*.

The *phepechang* involves not only beer-drinking but also feasting and eating such delicacies as oil porridge (*baltag/maldag*)—a bowl of boiled wheat flour submerged in cold mustard oil (which can be quite testing as a first-time experience)—and singing songs. From now on, the celebrations of the third and subsequent days may not be restricted to members of the host's clan. The women's and men's gatherings must be made up, respectively, by at least one woman and one man from every hearth in the village. Retirement ceremonies have abruptly changed from being celebrations of clan solidarity to gatherings of the whole community defined in terms of residential units.

The second part of clause 19, concerning the presentation to the host of a minimum of 8 rupees and a clean ceremonial scarf, cannot be properly explained outside a wider discussion of the nature of reciprocity in Te, and I shall return to it in chapter 11.

20. If any important people come to the community, the Headmen and Constables, those seven, should take the responsibility for [providing] whatever materials, drink, and food are required. If any expenses are incurred, the four men must do the accounts. The Headmen and Constables, those seven and the Four Men, eleven altogether, shall be provided with all their food and drink by the community [until the business is concluded].

“Materials” (*bca' dngos* in the text) denotes cups, plates, pans, carpets, horse-feed, and suchlike. The officials should provide it themselves and not borrow from other villagers. The clause also provides further details concerning the obligations and privileges of the Four Men, the new category of village officials who appeared in clause 17.

21. If someone is late for the beginning of work on the Yurchu [the Budubudu canal] he will be fined 15 rupees, and if he has not arrived by the time the work is over he will be fined 50 rupees.

I have explained the reasons for the urgency of repairing the dyke of the Yurchu when it collapses periodically in my commentary to rule 12.

22. If people do not come as soon as they have been called for meetings of hearths or households they will be fined 5 rupees. If they have not arrived by the time the villagers have dispersed they will be fined 20 rupees.

“Hearths or households,” *khyim grangs yul pa* in the document, refers to the two main categories of assemblies, entailing either all the hearths (Tk. *mem-ang*) or just the estates (Tk. *yupa*). For anyone familiar with normal practice in

other villages of Baragaon, where people dawdle along to meetings half an hour or more after they have been summoned, the promptness with which Tepas respond to the constables' call is remarkable. This clause is a means of sustaining this punctuality.

23. Concerning the field forest: the forest may be cut only after asking permission of the Headmen and Constables.

"Field forests" (*klungs nags* in the text) are the thorn bushes (*Hippophae*, *Caragana*, etc.) growing on the margins of the cultivated area. This supply of fuel is supplementary to the five bundles that may be taken from the communal forests. Here, however, the bushes may be cut only on one's own land: the headmen must be asked to supervise in order to ensure that gatherers do not steal from neighbours' field borders.

24a. Concerning the work on the reservoir: if anyone above the age of thirteen and below the age of sixty-five does not come for the work he or she will be fined 20 rupees for the two days.

Moreover, if someone does not come to the dancing ground when the reservoir is being cleared, he or she will be fined 20 rupees.

24b. During the Lama Guru, everyone over thirteen and under sixty-five must come to the spectacle on the tenth day. If someone does not come he or she will be fined 20 rupees.

24c. Moreover, the two monasteries, like the community, may not let their livestock into the fields. If they are let into the fields and the Headmen or Constables seize them, the fine will be the same as for the community.

(24a) Clearing the reservoir is a major two-day event, called Cingza, involving dancing and singing, that leads directly into the Lama Guru festival. The dancers are the *bön-tshame*, the Young Men and Women. Until now, the fine for nonattendance has been only 1.5 rupees.

(24b) Like clause 3, clause 24b is a further indication of a conscious policy to ensure the community's full participation in the Lama Guru. Nyima Drandul suggested that the intention is to enhance the efficacy of the prayers for rain and bountifulness inherent in the songs that are sung on this occasion (personal communication, April 1996). None of the Tepas, however, offered such an explanation. All the responses we received were of the order "to make it more fun."

24c. In most villages, animals are allowed into fields to graze the stubble after the harvest. This practice is called *nor* (SMT), *nol* (Panchgaon, where it usually appears as *rnol* in documents), and *no* (Tk.). Traditionally it is not

permitted in Te, perhaps because the terraces are steep and the cattle break the walls. However, the priestly families of Baza and Tshognam did enjoy the special privilege of allowing their animals to graze on stubble. The withdrawal of this privilege is one of several gestures whereby the community has expressed its disfavour toward the chaplains.

26. Anyone who is caught by the Headmen or Constables taking earth from irrigation ditches, fields or suchlike shall be fined 5 *zoba* of grain.

Wood may be collected only above the cairn of Yathang and above Ordothang. If someone collects wood below these points there will be a fine of 5 *zoba* of grain per bundle of firewood.<sup>5</sup>

Yathang and Ordothang are situated a short distance south of the settlement area. The aim of the restriction is to prevent fuel from being exhausted in the proximity of the village.

27. Until a [male] individual is over seventeen years old, he may act only on his own behalf as he would within his family, and may not be accepted as a hired worker.

Furthermore, until the junior member of the assembly is eighteen years old, he is capable of managing only his own affairs, not those of others.

There are certain community tasks for which, as we have seen, each household must provide one man over the age of eighteen. If a householder happens not to be free at the time, it is permissible for him to appoint a substitute from any other house. The term used in the document for substitute is *mi lag*, which normally has the connotation "hired worker." In Te, in fact (unlike most other villages), there is no tradition of hiring another villager for payment in cash or kind, nor is there any policy of direct reciprocity for such favours. Any man may be asked to substitute for another, and if he has no other pressing engagement, he will generally agree. Until now, it has been possible for an adolescent as young as thirteen to be substituted for someone over the age of eighteen.

28. Concerning the retrieval of dzos and goat-herding: only those who are above eighteen and below sixty-five may go. If someone who has not reached the proper age should go, he will be fined 25 rupees per day. If a household has its own goats, one herder shall be exempted from village duties.

The dzos of Te are pastured on the hills around the village. On the tenth day of every month according to the Tepa calendar, they are rounded up and brought

down to the settlement, where their owners examine them, give them salt, and oil their horns to prevent them from cracking. There is a roster of dzo-owning households who take it in turn to bring the animals down each month. The aim of this clause is to ensure that the duty household provides someone who is capable of performing the task properly. Young boys are too easily discouraged in their search for missing animals, and often return to the village without a full complement.

The rule concerning the age of the goatherds refers to goats that are kept in the village. Each hearth is allowed to keep ten goats within the village, mainly for the sake of collecting their dung. These goats are split into two herds and are grazed in the vicinity of the village every day.

Goatherds who are too young tend to be more concerned with playing games than finding good browsing, and they may let them into the fields.

Each household has its own major herds up on the high pastures. These herds are economically important for the whole village, and herders are exempted from other village duties. There is usually an adult in charge of each herd; sometimes households combine their herds and the owners take it in turns.

29. The people who make the beer for the Lama Guru must swear an oath about whether the [grain for the] beer has been thoroughly boiled or not.

The grain for making the beer for the Lama Guru festival is accumulated in the form of revenue from a group of communal fields that are dedicated to this purpose (on the subject of communal fields, see clause 1). The duty of brewing the beer rotates around the estates. As a fee for performing this task, the responsible households are permitted to keep the lees for cattle feed. Unboiled grain is much more nutritious for livestock than beer-lees, and it often happens that the household charged with this responsibility will not convert all the grain into beer. A part of the grain is boiled and cooled, and then mixed with the portion—as much as a third of the total quantity—that has been set aside. After the addition of yeast, the mixture is put into large earthenware jars to ferment. The unboiled grain will not, of course, ferment, and is only added in order not to raise suspicions over the relatively small quantity of must. When, at the end of the ceremony, all the beer has been drained off, the brewer's animals will feast on a mixture of lees and whole grain, misappropriated from the public fund.

30. Water may never be channelled to the Shagthang fields from the Yurchu. Anyone who channels water shall be fined 100 rupees for every subsection, and no excuses.

Fields are divided into a number of subsections, separated from one another by earth walls a few inches high. Each section has a small sluice gate that links it to the nearest canal, and may therefore be irrigated independently of its neighbours.

The Shagtang fields are located close to the gravel bed (SMT, Seke *shagtang*) opposite Tshognam on the south side of the Narshing River. They used to be irrigated with the water from the river (see earlier), but the connecting canal was washed away some years ago. The owners of the affected fields are at liberty to restore the canal, but seem to consider the expense and effort involved not worthwhile. It would be far easier for them to irrigate these from the Yurchu, a canal that is connected to the Narshing River further upstream (see clause 12). However, the water of the Yurchu is reserved for the Mangtse area of cultivated land, and may not be used on the Shagtang fields.

31. After it has been established who owns fields in the Mangtse area, taxes will be levied according to the size of fields.

Mangtse denotes the area of fields that is irrigated by the Yurchu. It has been badly eroded by the river, and people are still paying taxes on fields that no longer exist. Until now, contrary to the case of the Tongtse cultivated area (which is irrigated with water from the reservoir), the Mangtse fields are not differentiated in terms of their seed capacity for the purpose of irrigation. Each of the three estates that has rights to water on a given day simply takes it in turn to irrigate one entire field at a time. As I shall discuss in chapter 10, the system for the irrigation for Mangtse involves the allocation of quantities of water commensurate with field area, computed in terms of seed capacity. This point is effectively a tax reassessment of the area. Henceforth, as a result of the annually diminishing quantity of available water, the irrigation of the Mangtse fields will be reckoned with greater precision on the basis of the seed capacities that are recorded in the new assessment.

32. If someone from the community belonging to the group [that does the dancing] at Zatönse does not come to the dancing area, he or she will be fined 25 rupees, and no excuses.

Another example of the effort to ensure that the main community ceremonies are a “good show.”

33. In the area of Sumdü Deyang people should never tan [lit. soak] hides, pound chillis, whip goat-wool, remove earth, work a hide, or carry out manure. If someone violates this rule he shall be fined 50 rupees, and no excuses. Only spinning is permitted.

Sumdu Deyang is an open area where people gather informally to talk and spin. The activities listed here are proscribed as being antisocial. Tanning hides smells bad; pounding chillis makes everyone sneeze; goat hair fills the air. Removing earth here refers to the practice of digging sand from an irrigation ditch that passes underneath a neighbouring house. Apart from the fact that the area in which people sit becomes muddy, the removal of silt from irrigation canals is now generally prohibited according to clause 30. "Working leather" is the process of wringing hides, one small area at a time, that follows the stage of soaking. Hides being worked in this way are evil-smelling (since the process involves the use of putrid yak-brains as an emollient) and shed hanks of hair. Householders who live in the immediate vicinity of Sumdu Deyang customarily pile their domestic manure in the square before transporting it to their fields. It is this practice of heaping the manure outside, rather than carrying it from the house to the fields, that is being proscribed.

- 34a. If the reservoir fills up and overflows, two people from each [household in each] unit on the irrigation roster will be excused from civic duties, but if it does not overflow, one person from each shall be exempted.
- 34b. If a child under the age of twelve dies the people in the house may mourn for no more than three days.
- 34c. Further to point 34a, if there is someone who cannot come because he is ill or whatever, he may be excused if he can swear an oath to this effect. If someone falls seriously ill and has to go to Jomsom hospital or wherever, even if four or five people go to carry the patient, only one person may be exempted from village duties as a helper to the patient. The others must come back up immediately. If a sick person in the village is capable of walking out of his house, there shall be no assistant who is exempted from village duties.
- 34d. The [people of the] community of Te gladly and willingly set their thumbprints [to affirm that] they will never deviate from these rules.
- 34e. Omitted above: if anyone sees a person taking black earth around [lit. to right and left of] Kutsog ridge, [the offender] will be fined 100 rupees.

(34a) As I have mentioned, the complicated business of irrigation management is dealt with in the Introduction to *Tibetan Sources* (vol. 1.), but this subclause can be explained briefly as follows. Four households each day are entitled to use the water that has collected in the reservoir the previous night. If

there happens to be some communal task in progress at the time, only one person from each of the estates concerned may be exempted from public labour. If, however, because of warm sunshine on the snow peaks, or heavy rainfall, the reservoir accumulates so much water overnight that it overflows (the expression used in the document is *smugkyu*, a Teke term meaning “overflow water”), two people from each of the four estates are liberated in order to ensure that none of the precious water is lost while managing the channels. (34b and 34c.) Both these paragraphs are intended to define a reasonable degree of compassionate leave in the event of private bereavement and illness. The aim is clearly to ensure that such occasions are not used as an excuse for absenteeism from whatever communal tasks happen to be in progress, and the rules are irrelevant when there is no demand from public labour. These paragraphs—the first, at least—appear to be an afterthought to clause 8. 34e. The black earth in question, a variety of clay, is used for washing hair, plastering walls and floors, mixing with manure, and so forth. Kutso Gang, situated just to the west of the settlement area, is a ridge on which there stands a stupa. The ban on taking clay from the site is intended to prevent the stupa and adjacent fields from collapsing as a result of being undermined.

### The Individual and the Collective

I will assess the particular significance of some of the clauses in the constitution in chapter 11, but to conclude here, a few general observations may be made about the matter of law in Te.

In chapter 4, I explained and emphasized the importance of the household unit. It is this particular institution with which individuals most readily identify in preference to other configurations, notably the obsolescent patrilineal clan. The estate is not a property that ought to be maintained for the benefit of one’s lineage by default, or for other chosen successors; on the contrary, suitable heirs must be found to do justice to the estate. Voluntarily making concessions to other estates at the expense of one’s own would be regarded as irresponsible, even pathological, behaviour.

In the constitution, however, we see the operation of a very different ethic. Nearly every one of the clauses is the consequence of individuals voting in favour of measures to limit the activities of the estates and their members’ freedom to enhance their prosperity. The constitution is, in short, for the benefit of the community as a whole, not for the domestic units that compose it. The Tepas, evidently, do not share the confidence of utilitarian phi-

losophers that a society of people acting in the interests of their own private ends will naturally impose limits on themselves in order not to encroach on the freedom of their neighbours; they do not hold with the idea—promulgated in Europe by Herbert Spencer—that social cohesion should be “nothing other than the spontaneous accord of individual interests” (Durkheim 1933 [1920], cited in Lukes 1973: 143). The Tepas’ constitution is a manifestation of the opposition that was hinted at in the story of Kog’s abandonment. Individualism is the basis of prosperity, but its centrifugal action tends toward the destruction of the community. Opposed to the individual is the collectivity, and because the individual is associated with wealth, the collectivity is characterised by poverty. This is the message of the myth, which, as myths will do, presents a picture of irreconcilable opposites. But life in the real world is always a compromise, and the Tepas’ task is to turn the two extremes into a workable dialectic: the community, after all, is made of individuals, but the viability of their estates depends on the existence of the community. There are two ways the conflicting demands of the two opposites can be met. (Spencer’s idea was that the pursuit of self-interest and the development of altruism would reinforce each other mutually with the growth of industrialisation; whatever the merits of the argument, the clear opposition in Te between individual and community interests rules out Spencer’s hypothesis as a solution in this case [142 n. 18].) One possibility is for people to determine a course of action by appraising the circumstances and consequences of every situation in terms of its relative benefits for themselves and for the community. Does the benefit to my household that will be gained by uprooting an ephedra plant from this field wall justify the risk the action carries for the stability of the village irrigation system? If I collect an extra load of firewood, is that really going to create a noticeable impact on the state of the community forests?

In her critique of rational choice theory, Mary Douglas discusses the exception its exponents usually make for small-scale societies. The grounds for this exception are “a common belief that in something called ‘community’ individuals can disinterestedly collaborate with one another and construct a collective good.” By this reasoning, the Tepas, as a small community, should have no need for a coercive legal system, since everyone’s internalised sense of the public weal will ensure that no one’s self-interest will acquire damaging manifestations. “The faulty argument,” says Douglas,

can be expressed as follows: smallness of scale fosters mutual trust; mutual trust is the basis of community; most organisations, if they

do not have a base in individual selective benefits, start as small, trustful communities. Then the special characteristics of community solve the problem of how the social order can ever emerge.

The obvious flaw in this ingenious line of reasoning does not need to be spelled out. Douglas's exasperated question says it all: "Has no one writing on this subject ever lived in a village?" (1987: 24–25).

So much for a society based on mutual trust. In Te, trust and altruism tread dangerously close to the threshold of irresponsibility to one's household. The Tepas' creation of a set of rules *pro bono publico* effectively formalises the disjunction between the community as a set of individuals and the community as a collectivity. During the two-week meeting for the Turning Upside Down of the Law, the Tepas think primarily about how the community might best be sustained and protected. When the meeting is over and the decisions committed to writing, people can stop worrying about the village as a whole and bring their attention back to the problems of their own estates. The edifice is in place, and individuals can enjoy the paradoxical freedom of pursuing their private ends without the burden of ambivalence. One advantage of this system is that it spares individuals the cognitive effort of dealing with moral dilemmas a dozen times a day. The policy amounts to a sort of institutionalised *mauvaise foi*, in which the Tepas limit their own freedom and the range of choices available to them by creating a set of external restrictions.

### Village Law and Civil Religion

The ideal of community is preserved by being distanced from the daily pursuit of the ideal of individualism in such a way that it can influence people's behaviour without being modified in turn. The relevance of the idea of a transcendent location for the moral order that resurfaces periodically in the history of civil society now becomes apparent.

In the introduction, I mentioned a modified form of Durkheim's thought that allows greater autonomy to individual agency. This change of emphasis is clear in the work of one its major exponents, Peter Berger. Berger's approach is probably open to the charge of dilettantism, but his selective use of concepts developed by a range of thinkers does produce a synthesis that extenuates aspects of Durkheim's work that have been most susceptible to criticism. The social world, as we saw in the introduction, is created by a threefold process of externalisation, objectification, and internalisation.<sup>6</sup>

Consciousness precedes socialisation, and the internalisation of the social order results in the “duplication of consciousness” (a concept derived from both Mead and Durkheim), through the cohabitation in any given individual of a socialised and nonsocialised component of the self. A person perceives the social world, as well as his or her own socialised self, as an Other. This dissociation can proceed in one of two directions. Either “the strangeness of the world and self can be reappropriated (*zurückgeholt*) by the ‘recollection’ that both world and self are products of one’s own activity”; or reappropriation is no longer possible, and “the social world and the socialized self confront the individual as inexorable facticities analogous to the facticities of nature.” Berger assimilates this process to the Marxist concept of alienation (Berger 1967: 90–92) with certain modifications.<sup>7</sup> He is at pains to point out that alienation is not to be confused with “anomy” (that is, existential horror of chaos). On the contrary, the seeming naturalness of a socially created world is all the more reassuring for the fact that its artificial origins have been obscured. One of the most important cultural phenomena in this regard is religion, which has been “so powerful an agency of nominalization precisely because it has also been a powerful, probably the most powerful, agency of alienation” (94).

The constitution of Te and the various oaths are clearly more important nomic edifices than either Buddhism or the cult of territorial gods, and they also have a considerable alienating quality. But is it reasonable to think of them as religion? Buddhism and pagan practice are “obviously” religious, insofar as they both entail a belief in anthropomorphic supernatural beings, but clearly neither can be regarded as having the status of a religion independent of the structure of the community.

The arguments that have been forwarded in favour of secular ritual also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to religion. According to a much-discussed definition by Victor Turner, ritual is “formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (1967: 19). A number of authors have challenged the definition on the grounds that the specification of a supernatural component is unnecessarily restrictive. Goody, for example, suggests that the necessary scope could be achieved simply by getting rid of the sticking point, “mystical beings or powers.”<sup>8</sup> But the suggestion is, of course, a trap, because the result of the omission is the creation of a category “so engulfing it seems likely to block research” (1977: 27).

If the notion of secular ritual is now well established in anthropological literature, what about the apparently oxymoronic idea of secular religion? Precisely what criteria one regards as germane to religion are, as Berger concedes, a question of taste, adding that “the only sensible attitude in matters of

definition is one of relaxed tolerance" (1967: 177). The problem of definition arises because religion *can* be a composite of so many factors any of which *may* be regarded as the crucial element.<sup>9</sup> The liberal approach is exemplified by works such as Thomas Luckmann's *Invisible Religion* (1967), which maintains an open-door policy about what should be admitted to the category. Berger objects to this approach on the grounds that "it is one thing to point up the anthropological foundations of religion in the human capacity for self-transcendence, quite another to equate the two"; by this token, he goes on to say, science, too, would be classified as religion (1967: 179–80). Berger himself advocates defining religion in terms of the category of the sacred, a suggestion that a reader may be forgiven for thinking only shifts the definitional problem from the frying pan into the fire. The radical bipartition of the world into sacred and profane spheres proposed by Durkheim is no longer tenable;<sup>10</sup> not least because there are too many shades of grey in between—something that will be apparent in the case of Te from the discussion of "sacred landscape" in chapter 6. From a sociological point of view, what constitutes sacrality is less important than the way societies respond to it. This becomes evident in situations where the sacred, as defined by the canons of a state-supported world religion, are abolished at a stroke and replaced with radical state-supported secularism. When the architects of the French Revolution did away with Christian rituals, they did not leave a vacuum but choreographed spectacular state ceremonies to take their place. The fickleness of the populace, who seamlessly transferred their Christian devotion to the new faith—whatever it was—came as a shock to at least one contemporary, Adolphe Thiers, who recorded his observations as follows.

It is impossible to view with any other feeling than that of disgust these scenes, possessing neither reflection nor sincerity, exhibited by a nation that had changed its worship, without comprehending either the previous, or the present, form of adoration.

When is the multitude sincere? When is it capable of comprehending the doctrines that are submitted to its belief? What does it generally want? Great meetings, which pander to its desire of being assembled, symbolic spectacles, which incessantly remind it of a power superior to its; lastly festivals, in which homage is paid to those who have made the nearest approach to what is good, noble or great; in short, temples, ceremonies and saints. There were now temples to Reason, Marat and Lepelletier. The people were assembled, they adored a mysterious power, they celebrated those two men. All their desires were satisfied, and they gave themselves up to their

passion on this occasion, in no other manner than as they always have done. (“The worship of Reason substituted for Christianity” [1793], cited in Falassi 1967: 103)

While the aftermath of the French Revolution has attracted the attention of numerous sociologists of religion (including, of course, Durkheim), the religious characteristics of more recent secular ideologies have also come under scrutiny. Brian K. Smith has argued that any humanistic approach to the study of religion must exclude from its definitions criteria—notably, the supernatural—that are posited from an insider’s point of view. What should be regarded as the defining characteristic of a religion is the existence of an authoritative source or canon, whether a literary corpus, a set of myths, “or any other functional equivalent” (Smith 1987: 53). By this token,

Marxism and Freudianism are therefore religions in the same way Hinduism is a religion: you can no more say anything as a Marxist or Freudian without returning to Marx or Freud (restating, recapitulating, reproducing their discourse) than you can as a Hindu without returning to the Veda. There are differences in the way these two new religious traditions use their canons and the way Hindus use theirs (generally speaking, Hindus take far less account of the actual teachings of the Veda than Freudians and Marxists do of Freud’s and Marx’s). (54–55)

As I mentioned in the introduction, the idea of a corpus of writings with canonical status at the heart of a “secular” religion figures prominently in discussions of American civil religion. As in the case of the French Revolution (although the idiom of Christianity was of course always far more prominent in American civil society), much of the public ceremonial was focused on the national day and the inauguration of the president, while the Declaration of Independence and Thanksgiving Day speeches have provided the tenor—the “form and tone”—of American civil religion down to today (Bellah 1967). But it is in the Constitution that the core values of the nation are preserved. Of course, many countries have constitutions, but in the case of the U.S. Constitution,

its uniqueness, in that for more than 200 years it has continued to be the central tenet of American values and institutions, distinguishes it from other constitutions, which have been changed and adapted by various political regimes. This, together with the “sacredness” with which the American Constitution is imbued, has accounted for its role in everyday life. (Seligman 1992: 109)

The sacred character of the text is further indicated by the word “unconstitutional,” which has not merely legal connotations but overtones of strong moral censure.

The transcendent aspect of the Tepas’ legal code is due precisely to this quality of untouchability. This being said, there is an important difference between the Sanyor Chewa and other oaths on the one hand and on the other the legal code that is worth closer examination: the fact that the latter is written while the former are not.

### Literacy and Innovation

One of the distinctive features of literacy is the quality of permanence that sets it apart from the more malleable realm of the oral. The fact that the constitution is, thenceforth, no longer susceptible to change has the effect of “objectivifying” (in the Marxist sense) the community from its members and endowing it with a degree of autonomy.

Legal systems, written constitutions, and the like belong to the category of entities that Durkheim called “social factors” (*faits sociaux*), which are defined primarily by their constraining influence on members of a society and their existence outside individuals. Since binding laws are constraining in a more unproblematic sense than other institutions Durkheim proposed, such as language and psychological factors, I do not need to rehearse here the well-known criticisms of the validity of the concept. (See Lukes 1973: 12 for a summary of the objections.) What does warrant closer examination here is the relationship between the individual and the community that is revealed by the institution of Te’s legal code.

The written word, as I noted, offers a measure of immutability that orality lacks. J. Baines, commenting on the uses of government documents in the ancient Near East, noted that “the incorporation of knowledge in a system of writing that endured over a long period led to the need for deliberate reforms because it froze the process of constant adaptation” (Baines 1983: 584, cited in Goody 1986: 34). It is possible to look at the matter from a different point of view. The fact of committing laws to writing and submitting the corpus to periodic scrutiny is, in fact, an ideal way of *effecting* social change. The twelve-yearly Turning Upside Down of the Law in Te ensures that the community, as far as it is represented in the constitution, never makes the transition from autonomy to hypostasis. After twelve years of being a constraining social factor, it loses its status as a collective representation and becomes the property of the individuals who created it. It is brought close again, into the sphere

where the conscious preferences of individuals can radically change it and, after suitable modification, set it apart from themselves again to get on with its constraining work. The existence of a written set of rules does indeed limit the process of constant adaptation; and even if the alterations made during the periodic revision are radical, they are measured, and are based on the considered judgments of people who are trying to adapt their own society to changes in the surrounding world of which they are aware. "Constant adaptation" can too easily turn into drift, and drift into anarchy.

There are certainly institutions in Te that undergo gradual change without the assembly of villagers having to make conscious decisions: clothing styles, for example, or the fashion of chewing tobacco or smoking cigarettes. In these cases, of course, the distribution of innovations and the rapidity with which they are accepted are not uniform throughout the community but depend on a range of more or less obvious factors. The modification of certain other conventions may be retarded by their association with more conservative institutions; the matter of whether men wore their hair long or short was not, as we have seen, just a question of fashion.

The community oath, the Sanyor Chewa, differs from the written constitution in a number of significant ways. First, the language is not the colourless prose in which the clauses of the former are set down, but is characterised by the poetic devices of parallelism and repetition. Second, the number of clauses—perhaps we should call them verses—has a symbolic importance. Third, the oath's solemnisation is effected by certain ritual gestures. Fourth, conformity is enforced primarily by the threat of divine, rather than pecuniary, sanctions. The oath works as a monitor of future conduct only by implication; those who swear it are declaring that they have not *in the past* acted in violation of its terms. Its normative force lies in the tacit knowledge that the procedure will be repeated in a year's time: the Sanyor Chewa is an oath, not a vow. The implication of this temporal structure is that the proscriptions belong to the category of "that which goes without saying." A feature of several of the clauses I noted earlier is their extreme specificity. The villagers do not declare that they have not stolen, or even that they have not stolen cash or goats; they swear that they have not stolen 81 rupees and 36 rupees, or *the goat*. The first point to be made is that such specificity is, as Goody points out, consistent with the highly contextualised formulations characteristic of oral societies. Goody suggests that the difference between the specific and general idioms of prohibition can be understood in terms of the Weberian opposition between traditionalism and rationalism, where rationalism is marked by its "receptive attitude towards new solutions of problems." Unlike the constitution, which is based on rational appraisal of a situation by individuals, the institution of the Sanyor Chewa

contains no mechanism of adaptation. It is out of reach. The fate of the Sanyor Chewa is consistent with the historical fact that radical transcendence may be a prelude to secularisation—but this observation anticipates chapter 11.

Now, both the Sanyor Chewa and the written constitution are products of consensus among individuals. But the type of interaction that produced them is different. The rational character of the decisions that lead to the formulation of the constitution means that it is easily reducible again to individual analysis. In the case of several, at least, of the clauses of the Sanyor Chewa (particularly the clauses concerning theft), the motive force seems not to have been cold reason but public outrage. It may have seemed like a good idea at the time to condemn the offending acts in perpetuity, but the formulation, once made, outlives the passion that made it relevant. The oath is not amenable to modification based on rational assessment: it was not formulated in public debate, and it is locked up in poetic form, a fixed number, an inaccessible past, and divine curatorship. It exhibits the principle—beloved of myth—that *it is the most intangible things that are the most binding*.

When the Norse gods set out to tie up Fenris the Wolf, the Hound of Hell, their efforts to restrain him with the strongest fetters they could make—Loedhing and Drómi—came to nothing. At last the black elves in the underworld created Gleipnir, a leash made from the subtlest things in the world: the step of the cat, the beard of woman, the spittle of birds, the roots of the mountain, the breath of the fish, and the sinews of the bear.<sup>11</sup> The gods bound the monster with this rope, and Fenris was unable to break it. Snorri Sturluson, the thirteenth-century compiler of the corpus, comments that the point of Gleipnir's components is that they do not exist.<sup>12</sup> But I think Snorri is wrong. These things *do* exist—but only just. They are too intangible or imperceptible to be got at, and that, I think, is the point.

# The Headmen of Te and the Heaven-Appointed King

This chapter will consider the nature of community leadership in Te, with a particular focus on the ceremony whereby the headmen are appointed. This complex process is worth our close attention because it entails one of the most striking illustrations of the ritual manufacture of a collectivity and, by implication, divinity. Certain aspects of the institution of headmanship are remarkable and complex, but the system is nevertheless consonant with the prevailing forms of government in south Mustang. To avoid the danger of Te appearing unnecessarily freakish, in the first part of the chapter I provide some essential historical and ideological background regarding political power in the region.

## PART I: THE IDEA OF MONARCHY

Broadly speaking, government in Mustang has been represented by two models: monarchy and democracy. Monarchic government extended through the area following the establishment of the kingdom of Lo in the fifteenth century, but after that the story is one of gradual decline. The intervention of Jumla resulted in the withdrawal of Lo's power above the Panda Khola—the southern boundary of Baragaon—and eventually as far north as Gemi. A royal model continued to prevail in Baragaon under the authority of the Kyekya Gangba dukes, but over the course of time the real power of that family came to be reduced to the proportions of mere ceremony.

Nevertheless, the concept of monarchy is not limited to the constraints of *Realpolitik* but makes up rather a set of principles underlying a system of government. Royalty and democracy have a complex history of interaction in Mustang, and under certain circumstances each has a disconcerting tendency to turn into the other: to qualify as a true monarch (as Montesquieu argued) the king must govern according to fixed and established laws (Casajus 1996; Durkheim 1992 [1957]: 76); and as I shall discuss, the democratic structures that make up the civil society of south Mustang are themselves predicated on a certain ideal of royalty. The basis of this ideal, which derives from the Tibetan model of kingship, is worth examining briefly. I shall concentrate on three features that seem to me particularly distinctive of the model.

The Tibetan prototype of a king's accession to the throne is the story of the first ruler, who is variously known as Ode Pugyal or Nyatri Tsenpo.<sup>1</sup> Later Buddhist tradition has the king coming to Tibet from India, whereas in earlier sources, including Bonpo literature, he descends from the sky. (For a discussion of the chronological development of the myth, see Karmay 1998c.) The account given in a Bonpo work called the *Grags pa bon lugs* has been summarised by Samten Karmay:<sup>2</sup>

At that time, the nine "fathers" (*pha dgu*) of the twelve principalities of Tibet are not united and are ruled by no one. A council is held. One says: "We need to look for a true chief who is endowed with magic capabilities. Where could a person like that be?" Then a voice is heard saying: "If the black-headed Tibetan people wish to have a ruler, on the seventh stage of heaven, the place of dMu, in a gold castle with a turquoise roof, there is the Lord Khri Bar-gyi bdun-tshigs who is a descendant from the Phyva gods and a cousin of the dMu gods. Invite him to be your ruler!" So everybody accordingly agrees to invite him. Then the voice further says: "No one else can invite him but the god of the ribs [so called because he came into the world through his mother's ribcage], sKar-ma yol-lde, the son of Sa-bla mgon-bu." The latter is requested to go and invite him.

He says: "O Lord! On earth down there, the country La-ga gling-drug, there is no ruler for the nine fathers of the twelve principalities. Everyone says he is a lord. In heaven where there is no yak, any animal which has a long horn would claim to be a yak! If there were no water on earth, it would be too dry. If the horses had nothing to eat, it would be as if they were in a desert. Please come and be the ruler for those who have none. Come to be the master of the yaks

which have no owners. Come to look after the animals which are helpless!"

The Lord replies: "Down there on earth there are various calamities, such as theft, poison, hatred, enemies, demons, lies, the *sri* spirit, the *btsan* spirit, imprecations, the crooked and yaks." The god of ribs insists: "For theft, there is a way of dealing with it; there is medicine against poison, love against hatred, friendship against enemy, god against demon, truth against lies, means of supressing the *sri* and *btsan* spirits, deliverance from imprecation, straightforwardness against the crooked and weapon against yaks.

"You and I are related (being first cousins). The wood *se ba* burns well, the meat close to the bone tastes good, wool is warm for clothes (allusion to the idea of it being good to be with a relative). I beg you to come to be the ruler of those who have none and be the master of yaks which have no owners." The Lord agrees to come.  
(1998a: 299–300)

This, then, is the first point: the model Tibetan ruler does not impose his reign by force but comes reluctantly, in response to a desperate request by men in search of a ruler.

The second point is that the king rules on the basis of a contractual agreement with his subjects. This idea, too, finds expression in early Tibetan sources. A manuscript from Dunhuang cites a reciprocal oath sworn by the emperor Songtsen Gampo and one group of his subjects, the Wä (Tib. *dBas*) clan. In the relevant passage, summarised by Macdonald, "the king and the elderly Wä swear mutual help and fidelity in perpetuity, in an alternating song." Among other things, the king provides the assurance that "if you are not disloyal towards the Pugyal king(s) we shall never, ever have [your] sons punished if they are innocent; we shall never listen to slander"; and so forth. The Wä in turn "reply with a reciprocal oath. 'We shall never be disloyal towards the Pugyal Tri Songtsen or his sons; we shall never be disloyal towards his lineage, never.' And so they promise not to seek another lord and not to associate with others who might be disloyal" (Macdonald 1971: 255–58).<sup>3</sup>

The same motif of mutual loyalty between the lord and his subjects appears later on in the same work with reference to the association between Songtsen Gampo and his celebrated minister Gar (Macdonald 1971: 269–70):

Let the lord not reject his subject....  
Let the subject not reject his lord

The third and final point concerns the accountability of the ruler to his subjects. A feature of the early Tibetan monarchy that is attested to in various sources is the heir's accession to the throne at the age of thirteen with the corresponding displacement of the incumbent, who was either ritually killed or consigned, with an entourage, to an enclosure that was conceived of as a realm of the dead (Haarh 1969: 334; Snellgrove and Richardson 1995: 29–30; Tucci 1955: 198). The burying alive of Tibetan kings may be understood as part of the susceptibility of an individual's reign to constitutional limitations. Haarh remarks that "the astounding number of historical kings who were murdered shows the persevering maintenance of the constitutional right to commit regicide, and the justification of it, even if it is committed much later than originally prescribed" (334). Straightforward factionalism unquestionably accounted for the great majority of these killings, but what concerns us here is the terms in which these acts were justified. Haarh cites unsoundness of mind or body as a recurrent stimulus, but it is also true that insanity is sometimes offered as a sort of apology for a king's violation of his constitutionally defined role.

It is worth examining briefly two well-known assassinations that had major consequences for the dynasty as a whole. The first of them has been associated by certain scholars with the transition of the monarchy from a sacerdotal office to a political institution (Haarh 1969: 109; Tucci 1955); the second resulted in the disintegration of the empire. A well-known work, the *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, gives the following account of the circumstances leading to the first of these regicides:

The king [Drigum Tsenpol], got his mind possessed by a *gdon* [demon], and to a minister called Longam Tadzi he said: "You shall act as my adversary!" Longam answered: "But why, Ruler? *I, a subject, cannot be the adversary of a Ruler.*" But because he had no power (to decline), he was obliged to fight." (Haarh 1969: 147; my emphasis)

Drigum was duly killed, and from that time on, the Tibetan kings no longer reascended to heaven at the time of their death but left their bodies on earth. The gloss cast on the episode by this account is unambiguous: the corruption of the king's senses by an evil spirit causes him to break the compact that obtains between lord and subject, with inevitable results. In certain Bonpo versions of the conflict, the killing is justified on the grounds that the king was hostile to the old religion, and to the extent that he became an oppressor, compromised the legitimacy of his reign. The second assassination, too, is customarily justified in the literature by casting the king in the role of deranged

oppressor, in this case, of the Buddhist religion. This king, Langdarma, was assassinated in AD 842 by the monk Palkyi Dorje.<sup>4</sup>

To the extent that it remained under the power of the rulers of Lo, the northern part of Mustang has been subjected to uninterrupted monarchic authority, a situation that is reflected in the preoccupation of the greater part of the secondary literature concerning this region. Southern Mustang, by contrast, from which the rule of Monthang withdrew at a relatively early stage, is characterised rather by a democratic form of local government. This fact, too, features in the work of a number of authors (e.g. Vinding 1998: 252) and receives special emphasis in an article by Dieter Schuh (1990). However, it is in the area between these two extreme poles that we find the most interesting interplay of the two systems, and for this reason the enclaves of Panchgaon and Baragaon deserve special attention. As we have seen, the sharp ethnic and linguistic boundary between the two is the result of historical accident, and the available evidence suggests that the areas once exhibited considerably more cultural homogeneity than they do at the present time. By the same token, there are also good grounds for supposing that the very different forms of government in Panchgaon and Baragaon mask a common substratum of civil society and a shared set of political ideals. The evidence for this claim lies in a number of documents from the two areas.

### Democracy and the Despot

The most important political entity in Panchgaon was Thini. Local sources suggest that it may originally have consisted of a principal settlement with half a dozen (the numbers vary according to sources) satellites, a configuration represented in the old Tibetan formula *Thin ma bu drug*: “Thini, the Mother and Her Offspring, Six in All.” All that now remains of these lesser villages are a few ruins and some suggestive toponyms. Documents from the area suggest that an earlier nucleus may have been made up of three settlements, for it is referred to as *Ma bu gsum*, “The Mother and Her Offspring, Three in All.” This original threesome may provide the source of the Tibetan name of Thini, Sumpo (Tib. *gSum po*), “the Triad.” Thini appears to have been very powerful before the rise of Lo, for it received taxes and tributes from certain settlements in what is now Baragaon, and from as far afield as Gelung and even Manang. Marpha, closer to home, was required periodically to provide unpaid agricultural labour. Panchgaon and Thak were absorbed into the kingdom of Lo, but shortly afterward became independent. The evidence for this is to be found in a document, probably dating from 1697, in which Thak, Thini, and Marpha

(which by now had itself broken away from Thini) are signatories to an agreement concerning procedures for dealing with a king of some neighbouring power, either Parbat or Jumla (Schuh 1995: 8–11). The document provides a neat illustration of the basis on which the communities of the Thak Khola created a confederation. One passage in particular is worth quoting here because of its resonance with certain treaties from the Shöyul that I discussed in chapter 4.

As the rGan-pa and mKhar-dpon of the three countries reached an agreement in a meeting on the third day of the Monkey Month of the Female-Fire-Ox year, the [following] document has been recorded:

In the event that the inhabitants of gSum-po are attacked by foreigners, the inhabitants of Thag and of dPung-dgris [i.e. Marpha] must support them.

Further, in the event that the inhabitants of Thag are attacked, the inhabitants of gSum-po [i.e. Thini] and dPung-gris must support them.

If the inhabitants of dPung-gris are attacked, the inhabitants of Thag and gSum-po must support them.

Whenever anyone goes to address the King [of Jumla or Parbat, CR], whoever arrives first must bring up the concerns of all and not commit slander.

If in [another] country harmful slander is committed towards all of the three states, all three states must give mutual support to each other.

It must not happen within the three states that one [state] commits slander against another [state].

... If someone does not behave in accordance with the contents of this letter which was written after [all] enacted [the agreement] accordingly, the witness of the vow, [that is] the Dharmapala of the [Buddhist] religion, the Bon-protector of the Bon[-religion], the *lHa*, *Klu* and *gZhi-bdag* of this world and the *Pho-lha* and *dGra-lha*, on whom [we, CR] rely, will punish those who do not behave accordingly with harsh punishments.

We request them to bless those who act accordingly. (Schuh 1995: 10)

The document is signed by the headmen and various other individuals of the three principalities concerned.

The three "states" were treating with each other as equals, without a superior power to coordinate their cooperation or to ensure their adherence to the terms of the agreement. The only guarantors of the alliance are political expediency and divine witness.

The leadership of Thini at this time consisted of a small group of headmen and lesser officials. In more recent times, these various leaders (with the exception of the clan chiefs) held office for relatively short terms—one to three years—although it did happen that a particularly competent headman would be asked to retain his position for life. It is possible that the foundations of local leadership in the seventeenth century were similarly contingent. It is clear at any rate that the notion of absolute power was obnoxious to the political sensibility of Thini, as revealed by the continuing vitality of a story of the principality's brief encounter with monarchy.

The story, which is preserved in a number of textual and oral variants, runs as follows. King Thökarcen—a name meaning "the one with the white turban"—came to southern Mustang in quest of a throne, and found the confederation of Thini with no ruler other than a committee of elders. After some confusing preliminaries, he comes to the point:

"Will you three elders accept me [as your king] or will you not?"

"Well, Precious King, we must discuss the matter with the other inhabitants of Ma-bu-sum."

"So be it," [said the king,] "hold your discussion." In the daytime both men and gods assembled, and in the night gods, demons and goblins met. We duly met at [the site called] Mapangcen and held the discussion. "[Even] if King Thökarcen flies in the air we shall consider him [as our king], and even if he enters the earth we shall so consider him." (Ramble and Vinding 1987: 14)

This account was probably written a very long time after the events on which it was based, and its importance lies not in its historical worth but in its presentation of the circumstances in which the king accedes to the throne. At the beginning of the account, we are left in no doubt that Thökarcen has set out to seize a kingdom—indeed, any available kingdom—by force. But when it comes down to it, his aspiration is referred to the populace by the mediating elders, and it is only on the strength of their agreement that Thökarcen becomes king. The clause about flying in the sky or entering the earth is a legal formula of the sort that is used in local documents to seal any kind of agreement, such as the resolution of a private dispute or the sale of a field. Whatever

the historical reality may have been, the document appears to legitimise Thökarcen's reign by formulating it as a contract, ratified by general agreement among the people. This presentation accords with one of the three principles of Tibetan kingship that I have discussed: the ruler's reign is contractual.

The account of the royal family of Thini contains two further aspects of kingship I would like to draw attention to here. The only named successor of Thökarcen is Thangmigcen. He is not identified in the documents as one of Thökarcen's several sons, and the documents sometimes confuse him with Thökarcen. In the oral tradition, they are conflated into a single character. At one point, Thangmigcen is confronted by a hostile neighbour, King Punari, who threatens to cut off Thini's water supply if Thangmigcen does not permit him to settle in the vicinity. Thangmigcen acquiesces, not because he has been browbeaten but because he is concerned for the welfare of his subjects.

King Thangmigcen thought concernedly, in accordance with his being a bodhisattva, "If there is no water in this land, how will the water mills be turned, how will the fields be irrigated, and what can we drink?" The king and his subjects consequently held a discussion.

(Ramble and Vinding 1987: 16–17)

They agree to establish peaceful relations with King Punari. The idea of the good king being a bodhisattva, someone who postpones his own liberation in order to reincarnate for the benefit of living creatures, is a well-established motif in Buddhist literature. It accords with an indigenous Tibetan concept, discussed earlier, of the divinity who descends to earth *reluctantly* as a much-needed ruler.

The principle of the king's accountability is neatly illustrated by the story of the demise of Thangmigcen. Irritated by a hill that stood between the rising sun and his palace, he ordered his subjects to go and remove the offending peak. They had got no further than felling trees when they tired of the laborious task and hatched a scheme to rid themselves of their oppressor. While the king was inspecting the site, he was somehow persuaded to insert his hands into a split log that was held open with wedges. The wedges were quickly knocked out of place, and the king was caught firmly by the fingers. All the subjects had to do was to roll the log down the hill, and Thini's brief flirtation with monarchy came to an end.

The assassination of the king is presented as a justifiable regicide: the ruler is accountable to his people.

Whereas the communities of Panchgaon were directly under the suzerainty of Jumla, and treated "horizontally" with one another, certain critical aspects of Baragaon's administration were taken away from the community

and concentrated in the hands of the dukes. The situation is described in some detail by Schuh (1995), but two instances of ducal authority may be mentioned to illustrate the “top-down” system of government that prevailed. According to a seventeenth-century law book (Tib. *bem chag*) from Kag, the headman received his authority from the palace of Kag. Furthermore, he was the headman not only of his village of but of all Baragaon. The relevant passage of the law book reads as follows.

Concerning . . . [lacuna, CR] of the *rgan-pa* of *sKag* . . . : with the pronouncing of the words “from the point in time onwards in which the turban was first presented to you, you are not [only] the *rgan-pa* of *sKag*; you are the *rgan-pa* of the land of the twelve villages (*yul-kha bcu-gnyis*),” a turban shall be presented by the fortress (*mkhar*). (31)

A second important point is that whereas the frontiers between the states of Panchgaon were fixed by common consent of the communities concerned, the principal territorial divisions in Baragaon were imposed by the first duke, Pöndrung Trokyawa. Whether he really imposed them, as the Kag law book claims, or—as is more likely—merely reinforced existing boundaries is irrelevant. The point is that the authority of the boundaries is sanctified not by agreement among the villages concerned, but by the ruler who stood above them all. Even after the annexation of Baragaon by the Gorkhas, and well into Rana times, the Kyekya Gangba family retained their position as hereditary local rulers, a status that was confirmed by decrees from Kathmandu.

I have found only one document that concerns accession to the dukedom of Baragaon. The fact that the date given contains only the calendrical animal, either a Snake or a Dragon (Tib. *sbrul* or *'brug*—the word is not clear), and lacks an accompanying element means that we can place it only within a twelve-year, rather than the full sixty-year, cycle. However, if the lord named Gung *rgyal* in the document is the same as the Kun *rgyal* who appears—still alive—in another document of 1820 from Dzar (Schuh 1994: 44), the work can be no earlier than the Iron Dragon year of 1820 or the Iron Snake year of 1821, and more probably dates from the next Dragon or Snake year twelve years later.

From the Trithob Trashi Thog-gyal, the lord, to those between the ages of eighteen and sixty in the Twelve Communities of Lower Lo.

When my father [A *khu*] Gung-gyal became the Trithob [he said], “Although I can endure the shooting pains in my upper body [occasioned by the thought of refusing this responsibility], my heart, in the lower part of my body, cannot bear it, and I shall accordingly come to the community below. Those aged between eighteen and

sixty among the subjects of Lower Lo reached this agreement with the lord, and he remained [as our ruler].

And now I shall do [likewise], but only because it is in accordance with the terms of the edict that was issued in the Monkey year. And moreover, the lord and the people are united as one under the law. The lord, for his part, should not abandon his subjects, [the people of] Lower Lo, and the subjects for their part should not abandon their lord. The present sealed document has been issued to this effect. . . . [The meaning of the next line is unclear but seems to suggest that three months earlier he was considering going—defecting?—to the king of Lo.] If I have two lines on my heart, or behave like a needle with two points, I shall willingly pay a fine of 1,000 rupees to my subjects of Lower Lo, and [remainder of sentence unclear]. In order that there should be no transgression of this matter, the Trithog Trashi [Thog-]gyal has issued this sealed document on the sixteenth day of the first month in a Dragon [or Snake?] year. (HMA/Te/Tib/61)

The document is impressed with the seal of the lord of Baragaon, which bears the two Tibetan syllables “Thog rgyal.”

This document is a fine example of the principles of monarchy. The circumstances in which the author’s father, Akhu Gung-gyal, became the Trithob are expressed in terms of heroic service. More explicitly than in the case of Thini—where it is hard to mask the fact that King Thökarcen is an unprincipled adventurer—we see here the future ruler’s reluctance to accept his office. He is racked with pity at the thought of the rudderless populace, and while his strong shoulders can bear this agony, his compassionate heart undermines his resolve, and he “comes to them” as a ruler.

Trashi Thobgyal, too, accepts his destiny with great unwillingness. He does so only because he is bound to do so by the law. I do not know of the “edict issued in the Monkey year” to which the document refers. The fact that the term for edict, *mor*, obviously signifies the Nepali word *[flāl]mohar*, suggests that it was an affirmation by the Gorkhas of the family’s hereditary right to rule.

The earliest available Gorkhali document concerning Baragaon, dating from 1790 and addressed to the lord of Dzar, begins with the following reminder.

[We] issued, be it recalled, a *[flāl]mohar* in the past [lit. yesterday] to the effect that you should enjoy the *birtto* [of] Bahrāgāū (Baragaon), Nār, and Manān (Manang) along with the *jāgāt* of Kāk, which you have enjoyed since olden times. (Pant and Pierce 1989: 21)

The date of the *mohar* in question is not given, but it may be noted that the nearest Monkey year to 1790 was the Wood Monkey year of 1788, just two years earlier.

The author of this document, Trithog Trashi Thobgyal, prefers to interpret the *mohar* as a binding obligation that he must honour rather than the perpetuation of a sought-after privilege. He and his subjects are bound to each other under the terms of the law, and he promises, on pain of paying a substantial indemnity, that he will not deal with them in a duplex manner—as if he had two lines on his heart or behaved like a two-pointed needle.

What about the accountability of the lords of Baragaon to their subjects? As we have seen, the principle according to which the Tibetan kings ruled by agreement with the people was an idealisation of the reality that his power was not absolute. Even in the case of Thini, where a warlord apparently seized control of the state at some point in history, the record of the event is suffused with the fiction of popular acquiescence. As the Kag law book of 1697 indicates, the power structure of Baragaon was of a simple pyramidal kind: the lord was at the top; beneath him was the headman of Kag and of all Baragaon, and beneath this headman there were presumably the headmen of each village. But when the authority of the dukes weakened in the nineteenth century, the capacity of the enclave's settlements to communicate and to act in concert did not disintegrate; on the contrary, Baragaon showed itself to be entirely capable of coordinated action.

In 1856, the government of Nepal took away from the ruling family of Bargaon the right to collect taxes, and simultaneously deprived them of certain other privileges. The office was instead auctioned to a contractor (Nep. *ijaradar*) (Regmi 1978: 88). The contractor, however, apparently engaged some other branch of the Baragaon aristocracy as his local agents, and their excesses prompted the people to protest directly to the government. The protest is recorded in a document dated 1865, one copy of which was photographed in Dzong and another in Chongkhor. The text is apparently the Tibetan translation of a missive from Kathmandu (cited by Regmi 1978: 88) that begins by quoting back to the addressees—the people of Baragaon—the details of the complaint they originally lodged against the contractor and the “new” lords. A few examples will suffice to give an idea of the nature of Baragaon’s grievances. Among other things, the newcomers impose fines without prior consultation with local leaders; insist on payment of taxes in a more costly variety of barley than was customary; have prolonged from four to eight months the period during which the people must provide them with fodder and fuel; requisition animals for transport at unreasonably short notice; have extended the privilege of tax exemption to their own illegitimate children; demand the payment of fines in

cash rather than a combination of cash and grain; have raised the fine for sleeping with low-caste Artisans from 1 rupee to 8 rupees; and send their livestock into the fields before the harvesting (Dzong doc. 1; Chongkhor doc. 1).

One of the interesting things about the document is that the principle of local nobles being entitled to services by the Commoners is nowhere challenged. The tone of the complaint is one of injured pride on the part of a people who are prepared to pay their taxes and perform various sorts of unpaid labour for their lord, but will not suffer the indignity of perceived exploitation. Life under the old lords (generically referred to as *Tshakar Bista*) was evidently no holiday, but one cannot help feeling that the main, unstated grounds for the complaint were not the aggravation of material circumstances so much as the withdrawal of reciprocity, as slight as that may have been.

The main point, however, is the promptness and effectiveness with which the populace responded to shabby treatment by an *arriviste*. As I shall discuss, this is not the only evidence to indicate that four hundred years of royal or ducal rule had failed to render the villages incapable of effective political co-ordination.

As it turned out, the Kathmandu government supported most of the grievances, but it did not change its policy of engaging contractors to administer the area. The people, in turn, remained watchful of the activities of the nobility. One of the results of the investigation carried out was the revelation that all the taxes levied by the *Tshakar Bista* had not been forwarded to the government treasury. To this extent the complaint backfired, because the villagers were then required to pay the sum that had been misappropriated by the ruler.

The Baragaon archive contains a document, dated 1867,<sup>5</sup> that was almost certainly drawn up as a consequence of this discovery. The text is brief, and some of the details are obscure, but the main concern seems to be the failure of the last lord of Baragaon to pay the government of Nepal a sum of 25 rupees—presumably money he had levied from the villagers in his capacity as collector (Nep. *anyal*).

Following a meeting of one person from each estate of the eighteen communities of Ngazhab: point 1: we request the nobles [to show us] all documents concerning past rules; point 2: we must first be allowed to conduct an investigation. Up until now, from the time Kuwang [= *Kushog Wangyal*?] of Dzar became the tax collector of Kag, there has still been no investigation. (HMA/Baragaon/Tib/35)

Another document, dated 1886 and kept in a private archive of Tshognam (HMA/UTshognam/Tib/40), shows that the people maintained their vigilance over their lord and his associates well into the era of the contractors:

The eighteen headmen of the eighteen villages of Baragaon submit this document to the Nobleman Zangdor, Duli of Te, and Tshewang of Dzong.

Since Kushog Bhelpo of Dzar became the lord in the Iron Dragon year (1879), his three ministers have been Gaga Zangdor, Duli of Te, and Tshewang Hirdar of Dzong.

Concerning their collection of double taxes from us, the people of Ngazhab: earlier, the Subjects [Ngazhab] seized them at Kag on the matter of taxes, and then, in order to investigate the matter with His Majesty's Government in Kathmandu, [sent] four men there for a meeting without delaying even one day, [saying that] if they did not arrive [there], their gold, silver, turquoise, coral, copper, and brass [possessions], as well as their four-legged chattels of various kinds, would be seized, without the option of refusal or begging for exemption.

A document of confirmation [that they had fulfilled these charges] was drawn up and given to them. This document the four of them signed and presented to Ngazhab.

The Nobleman Zangdor, Tshewang Hrithar, and Duli were brought before the royal authority, and Ngazhab presented a petition to the royal authority. The legal authorities apprehended those three men, and after the court investigated the matter it was judged that the double tax had to be returned. Kushog Bhelpo was pardoned, but the other three humbly begged forgiveness and paid Ngazhab 140 rupees, with a formal apology. We [people of] Ngazhab have accepted this [lit. "heard it in our hearts"], and in the future we shall not say that you three have yet to pay, and that there is an investigation to be made.

It would appear that the three ministers of Kushog Bhelpo, the lord of Baragaon, were suspected of levying twice the amount of taxes required by the government in Kathmandu. In order to check the truth, Baragaon sent four messengers to the capital, with the assurance of dreadful reprisals if they did not make their enquiries properly and report honestly. Given the severity of the threatened consequences, there could be no doubt about the veracity of their findings—that the double taxes were not imposed by Kathmandu but fabricated by the "ministers" of Kushog Bhelpo for private profit. They were brought to trial—presumably at the nearest government court—and found

guilty. The only penalty mentioned is the repayment of the money extorted. Kushog Bhelpo himself was not found guilty, but it is difficult to imagine that he was not aware of the situation, and, reading between the lines, it is fairly clear that the people of Baragaon were not convinced of his innocence. The case had already been settled by the time this document was drawn up, and the purpose of writing it is primarily to declare the restoration of the status quo: apologies have been offered, restitution made, and the matter is closed. But most important of all, perhaps, the document is a declaration of Baragaon's refusal to abdicate to the authority of the government of Nepal the responsibility for defending its honour and integrity.

This discussion has led away from the immediate confines of Te. However, an understanding of the Tibetan model of kingship, and its resonance with the interplay of monarchy and democracy in Mustang, is crucial to our understanding of the sacral character of Te's headmen. To this institution of headmanship I now turn.

## PART 2: COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

In many of the documents I have discussed in the preceding chapters, and especially in the law book of Te, resolutions are enforced by the threat of fines. All punishments in Te are imposed by the headmen, or by the constables who serve under them; it is they, and particularly the headmen, who represent the highest authority in the village. This authority is reflected in the stock phrase that recurs with great frequency in the archives, "the people of Te who are led by their Headmen." The expression I have translated as "led" is *tsöpa* (Tib. *gtsos pa*), which might be more literally translated as "of whom the foremost are . . ." In most of Mustang, including Te, the word for headman is *ganpa* (Tib. *rgan pa*). "Headman" is preferable to the etymologically more accurate "elder," since the position is not necessarily held by older members of a community (in fact in some cases the criterion for selection is youth, not age). The term *ganpa*, which is widely used throughout the Tibetan-speaking areas of Nepal and in many parts of Tibet itself, corresponds to the Nepali *mukhiyā*, which has the sense of "chief" or "main."

After the inception of the Partyless Panchayat System in Nepal in 1962, the role of the headman—as well as other categories of local elites—was supplanted in most parts of Nepal by the local representatives of the new state machinery. After the ban on political parties was lifted in 1990, the same system survived, *mutatis mutandis*, with certain structural modifications and a change of name from "panchayat" to "development committee" (Nep. *bikās*

*samiti*). The pre-panchayat local institutions (many of which were themselves residues of relatively large-scale political configurations) either disappeared altogether, or lived on in a reduced capacity with a symbolic status, as in the case of the clan heads of eastern Nepal, who became glorified tax collectors. In some cases, however, the structures of which local chiefs were a part retained considerable relevance as a sort of civil counterpoint to the panchayats and VDCs. This is the case in most of Mustang District (as opposed to, say, neighbouring Dolpo), and Te happens to be a particularly good example of the endurance of a civil society.

As for the partition of roles between the two entities, the VDC structures tend to be confined to dealings with external affairs, particularly in liaising with the central government through the district assembly and with governmental or nongovernmental line agencies. The fact of being a VDC member gives a person no special authority in internal village affairs. By contrast, the village headmen and other officials do not involve themselves with political or developmental issues outside the village. The three types of messengers, it should be noted, do not liaise with government bodies but run errands on behalf of the community at the instigation of the headmen.

In the following pages I will have less to say about the duties of Te's headmen than the matter of their recruitment and status. This assessment should be seen against the background, provided in the first part of this chapter, of the interaction of the democratic and monarchic models of government in the administration of Mustang. To review the main points of this discussion: since at least the fifteenth century, Baragaon was ruled either by the king of Lo or by local dukes, who were successively vassals of Jumla or semi-autonomous governors under the Gorkha state. The gradual reduction of the power of these dukes revealed a capacity for horizontal communication and a capacity for coherent political action among the nonnoble "subjects" (Ngazhab) that hinted at a well-established tradition of democratic civil society. This impression is vindicated by the evidence provided in chapter 3, which examines the Shöyul's acephalous alliance against the rest of Baragaon as well as the king of Lo. The attenuation of the dukes' authority finds expression, in certain documents, in admissions of weakness disguised in the idiom of the Tibetan ideal of kingship. This ideal, I suggested, is characterised by three main conditions:

1. The ruler does not impose his authority by force; he is appointed by heaven at the request of humans in need of a leader, and comes reluctantly.

2. The king rules according to the law.
3. The king is accountable to the people.

The authority of the dukes of Baragaon was mitigated in terms of these more democratic features. The case of the headmen of Te, as I shall discuss, presents us with precisely the opposite situation: a system of civil society based on the ideal of monarchy.

### Forms of Headmanship

Headmanship in Baragaon has a number of common features that may be noted. First, the duration of office of headmen is not more than one year. This may be contrasted with the situation under the Baragaon dukes, when the Kag headman received his authority from the palace and served for life. In Thini today, the headmen serve for three years, and instances of lifelong tenure in the case of uncommonly competent and popular individuals are recorded. Second, headmen are never chosen by majority vote. This may seem surprising, especially in Te, where, as we have seen, balloting is a well-established tradition that is used in a number of situations—such as the formulation of the village constitution. The commonest form of recruitment is simply a household roster, with the responsibility moving from one estate to the next each year according to an established circuit. (Numerous duties in Te are allocated by this method, as we have seen, but not that of the headmen.) I will briefly describe a number of other systems.

Tshug consists of three discrete settlement areas, Kyangma, Braga, and Cikyab. Like Te, it is divided into four sectors (*tsho*) that are based on residence: Braga, Cikyab, and two subdivisions of Kyangma named after territorial gods—Jowo Shartsen Gyalpo and Jowo Laptsen. For certain administrative purposes, the community is divided more simply into two moieties, Kyangma on the one hand and Braga/Cikyab on the other. This is apparent in the case of recruitment of village officials. Of the two annually serving headmen, one is recruited from Kyangma and the other from Braga/Cikyab. In addition to the two headmen, there are also six annually serving constables who are recruited by lot. The recruitment of headmen within each moiety alternates annually between the two sectors of which it is composed. The sector that provides the headman in each moiety furnishes only one constable, while the remaining two must choose two each. Headmen within the appropriate sector in each moiety are recruited on the basis of seniority, with the oldest man under retirement age acceding to the position.

Headmen are usually only recruited from full estates, not from subsidiary households. An interesting exception to this rule is the priestly village of Chongkhor. In addition to its estates, Chongkhor includes a number of subsidiary households called *khaldura*, and corresponding to the *phorang-morang* of Te and other villages (see chapter 4). The meaning of this term varies considerably from one village to another in Baragaon. In Chongkhor, for example, the *khaldura* were probably created by younger brothers who had no wish to participate in a polyandrous marriage, and therefore forfeited their rights to the usufruct of their parents. The founder of a *khaldura* household marries separately from his brothers and, with sufficient industry and luck, builds or buys a house and purchases fields. The name *khaldura* implies a degree of poverty and inferior standing,<sup>6</sup> but such households can in theory acquire considerable wealth and prestige. Some decades ago in Chongkhor, the subsidiary households were able to form a persuasive lobby that demanded similar rights to those of the estates. A consequence of this dispute is that, at the present time, the headman of Chongkhor is recruited *exclusively* from the subsidiary households.

In the late seventeenth century, Kag used to have a single headman who served on a lifelong basis under the authority of the nobility. There is some evidence that there were two concurrently serving headmen during the nineteenth century (Ramble 1994). Information about what happened to the structure of village leadership after the dissolution of the sectoral structure of the community is inconsistent, but, broadly speaking, the institution seems to have undergone the following changes. There was an intermediate phase in which there were one headman and three constables. This situation has been reversed: there are now three headmen and one constable. No system of household rotation applies for either position, and the institution of hereditary headmanship has long ceased to exist.

At the time of writing, the three headmen are appointed by the community for a period of one year. As an honorarium for their service, they are each given an interest-free loan of 3,000 rupees from the village coffers, repayable at the end of the year. Given the rapid organisational changes Kag is undergoing today, this state of affairs is also likely to be altered in the near future.

One obvious point about these systems is that it should not matter who is selected as the headmen. The conclusion to be drawn from this observation is that the tasks required of the headmen are not particularly demanding of either authority or intelligence. This being said, the fact that in most villages there are two or three headmen serving in a given term of office reduces the statistical probability of a completely hopeless leadership. Some communities insure themselves against this possibility by the institutional provision of nominating a group of people, known for their competence, to supplement the headmen in

the event of particular crises: this policy is adopted in Thini, for example. In villages where a rotational system of recruitment is not employed, the candidate may be nominated on the basis of his recognised capability. This is the case in Shang, in Panchgaon, where the community is headed by two officials, a *ganpa* and a *thümi*. Shang is divided into two moieties based on residence, and the *ganpa* and *thümi* are selected from each of the sectors in turn, but the candidate is always appointed by the other sector. Let us suppose that, for the coming term, sector A is to provide the *ganpa* and sector B the *thümi*; it is the assembly of sector B that will choose the *ganpa* from A, and the assembly of A that will choose the *thümi* from sector B.

The situation summarised here suggests two reasons why headmen are not chosen by ballot. First, it is a wretched job, and no one wants to stand for it anyway. The remuneration is either nonexistent or token. In Te, certain fines are levied in cash and others in grain, and the headmen and constables are entitled to keep and divide up equally between them half the amount of cash so obtained—but this is small recompense for the burden of vigilance and having to forgo trading expeditions to remain in the village.

Nevertheless, this does not explain why balloting is never used in the recruitment of headmen, since a nominee need not of course be a volunteer. Panchayat representatives were recruited by election, as in the case of their present-day VDC successors. This, at least, was the theory: in most of Baragaon, the usual procedure for recruitment is either household rotation or appointment by the village assembly. Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, the chair of a VDC has come to be a more interesting position, largely because of the greater quantity of funding that is being directed toward Mustang (naturally enough, a chairman will tend to favour his own community when helping to identify projects that require financial support). Rival candidates stand for the position and canvass votes among the villagers within the VDC. These elections and, even more, those for the chair of the district development committee—not to mention the periodical election of members of parliament from opposed political parties—are perhaps the single main cause of acrimony in Mustang today (as presumably they also are in other parts of Nepal): it was as a consequence of a local election, it will be remembered, that the priests of Baza were forced to leave their family home.

Generally speaking, advocates of democracy consider election violence to be an acceptable side-effect of an unassailable desideratum—“discomfort” that follows an operation as opposed to the “pain” that precedes it. But the divisiveness inherent in voting may not be universally acceptable, and I think this is an important reason why the method is not used in recruiting headmen. The simple fact is that if there is a majority there must also be a minority, and if that

minority happens to be disgruntled, there will be two factions. Te has devoted considerable effort to dissolving the corporate character of its clans, and was obliged for a long time to cope with the effects of its new hierarchical "mouths" (see chapter 4); the last thing it needs is the emergence of political factions aligned behind rival leaders.

This, then, is the problem: how can Te be assured of having leaders who are competent and forceful enough to uphold the law, and have the universal support of the community?

### The Recruitment of the Constables

Lottery is used throughout Mustang in order to reach decisions from which the bias of any individual preference should be absent. The system has two characteristics that, in certain circumstances, make it preferable to voting or appointment. Unlike the former, it is not limited to the resolution of either-or situations; and it differs from appointment mainly insofar as the decisions reached are untainted by possible individual bias and human fallibility. To the extent that it defers to the authority of a nonhuman agency expressing itself through a game of chance, lottery bears certain important similarities to divination, and I shall discuss this later in the chapter. The technique most widely used in Mustang involves rolling dice, and many villages keep a special set that are used in settling matters relating to the community. The Tepas (uniquely, as far as I know) do not use dice but a system of notched sticks known as *ror* or *rol* (the final consonant is unstable).<sup>7</sup>

There is a basic set of eight cylindrical sticks, each one some 2 centimetres long, and cut into a distinctive shape. Each of the eight sticks has a particular name referring to the pattern of notches that it bears at one or both ends (fig. 10.1, nos. 1-8). The number of differentiated sticks can be increased simply by making different shallow cuts on the back and front of copies of the basic eight lots (fig. 10.1, nos. 9-11). How does the lottery work? Let us say that two people need to be chosen for some task. The group of candidates (one or other of the types of village assembly) gathers, and each person takes a stick out of the bag in which they are kept. He (or, more rarely, she) examines the stick that he (or she) has selected, remembers its shape and name, and returns it to the constables. The sticks are then replaced in the bag and shaken up. One of the constables then draws two lots from the bag and calls out their names. The two people who had earlier selected these particular sticks identify themselves, and the allotted task falls to them. It is by this process that the constables are recruited at the beginning of the second month.

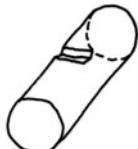
*dumbu/ rogpo ror**tiglen ror**metong kalen ror**gyabdün kalen ror**metong ror**metong tiglen ror**tongdze mangdze*  
*metong ror**sumsur**rogpo düntse*  
*tikhä**dumbu düntse nyikhä*  
*gyabtse tikhä**tiglen gyabtse*  
*tikhä*

FIGURE 10.1. Tally-sticks used in the recruitment of the constables.

### The Appointment of the Headmen

The appointment of the new headmen takes place between the end of the reservoir-clearing ceremony (the Cingza) and the beginning of the Lama Guru, and must therefore be completed by the tenth day of the second Te month. Among the village officials who play an important role in these formalities are the new constables. They will already have been recruited previously by the

lottery system just described, but the old constables only relinquish their positions officially in tandem with the outgoing headmen.

On the first day of the second Te month, the new constables formally instruct the old constables to summon the *yupa*, the assembly of estate-holders. After they have assembled, the old constables summarily appoint three men whose sole function is to be the “markers” of three teams that will form the “electorate.” The men draw lots to decide who will form the teams of the eldest and second eldest people nominated by the constables, and the remaining *yupa* make up the team of the youngest “marker.” The three groups are accordingly named the “large,” “middle,” and “small” teams (Tk. *tsho khe*, *tsho paten*, *tsho cangba*, respectively). The outgoing headmen and constables, on whose term of office the village will pass judgment before the selection of their successors, are excluded from these teams.

A number of other officials are needed for the forthcoming preliminaries to select the headmen, and these are drawn from the three teams. Two of the old constables approach the large team, and one constable each of the other two teams. They circumambulate their teams and demand formally:

*Parmi nang-go, parmi nang-go*

Give us an intermediary, give us an intermediary

Each team then sits in silence for a short time, and then any one person within each team nominates any fellow team-member as an intermediary (*parmi*, < Tib. *bar mi*, lit. “middleman”). The first nomination is accepted. After the nomination of all three intermediaries, the constables again circumambulate their teams and make a further demand:

*Nyopa nang-go, nyopa nang-go*

Give us a supplicant, give us a supplicant

A similar process ensues, and with the nomination of these supplicants (*nyopa*; Tk. *nyowa*: “to ask”) the stage is set for the first phase of the selection process—the evaluation of the outgoing headmen and constables.

## The Reckoning

Following the nomination of the supplicants and the intermediaries, the outgoing headmen and constables enter the constabulary (*tshowahang*, < Tib. *tsho ba khang*), out of sight and hearing of the proceedings in Sumdu Deyang, and

there they must sit and wait until their cases have been discussed and resolved. Once they are safely out of the way, the deliberations begin.

The supplicants ask the assembly what complaints they have against the absent officials. Whether grievances are made because the speaker is genuinely convinced that there has been some dereliction of duty or out of personal spite, there are always many. The commonest complaints concern alleged negligence in supervising agricultural affairs, for example, failure to observe the condition of the irrigation systems and to implement maintenance work; failure to examine the various pastures and to specify the times of year when each might be grazed; not fining the owners of animals that enter cultivated fields; and so forth. The validity of each accusation is assessed by the supplicants and the assembly, and if it is approved, a penalty is attached to it. The supplicants periodically visit the constabulary to report the accusations to the interned officials. They are not allowed to enter the building but remain on the threshold, while the accused communicate with them from an upstairs window. At each visit, one of the constables comes down to the door with a quantity of beer with which to put the supplicants in a more benevolent frame of mind.

The officials in turn defend themselves against the accusations, and the intermediaries carry their replies to the congregation in Sumdu Deyang. When the assembly has completed its list of accusations concerning the defendants' negligence toward public institutions, its members then voice their private grievances about the injustice of the fines that were imposed on them during the year. The gathering appraises each complaint in turn and either adds it to the list of charges or rejects it. The deliberations may continue in this way for several days, during which time the headmen and constables must remain in the temple, even when the meeting adjourns for food or sleep. Food and bedding are brought to them by their families. This period represents the lowest point in the status of the headmen. Whereas at the outset of their incumbency they are compared to kings, they are now said to be "like dogs." They ply the intermediaries with beer at each visit and beg them to present their defence convincingly so that the judgment of the village will not be too hard. Ideally, then, after a suitable period of to-ing and fro-ing, the village reaches its verdict, and the intermediaries will have pleaded the case for the defence well enough that the fine is a reasonable one; they should also have represented the prosecution sufficiently tactfully for the accused to accept the verdict.

It sometimes happens that the intermediaries fail—for that is how it is seen—in their task, and the ill feeling between the two parties becomes uncontrolled. The village may demand an excessively high fine, and the headmen refuse to pay it. Unfortunately for them, the village's decision is incontestable.

During the course of the trial, the supplicants are endowed with extraordinary powers, and they have the authority to enter the houses of the accused and seize any items they wish as a security against the payment of the fine that has been decided. After the confiscation, the internees may be released from the constabulary. The items are returned on subsequent payment of the fine, but if any of the officials continues to refuse to pay as a matter of principle, the goods become village property. Entering someone's house and rummaging for valuables can be an awkward business, and often not very profitable, since the headmen and constables take their most precious coppers into the constabulary for safe keeping.

In preference to domestic utensils, the accusers generally prefer to seize livestock. Two adult goats are taken from the herd of each of the seven defendants and impounded in a room. The internees are again released, and may redeem the animals by paying the fine. Sometimes—because relations between them and the village have reached an irreconcilable pitch of acrimony—they refuse to pay, and a gruesome law is subsequently enforced. The goats are given neither food nor water, and unless the headmen agree to pay the fine, the fourteen animals die within seven or eight days. The bodies are placed in the branches of a large birch tree in the village. No one may move them, and there they remain until they are picked to pieces by the birds. The value of the goats is regarded as being equal to whatever fine was imposed by the village, and following their death the matter is closed.

The atmosphere between the village and the defendants has to be unusually strained for the impounding of the goats to reach its unpleasant conclusion. Before the goats have perished, the three supplicants resign their position and are replaced by three other nominees, who usually manage to persuade the headmen to pay the fine. The settlement of the fine, when it is reached, is proclaimed by the new constables, and the proclamation is made by firing a total of nine shots from two ancient matchlocks.

On the night of the fourth or fifth day of the month, while the trial of the old headmen and constables is still in process, defendants are led out of their confinement to swear two oaths, the *Nama Jagpa* and the *Tshowa Napirpa*. The latter term means simply "the oath-swearing of the constables." The probable meaning of *Nama Jagpa* is "enumerating the clauses." *Jagpa* is a Seke word meaning simply "to count." The term *nama* probably represents the Nepali term *nāmā* (ultimately derived from Persian *nāma*), which signifies a written document. (The points that the headmen enumerate are certainly not written, but the eighteenth-century *Complaint* I summarised in chapter 3 uses the expression *na ma* to prefix each of the grievances on a long list.) I have

discussed the procedures and wording of these two oaths in chapter 6 and need not repeat them here. The outgoing officials will have other oaths to swear before they are finally left in peace, but immediately after a settlement has been reached between them and the assembly of estate-holders, the village then proceeds with the appointment of the new headmen.

### The Ceremony of Appointment

The village again convenes at Sumdū Deyang. As before, the assembly is made up of the estate-holders (*yupa*), and the three teams that were selected earlier remain the same. The old headmen and constables are now allocated to the teams by the new constables, but the old headmen are not eligible to be chosen for a concurrent term of office.

Three new intermediaries and three new supplicants are nominated in the same way, and the formal request for them is made by the new constables. The three teams sit separately, out of hearing of one another, and the three intermediaries and five new constables also form two distinct groups. The meeting is convened in the morning, and no one may leave the gathering under any circumstances, on pain of being fined by the constables, until the new headmen have been selected. For the sake of clarity in the following description, the three teams are designated A, B and C, and the three supplicants a, b, and c, according to the teams from which they were originally nominated.

The three supplicants circumambulate their respective teams once, calling

*Genpa nang-go, genpa nang-go, genpa nang-go.*

Give us a Headman, give us a Headman, give us a Headman.

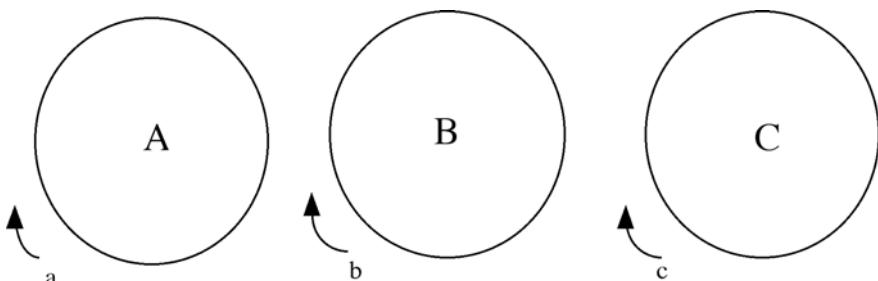


FIGURE 10.2. Circumambulation of the electoral teams by their respective supplicants.

The members of each team then deliberate for a while and elect one candidate from each of the other two teams: team A chooses someone from B and from C, team B chooses someone from A and from C, and so on. Each team reports its decision—*sotto voce*, so that the other two will not hear—to its supplicant. Supplicants a and b then walk away from the gathering and confer about the candidate from C whom their own teams, A and B, have elected. The chances that the same individual has been proposed by both are slim; the process that follows such a coincidence will be described later, but for now let it be assumed that teams A and B have proposed different people from team C. Supplicants a and b return to their teams, and then a and c walk away together to hold a similar conference about the names that have been proposed by teams A and C from team B. The same person may not be proposed twice in succession by the teams, but it is apparently not obligatory to go through the entire roll of candidates before a nomination is repeated.

After all three conferences have taken place, the supplicants rotate, so that a is now stationed at B, b at C, and c at A. As before, they circumambulate their new teams making the triple request for a headman, and the deliberations of the teams and the conferences of the supplicants are resumed. The rotation of the supplicant also continues after each round of proposals.

Sooner or later, two of the supplicants—let us say a and b—will find that their teams have nominated the same person from the third team, which may

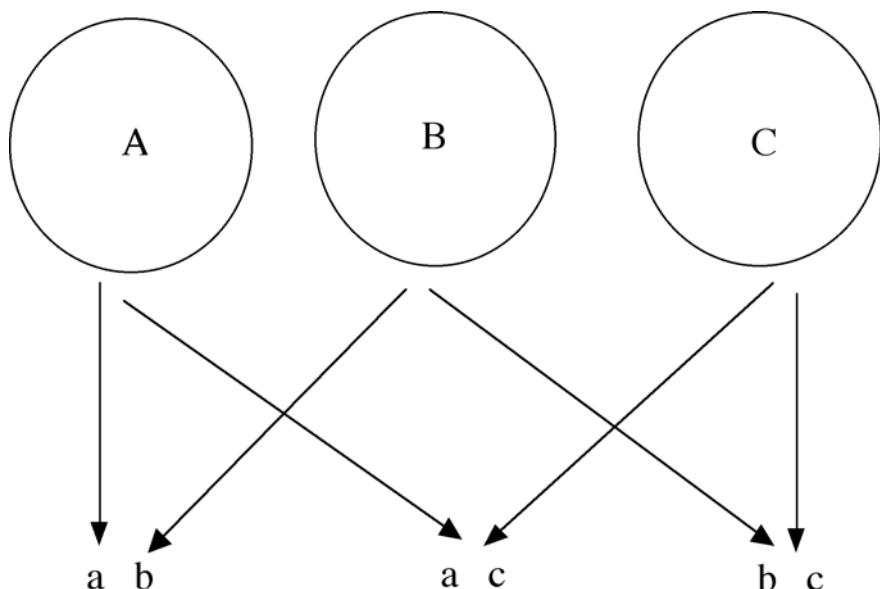


FIGURE 10.3. Consultations between the supplicants of the three electoral teams.

(though of course not necessarily) be C. The two then approach the intermediaries and announce that a headman has been selected, and discreetly, so that no one else should hear, give the individual's name. The supplicants return to their teams and the intermediaries announce to the village that a new headman has been chosen. This is not done verbally but by firing a volley of nine rounds from two matchlocks.

After the announcement, the process continues as before. Teams A and B continue to propose candidates from team C, and although statistically unlikely, it is at least theoretically possible that all three headman may be selected from a single team.

When all three headmen have been chosen and the fact duly publicised with volleys of gunfire, the three teams dissolve and sit down to form a single large circle, facing inward. Unless the candidates have been drawn from a single team, it is only the intermediaries who, having received the announcements of the pairs of supplicants, know the identity of all three headmen. The intermediaries approach the five constables and inform them who has been chosen, and the latter enter the circle and sit in a line. Three of them hold a red-and-white-striped cotton shawl (Tk. and SMT *ertig*, Tib. *ar ti*) of the sort usually worn by lay priests, and a 4-cubit-long strip of white cloth known as a *köthö*. There is a short period of complete silence, and then the constables rise and approach the eldest of the three new headmen, respectfully protruding their tongues and scratching their heads.<sup>8</sup> They say to him in unison:

*Orche, orche, genpa sheng la dzero.*<sup>9</sup>

Pray, pray ascend to [the office of] Headman.

This request effectively transforms the character of the candidate for the next year. His immediate reaction is one of histrionic fury, during which he proclaims his complete refusal to accept the role and abuses the constables for suggesting it. They humbly persevere and attempt to wind the white turban around his head, but he pulls this off and throws it to the ground amid loud declamations. Eventually the constables leave him and approach the middle and junior headmen, with the same result. Each announcement is again celebrated with a *feu-de-joie* by the intermediaries.

The constables lead the three Headmen, growling and complaining, to three low tables that have been placed in a row outside the circle, and here the headmen take their places on cushions. Three shots are again fired for each headman. On top of each table is a silver cup, which is filled with beer, and after the headmen have drunk three full servings, a further nine shots are fired. The constables again approach the headmen in an attempt to wind the white

cloth, and then the striped shawl, around their heads, and this time the headmen grudgingly acquiesce.

Until now, everyone—the three teams, the intermediaries, the constables, and the supplicants—has been drinking the beer that was prepared for the occasion. With the accession of the headmen, the atmosphere of the gathering changes completely. The egalitarian nature of the meeting promptly gives way to a hierarchical arrangement. Circles break into straight lines. Below the headmen sit the various officials who have participated in the proceedings: the four constables, followed by the three intermediaries and the three supplicants, the three intermediaries from the trial of the past year's incumbents (if they have not been selected as the new headmen), and two nominees from each of the four sectors. These twenty-four people drink the remaining half of the beer, while the rest of the assembly look on. The headmen speak to no one but the constables, who jump to carry out their instructions.

The headmen are expected to exercise their new authority immediately by imposing peremptory fines with the slenderest excuse. Thus if one of the obsequious attendants should happen to sneeze or cough while serving beer, or raise dust while walking, a headman will say a quiet word to the constables and the latter will point at the offender, shouting "*Jagje!*"—"You're fined!" The fine will be collected later by the constable. The proceedings continue with the headmen being escorted to the temple, where prayers are recited and various divinities from the Buddhist pantheon and Te's territory are invoked.

### The Assumption of Office

On the sixteenth day of the month, after the end of the Lama Guru, the old headmen and constables must swear another oath, in Sumdü Deyang. The first to take the oath are the four constables. The oath consists of seven clauses; these are not all sworn by the four but are apportioned out among them, the order in which each of them must come forward being determined by the lottery of tally-sticks. The first three take two clauses each, and the last takes one. (The discrepancy between the number of clauses and of headmen suggests that the oath was formulated at a time when there were seven constables.) All constables live in dread of being landed with the last clause, for reasons I shall discuss in a moment.

The procedure begins, as usual, with the intermediaries summoning the gods to witness. Then the first constable steps up to a rock on which an intermediary, facing him on the opposite side, has piled three stones. The intermediary says:

*Yeren ra yab pi duma*  
*mi zhü*  
*lagche zhug*  
*Yemen ra yab pi du ma*  
*mi zhü*  
*lagche zhug*  
*citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

At the time of going to Yeren,  
 The enlistment of manpower,  
 The organisation of implements;  
 At the time of going to Yemen,  
 The enlistment of manpower,  
 The organisation of implements:  
 If he acted as he ought to have [with regard to these things] may  
     he be blessed;  
 If he did not so act may the three territorial gods punish him!

Yemen and Yeren are the names of two arterial irrigation channels that collect snow-melt from the mountains to the east. The village workforce spends two days in these highlands to clear the channels in summer. The constables must check that everyone eligible turns up for the work, and that all have come equipped with the requisite implements.

When the intermediary utters the final phrase, “may the three territorial gods punish him,” the constable must knock over the pile of three stones in confirmation of the oath. According to the interpretation of several Tepas, the pile represents the life-force (*hrok*, Tib. *srog*) of the oath-taker, and this knocking over the pile signifies his assent that he should lose his life as punishment for perjury.<sup>10</sup>

The intermediary replaces the pile, and the next constable steps forward. The intermediary says:

*Musha ra yab pi duma*  
*mi zhü*  
*lagche zhug*  
*cing ra yab pi du ma*  
*gongmo kepi cacö*  
*ngatog thangbi cacö*  
*citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

At the time of going to Musha,  
 The enlistment of manpower;  
 The organisation of implements;  
 At the time of going to the reservoir,  
 Checking that [the water] was shut off in the evening,  
 Checking that it had been opened in the morning;  
 If he acted as he ought to have [with regard to these things] may  
     he be blessed;  
 If he did not so act may the three territorial gods punish him!

The second constable then knocks over the pile of stones. The oath that the intermediary recites for the third Constable runs as follows.

*Mangtse gen lawa jepara  
 ngatog drenpe cacö  
 gongmo khyawe cacö  
 tshug lhanga gen lawa jepara  
 yar laso thig tsa  
 gun laso khawa  
 citra patra dzetse muli trashi na  
 dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

In taking responsibility for the [lower field area called] Mangtse,  
 Checking that [the water] had been channelled in the morning,  
 Checking that it had been diverted [lit. “thrown away”] in the  
     evening;

In taking responsibility for the temple,  
 The removal of raindrops in summer,  
 The snow in winter:  
 If he acted as he ought to have [with regard to these things] may  
     he be blessed;  
 If he did not so act may the three territorial gods punish him!

And he knocks over his stones.

The fourth constable swears only a single short oath, but it is the unkindest one of all:

*Rilung kun gen lawa jepara  
 citra patra dzetse muli trashi na  
 dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

In taking responsibility for all the pasturelands and fields,  
 If he acted as he ought to have may he be blessed;  
 If he did not so act may the three territorial gods punish him!

It is highly likely that, in the course of the year, domestic animals will have found their way onto the field terraces unnoticed; and it is certain that people from neighbouring villages will have crossed the boundaries of Te's uncultivated wilderness to steal dung or brushwood or to graze their animals. And yet the last constable has to affirm that if he has not patrolled Te's lands with complete effectiveness, he is willing to give up his life. The stress of knocking over the last pile of stones is said to be dreadful.

The three headmen then line up and hold hands, linked to one another by their third fingers in the gesture known as *lagtrö lawa*. The four constables also join hands in a line, apart from the headmen. The intermediary says:

*trali zhug*  
*babche zhug*  
*citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

The apportionment of taxes,  
 The allocation of communal tasks:  
 If they acted as they ought to have [with regard to these things]  
     may they be blessed;  
 If they did not so act may the three territorial gods punish them!

The headmen knock over the pile of stones. The intermediaries reerect it and turn to the constables:

*mi zhü*  
*lagche zhug*  
*citra patra dzetse muli trashi na*  
*dzetse areli yuka sompayi chepa jero*

The enlistment of manpower,  
 The organisation of implements:  
 If they acted as they ought to have [with regard to these things]  
     may they be blessed;  
 If they did not so act may the three territorial gods punish them!

After the completion of the oaths, the headmen and constables then go through a procedure known as *phog phurpa*, which may be translated as "giving account." In short, they hand over to the new officers all the village documents and other items that have been in their care for the past year, and visit the public buildings (mainly the temple and the constabulary) to prove to their successors that they are in good repair. Once the accounts have been settled, the obligations of the old headmen and constables are over.

## Kings, Dogs, and Accountability

At the beginning of their term of office, the Tepas say, the headmen are like kings, and at the end of it like dogs. The simile concerning their royal character might be understood simply in terms of the special reverence with which they are treated. Their status is raised above that of their fellow-villagers; they glower and strut in accordance with popular notions of appropriate kingly behaviour; they impose punishments at their whim, and communicate with their subjects only through the intermediary of the constables. Headmen throughout Baragaon don a turban at the inception of their incumbency, but this item of headgear is also characteristic of kingship throughout much of the Himalayan region. As such, it might be of either Indic or Tibetan provenance. In the case of Tibet, a number of kings from the dynastic period, such as Songtsen Gampo, are conventionally represented with white turbans. The name Gyal Thökarcen, the semimythical king of Thini discussed earlier, means “the King with the White Headpiece.” Similarly, the father of the Bonpo hero Shenrab Mibo, the king of the sacred land of Olmo Lungring, was called Gyalbon Thökar (rGyal bon thod dkar; see e.g. *gZer mig* 1991: 15), and an old Bonpo chronicle cited by Tucci refers to the king wearing a turban in an annual ceremony to reaffirm his royalty (1955: 201).

Apart from these relatively superficial features, there are certain aspects of the structure of the Tepa headmen’s term of office that are worth examining more closely in the light of the ideal of Tibetan kingship I discussed in the first part of this chapter. During the gathering in Sumdü Deyang, at which the headmen are appointed, the process begins with an intermediary, called the “supplicant” or “asker,” circling each of the three groups and saying, “give us a headman.” The request is not a casual demand in everyday speech; it is formalised by the use of an honorific verb and a triple utterance, in line with what Frank Kermode has called “the fairytale rule of three.” When the selection has been made and the constables approach the men who have been appointed, their immediate response is to reject the honour with a display of histrionics. It is only after repeated entreaties that they eventually accept the turban of office. The role of the supplicant and the response of the headmen evoke the first of the three principles of Tibetan kingship, as summarised earlier: the ruler does not impose himself on the people; the rudderless people engage an intermediary to *ask* for a ruler. The one who is appointed to rule refuses to do so, and acquiesces only after being besought repeatedly. In point of fact, anyone who is selected as a headman genuinely does not want the position, for the various reasons I have mentioned. When he does finally agree, it is not out

of compassion but because he has no choice: as clause 14a of the constitution says, a headman may even be selected in absentia and the appointment confirmed by the expedient of attaching the white cloth of office to the main pillar of his house. But as far as possible the procedure maintains the fiction that the candidate has a choice in the matter.

At the end of their term of office, the headmen are “like dogs.” Throughout the year, they and their constables uphold village law by enforcing community obligations and punishing transgressors. Their main function is to preserve the law, and their authority is defined by legal limits. This is the second point: the king rules in accordance with the law.

In spite of the power they wield during their incumbency, the headmen are ultimately accountable for everything they have done. They swear before the territorial gods that they have acted to the best of their ability; they “give account” to their successors of all communal property with which they have been charged; and their efficiency and fairness are judged by the assembly of estate-holders who exact retribution for their deficiencies. This corresponds to the third feature of the ideal of Tibetan kingship: the ruler is accountable to his subjects.

The dramatisation of an ideal should not of course distract us into making unrealistic assessments about the true nature of political power. The balance of proof suggests that it does in fact come out of the barrels of guns. We have seen, earlier in this chapter, how the idiom of kingship surfaced in two situations: first, when the village of Thini, rewriting its own history, swallowed its humiliating oppression at the hands of a warlord by attributing to popular demand the legitimacy of his reign, and second, when a ruler of Baragaon declared his reluctant acceptance of office for the sake of the people—at a time when the authority of the nobility was in decline. It is only absolute power that requires no justification of being grafted onto the divine or natural order of things.

The monarchic model of law in Baragaon was, as we have seen, opposed by a democratic form of civil society, which enabled villages to formulate political strategies, and organised confrontation with the diminished duke, without the benefit of a coordinating nucleus. Te’s internal civil organisation is democratic, most obviously because each of the estates has an equal say in the formulation of village law. The constitution, we saw, was a means by which individuals absolved themselves of the burden of altruism. The recruitment of a leader who is something other than a general dogsbody—effectively the role of headmen in many villages—ensures that the rules are enforced; the Tibetan ideal of kingship provides a convenient template on which the form of the office is structured.

### A Willing Suspension of Disbelief

I have mentioned the reluctance among headmen in other villages to exercise real authority, for the reason that they are not set apart from the rest of the community. The theatrical aspect of the Te ceremony, in which all the villagers are players, raises the headmen to the highest eminence. In Te, any shyness that might afflict the headmen and inhibit their authority is overcome by means of a dramatic sequence in which all the villagers are allocated roles. To review some of the features of this sequence:

1. The spectacular debasement and even humiliation of the outgoing headmen ensures that no traces of their authority linger beyond their term of office. The sharp conclusion of their incumbency leaves the community with the sensation of a real power vacuum.
2. The elaborateness of the selection procedure conveys to the participants a feeling of the solemnity of the occasion, and the rather precise choreography accustoms them to behaving in a formalised way.
3. The announcement of the headmen's identity is the signal for all the villagers to adopt various styles of behaviour appropriate to well-established roles. The insolence of office that is essential to good headmanship is exhibited from the very outset by the candidates' refusal to accept the honour that is being bestowed on them. The separation of the headmen is further emphasised by the role of the constables, who are not only a link but also a barrier between them and the villagers. The custom of imposing fines arbitrarily is also a useful device for eliminating any possible reluctance to punish villagers in an everyday setting: it breaks the ice.
4. The mobilisation of the entire male population of the village to catch partridges for the new headmen is another instance of the servitude of the community to its leaders.

The persuasive power of role-playing in groups is well attested in literature from a range of disciplines, including social psychology, sociology, and, of course, anthropology itself. In his well-known study of social roles, Goffman provides several examples of groups whose members diminish themselves deliberately in order to aggrandise, in their own perceived interest, whoever it is with whom they wish to establish the desired relationship.<sup>11</sup> The realisation of a particular role is of course greatly aided when it is reinforced by the expectations others have. This sort of reinforcement is the motor that drives what Goffman calls "the cycle of disbelief-to-belief," and transforms a pose into

an identity. One of the best known examples in the ethnographic literature of social relations being established by the playing of differential roles is the situation described by Bateson during the Naven ceremony among the Iatmul of New Guinea, which led to his formulation of the notion of “complementary schismogenesis” (1958 [1936]: 171–97, esp. 176).

It may be objected that being a “king” in Te is not the same as being a husband or a widow or a father’s sister’s son. It is make-believe. While this is certainly true, we should be careful about drawing too rigid a distinction. More familiar social roles are themselves (to use a rather tired expression) constructions, and the main difference is surely that, in the case of the headmen, the process that raises them to their position happens to be more transparent because of its suddenness and, to outsiders at least, its unfamiliar character. The inception of many social roles is, after all, marked by an emphatic *éclat* that draws attention to the transition: spousehood begins with a wedding (a very subdued event in Te, as it happens); official senescence begins with a retirement ceremony; being an anchorite starts with the *tshamthön* (“coming out of retreat”) celebration.

The persuasiveness of role-playing, even in situations that are artificial to the extent that they are not normalised by custom, has been demonstrated in a number of experiments, most spectacularly perhaps in the celebrated prison simulations by Philip Zimbardo. For this extended study, volunteers were cast in the role of either warders or inmates in a prison. At the end of the study, a number of the former expressed amazement at the brutality they had exhibited under the influence of their roles. Some “prisoners,” unable to tolerate their abjection, withdrew from the experiment before its conclusion (Zimbardo et al. 1977).

The parallel, suggested earlier, between the Tibetan ideal of royalty and the Tepa representation of headmanship, omitted to address one important feature of the former: the fact that the king was requested by the people, but appointed by heaven. In later versions of the Tibetan myth, the arrival of the first king is elided with Indian models according to which the ruler is chosen not by the gods, but by people. In these versions, the king bears the epithet *Mang pos bskur ba*, “charged by the many.” In the earlier versions, the epithet is *gNam gyis bskos pa*, “appointed by heaven” (see Haarh 1969: 135, 140, 241, 250). The verb used for the recruitment of the constables in Te is *khurwa*, which is cognate with *skur ba*, to “charge” someone with an office. In the case of the headmen, the verb used is *kowa* (Tib. *sko ba*),<sup>12</sup> “to appoint.” If the Te headmen are appointed, who does the appointing? There are aspects of the procedure that bear closer examination.

## The Transcendent Community

At first sight, the system of recruitment may seem to be democratic, insofar as it is the village assembly that nominates candidates. But of course it is nothing of the sort: the purpose of the nominations is effectively to generate random names, since the selection of candidates is ultimately the result of chance, the coincidence of nominations by two of the three groups. The groups' nominations are "democratic" only to the extent that they provide a kind of shortlist from which chance will select. As far as I am aware, this method of choosing a headman does not exist in any other community in Baragaon or Panchgaon. However, Te is certainly not unique in the Tibetan world with regard to its use of chance to recruit officials. Two examples may be cited here. The abbot of the Bonpo monastery of Menri (now located in Himachal Pradesh, in India) is chosen by a system of lots. The candidates' names

were written on a piece of paper which was encased in a ball of parched barley flour (*rtsam-pa*) dough. At the end of two days of prayers, the final ritual act was the "name-ball" (*rtags-rił*) procedure. The balls of dough containing the names were shaken in an urn and the first one to drop out contained the name of the new abbot. (Cech 1987: 112)<sup>13</sup>

Much the same method is used among the Gelugpas for the selection of the junior tutor of the Dalai Lama. A shortlist of candidates is drawn up by a committee of lamas and oracles, and as described earlier, the names are concealed inside balls of dough:

During a special ceremony these balls are placed in a bowl before a Buddha stature or a painting of a meditational deity.... Whichever ball comes out of the bowl during the ceremony, that candidate becomes the next Junior Tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.  
(Sherpa Tulku et al. 1977: 68–69)

To press the question one stage further, who is responsible for decisions reached on the basis of chance? Let us return to the examples given earlier. In the case of the junior tutor of the Dalai Lama, the agency responsible for a particular name-bearing doughball falling out of the container is the divinity represented in the adjacent image (68–69). Similarly, the name that appears from among the candidates for the abbacy of Menri monastery represents the choice (the term *sko ba* is used) of certain categories of gods and goddesses (Khenpo Sangye Tenzin, personal communication, June 1986).<sup>14</sup> More generally, games

of hazard are seen by Tibetans as a vehicle through which the divinities express their wishes. Calkowski (1993) cites numerous instances in which *lungta* (Tib. *rlung rta*), the quantity that determines the outcome of such games as well as trials of ordeal, is perceived by Tibetans as being of divine origin. The procedure for the recruitment of Te's headmen must certainly be seen as one such strategy: the villagers are players not only in a drama, but in a game.

In short, the authority of divinatory devices is supernatural: people roll the dice, or stir the bowl of names, but the gods decide the outcome. In using a strategy of chance, the Tepas would therefore appear to be leaving the selection of the headmen up to the authority of the gods. To this extent, the institution conforms to the widespread Tibetan notion of the divinely elected ruler.<sup>15</sup>

However, in attempting to link the institution of headmanship in Te with these features of Tibeto-Himalayan culture, we are faced with a curious situation: there is no evidence of any belief among the Tepas that gods are instrumental in the selection of their headmen. Following the appointment, various divinities are called to witness, but there is nothing at all to suggest that they are *responsible* for the choice. The villagers themselves deny that there is any divine involvement.

What are we to make of this anomaly? It cannot be claimed that Te is a secular society that has eliminated the role of the gods from once-religious ceremonies. Religious belief and practice play an important part in other aspects of village life, and the community exhibits none of the other features that are properly associated with secularisation. The evidence leaves us with no option but to conclude that it is the *game itself* that decides. People nominate certain candidates, and the gods are called as witnesses to the decision, but the selection is made by nothing other than the game.

The absence of divinity is undoubtedly the exception rather than the rule in such situations; but, historically speaking, the gods may not be an essential component of these devices. It is likely that divine intervention is a secondary matter, a religious elaboration of an older, starker concept. Much the same point has been made by Huizinga with regard to trials of ordeal in general. The notion of supernatural involvement, he suggests, is

probably an interpretation coming from a still earlier phase of culture. The original starting-point of the ordeal must have been the contest, the test as to who will win. The winning *as such* is, for the archaic mind, proof of truth and righteousness. The outcome of every contest, be it a trial of strength or a game of chance, is a sacred decision vouchsafed by the gods. (Huizinga 1955: 81–82; original emphasis)

But the probable primacy of the game only offers a partial solution to the problem, since it defers the question of why the gods do not choose Te's headmen, when there is an abundant pantheon at the community's disposal.

There is something unsettling about major consequences following trifling causes, and mythology tends to reserve such imbalances for disastrously unstable situations: in the *Mahābhārata*, for example, the war between the Pandavas and Kauravas was fought over a kingdom that had been lost in a game of dice. As a general rule, the magnitude of rituals is commensurate with the perceived importance of what they are intended to celebrate or effect. The procedures for choosing the abbot of Menri or the junior tutor of the Dalai Lama are technically simple. The attribution of the outcome to a divine decision is necessary in order to avoid the bathos of selecting hierarchs by drawing names out of a pot. But magnitude may be achieved by other means than the implication of the supernatural.

In Mustang, people do not usually walk around other people in a complete circle. I may be sitting on the ground, for example, when my companion, who is walking behind me from right to left, notices that the cigarettes or the horsewhip he was looking for are on a stone in front of me; he will walk around me, clockwise, to pick up his effects, but he will return the way he came, making sure not to enclose me completely with his trajectory. To have done so would be very unlucky for me. One only walks around sacred objects: temples, stupas, lamas, reliquaries, and suchlike. By some associative chain in which the individual links are rather variable, since I am none of these sacred things, I am the next best thing—that is to say, dead.<sup>16</sup>

When the supplicants formally request the three groups of the electorate for a headman, they circumambulate their respective groups three times—without anyone taking offence at being encircled. Without labouring the point, the implication is clear: if the assembly is not dead, it is sacred.

In chapter 6, I described some of the methods the Tepas use to come into the presence of their gods. It is insufficient merely to visit the site where they are located. Additional distance has to be *created* within a given space either by following a circuitous route or by “stretching” the space across a relay of people. According to the choreography of the appointment, when a group nominates a candidate, it reports its decision to the supplicant. If two supplicants have been given the name of the same nominee from the third group, they then go and inform the intermediaries; the intermediaries fire the match-lock to inform the community of the fact of a successful nomination, and pass on the names of the people to the constables. It is the constables who at last reveal the identity of the appointed men when they request them to accept

the office of headmanship. Functionally, the whole thing could have been short-circuited by having three of the constables replace the three supplicants; that would remove two intermediate stages between the decision and the announcement; but it is precisely the existence of these two stages that help to distance the electoral assembly from the rest of the village. The separation is not geographical—the assembly is, after all, in the middle of the village—but entails the kind of distance that has to be crossed in order to reach the gods.

### Demystifying Transcendence

The ceremonies discussed in chapter 8, the legal codes described in chapter 9, and the procedure for the recruitment of the headmen that has been examined here all, I suggest, contribute to the creation of a reified entity that transcends the community as an assemblage of individuals and households. In advocating an approach to religion that sidelines “insiders” definitional criteria—such as the supernatural—I have drawn support from the work of J. B. Smith, who makes a convincing case for the inclusion of nominally secular traditions—Marxism, Freudianism, and so on—in a sociological understanding of what the term might circumscribe. Since the article by Smith I have cited is entitled “Exorcising the Transcendent,” I feel I owe it to the author to explain my sacrilegious retention of this term.

Smith’s objection lies in his reluctance to use terms that have a charged connotation within the subject of the sociologist’s scrutiny. My own laxity in this respect is due to the fact that “transcendence” seems to have acquired a certain currency in analytical writings where its usage is, as it were, above suspicion. (To cite just one example, Terence Turner’s “Transformation, Hierarchy and Transcendence,” 1977, is an interesting, if rather densely argued, development of the notion.) A concept that may be particularly useful for aspects of this study is the idea of “autotranscendence” that has been developed in the work of Jean-Pierre Dupuy. Dupuy’s investigation of “collective phenomena” takes its cue from Adam Ferguson’s insight that the social order is “the result of human action but not of human design” (cited in Dupuy 1992: 12). As an instance of such phenomena, he examines the behaviour of crowds, as presented in the work of both Freud and Canetti, with special attention to the spontaneous production by crowds of an “endogenous fixed point”:

When panic strikes a group and its leader flees, he is replaced by another representative of the collectivity that seems to be transcendent with respect to its members. This representative is nothing

more than the collective movement itself, which separates off and distances itself as something autonomous from individual movements, while nevertheless remaining the simple composite of individual actions and reactions. It is a system effect. In these moments of "effervescence," as Durkheim understood, the whole presents all the features attributed to divinity: exteriority, transcendence, unpredictability and inaccessibility.<sup>17</sup>

It is this production by the group of an element that it considers to be extraneous to itself that Dupuy, borrowing his terminology from quantum mechanics, refers to as "bootstrapping" or "autotranscendence"—a far more appropriate metaphor than that of exteriority.<sup>18</sup> In concluding the same essay, Dupuy cites certain mathematical games that are "cybernetic" insofar as they imply the production of a third element as a system effect. Without reproducing the complex logic of his arguments here, I suggest that the dramatic structure of the recruitment procedure I have described is a particularly good example of autotranscendence. The point is best made obliquely by approaching it from the angle of another arena of legitimation: that of capital punishment.

"The use of force," says Weber, "is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it" (1947b: 156). Whoever kills with the authority of the state is therefore by definition not a murderer.

The king's executioner, who faithfully chops off the head of the lawfully condemned malefactor, not only represents the institutions of kingship, law, and morality as established in his society, but he represents the divine justice that is posited underlying these.  
(Berger 1967: 99)

While in many countries the necessary authority might be invested in the executioner unambiguously simply by royal or governmental fiat, problems are likely to arise in societies with a tradition of challenging the state's monopoly of moral authority. The executioner might, for example, suffer the opprobrium of critics who do not accept the state's supremacy in this regard. Precisely this problem has arisen in the United States, and it is worth our while to look at one of the strategies by which it is got around.

In the thirty-eight states where the death penalty is enforced, the storybook figure of the lone hangman has been replaced by an execution team made up of personnel from the department of correction and, in some cases, medical experts. According to a report on procedures used in seventeen of the states, the authorities interviewed "cited the need for statutory provisions regarding

protection of medical personnel from censure from professional associations with regard to their involvement in the execution process" (Florida Corrections Commission 1997). As a general rule, in fact, precautions are taken to ensure that the identity of the team members is kept secret.

While the mutiplicity of personnel within each team effectively diffuses what critics would perceive as moral, if not legal, culpability, there is another "distancing" mechanism that is especially interesting here: execution procedures in a number of states use "dummy" devices that prevent the identity of the proximate agent of the execution from ever being known by anyone—including himself. In Tennessee, for example, "the electric chair is computer controlled: there are dual controls and the computer decides which 'switch' executes the inmate" (Florida Corrections Commission 1997). Some states use an analogous procedure with lethal injection: only one of two buttons, each allocated to a different team member, effects the release of toxins into the inmate's bloodstream. The same element of chance has also been built into the protocol for (rarely applied) execution by firing squad: the rifle of one—no one knows which—member of the five-man squad contains not a live round but a blank (Sandholzer 1998).

Any suggestion that the aim of the "dummy" component is to spare the executioners from guilt by opening the possibility that they may not have committed homicide is, frankly, spurious. Team members are either volunteers or, if nominated, may decline; if, in spite of screening, they are the sort to suffer remorse, the added doubt of either even or four-to-one odds on is arguably a likelier cause of sleepless nights than certain guilt. However the official reasoning may run, I suggest that the real beauty of these arrangements is the production of a "system effect" of the sort we see in the recruitment of Te's headmen. The blank shell and the dummy switch introduce the factor of chance into the execution process. The team members are not thereby only four-fifths or half responsible; the fact that *no* individual in the team is the unequivocal agent defers the responsibility to a third party that is conjured by implication—the state itself.

While the general project of demystifying the process of institutional autotranscendence may justify the use of this macabre example, the case is unrepresentative, insofar as most of the analogous procedures described in the anthropological literature have distinctly supernatural overtones. I shall conclude this chapter by summarising an activity that, strangely, seems not to have attracted scholarly attention.

The letters of the Roman alphabet are set out in a circle on a smooth-topped table, in the centre of which there stands an inverted crystal wine-glass. Around the table sit half a dozen people, with the forefingers of their right

hands resting lightly on the upturned base of the glass. The lighting is subdued. After a period of silence, the spokesperson of the group asks if there is a spirit present. The glass begins to move, touching letters in a sequence that spells out messages from the undiscovered country. Frequency of séances strengthens links—or opens channels—with the spirit world: the glass will move more vigorously; the same spirits will reappear and identify themselves by name and other distinctive quirks of communication. It will also be found that the game—as, curiously enough, table-turning is sometimes called—works very well in the most banal circumstances: any two group members, say, will find that they can communicate with the spirits on a cement floor under a neon light through a plastic cup oscillating between a roughly chalked “yes” and “no.” If the group eventually breaks up and its members interest themselves in other things it will probably be because of the enduring inanity of the messages, not because of the conclusion that any one member of the circle—or pair—is intentionally moving the glass. No *one* is.

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## II

# Conclusion

### *The Disenchantment of Te?*

Mustang District has been the target of a number of development projects in the past few decades, and more enlightened agencies have taken good advantage of the special opportunities provided by the structures of civil society in Baragaon. One of these is the non-governmental organisation CARE Nepal, which has been particularly active in the enclave since the early 1990s. Through the Nepal Resources Mobilisation Project, CARE began its work in Baragaon by collaborating with villagers in identifying the area of social and economic activity that needed particular attention. The agency operates a policy of providing the technical advice and material wherewithal, but demanding participation from the beneficiaries in terms of unpaid labour. The initial essays were unsuccessful. Projects had been planned at the level of the VDCs, and people were simply not willing to contribute their efforts to schemes that were seen to benefit neighbouring communities as much as or more than their own. To its lasting credit, CARE redesigned the projects in such a way that people provided free labour only for their own villages. The difference in the results very quickly became apparent, and an assortment of reports and evaluations documents the programme's subsequent success.

Something that emerges with great clarity from this body of "grey literature" is the evident surprise on the part of both the project's staff and its assessors at the sheer capacity of villagers to organise themselves without succumbing to the intracommunity strife

and misappropriation of funds that compound the more general problems of economic development in Nepal. The reports express frank admiration for the traditional “Mukhiya [headman] system” that guarantees financial transparency and accountability while assuring a role in decision-making for all (or very nearly all) households. While recognising the importance of the District Development Committee (DDC) as a focal point for the coordination of activities in Baragaon and Mustang as a whole, CARE bypassed the largely irrelevant VDCs and dealt directly with smaller village-based groups called Community Development Committees (CDCs), which are essentially scaled-down and slightly modified versions of the traditional village assemblies.

The early chapters of this book have attempted to explore some of the social-historical conditions that unquestionably laid the ground for a state of affairs that has proved so receptive to well-thought-out development. From at least the fifteenth century, Baragaon was governed by a number of manifestations of monarchic rule that left subjects to run their own internal affairs within broad limits. This royal model of government was imposed variously in the form of the kings of Lo, their ducal representatives in Baragaon itself, their royal overlords in Jumla, and the subsequent shah state of Nepal. But throughout all this, the region maintained a civil society with a local-republican character that very probably had its antecedents before the arrival of the kings of Lo. The likely antiquity of this model is implicit in the ability of settlements with a strong sense of their distinctive identity to organise political alliances of varying duration without any centralised coordination—sometimes even against an enfeebled ruler. The collective political identity of Baragaon was manufactured at a number of levels, not the least of these being the organisation, by the dukedom, of rituals in which each of the component settlements was allocated a specific role, but this did not offset the primacy of the individual communities as the focus of people’s identity.

A background of intermittent warfare and territorial conflict may go a long way toward explaining the endurance of this focus, but it does not by itself tell us why some communities, notably Te, should be more introspective and cohesive than others. Undoubtedly a number of factors are involved. In the case of Te, an important consideration must surely be the persistence of local endogamy. One basic sociological tenet that has been implicitly accepted throughout this book is that societies are reproduced by people who are themselves largely formed by society. Exogamy implies that a society that opens its doors to in-marrying outsiders, is going to be at least partly reproduced by people who have been formed in some other society. The stimulus for change within Te comes from adults who are in contact with the outside world. But the perceptions of the individuals who are responsible for effecting change are

translated into action through the dense filter of Tepa socialisation that they themselves have undergone.

Another factor that is less trivial than may at first appear is Te's location away from the main trail. There is a certain amount of through traffic in the form of travellers to and from the upper Muktinath valley, but nothing like the density of visitors hosted in Tshug. There is no shop, no teahouse, no lodge, nowhere where villagers might go and happen upon a passing government official, a development worker, or a trader. Much of what goes on in Te is highly complex, but the nature of the complexity is very different from what might be observed in settlements such as Kag. Apart from the presence of the nobility, Kag's social organisation seems once to have been broadly similar to that of Te. But Kag is just an hour's ride from Jomsom, the district headquarters, and stands on a major crossroads at the junction of the Muktinath valley with the Kali Gandaki. There is youth club, a large school with an associated schoolmaster culture, a well-developed tourist infrastructure, offices of several governmental and nongovernmental organisations, Hindu pilgrim traffic, and a monastery with international links, all against a background of disintegrating estate-based social organisation that is in the process of transition to a more fragmented family-based model. While this situation offers a rich field for certain kinds of sociological inquiry, the hothouse complexity of Te makes it an ideal environment in which to focus on processes that are harder to identify in the general hubbub of places such as Kag.

The later chapters of this book have focussed broadly on the idea of the community as a superordinate entity that transcends the individuals who created it and is conceived by them as lying beyond their reach. As I said in the introduction, I began the research for this book with the intention of examining the interaction between Tibetan Buddhism and local religion in a Himalayan community. As the investigation proceeded, it became obvious that the community could not be regarded as merely the setting for the action, but had to be treated as the action itself.

This shift of attention does not imply that Tepas profess no Buddhist faith. There does in fact seem to be quite a spectrum of belief. One Tepa who spent a week in my house in Kathmandu—the only time he had ever been to the capital—passed much of his day telling the beads of his rosary and visiting the Buddhist shrines of the city. In Te I had seen no such evidence of religious interest on his part. Another Tepa, who had been inspired by communist ideas in the course of his travels, succumbed to a fit of iconoclastic zeal during a meeting in the village temple; declaiming against Buddhism and superstition, he threw stones at the images and caused some minor damage. (He was fined by the headmen.) Belief is very often a contextual matter, and it would be

unreasonable to expect of the Tepas a degree of consistency that is absent in the supposedly secularised West: atheists find themselves praying in aeroplanes on their way to a crash landing; biologists (who have presumably thought through the devastating implications of Darwinism) can still claim to be Christians; Peter Berger, the author of *The Social Reality of Religion*, was stung by subsequent accusations of godlessness into writing a credo entitled *A Rumour of Angels*; Marshal Zhukov used to carry a concealed icon into battle. In Te, like anywhere else, contradictions between expressed belief and actual practice become a problem only when a missionary appears on the scene, points out those inconsistencies, and presents the people with hard choices.

It should also be stressed that this book's emphasis on social organisation is in no way intended to devalue the importance of Buddhist or Bon scholarship in the anthropological study of Tibetan religion. David Snellgrove's stern warning, delivered in his critique "For a Sociology of Tibetan-Speaking Regions" (1966), about the dangers of engaging in any such enterprise without a reasonable grasp of the literary heritage of Tibetan Buddhism, is still not always heeded as rigorously as it ought to be. The lack of close attention in this book to, say, the Buddhist rituals performed by the lamas of Tshognam, is due precisely to the fact that these highly specialised activities are relatively marginal in the composition of what I have called the civil religion of Te; far less important, at any rate, than the legal system or the institution of headmanship.

The reason I have associated Te's institutions with a civil religion in this book is not, of course, to defend the people against accusations of being poor Buddhists, but because these institutions are particularly amenable to analysis in terms that have been developed in the sociology of religion. An important feature of the examples examined is their transcendental character, where transcendence has been understood in a modified sense to signify the greater or lesser degree of reification that "social factors" have undergone. Contrary to the case of "universal" religions, such as Buddhism and Bon, that are imposed on communities as integrated packages of practices and meanings, the institutions with which I have been concerned are all locally produced in Te. Their transcendence lies in the fact that their rational manufacture is provisionally forgotten by their creators, who accord them an ontological autonomy that is most commonly associated with religious phenomena. The autonomy with which these institutions are so endowed means that they influence practice without being readily susceptible to rational modification.

Autonomy can be achieved in different ways. In the case of the constitution, an assembly of rational individuals deliberates the relevant issues and sets the outcome down in writing. For a period of twelve years, the code enforces forms of behaviour that become increasingly outmoded, but the indi-

viduals who created it may not modify it to accord with changing reality. Some of the clauses of the Sanyor Chewa oath were undoubtedly incorporated as a result not of cool debate but of spontaneous anger. In the public emotion of the time they seemed to be a good idea, but now they appear to be slightly ridiculous. The fact that there is no built-in mechanism of change means that they linger on as a monumental inconvenience that no one can modify. Where the appointment of the headmen is concerned, by contrast, the decision is made not by rational individuals but by an agency—chance—that represents the community as a collectivity. However unreasonably or incompetently the headmen behave, they are above correction for the duration of their term of office.

Religions that reflect the political and social values of the environment from which they grew continue to purvey the standards of that environment even when they have become outmoded, but only up to a point. If it is unsympathetic, the new setting—new, that is, either geographically or temporally—will either consign the religion to a marginal group of traditionalists or reinterpret it to accord with contemporary social reality. A hypostatic institution that is not redeemed and sanitised for continued use may be destined for a more radical transcendence. A god who is “absolutely unexpressed in the world,” says Collingwood,

is reduced to an abstractly transcendent being, aloof from reality and eternally impotent either to influence it or to use it as the expression of his own nature. He is thus shorn of all true Godhead, and becomes little more than the spectator of an automatic world. (1994 [1916]: 198–99)

As we saw in chapter 9, the respectful relegation of God to a transcendent sphere by seventeenth-century Protestantism opened a great swath of territory to humanistic inquiry. Berger argues that the seeds of secularisation were already contained in the extreme transcendentalism of the Old Testament’s Yahweh. The rise of Roman Catholicism represented “a retrogressive step in terms of the secularizing motifs of Old Testament religion,” with the mediation it provided in the form of the Incarnation and the intervention of saints and angels (Berger 1967: 117–27).

In a well-known passage, Max Weber describes modern secular society as characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the “disenchantment of the world.” Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either in the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal relations. (1947a: 155)

Weber's idea of disenchantment is tantamount to a sort of curdling of society, in which sacral qualities are separated off in a thin whey of transcendence to leave behind a lumpish rationalism.

A certain amount of the ethnographic description in the preceding chapters has been conveyed in an "ethnographic" present tense for the sake of convenience. This present came to an end in 1992, following the assembly for the Turning Upside Down of the Law that took place in that year. A number of the changes incorporated into the constitution that was drawn up then have a wider significance than the immediate consequences summarised in chapter 10. If my suggestion that the complex of Te's institutions is constitutive of a civil religion is not completely misguided, it should follow that these institutions are subject to processes that sociologists have identified in the case of more standard manifestations of religion. The changes that were initiated by the 1992 revision have the flavour of disenchantment, inasmuch as they have ushered in what Nisbet calls "the institutionalization of utilitarian norms" (Nisbet 1970: 244–45, cited in Glasner 1977: 45).

Let us reexamine a few of the clauses that I think are diagnostic of this development. I described the general circumstances and operation of these rules in their respective commentaries in chapter 9, but some of them are worth closer attention because they betray features that are, I think, diagnostic of this development. Clause 5 declares that monks and nuns must be literate and must "act like religious people" if they are to be exempted from village duties. Chapter 5 described the peculiar form monasticism had taken in Te; like a number of other phenomena, it was a Buddhist institution that had been stranded in the village by the receding tide of Sakyapa influence, and transformed into something that answered a local need: a class of traders committed to the service of their households and unrestricted by the demands of civic duties—such as holding office, participating in festivals, and engaging in public labour. Monasticism in the Tibetan cultural sphere provides an opportunity for fortifying a house by swelling its population. A good example is provided by the matrilineal, matrilocal society of Gyelthang, in Yunnan. Polyandry is not practised there, and the demand for a group of men to run the affairs of these large, impressive households was met by creating an inordinately large number of monks among the brothers of the bride (see Corlin 1978). Although polyandry does exist in Te, the brothers who participate in a marriage, by virtue of the fact that they are married, are not exempt from village duties, like monks. The survival of monasticism in Te was due entirely to the economic benefits it brought.

But the tradition was a collective enterprise only to the extent that it benefited a majority of the households that make up the community. The

increasing long-term outmigration of younger sons in recent years has meant that a significant number of estates have had no monks, and it has been these houses that have lobbied successfully for the abolition of the category. And so monasticism has ceased to be the uniquely Tepa institution described in chapter 5, and second sons must now either be fully participating members of the community or “true” monks, as defined by the Buddhist clerisy, who are both jurally and physically outside Te.

Clause 8 concerned a relaxation of the rule concerning the beginning of the harvest. Henceforth, a household might harvest its fields before the appointed day by presenting the community with 8 rupees and a white scarf. The beginning of the harvest was not previously triggered by the readiness of the crops to be harvested, but by a rule that approximated this readiness. The rule continued to determine agrarian practices to the point of detriment to the crops. The rule still stands as an ideal but is no longer absolutely determinant; the fact that it may now be bypassed with a polite nod, so to speak, marks the onset of what we can think of as its “radical transcendence.”

One of the most dramatic changes is signalled in clause 14, which revises the procedure for the recruitment of the headmen: “the community shall be divided into three groups according to age, and each group shall cast lots to decide one of the headmen.” The method has been changed to a much less theatrical one than that described in chapter 10. Now, each of the three groups from the *yupa* assembly draws lots to choose one incumbent. Although the headmen are still honoured with the white headdress and deferential treatment, the loss of prestige that is implicit in the diminished drama of the ceremony is matched by a corresponding reduction in real authority. In the past, headmen were effectively free to do whatever they wanted until the end of their year of service. What could be more disenchanting than to subordinate a leadership modelled on the idea of divine kingship to the authority of accountants? The headmen no longer range free over the course of a year but are subjected to a monthly audit by the four anonymous men.

There is one significant change that is not recorded in the 1992 constitution. The two main corpora for the regulation of social behaviour are the written code itself and the unwritten oaths. I suggested in chapter 9 that while the former is periodically updated, the oaths are less accessible because of a combination of factors: mainly that they were probably produced by a process other than cool rational appraisal, and that they are preserved not in writing but in poetic oral form. The oaths are far less rational than the constitution; some of the clauses they contain are hopelessly redundant, while others set unrealisable standards—characteristics we would associate with transcendence: the terms are impossibly exigent, but the penalties demanded are intolerable.

People would gladly modify the oath, but they cannot. It has an existence independent of its members' volition, and it continues to coerce them on behalf of a reified collectivity. In accordance with a decision made in 1992, all the major oaths—the Sanyor Chewa, the Namajagpa, the Tshowa Napirpa, the Magkhyugen, the Gentshang, and the Phogphurwa—have now been abandoned.

### The Cycle of Invention and Convention

For an outsider who does not have to live in Te, the decline of these baroque traditions may evoke a certain nostalgia: another victory for the dreary schoolmaster-culture that is levelling the wealth of rural Nepal. Certain remarks might be made with regard to this passing (apart from the obvious one that it was the Tepas themselves who wrought the changes; the emended customs may have been picturesque, but they did make life terribly complicated).

First, there are good grounds for arguing that the peaceful death of obsolete traditions is preferable to folklorisation, the cultural equivalent of the Undead. Mustang, like many other parts of the country, is benefiting from well-intentioned efforts to preserve its exotic customs; among other things, this has entailed the development agencies' adoption of certain prominent festivals (horse-racing ceremonies, monastic dance, and so on) and embellishing them with games of tug-of-war, volleyball, and "Cultural Programmes" of ethnic song and dance.

The second point concerns the long view. The institutions examined in the preceding chapters have emerged out of the dialectic between the individual and the collective. In the dynamic of this relationship, they develop according to a logic of their own, sometimes growing out of control and beyond the reach of the people who created them. There is no reason to suppose that as long as the community endures, the sequence of invention, reification, transcendence, and obsolescence might not be part of a continuous pattern. It may be instructive to consider the process in the light of cycles of change that are observable in certain language-groups. A particularly interesting example is related to the development of an "analytic" future form of the verb in Romance languages from the "synthetic" Latin form. The first person future of the verb "to sing" in Latin is *cantabo*. Between AD 500 and AD 1000, this conjugated form was replaced by following the infinitive of the main verb, *cantare*, with the auxiliary *habere*, to have. Thus "I shall sing" was no longer expressed as *cantabo* but as *cantare habeo*, "to sing I have." The development of the

Romance languages saw a return to a synthetic form of futurity (*chanterai*, *cantaro*, *cantaré*, etc.), in which the *-r-* is a relic of the Latin infinitive form and the conjugation derived from that of the verb *habeo*.

Alfred Gell, from whom I borrow this example, cites some of the explanations for this phenomenon that have been proposed. One suggestion is that the change reflects the rise of popular culture, which sees itself as confidently “possessing” its future. Without denying the credibility of this argument, Gell points out that it has certain shortcomings, not the least that the change seems to be just one phase in a more general trend. *Cantabo* itself “was once an auxiliary verb construction in proto-Indo-European (cant-a + \*bhwo, the verb ‘to be’).” Similarly, futurity is now more commonly expressed in some Romance languages by combining the imperative form of the main verb with the auxiliary verb “to go” (*je vais dormir*, *yo voy a dormir*). Nor does it stop there; the Spanish form has “entered yet another cycle of agglutination in the popular speech of Hispano American, where *yo vadormir* is to be heard” (Gell 1992: 130). The explanation Gell himself offers has an obvious relevance for my purposes, in that it involves an alternating process of conscious invention and passive formalisation.

I do not think it is absurd to think that language incorporates a sedimented rhetoric, the congealed residue of a tradition of conventional arguments, which were once active thoughts, achieved against the resistance of language (as I have to struggle with language now, in order to say what I want to say, and not something else) but which become, by-and-by, discursive clichés and eventually automatisms of “grammar.” Language and discourse are continually poised between convention and discovery. (131)

Perhaps it is something like this that we see in the development, over time, of Te’s collective representations: the origin of codes of action in the considered inventiveness of individuals, and the subsequent acquisition, by the codes, of the status of objectified conventions. But is there anything to suggest that the process is a continuous one, corresponding to the oscillation between “synthetic” and “analytic” verb forms?

Disenchantment is a conspicuous event because it is marked by a loud shattering of hypertrophied forms. The rustling-in of enchantment, by contrast, is by its very nature a discreet affair, and apt to pass unnoticed. The birth of two illegitimate children in the nineteenth century perhaps attracted some disparaging remarks at the time; but surely no one could have foreseen that a decision to marginalise them would have resulted, a century later,

in the spectacle of the whole community floundering helplessly in the thrall of a social hierarchy that is perpetuated by its own inexorable dynamic, and that nobody is able to break.

The new office of the Four Men seems desperately lacklustre by comparison with that of the headmen, whom the Four Men now supersede in real authority. Their role is defined at the beginning of clause 17 of the constitution: to supervise the honesty of the headmen and constables, and to check the accounts during a monthly meeting. But clause 17 does not end here. After taking care of the practical matter of regular auditing, the Tepas obviously gave some thought to the matter of the prestige and privileges of the new officials. In the second part of clause 17, they are allocated a monthly payment of beer, and at public gatherings are entitled to as much beer as they can drink. We are told that they are to be appointed, and since 1992 all the incumbents have been nominated by the assembly and have acquiesced. But what if someone refuses? Some further legislation or recruitment procedure—which cannot be just a lottery, since the candidates are chosen for their competence—will have to be created in the future. Not only have the four grey suits, as it were, already begun to grow ceremonial feathers, but the institutional procedures surrounding them are so flimsy that they are bound to increase in complexity as time goes by. The king is dead; long live the king.

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. “Le Népal, c'est l'Inde qui se fait” (Lévi 1905: 1:28).
2. The main outcome of their collaboration, *Les Neuf Forces de l'Homme*, appeared in print only in 1998, but the authors were kind enough to let me read the unpublished manuscript.
3. *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.19, cited in Thrower 1992: 146.
4. *Histories* 6.61.6–12, cited in Thrower 1992: 146–47.
5. Examples of studies of communities at the subnational level include T. Dunbar Moodie (1975); Rowbottom (2001).
6. The other reason the authors give for their rejection of the civil/civic opposition—that it cannot easily be made in either French or German—is less persuasive. By the same token, we ought not to accept the distinctiveness of related concepts in these languages—such as *mot/parole* and *Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft*—for which English is obliged to find tedious circumlocutions.
7. See especially Gyurme Dorje and Kapstein (1991).
8. See, for example, Aris on Pema Lingpa (1988), Edou on Machig Labdrön (1996), Gyatso on Jigme Lingpa (1998), and Havnevik on Jetsun Lochen (1999).
9. E.g., HMA/Baragaon/Tib/07, HMA/UTshognam/Tib/29, etc. HMA stands for “High Mountain Archaeology,” while the prefixes “U” and “L” for documents from Tshognam archives signify the *upper* and *lower* parts of the small settlement, which contain the archives of different priestly families.
10. See, for example, Walter and Beckwith (1997).

## THE PEOPLE OF MUSTANG AND THEIR HISTORY

1. The single best account in English of the Gorkha conquest is Stiller (1973).
2. On the history of the royal lineage see Jackson (1984: 96–144); the wider political context from which the dynasty emerged is described in Vitali (1996).
3. Detailed accounts of relations between Lo and Jumla in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are provided by Jackson (1978: 218–24); Schuh (1994: 68–88); Dhungel (2002: 99–116).
4. The history of the salt monopoly is discussed by several authors, notably Bista (1971), Fürer-Haimendorf (1975), and Rai (1994). The most substantial treatment of the subject is contained in Michael Vinding's comprehensive study of the Thakali (1998, esp. 69–92).
5. See especially Gaborieau (1994).
6. For a bibliography of the Tharu, see Krauskopff (1995).
7. Goldstein had already coined the term “Tibetanoid” for the group (1975: 68), but Höfer reserves this name for groups such as Gurungs, Tamangs, and Thakalis (1979: 43 n. 2, 44).
8. The most frequently encountered spellings of the name, sMon thang and sMan thang, signify “Plain of Prayer” and “Plain of Medicine,” respectively. It is possible that these renderings are sanitised versions of some such form as Mon thang (Jackson 1984: 7), in which “Mon” is a mildly pejorative term for southerner. Regarding the possible origins of “Mustang,” it is worth pointing out the similarity between the variant sMos thang (see, e.g., Vitali [1996: 530–32], and the Nepali “Mostām” of early Gorkha documents (Pant and Pierce [1989: 17]).
9. The etymology of the term *spyan btsug* is uncertain; *sPyān* is an honorific term for eye, and *btsugs* is the past tense of *'dzugs pa*, meaning to pierce or to bore. The name is undoubtedly related to similar forms such as *spyan pa*, which signifies “overseer” or “steward,” and *spyan bsal*, denoting a personal favourite appointed to office by a ruler. An early quasi-historical work called *dBu' bzhed* contains the word *spyan dbang*, “an obscure title which might indicate somebody in charge of the private affairs of the king” (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 30 n. 41).
- Headmen and mediators in Baragaon villages are sometimes called *migtsum*, Tib. *mig btsum*, “[Those who have their] eyes closed,” signifying that they are deeply pondering the solution of the problem in hand (Tib. *mig*: eye; *'dzum pa*, pf. *btsum*: to shut).
10. For the origin of the term and the range of its application see Heywood (2000: 800–801). Dhungel cites a Nepali document from 1701, issued by a king of Jumla, declaring that Te and Tshug were obliged to provide unpaid transport duty (2002: 191).
11. Vinding reports that one group of Thakalis from southern Mustang was accorded low status because of its portage obligations (1998: 207).
12. This section summarises a more extensive treatment of the subject presented in Ramble (1997).

13. “*De yul mi rnams cha lugs 'di ltar 'dug / pho rnams mgo la thor cog bod kyi chas.*”

14. Tib. *mdzo*, yak-cow crossbreeds.

## INSIDE THE SHÖYUL

1. A considerably more detailed treatment of the subject of this section may be found in Ramble and Seeber (1995).

2. For Tibetan etymologies of these names see Snellgrove (1989 [1981]: 170).

3. “Domari” is the local pronunciation of the name *rDo dmar* (*pa'i*), an important Nyingmapa lineage. The origins and peregrinations of the family are recounted in a study by Brag sne Kun bzang chos 'phel (1996). According to biographies consulted by this compiler, the family originated in China and came to Tibet in the seventh century as part of the entourage of Kongjo, the Chinese wife of Songtsen Gampo. The close association with the ruling dynasty of Tibet continued until the ninth century, when its scion Tsang Rabsel was one of four chaplains of King Repachen (Brag sne Kun bzang chos 'phel 1996: 49–54). Later the family flourished for several generations in a place called Kampo Namdrol (*sKam po rnam grol*) in southern Latö (La stod), in Tsang. Following the outbreak of war with the Mongols in the thirteenth century (*dus rabs bcu gnyis*—the author's understanding of the term *dus rabs* is consistently one century later than in common usage), the holder of the lineage, *rJe rTsangs dbon Dor mo rje*, fled north, where he found patronage among the local pastoral community. Tsang (*rTsangs*) seems to have been the original name of the lineage, at least in Tibet. Then, “in accordance with a prophecy that bade him go to Lake Namtso and establish himself there, he travelled north and settled in a place called Domar Marpo Meyigye, where his achievements on behalf of living creatures surpassed reckoning. From that time on, the place name was adopted as the family name, and that is why they are known as the Domarpa” (“*Lung bstan byung ste byang gnam mtshor song la gnas thob ces gsungs te byang du byon nas rdo dmar dmar po me yi brgyad bya ba'i sa gnas su bzihugs te 'gro don dpag med byung zhing / dus de nas sa ming mi la 'jags pas rdo dmar pa zhu ba de nas byung*”) (60–61). It is possible that the duplication of the word *dmar* in the toponym is a misprint, and the name should be simply Domarpo Meyigye (*rDo dmar po me yi brgyad*).

4. For a study of petroglyphs in Mustang, see Pohle (2000).

5. The Tk. and SMT term *oldog* in fact denotes only dried turnips.

6. In fact the name is pronounced roughly “A,” but I shall write it “Aga” for the reader's convenience. The form is justified by the only appearance of the name in a document of which I am aware, where it is rendered as *A ga*. The term “*a*” (Tib. *wa*) is the Tibetan and SMT word for a wooden aqueduct (Sk. *ku*), but the author of the document apparently did not consider this to have been the derivation of the name.

7. Concerning the “supervisors,” see chapter 1.

8. See, for example, the comparable formula that closes a seventeenth-century law book from Kag (Schuh 1995: 39).

9. The etymology of *khurchang* is uncertain. Several informants have suggested that it may be derived from Tib. *'khur ba*, to carry (as in commercial goods), and *cang*, the name of a volumetric measure that is used in Monthang and other parts of Lo. Thus *chang* (< *cang*) in this case would represent the grain that would have been paid as trading dues.

10. “BS” stands for Bikram Sambat (or Vikram Samvat), the official calendar of Nepal that begins in 57 BC.

11. The meaning of the phrase *gyal po skun po gyab gyur men* remains uncertain. It is also not definite that the syllable following *men* is in fact *rgyal*, as suggested here. The alternative translations proposed here are based on two readings, neither of them grammatically satisfactory: respectively, *rgyal por gus pa rgyab rgyu med*, and *rgyal po rkun por rgyab skyor med*.

#### NEIGHBOURS AND ENEMIES

1. *Tibetan Sources*, vol. 1, HMA/Te/Tib/36.

2. Unfortunately, I am no longer able to locate the reference for this identification.

3. The transliterated text of the *Complaint* is provided in *Tibetan Sources*, vol. 1, HMA/Te/Tib/36; the numbers in the following excerpts correspond to the lines in the Tibetan text.

4. The term “capital” in Baragaon denotes the settlements of Dzar, Dzong, Kag, Dangardzong, and Samar (see chapter 1), although Samar presumably did not classify as such at the time of the events recounted in the *Complaint*.

5. The identity of the “Bamen” (*ba sman*), a name that appears a number of times in the text, is a mystery. The following line implies that it is the name or title of an individual, the leader of a force, rather than a category of people. (It may be noted that the term Brahman is pronounced “bamen” in SMT.)

6. Because of damage to the text, it is not clear whether the vultures in question represent the Tepas, who are being pestered by less noble creatures, or the Monpas, on whose backs the Tshugwas are riding to (temporary) success.

7. sNe shang: possibly a reference to Nyeshang (sNye shang, Nye shang etc.), in the Marsyangdi valley east of the Annapurnas.

8. Namgyal is the name of a small village located a short distance to the northwest of Lo Monthang.

9. In some chronicles he is named as *Surtiśāhī*, a name that properly refers to an earlier king who ruled a part of Jumla about a century earlier (Pandey 1997: 201–2).

10. Probably Kaviram Thakali, who held the customs contract from 1877 to 1882 and again from 1889 to 1891 (Vinding 1998: 81).

11. Ada Naren was a prominent trader and landholder of Marpha. He is best known for having been the host of the Japanese traveller Ekai Kawaguchi, who spent time in the area on his way to Tibet in 1899 and 1900 (Vinding 1998: 86–88; Kawaguchi 1909: 64–65).

12. The Tibetan text reads: “*chu srin yod med lta mkhan phug ron dgos / phug ron gso byed til gyi 'bru mar dgos / chu srin 'dul ba'i dung phrug gson po dgos / dung phrug gso byed 'dod 'jo' i ba mo dgos*” (*Khye'u padma 'od 'bar gyi rnam thar bzhugs so* n.d.: 48).

#### FROM CLANS TO HOUSEHOLDS IN TE

1. The published works that would make up the building blocks of such an enterprise would certainly include Allen’s analyses of evolving kinship terminologies (1975, 1976, 1978a, 1978b); Karmay’s study (1998d) of the relationship between kinship terms, social groups, and political expansion, as revealed in the Tibetan epic; Uray and Uebach’s succinct revelation (1994) of administrative strategies for shoring up the empire against clannish and regional factionalism; and a number of ethnographic works on marriage strategies and household organisation (Aziz 1974; Corlin 1978; Goldstein 1971; Levine 1988), to cite a few key studies. The enquiry would also surely benefit from comparison with the recent work—mostly concerning South-east Asia and Oceania—that has grown out of Lévi-Strauss’s inspiration concerning “household societies” (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Hsu 1998; Macdonald 1987).

2. The word carries a high tone and should not be confused with the low-toned *lung*[*ba*] (Tib. *lung pa*), meaning “valley” or community and very broadly synonymous with *yul*.

3. Interestingly, the epithets in the second and third terms, *chung* and *sum*—meaning “small” and “third” (literally “three”)—are Tibetan; the equivalent in Seke would be *cang* and *som*.

4. “*Gro zhon zla pa*” for “*gro bzhin zla ba*” (l. 14), corresponding to August.

5. A Nepali document from Dzong refers to a certain “Muwakot,” apparently denoting the castle of that settlement (see Karmacharya n.d.).

6. *Ya* in Seke means “pass.” My addition of the word “Pass” after names ending in -ya or -la should be understood as an exegesis, rather than a translation, of the name.

7. The name Putra, in fact, seems to be an alternative form of Butra that has come to replace the latter.

8. See Gyatso 1993: 97 n. 1, citing Ruegg (1966).

9. This is the only instance I have encountered, either in documents or in oral tradition, where the Cimden are attributed with antecedents in Jumla.

10. Elsewhere (Ramble 1984), by way of an etymology for *khaldura*, I have cited a local suggestion that it might denote *kha thor ba* or *kha thor thor ba*, which in Tibetan would mean “scattered [or separate] parts.” It is more probable, however, that the name is derived from Nep. *khal*, “lowly,” and *dhur*, “household.”

11. SMT *kyipcang* < Tib. *khyi spyang*, lit. “dog-wolf”; the usual Tk. word is *shal*, < Nep. *syal*.

12. Sk. *pyangku* < Tib. *spyang ku*, “wolf”; Sk. *pu*, earthenware pot.

13. The two herders are recompensed in grain by the owners: 3 *mana* (small measure) of buckwheat and 6 *mana* of barley per animal. The herding of the bucks—there are about a thousand in Te—is organised differently: only eleven estates have

bucks, and they are grouped into three herds on pastures away from the does. The herders are paid in cash, 10,000 rupees per year.

#### THE ENCOUNTER WITH BUDDHISM

1. This dual category of taxes certainly existed in parts of Tibet, but its significance seems to have differed from place to place according to circumstances. In western Tibet, for example, whereas “outsiders’ tax” referred to the various obligations in cash, kind and services paid by the ordinary people to the different branches of a rather complex government structure, the somewhat lighter “insiders’ tax” was paid by a very specific segment of the community. Following the liberation of western Tibet from the rule of Ladakh in 1683, the commander-in-chief of the Tibetan force, Ganden Tshewang, created an elite guard of twenty-five Mongol soldiers to oversee the security of the frontiers. The descendants of this group—who, by virtue of the highly mobile duties of the corps, were scattered across the country—were known as the “Lower Mongols” (Tib. *Sog smad*). The tax these descendants paid to the Ngari administration was known as “insiders’ tax,” “because of its comparability with the so-called courtier tax”; “*rgyal po nyes skor gyi khral zhes pa'i dpe ltar nang khral sog smad la khri gi yod*” (*sTod mnga' ris skor gsum gyi lo rgyus* 1996: 73).

2. “*Trogrog*” (Tib. *krog krog*) is usually translated as “showoff.” In SMT, however, the adjective carries fewer pejorative, and rather more affectionate, overtones than in Central Tibetan.

3. The divinities who feature in the mandala of the Union of Precious Ones are described in Snellgrove (1957: 228–34); a diagram of the mandala is provided on p. 295.

4. *gShags* apparently stands for *sha*, a Seke suffix signifying “female.”

#### THE WILD GODS OF TE

1. For a discussion of this myth, see Aris (1979: 3–41).

2. For a reference to this place in a local pilgrimage guide, see Snellgrove (1979: 109, 128 n. 54).

3. I am indebted to Franz-Karl Ehrhard for drawing this etymology to my attention. The work in which it occurs is entitled *Ra sa 'khrul* [= 'phrul] *snang gi jig skyobs lung bstan rdo rje'i lha khang zhes bya ba'i dkar chag dad ldan dg'ba skyed byed* (16 fols., blockprint, Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, reel no. AT 99/7, fols. 8b/6–9a/5). The corresponding passage is cited in Ehrhard (1998).

4. “*Khyed rnams ni gnas po yin / bdag rnams ni mgron po yin / gnas mgron gyi dam tshig bsrungs / dpon slob kyi rten 'brel sgrigs / zhes chos ldan yid bzhin du 'grub pa'i 'phrin las sdong grogs rgya chen po mdzad du gsol lo / phar 'gro na skyel ma mdzod / tshur la yong na bsu ma mdzod / rjes su 'gro na lam grogs mdzod / brag la 'gro na them skras mdzod / chu la 'gro na zam pa mdzod / mun la 'gro na sgron me mdzod / sdang ba'i dgra sod / gnod pa'i bgegs thul / bar chad kyi skyon zlog*.”

5. “*Gangs su rtse na bzhugs pa / jo bo shar btsan rgyal po / char chu dus su 'bab pa'i / bkra shis smon lam tshang / nor phyugs rtag tu legs pa'i / bkra shis smon lam*

*tshang / yul gyi dbu na bzhugs pa [or: bkra shis yul gyi bdun du] / pho lha yon tan dkar po / 'bras bu dus su smin mchis [or pa'i?] / bkra shis smon lam tshang / mi nad phyugs nad rgyun chad / bkra shis smon lam tshang / gtsang po'i gram na bzhugs pa / mo lha chu btsan gnyan po / dgra bo 'chi bdag bdud po / ma {le} yongs na dga' / bdud kyi mi nag nag po / ma {le} mthong na dga' / khyim gyi phugs na bzhugs pa / khyim gyi s brten pa'i sgo lha / sngar kyang gsol ba btib pas / da yang thugs rje gzigs / bkra {la} shis pa'i lung pa / g.yang {la} chags pa'i lung pa / mi nor skyid gsum 'dzom pa'i / bkra shis smon lam tshang / zas nor phyugs gsum 'dzom pa'i / bkra shis smon lam tshang / rdza chu spang chu gnyis po / yur ba'i nang la zhugs / ljang pa rnam rgyal bum pa / snyan gyi bar nas 'khrungs."*

6. To the best of my knowledge, a possible etymological relationship between *dom* and the Tibetan *sgrung*, "bard," has not been remarked by scholars. *sGrung* is pronounced *drung* in Central Tibetan, but in the Mustang dialects it is *drum*.

7. In certain Tibetan dialects the term *nagmo*, "female black one," is the usual term for wife or woman.

#### BUDDHISTS OR PAGANS?

1. It may be appropriate at this point to cite a defence I have offered elsewhere of my use of the term "pagan": "Non-Lamaist Tibetan traditions of a sacred or ritual character are, notoriously, nameless. Giving a name to a set of disparate practices carries the risk of reifying them and creating the illusion of a coherent, systematised religion. I can only emphasise that 'pagan' is used here as a convenient adjective and should not be seen to denote a follower of some organised creed called 'Paganism.' ... 'Pre-Buddhist' and 'non-Buddhist' are inadequate for a number of reasons: the first not least because it begs important questions about the relative antiquity of the two traditions in the region, while the second fails to distinguish other forms of 'non-Buddhism'—such as Hinduism—that exist in Mustang. 'Popular,' another handy evasion, is perhaps even more misleading because of its implication that the cults of place-gods lie within the sphere of public activity, whereas they are in fact quite specialised fields. Whatever its shortcomings, 'pagan' at least expresses the essentially local character of these cults (the Latin *pagus* could be very acceptably rendered by the Tibetan word *yul*), and also suggests an ethos that is at odds with the tenets of high religion, whether Buddhism or Bon" (Ramble 1998: 124).

2. Tk. *gyang* corresponds to the Tibetan *sekhāl* (Tib. *se khal*), which equals thirty *zoba* (Tib. *zo ba*)—that is, approximately 60 litres; the *drin* in Te equals 20 *zoba* and therefore corresponds to the Tibetan *bokhal* (Tib. *'bo khal*).

3. Concerning attitudes to the consumption of cow and yak meat in the Muktinath area, see Schuler (1979).

4. The story is curiously similar to one that was told to me in Lhasa about the well-known Tibetan nobleman Ngabö Ngawang Jigme. Because of his close association with the Communist Chinese authorities—he was one of the Tibetan signatories of the Seventeen-Point Agreement of 1951—Ngabö abandoned the traditional Tibetan dress and had his hair cut in emulation of the modern style. In Lhasa,

however, his new coiffure was regarded as a disgrace to the aristocracy, and he was not permitted to approach the Potala palace beyond two large stupas that used to stand a short distance to the west of it, at the foot of Cakpori Hill. His solution was much the same as that adopted by Tepa Sonam—a yak-hair wig. The difference is that Ngabö's remedy was deemed acceptable.

5. The Mustang dialects of Tibetan contain no “devoiced” (that is, voiced and aspirated) consonants.

6. Personal communication by Per Kvaerne, cited in Karmay (1998: 16). Regarding the language of the *Caryāgītikosa*, see Kvaerne (1986: 3–4).

7. Since the connection between Mani and *'ba'ji* is far from obvious, Martin's reasoning is worth quoting at some length: “[The late Géza Uray] argues against the idea that the form ‘Mar Ma-ne,’ which occurs in a late-eighth-century Tibetan text to represent Mar Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, would have been borrowed from Chinese. As part of this argument he reconstructs what a Tibetan transcription from a north-western Chinese dialect of the period would have looked like, yielding the hypothetical forms *\*'bar 'ba ji* and *\*'bar man ji*. It occurred to us that the first of these hypothetical Tibetan forms of the name Mani, namely *\*'Ba-'ji*, might very well explain a very difficult term used twice in the tenth-century antitantric polemic of the king Lha bla-ma Ye-shes-'od. In the latter we encounter the form *'ba-'ji-ba*, further qualified as *mu-stegs*, ‘heretics’” (Martin 1997: 261). Martin suggests, convincingly enough, that the use of the term for Manichaean in this case would signify not a follower of Mani, but a nondescript heretic.

#### AGEDNESS OF ERROR

1. The chapter epigraph is cited in Tillyard (1966: 114).

2. *Sho* is a common auspicious exclamation used in songs and local ceremonies of Baragaon.

3. The feminine form may be used here and in the seventh stanza simply because it provides an extra syllable to meet the demands of the metre.

4. The corresponding expression in SMT is *khyogthong-nozhung*.

5. The word is Tibetan, not Seke, but the etymology is uncertain and the English gloss therefore a description rather than a translation. Perhaps this is < Tib. *don gnyer pa*, “one who takes pains,” suggesting the officials’ role in maintaining the precision of the ceremony that follows. Alternatively, it may represent the Tibetan term *konyer* (Tib. *dkon gnyer*), a category of monastic steward: Seke pronunciation often favours the prefixed consonant that normally remains silent in cognate Tibetan words, as in *daro* for Tib. *dkar po* (“white”) and *gig* for Tib. *gcig* (“one”).

6. The subject is understood by the form of the verb. *Shag* (Tib. *gshegs*) is the honorific form of the verb “to go” applied to women, and *pheb* (Tib. *phebs*) is the corresponding masculine form. The same terms are also used in this gender-specific way in a number of Tibetan-speaking villages of Baragaon.

7. The term is also used in SMT, but its etymology is uncertain. Local documents sometimes render it *mda' pa*, “the archers,” but if the word is Tibetan it is more likely

to be cognate with *zla bo*, “companion.” However, variants of the term are used among non-Tibetan-speakers, for example *dapa-dami* among the Northern Magar to denote, respectively, men’s and women’s feasting groups (Anne de Sales, personal communication, 23 February 2000). This suggests that it may be derived from the Nepali term *daphā*, ultimately of Persian origin and signifying “section” (Turner 1931).

8. In Tibet the term denotes a high-ranking military officer.

9. This procedure is apparently much the same in other villages of Baragaon. For example, the Dachang (Tib. *mDa' chang*, lit. “Arrow Beer”) of Lubra, which is held over the course of several days in the spring, is broadly similar in form to the archery in Te, with a few differences. Since the Dachang is a celebration of the spring, the archers are decorated not with juniper but with sprays of willow.

10. The terms are Tibetan (*pho glud*, *mo glud*). The form of the effigies is not significantly different from those that are widely found in the Tibetan tradition. They represent a human figure riding a deer, and their sex is denoted by the addition of a wool-spindle for the female and a small model arrow for the male.

11. *On Reformation in England* (1641), in Milton 1958: 21.

#### COMMUNITY LAW

1. Brown (1996: 41–42), citing, in the last sentence, a report by the Naumann Foundation (1988).

2. Amartya Sen (1977) offers a synthetic perspective of this sort based on a re-reading of the nineteenth-century writers mentioned here; the argument for a possible cognitive basis for altruistic action—“the organ of exchange”—is examined in Ridley 1996. Sen’s and Ridley’s arguments have been tested against classical theories of prestation in a recent study of a Magar ritual of exchange (de Sales 2001).

3. *Tibetan Sources*, vol. 1, provides full translations of the five documents related to this case, HMA/Te/Tib/27–31.

4. The transliterated text and a facsimile of the constitution are presented in *Tibetan Sources*, vol. 1, HMA/Te/Tib/03.

5. There is no clause 25; that number should probably have been inserted before clause 24c.

6. Berger 1967: 14; the three notions are derived largely from the work of Hegel, Marx, and Mead (Berger 1967: 14 n. 3).

7. “Particularly we have not followed Marx in his pseudo-theological notion that alienation is the result of certain historical ‘sins’ of the social order or in his utopian hopes for the abolition of alienation . . . through the socialist revolution” (204 n. 5).

8. With reference to the same phrase and a later formulation of it, Humphrey and Laidlaw point out the analytical inadequacy of the term “mystical” itself: “Turner cannot bring himself to write ‘imaginary’” (1994: 82).

9. Following on from his earlier work on the cognitive basis for religious belief, Pascal Boyer isolates and discusses a dozen such factors that are commonly cited as being at the heart of religion. They include explanatory value with regard to

strange natural or experiential phenomena, moral and political coerciveness, nomic function, and so forth (2001: 10–31).

10. For a particularly lucid critique of the opposition, see Stanner 1967.

11. See for example, Guelpa 1998: 55.

12. Against authors who have accused Snorri of composing, rather than compiling, the *Snorra Edda*, see Dumézil 1986: 61–83.

#### THE HEADMEN OF TE AND THE HEAVEN-APPOINTED KING

1. On the subject of this multiple identity see, for example, Macdonald (1971: 199); Haarh (1969: 18, esp. ch. 11); Wylie (1963: 200).

2. A translation of the passage also appears in Haarh 1969: 214–15, and in Ariane Macdonald (1971: 208–9).

3. A translation of the Wä's oath to the king also appears in Snellgrove and Richardson (1995: 27–28).

4. As Karmay (1988: 76–80) points out, there is no evidence that he really did persecute Buddhism, but the story later acquired general currency in Buddhist works, and the assassination is even the subject of a much-performed monastic dance.

5. The date given is “the third day of the fifth month in a Wood Hare year; the third day of a peaceful auspicious month.” Likely candidates for the Wood Hare year are 1807, 1867, and 1927. The epithet “auspicious” (Tib. *bkra shis*) in the context of the lunar calendar signifies a month in which there are no excised (*chad*) or intercalated (*lhag*) days, and of the three possible years, only in 1867 did the fifth month have this distinction.

6. On one occasion, when using the expression in a conversation in Dzar, I was misunderstood by my interlocutor as referring to members of the Artisan caste.

7. Concerning the possibility of a historical link between Tibetan divination-dice and tally-sticks, see Róna Tas (1956).

8. Protruding the tongue is a gesture of respect throughout the Tibetan cultural world. Scratching the head (just above the ear) seems to have a more limited distribution, although it occurs throughout Lo and Baragaon. One plausible suggestion I heard was that it mimics the well-known Tibetan gesture of loosening one's pigtail in the presence of dignitaries.

9. The phrase is not in Teke, but a peculiar mixture of Classical Tibetan and SMT: *Or che or che rgan pa bzhengs la mdzad rogs*.

10. Concerning the use of stones in Tibetan oaths, see for example Stein (1972: 200–201).

11. Here is one particularly pleasing example (Goffman was writing in the 1950s): “American college girls did, and no doubt do play down their intelligence, skills and determinativeness in the presence of datable boys, thereby manifesting a profound psychic discipline in spite of their international reputation for flightiness. These performers are reported to allow their boy friends to explain things to them tediously that they already know; they conceal proficiency in mathematics from their less able consorts; they lose ping-pong games just before the ending. One

of the nicest techniques is to spell long words incorrectly once in a while. My boy friend seems to get a great kick out of it and writes back, ‘Honey, you certainly don’t know how to spell.’” Through all of this the natural superiority of the male is demonstrated, and the weaker role of the female affirmed” (1971 [1959]: 48).

12. The syllable *bskos* in the epithet *gNam gyis bskos pa* is simply the past tense form of this verb.

13. A procedure similar to the “name-ball” ceremony was used in choosing a bride for the present incumbent of the Bonpo gShen lineage (Cech 1987: 262).

14. The divinities in question are Ye shes dbal mo, followed by four classes of protectors (*srung ma*): *dbal mo*, *bdud*, *btsan*, and *rgyal po*. The first two classes are represented by Srid pa'i *rgyal mo* and Mi *bdud*, respectively, and the fourth by rGyal po shel khrab. The *btsan* alone have no particular representative.

15. The divine character of Tibetan kings is dealt with by numerous writers, such as Tucci (1955) and Haarh (1969), to mention just two works I have already cited. In a recent discussion of the significance of divinely elected chiefs in the Tibetan and Himalayan region, Philippe Sagant describes a number of instances in which strategies of chance are used to express the intentions of the gods: these include the people of Manang in Nepal, Tromo in the Chumbi Valley (citing Walsh 1906), and the Sharwa of Amdo (Sagant 1990: esp. 151, 154, 157). The latter case is developed extensively in a study of the Sharwa entitled *Les neuf forces de l’homme* (Sagant and Karmay 1998).

16. One plausible explanation I have heard for this reluctance is the association with the ritual known as *cō* (Tib. *gcod*), in which priests dance around a dead body prior to its disposal.

17. “Dans la panique, alors que le meneur a pris la fuite, émerge à sa place un autre représentant de la collectivité, apparemment transcendant par rapport à ses membres. Il n'est autre que le mouvement collectif lui-même, qui se détache, prend une distance, une autonomie par rapport aux mouvements individuels, sans cesser pour autant d'être la simple composition des actions et réactions individuelles. C'est un effet de système. Comme Durkheim l'a bien senti, la totalité présente en ces moments d'effervescence tous les traits que les hommes attribuent à la divinité: extériorité, transcendance, imprévisibilité, inaccessibilité” (Dupuy 1992: 37).

18. “Une métaphore qui devrait se substituer avantageusement à celle d’extériorité” (Dupuy 1992: 37).

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