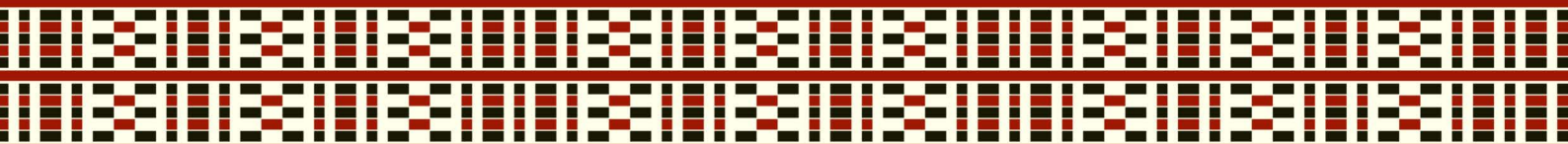




LEPCHA STUDIES

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THE USE OF THREAD-CROSSES IN LEPCHA LAMAIST CEREMONIES

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The pre-Buddhist Bön¹ faith of Tibet, remnants of which are still to be found in that country, employs in its ceremonies complicated, mast-like structures, consisting of sticks, thread and tufts of wool. These structures, technically known as "thread-crosses",² are called Dö (spelled *mDos*), Domo (*mDos mo*) or Ye (*Yas*) by the Tibetans. After its introduction into Tibet, the Buddhist religion incorporated into its system many of the aboriginal deities and numerous magical ceremonies of the Bön; it also took over the use of thread-crosses.

Although many western travellers observed and reported the use of these curious structures in various parts of Tibet, no comprehensive report on the purpose of the thread-crosses and the complicated rituals, accompanying their construction seems to have been published. Some information can, however, be gathered from various books on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.³ Summarizing our present knowledge we may say that thread-crosses are used in Tibetan religious ceremonies for the following purposes:

(1) As contraptions for catching demons. When applied in this way, they are put in front of objects, which they are supposed to protect (monasteries, villages, etc.) the idea being that approaching malignant spirits get caught in the net of the thread-cross, like flies in a spider's web. It is therefore regarded as necessary to renew the contraption and to destroy the old thread-cross when the *mDos* has served its purpose for some time and become "saturated" with the powers of evil; this is usually done by pulling it down and burning it ceremonially. It is interesting to note that parts of the destroyed thread-cross are sometimes suspended above the doors of houses, fastened on the ceiling or placed near the image shrine as "charms for good luck",

in spite of the fact that the *mDos* is in this case regarded as an abode of evil forces.⁴ Indeed, after the destruction of the structure a fight regularly ensues between laymen attending the ceremony, everyone trying to secure a piece of the *mDos*.⁵

(2) The *mDos* is sometimes regarded as a "house" or "seat" for gods or spirits and is used for this purpose in some ceremonies, the supernaturals being invited to descend upon the thread-cross. In some cases, however, malignant demons, especially those causing illnesses, are compelled by the exorcist to leave the body of their victim and to enter a *mDos*, which is afterwards carried away to some lonely spot and there abandoned or destroyed.

(3) For counteracting the influence of evil spirits or for appeasing their anger, special thread-crosses are erected, e.g. as described by Waddell in the ceremonies "barring the earth and sky demons".⁶

(4) A *mDos* appears to be sometimes used instead of the dough effigy which plays an important part in Tibetan religious dances. Thus a huge *mDos* consisting of three different parts and bearing the symbols of sun, moon and the wish-granting jewel on its top, is used at the religious dance of the *Karma pa* monastery *Pho brang dgon pa rdo brtsug* in Darjeeling.

Various names are given by the Tibetans to certain parts of the thread-cross. The stick which forms the central vertical axis, is called *Srog shing*, "life tree", a spider-web like part of a huge *mDos*, constructed with the help of four sticks, is called *dPal dbyer*, etc.

According to the purpose they serve or the relation they have to certain supernaturals, the thread-crosses bear various names, many of which refer to groups of gods or demons of the aboriginal Bön faith.⁷ Thus one kind of *mDos*, consisting mostly of red thread, corresponds to the group of the *bTsan*⁸ demons, which are thought of as having red bodies; other thread-crosses are called "The secret *mDos* of *Pe-dkar*"⁹ (*Pe dkar gsang mDos*), "The planet *mDos*" (*gZa mDos*), etc. When constructing the thread-crosses, strict

rules concerning their colour, the way of arranging and knotting the coloured strings, etc. must be observed according to orthodox traditions. While the work is progressing, prayers and magic syllables (*dhāranis*) are chanted and the officiating priest breathes from time to time upon the structure.

Besides the sticks, coloured thread and tufts of wool, used for the construction of thread-crosses, several other objects are often required in these ceremonies. They are: various skulls of animals - thus at the ceremony of "closing the door of the sky demons" the *mDos* is fastened to a dog's skull, while in the rite "closing the door against the earth demons" a ram's skull is used instead - furthermore flat wooden sticks, covered with rough drawings of various emblems and images. These sticks, which are called *Tamshing* (*Khram shing*)¹⁰ by the Tibetans, were originally used by Bön priests as important objects in their ceremonies. Other related instruments are sticks with tufts of white or coloured wool on top and in the middle, called *Yetag* (*Yas btags*), cones made of dough - termed *Torma*,¹¹ *gTor ma* - and images made of butter with the help of wooden moulds (*Zan par*). When preparing a base for the *mDos*, earth, straw and grass are used to build a series of square platforms, usually four in number, superimposed one on top of the other in decreasing size. On top of this the principal thread-cross is usually planted. This arrangement and some of the ideas connected with the various parts of the *mDos* itself show a certain parallel to the ideas connected with the symbolism of the Buddhist *Chötens*¹² (*mChhod rten*, Skr. *Stūpa*).

So far little authentic information on the original use of the *mDos* has been obtained from Tibetan sources; additional evidence on this subject can be, however, obtained from some neighbours of the Tibetans. It is well known to-day, that many of the neighbouring tribes, especially in the south and south-east professed or even still profess a religion, which seems to be very similar to the Tibetan Bön faith. The most comprehensive evidence on this question

is to be found in the religious beliefs and customs of the ¹Na-²khi tribe, who have been previously confused with the Mo-so. The ¹Na-²khi, a branch of the ancient Ch'iang live today in Southwest China around Likiang, their former capital. This tribe was carefully studied by Dr. J. F. Rock over a period of more than twenty years. Dr. Rock translated the greatest part of the comprehensive literature of the ¹Na-²khi and analyzed their religious ceremonies; thereby he showed that this tribe preserved in its beliefs and customs a very high percentage of old Bön traditions. The priests of the ¹Na-²khi, called ²Dto-¹mba, employ thread-crosses (¹Na-²k'wai in ¹Na-²khi) in a number of ceremonies. As in Tibet, these ¹Na-²k'wai are regarded as "seats" for either gods or demons. But we also find other beliefs. Thus it is reported in ¹Na-²khi books, that ²Dto-¹mba ³Shi-¹lo (who is identical with the Tibetan *gShen rabs mi bo*, the founder of the Bön religion), was transformed at the moment of his death into a thread-cross, ¹³ while on the so-called *Hä-shi-pi*, which is used at funeral ceremonies, ²Dto-¹mba ³Shi-¹lo's horse is figured carrying a ¹Na-²k'wai. ¹⁴ Another belief is that the ²Ba-¹d'a, the warriors who accompany some of the ¹Na-²khi deities, originated from thread-crosses in the intermediary space between heaven and earth. ¹⁵ We should finally notice that drawings of ¹Na-²k'wai are often found in the pictographic script of the ¹Na-²khi.

To Dr. Rock we are also indebted for the information that thread-crosses are used by the ancient Hapa sect, members of which are still living in the territory of Muli (*Mi li*) and Yung-ning in Southwest China. The Hapa erect elaborate thread-crosses for averting hail. ¹⁶ These structures, called Nyata by the Hapa sorcerers, are renewed after three or four years. As Dr. Rock obtained a Hapa manuscript, ¹⁷ written in Tibetan and dealing with the ceremony of erecting a thread-cross for the demon-king Pe-dkar we can expect to receive valuable information on this subject later on.

Unfortunately, less is known about the use of thread-crosses among other near or more distant neighbours of the

Tibetans. They are reported to be used by the Mongols who call them *öngge*, "colour", *makhabut* "body" or *tor-gaguli* "obstacle", the last name certainly referring to their ritual purpose. It seems, however, that their use has become very rare in Mongolia in more recent times.¹⁸

Other reports show that thread-crosses are used by the Kachin and some of the Naga tribes, especially in death ceremonies, and for averting or destroying evil.¹⁹

Further to the southwest we find, that thread-crosses are extensively used in the religious ceremonies of the Lepchas of Sikkim. The Lepchas, who adhere today to Tibetan Buddhism, have preserved some practices of their original religion, which - after the name of its priests - is called the Mun religion.²⁰ Consequently there is a mixture of rites and beliefs of both religions and it is very difficult to state with certainty, which of the rites and religious ideas originated from the Mun or from Lamaism. This situation is made still more complicated by the fact that the Buddhist teachings introduced into Sikkim were those of the unreformed *rNying ma pa*, the "Old Sect", which preserved in its religious practices many customs originating from the Bön, which, however, have scarcely been studied up to now.

How closely the Mun religion and Lamaism became associated among the Lepchas is shown by the fact that many of the Lepcha ceremonies are concurrently performed by Mun priests and lamas.

Thread-crosses are called in Lepcha *deu* - corresponding to the Tibetan *Do*, *mDos* - or *Yeu*, an equivalent of the Tibetan *Ye*, *Yas*. As to the meaning of the thread-cross, it is generally regarded by Lepcha lamas as a "seat", "house" or "place" for supernatural beings. The tufts of wool, which are fastened to the thread-cross or are placed on top of bamboo sticks planted near the structure are supposed to represent clouds, surrounding the "palace".

The remainder of this paper consists of details of Lepcha ceremonies in which thread-crosses are used. Some of these ceremonies have already been described and only short accounts will be given of these; in most cases there

are some new details on the composition or use of the thread-cross.

1. THE CHERIM CEREMONY

This ceremony, consisting of three parts, takes place twice a year in honour of the mountain god of Kanchenjunga (*Gangs chan mdzod lnga*, "The five glacier treasures"), as well as for appeasing evil spirits, to protect the crops from hail and men from diseases. It is partly performed by Mun, partly by lamas, who officiate during the last third of the rite. As a description of the ceremony itself has already been given previously,²¹ we shall mention here only the third part of the rite and the form of the thread-cross used herein.

This part is performed by the lamas who direct their sacrifice to all the gods and demons; the main sacrifice is made to the mountain god Kanchenjunga²² and the "gods of the plains". The essential part of the rite consists in erecting a *deu*, the construction of which starts some four hours earlier. The *deu* consists of nine storeys, made of blue, red, yellow and white thread.²³ This thread-cross is called *mamoo yam deu*.

The Lepcha lamas explain that this structure is erected to appease the malignant ghost of a Tibetan king, who was called Dayom Panoh, "king Dayom". During his lifetime enemies destroyed his palace and when he died his ghost started roaming around and harming people out of revenge. The *deu* should provide a nine-storied palace and entice him to return to Tibet.

Besides the *deu*, an image of a female supernatural being, called *mamoo*, is erected. The effigy of the *mamoo* is made out of ground millet and buckwheat dough. The *mamoo* is represented with outstretched hands, riding a tiger. On her breast she is wearing a necklace, made of butter, while the lower part of her body is covered by a garment, indicated by scratches in the dough. The supernatural being has snakes instead of hair and wears a five-lobed crown, apparently similar to that worn by Tantric lamas.

This image is placed upon a base, formed by covering a bamboo stretcher with earth and braken and superimposing upon it squares of turf, each smaller than the other, with the grass facing down. The nine-storied *deu* is planted into the topmost turf immediately behind the figure. On the lower steps of the base, a great number of cones made of dough and covered with pieces of coloured cotton is placed. These cones, called *diget*, represent the servants of the *mamoo*. On the four corners of the second layer, four *yeu* are planted: in front in the right-hand corner blue, on the left white, in the rear left yellow and in the rear right red. In the topmost layer as well as into the second one, several flat wooden sticks, called *Tamsing* by the Lepchas, and small sticks bearing tufts of wool - termed *pong* or *bamgyal* - are planted. On the lowest step, a wall called *po ryum*, with a gap in front, is erected around the last turf square. Opposite this gap, inside the enclosure, four small vessels containing milk, tea and strained Lepcha beer are placed. On the right and left outside of the wall, crossed arrows and spindles are stuck into the base, the arrows being put on the right, the spindles on the left, when facing the structure. According to the explanation given by the priests, the arrows represent the male element, while the spindles stand for the female. Finally, various flowers are put around the lowest base.

The ceremony is continued by offering food and various objects to the *mamoo* and other spirits and then by chanting of prayers. Towards the evening, when the ceremony comes to an end, the *deu* with the dough images is carried across three streams and then thrown away. If the images are eaten by animals within three days, it is regarded as a sign that the gods were pleased with the offerings made to them; if the effigies remain untouched, bad fortune may be expected in the near future.

There are several similarities to be found between this Lepcha rite and old Tibetan religious customs and thoughts. The name of the special thread-cross, *mamoo yam deu*, is derived from Tibetan. Indeed, one of the Tibetan thread-

crosses is called *ma mo mDos*, "The thread-cross of the *ma mo*" and is dedicated to supernatural beings called *ma mo*. This thread-cross seems to be an especially important form, as there is a special Tibetan book on its construction. The *ma mo*'s are represented by Tibetan artists as fierce and terrifying female demons; they are frequently met with in Tibetan iconography, where twelve Great *ma mo*'s (*ma mo chhen mo*) accompany Yama (*gShin rje*) as his messengers.²⁴ Since the *mamoo* of the Lepchas is also a female deity and as she has snakes instead of hair and is riding a yawning tiger, she should be regarded as a malignant spirit, most probably belonging or at least related to the *ma mo* group of the Tibetans.

The second syllable in the name of the thread-cross - *yam* - seems to correspond to the Tibetan honorific expression for mother, *yum*. This Tibetan word is frequently used in the names of lamaist goddesses and particularly denotes the female consorts or "energies" of Tantric gods. As already mentioned, the word *Deu* corresponds to the Tibetan word *mDos*.

It is interesting to note that this thread-cross is nine-storied, as the number nine is very frequently used in the Bön religion, where many of the deities are depicted as nine headed, are placed into groups of nine, etc.²⁵ The colour of the thread used for constructing the big *Deu*²⁶ and especially the colour of the four smaller thread-crosses which are planted in the four corners of the topmost square is nearly identical with the colours attributed to the four main quarters of the world by lamaist traditions: East white (or brown), South yellow (blue), West blue-green (red) and North black (yellow).

As for the story of the Tibetan king Dayom it was not possible to find a parallel in Tibetan mythology. But it may be mentioned, that in an old Tibetan record recently made available in a translation by Prof. Tucci, it is said that the king of the *bDud* demons, called *Mi byams pa khrag po*, "The merciless with the bloody face", was living in a black castle with nine storeys or pinnacles.²⁷

It has already been mentioned that some of the symbolism of the Tibetan thread-crosses corresponds to that of the Buddhist Chotens. In the present case the four steps, formed by the bamboo-bracken fern base and the three squares of turf, correspond to the four steps of a Choten. The Lepcha name for these steps, *bangrim*, is identical with the respective Tibetan expression, *bang rim*.

Several of the other implements used in this ceremony are also well known from ancient Tibetan rites. Thus the wooden slabs, which are planted into the turf on the side of the main effigy and which are called *tamsing* by the Lepchas, are identical with the Tibetan *khram shing*, already mentioned. As for the *pong* or *bamgyal* - the former word appears to originate from Lepcha, while the latter was derived from Bön terminology - the sticks carrying tufts of wool, we know that wool was used frequently by Bön priests. Thus those *bonpos*, who belonged to a sect called *sNang gshen*, had tufts of wool on their foreheads, while those of the *hPhrul gshen* sect used coloured thread of wool as their emblem. Adherents of the last mentioned sect are reported as having been especially efficient in the construction of *mDos* and *Yas*.²⁸

We find a parallel for the connection between arrows and thread-crosses in a recently published *than-gka* (painted scroll) of the Mongolian war god. On the lower part of this picture there is a hand, consisting of alternating thread-crosses and arrows.²⁹ Another similarity is perhaps the use of flowers, as a group of "Bön flowers" is mentioned in Bön scriptures. Finally, the ritual throwing away of the effigies also occurs in an important ancient ceremonies of Bön origin, called *lTo* or *gTo*, in which an effigy, regarded as a scapegoat, (*glud*³⁰) is thrown away.

2. CEREMONY FOR KEEPING AWAY ILLNESS

At the beginning of the rite a basket is filled with earth and on top of it three concentric, decreasing, square turfs are placed. The basket, arranged in this way, is called

rum by the Lepchas. In the centre of the topmost base a dough image is placed together with a big white *deu*. The image is said to represent the spirit "King Gebu". He is accompanied by four lesser supernatural beings and one minister. All six images are made of rice dough. On the four corners of the square, four *Yeu* are placed, two white in front, a red and a yellow one in the rear. To each of these four *yeu*, two *tamsing* and two *pong* are added, together with a strip imprinted with nine birds. On the step below, nine cones are placed, representing four ministers and five servants. Again, a band with representations of nine land animals is added. On the third storey, a great number of small images, representing male and female spirits, is placed. Into the lowest storey, eight arrows and eight spindles are planted and finally the whole structure is surrounded by various flowers. Later five cups, filled with Lepcha beer, tea and some bitter tasting liquid, are placed in front and several other implements, among them another image made of rice and with butter ornaments, are laid near the main *deu*. After burning incense, the officiating priests pray to the gods, to spare the population from illness.

As in the first rite, the number nine plays an important part and we find here again the various objects, which were said to be originally used in the ceremonies of the Bonpos.

3. SACRIFICE TO THE HAIL-DEMON DEBRONG PANOH

Debrong Panoh, "King Debrong", is a hail and thunder supernatural being who must be propitiated to prevent hail from ruining the crops. He is pictured as having nine faces, eighteen hands and a thousand eyes. His ritual is similar to that of Gebu Panoh. First a basket, with straw or dry leaves on the bottom, is filled with earth and afterwards again three concentric squares of turf are put on top. In the centre of the topmost square a dough image of Debrong Panoh is placed. This effigy, however, in contrast to the verbal description, has only one head and two hands. It holds a bow and a rope - perhaps the Tibetan

ritual snare, *Zhags pa* - in the left hand and an umbrella as well as an arrow in the right. The image of Debrong Panoh is accompanied by four effigies, representing his four ministers, which are placed in the four corners of the top square. On the second, third and fourth stage stand images of servants and lesser male and female supernatural beings; in front of the altar five cups containing milk, tea and strained Lepcha beer are placed. Finally, all sorts of grain are thrown into the basket and small twigs of various useful fruit trees are set around it. When the first part of the ceremony is finished, two images of Debrong Panoh's parents are made and set on two wooden plates. The image of Debrong Panoh's father is called *chien lut*, that of his mother *looh lut*. Then three pots, filled with tea, milk and strained beer, are put in front of each image and afterwards a white *yeu*, together with two *tamsing* and *pong* is set on the table of Debrong Panoh's father. Likewise, a white *yeu* again with two *tamsing* and two *pong* is placed upon the tray of the *looh lut*. Then a multi-coloured *deu* is placed on the image of Debrong Panoh itself, as well as four smaller thread-crosses in the four corners of the topmost square. The two *yeu*, which are set in front, are both white, those behind red and blue. Again, each *yeu* is accompanied by two *tamsing* and two sticks with tufts of wool.

Now the basket, containing the main image, is put upon a low table in front of the main structure, while the wooden plates with the images of Debrong Panoh's parents are placed to its right and left sides. Two pots filled with water are added - "for the gods to wash their hands and faces" - and two containers full of rice and again a cup filled with water - "for the gods to drink" - and then some strained Lepcha beer, cooked meat and rice are mixed together in a vessel by the officiating lama. Afterwards, while prayers are chanted to the accompaniment of music of the temple orchestra, offerings of rice and water are thrown out to the gods and finally a path, leading from the basket to the door, is made with powder. When this is finished, the central *deu* is removed from the basket and

carried out, while the basket and the two wooden plates are dragged along the path to the door. Once in the open, the basket is put in a tree, the *Chien lut* carried away to some other place and the image of Debrong Panoh's mother is thrown into the waterfall of a stream.

This rite contains some of the Bön elements mentioned before; further more this thunder and hail demon strongly resembles the appearance of gods as described by the Bonpos. Like many of the Bön deities, it is the personification of a natural phenomenon, depicted in the usual Bonpo manner, with nine faces and eighteen hands.

(5) For exorcising an evil spirit, who is causing an illness, several books must be chanted by a lama and two *deu*, called in Lepcha *chemen gedo* and *lumoo gedo* set upon a path. These Lepcha expressions are derived from the Tibetan terms *mTsho sman rgyal mdos* and *kLu mo rgyal mdos*, which are applied for two different kinds of thread-crosses, dedicated to certain groups of Nagas (*kLu*).

(6) While curing the illness, which had befallen a child, a horoscope was cast by a lama and it was decided that besides other rites a red thread-cross, called *Tsen Deu*, should be constructed. This *deu* is doubtlessly identical with a red *mDos* of the Tibetans, the *bTsan mdos* (pronounced *Tsen do*), which is constructed for averting the evil influence of the red *bTsan* demons.³¹

4. CEREMONY, PERFORMED BY LAMAS AND MUN FOR AVERTING AN ILLNESS

After a Mun has sacrificed an ox, some lamas erect a torma and sprinkle consecrated water and then make a tortoise, called *robe* in Lepcha - which corresponds to the Tibetan *Rube*, *Rus sbal* - which is drawn with its belly upward in powdered rice on a large mat. Afterwards, a square with various numbers, called *Miwua* (in Tibetan *sMe ba*)³², is inscribed upon the body of the tortoise, in the following way:

4	9	6
3	5	1
8	2	7

On the junction of 5 and 2, a plate is placed, containing an image of the invalid dressed with parts of his clothes. This effigy is surrounded by cones, representing years, and twisted pieces of dough which are waved over the invalid for exorcising the evil influence.³³ The effigy is surmounted by a *yeu* made of black, red, yellow and white thread and on both sides of the thread-cross some *tamsing* and *pong* are placed. Then various objects are laid upon each field of the magic diagram: Leaves of a tree called *gevo kanoh*, twisted pieces of dough, several triangular *tormas* surmounted by *yeu* - one of them in blue, the others white - a phallus-shaped cone tipped with butter,³⁴ and a bamboo holder containing water and surmounted by a flag, called *Tarchoh*. In the central square is placed a heap of bones consisting of six skulls of dogs and goats and two breastbones of sheep. After chanting prayers, burning incense and presenting offerings to the spirits, butter lamps are lit and a bow and a rope made of yak hair are brought into the room. This rope, which is called *sanong takpo* (it may be mentioned, that *Theg pa*, is the expression for rope in Tibetan) is reported to be used only in this ceremony.

Finally, a basket is taken by a friend of the family and held outside the house in front of the door. When the tray bearing the image of the invalid is incensed and the officiating priest addresses himself to the spirits telling them that they receive a substitute for the sick person, whom they should therefore release from their influence. At this moment, the invalid's father enters the room wearing a black cloth upon his shoulders and steps upon the central square of the tortoise. A stick is handed over to him, which he rests against his right big toe, while a helper pushes the heap of skulls previously placed upon this square, against his reels. Then the yak hair rope is drawn over the father's head, starting from his back, and placed against his ankles, while the tray containing the image of the sick person is lifted over his head and put into a basket, filled with leaves and grain. The father is then given a drink of water, which he spits into the basket. The contents of this are moved to

a bigger container. The father now steps from one square of the drawing to the other; his black cloth is removed. when reaching square 7, while a black yeu, which was placed upon this square, is replaced by a white one. Then, after exchanging his stick for the bow, he proceeds to square 4, where he stops for a while, sprinkling Lepcha beer over the sick person.

In the last part of the ceremony, twisted pieces of dough are waved over the invalid as well as over those standing nearby, while prayers are chanted by the officiating priest. After making a path of ground rice towards the door, the image of the invalid is carried out together with all the other offerings and laid into the basket which is held ready outside the house. Immediately, the carriers have passed the entrance, the door is shut on them. Finally, the basket with its contents is taken to a river and thrown into the water while in the house of the sick the chanting of prayers is continued.

The ritual here described is again identical in its general outline with the *lTo* ceremonies. Many objects are used, which we identified as being important implements of the Bön priests: however, there are also some new elements. Thus the drawing of a tortoise bearing a magic diagram upon its belly often occurs in Tibetan representations, especially on objects used in astrology. In this connection it should be mentioned that among a group of minor Tibetan deities called *Sa bdag*³⁵ "earth owners" a cosmic tortoise named *gSer gyi rus sbal*³⁶ "the golden tortoise" is mentioned and that other *Sa bdag* are depicted riding tortoises. The Lepchas too regard the tortoise as a cosmic creature; their lamas explain, that the *robe* is living in a subterranean sea and is kept down by the mountain Kanchenjunga, which rests upon its centre.

The peculiar flag, which is placed on top of the bamboo container, is also found upon Tibetan objects, used in rituals performed for the *Sa bdag*. Its Lepcha name - *tarchoh* - corresponds to the Tibetan *Dar lchog*, pronounced *Darcho*.

6. THE GYAPCHI KLON CEREMONY

This complicated ceremony is carried out concurrently by lamas and Mun priests in order to free a sick person from the evil influence of certain spirits, the presence of which was recognized by divination. As this rite has already been described elsewhere,³⁷ only the image used and the various thread-crosses will be described.

During this ceremony, five images are made of buckwheat dough and placed in front of an altar-like structure. Four of the effigies, said to represent male spirits, are depicted alike, that is standing, with raised hands; some scratches in the dough indicate that they are wearing a garment. The names of these four supernatural beings are Chyong moong, Deut moong, Lho moong and Sher moong. Their respective colours, rendered in the same order, are green, red, yellow and white. The fifth image is that of Marnoo moong, a female supernatural being whom we encountered previously. Her image is black and she is portrayed with legs apart, the sexual organs greatly exaggerated. Behind each of the images, a *yeu* of the respective colour is planted, together with two *tamsing* and two sticks with tufts of wool.

Another image, used in this rite, is called the "house owner". It is surrounded by small butter discs displaying images, impressed with wooden printing blocks (the Tibetan *Zan par*). Some of these depict the supernatural beings who preside over the cycle of twelve years.³⁸ The image of the "house owner" is connected with one *yeu*, two *tamsing* and two *pong*. The thread-cross used in this case is multi-coloured.

7. RITUAL, PERFORMED BY A LAMA TO APPEASE THE FEVER DEVIL DEUT-MOONG

After reading prayers, the lama, using bamboo sticks and blue thread, constructs a thread-cross, which is called *moong-ka deu bitomu*. After placing various sorts of grain, leaves, some fried rice and bread into the *deu*, he makes

a small image, which is afterwards connected with the thread-cross. Then the whole structure is offered to Deut - moong and finally somebody, who was designated by the lama, has to take this offering to a place in the forest where it is left to be eaten by animals. This ritual also corresponds to the ancient Tibetan *lTo* rites previously mentioned. In this connection it is interesting to note, that also in Tibet leaves or pieces of paper are placed in the thread-cross, usually in such a manner as to form the main features of a face. Occasionally a ceremonial scarf (*Kha btags*) is draped over the *mDos*.

8. RITE FOR AVERTING INFANTILE DIARHOEA

If several children die of infantile diarrhoea, it is assumed that their death was caused by a malignant spirit, called Sande moong. The Lepchas know two ceremonies for appeasing his anger. For the first a black dog is made with a rider on its back and two *yeu*, a black and a white one are placed upon the dog's head, while a red thread-cross is planted behind the rider.

The second ceremony has already been described elsewhere.³⁹ In this ceremony a life-sized cat with a very long tail is made out of dough. A rider, sitting upon a horse's saddle is placed on its back and four images of men are put in front of and behind the cat. The animal is led by strands of coloured thread, wound around its neck and held by the rider and the images in front. The rider carries a red thread-cross; on the left-front side of the tray a white *Yue* is placed, on the right front a black one, on the right hand rear a white and on the rear left a yellow. To each *Yeu* a *Tamsing* with wool of the same colour as the thread-cross is added.

9. EXORCISM, CALLED DEUT SHAGU KYOB

For curing a person who has fallen ill through the influence of an evil spirit called Hlamen Djeme Pum, a

ceremony - which again corresponds to the Tibetan *lTo* rites - is performed. An effigy is offered as substitute for the sick man or woman and afterwards carried far away from the house, in which the invalid lives. During this ceremony, also various thread-crosses are used. The name of this exorcism is nearly identical with the name of a Tibetan ceremony, called *Dushel-gugyur* (*bDud zhal dgu hsgyur*), "transferring the nine-faced *bDud*-demon". A treatise, composed by the well-known Indo-Tibetan mystic *Pad-masambhava*, describing the performance of this ceremony, is reported to exist in Tibet.

10. KEEPING AWAY ILLNESS AND DEATH FROM A HOUSE

When divination has revealed that a household is in danger of being attacked by spirits of illness and death, a ceremony called *Nambo Sagor* must be held by the lamas. First a dog's skull is hung over the door by means of a rope, to keep away all diseases which come over the ground. Then a pig's skull is buried under the fire-place, to keep away the diseases above it. While this is done, other lamas chant from books; rice and sacred water are sprinkled and a *torma* as well as a *yeu* are made. This ceremony shows a similarity to the Tibetan rites described by Waddell which are performed to protect a house from the influence of the *Sa bdag*.

11. CURING AN ILLNESS BY MEANS OF THE GO SUM RITE

This is a complicated ceremony, concurrently performed by lamas and *Mun* priests, during which a hemaphrodite image with three heads is erected. This effigy has a distinctly Tibetan name: it is called *Nagpo Gosum* (in Tibetan spelling *Nag po mgo gsum*), "the black three-headed one". It has two hands and its three heads seen from left to right, are those of a blue pig, red ox and yellow tiger. Behind the image, three *Yeu* of the same colour as the respective heads, are planted, and two *tamsing* are

placed behind the two upraised arms. A cloth, in its shape similar to that worn by dancers in Tibetan religious dances, is hung upon its shoulders. As a comprehensive description of further details of this image is available elsewhere⁴⁰ we would merely draw notice to the detail that the navel of the effigy is formed by a tortoise with a magic diagram upon its belly. This tortoise was described when speaking about the sacrifice to the hail demon Debrong Panoh. This rite also corresponds to the Tibetan *lTo* ceremonies and is regarded by the Tibetans as being purely of Bonpo origin.

12. KILLING THE MALIGNANT SPIRIT AROT MOONG, WHICH CAUSES VIOLENT DEATH

For this ceremony, a big horse and four smaller ones, all carrying riders on their back are made of millet dough, coloured red. Behind each rider, a red *yeu* together with *pong* sticks is planted and the smaller images are then placed into the four corners of a wooden plate, while the bigger image is put into the centre. In front of this a black figure of the *mamoo* is placed, together with an inflated animal's bladder. Other objects used in this ceremony are symbols of the 12 years cycle, four pots containing scrapings of iron, tree tips, poison and water from five rivers and various crops in leaf plates, prickly plants, and again arrows and spindles. The rest of this ceremony is described in *Himalayan Village* (p. 352). The four red images of riders seem to represent spirits, related to or identical with the *bTsan* demons of the Tibetans, who imagine these supernatural beings as ferocious riders of red colour. The red thread-cross would be then the *bTsan mdos* (or *tsen deu* of the Lepchas), as used in rite no 3.

13. THE SHIDOOK KYOB CEREMONY

If it is assumed that a person's death was caused by the demon called Shidook Moong, the ceremony called Shidook Kyob has to be performed. As this rite has already been

described,⁴² we will only note here those details, which are of special interest to our subject. Again, a base is made of layers of earth and in the centre of the topmost square a black thread-cross is planted, while in the four corners four small images together with the same number of *yeu*, in white, yellow, green and red, are placed. Below, 13 other figures together with 13 black thread-crosses, 13 knives, 13 sickles and 13 bows and arrows are arranged. In front of this structure stands a pot with nine handles. Besides encountering here the number nine, which we already identified as the most important number of the Bonpos, we find here the number thirteen mentioned, which is also regarded as a ritual number of this ancient Tibetan faith. As for the name of the demon, to whom the ceremony is dedicated, it sounds very similar to the name of the so-called "foundation owners", the *Shidak (gZhi bdag)*. They are a group of Tibetan supernatural beings who are supposed to dwell in the earth and when disturbed exercise an evil influence which might prove fatal to men.

It will be seen from the foregoing, that at the present stage, with the material available for comparison, it is impossible to state whether the Bön elements to be found incorporated in Lepcha religious ceremonies came from the original Bön religion, or whether they were introduced into them through the medium of the Red Hat Sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

NOTES

- 1 Spelled *Bon* in Tibetan. About the Bon religion see H. Hoffmann, *Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Bon Religion*, 1950, and the notes given by Prof. G. Tucci in his magnificent new work *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, Rome 1949. For a sketch of this ancient Tibetan faith see R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz: *Die tibetische Bon Religion*, *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, Vol. II, Vienna 1947, pp. 26-68 (Bibliography).
- 2 The distribution and use of thread-crosses in various parts of the world were described by W. Foy: *Fadensterne und Fadenkreuze*, I. *Ethnologica* II, Leipzig 1913, and by G. Lindblom: *Thread-crosses (Fadenkreuze)*, particularly in *South America and Africa*, *Ethnos*, Vol. V, nos 3-4, Stockholm 1940.
- 3 The main works consulted are:
 DAS S. CH.: 'The Bon Religion', *JASB*, Calcutta 1881 (p.196)
 SCHLAGINTWEIT, E.: 'Le Bouddhisme au Tibet', *Annales du Musée Guimet*, Paris 1881 (Plate XXXVII)

- WADDELL, L. A.: *Among the Himalayas*, London 1890 (Photograph on p. 387)
- WADDELL, L. A.: 'Lamaism in Sikkim', in *Gazeteer of Sikkim*, Calcutta 1894 (pp. 365, 368, 371-373)
- GRAHAM SANDBERG: *Handbook of Colloquial Tibetan*. Calcutta 1894 (p. 196)
- WADDELL, L. A.: *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*. London 1895 (pp. 484 - 488)
- DAS S. CH.: *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, Calcutta 1902 (p. 676)
- FRANCKE, A. H.: 'Kleine archaologische Erträge einer Missionssreise nach Zangskar in Westtibet', *Zeitschrift Deutschen Morgenländ. Gesellschaft*, Leipzig 1906 (p. 646)
- AHMAD SHAH: *Pictures of Tibetan Life*. Benares 1906 (Plates 29 and 40)
- GRÜNWEDEL, A.: *Der Weg nach Sambhala*. Abh. d. Königl. Bayer. Akademie d. Wissen philos.- philol. u. hist. Klasse, Bd. XXIX, München 1915 (p. 94).
- GRÜNWEDEL, A.: *Die Sternschnuppen im Vaidurya dkar po*. Festschrift E. Seler, Stuttgart 1922 (Note 5)
- FRANCKE, A. H.: *Tibetische Hochzeitslieder*, Hagen i. W. 1932 (III., appendix)
- SPENCER CHAPMAN, F.: *Lhasa the Holy City*, London 1938 (Photograph facing p. 8)
- STEIN, R.: Trente-trois fiches de divination tibétaines. *Harvard Journ. Asiatic Studies*, Cambridge Mass. 1939 (pp. 318-321)
- RIBBACH, S. H.: *Drogpa Namgyal*, München 1940 (Photograph p. 161)
- LESSING, F.: *Yung-Ho Kung*, Stockholm 1942 (pp. 148-149)
- HUMMEL, S.: *Geheimnisse tibetischer Malereien*. Forschungen zur Völkerdynamik Zentral- und Ostasiens, Heft 2. Leipzig 1949 (Ill., appendix)
- JÄSCHKE, H. A.: *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*. London 1949 (p. 274)
- TUCCI, G.: *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, Rome 1949 (II, pp. 715, 740, note 33)

Numerous works describing the construction and the use of thread-crosses composed by various Tibetan authors; e.g. the religious compendium of the "Red Hats", in 63 volumes, briefly termed *Rin chhen gter mdzod* contains in the volume *Phi pa tho* the following treatises:

- (1) *gNas chhos dgongs gter ias dbang phyug ma yi zor mdos khyer bde bar bkod pa bzhugs so*
- (2) *gNam chhos mi hgyur rdo rjei dgongs gter dbang phyug zor mdos kyi bka gtad hthabs bzhugs so*
- (3) *gLing bhi spyi mdos kyi zin bris ra ga a mdzad pa bzhugs so*
- (4) *bDe gshegs yongs hbul ias gLing bzhi spyi mdos bzhugs so*
- (5) *gLing bzhi spyi mdos kyi las hgrigs*
- (6) *Thugs sgrub yang snying hdus pa las / mkha hgro gling bzhi srid pai spyi mdos chhen po zhes bya ba bzhugs so*
- (7) *bDe gshegs yongs hdus las / srid pa khod snyomns kyi mdos bzhugs so*
- (8) *gSang bdag dregs pa hdul byed las tshogs dam srii glud mdos zhes bya ba ghugs so*

- 4 See e.g. the report given by Ribbach in Droga Namgyal. As also stated by A. H. Francke, thread-crosses play an important part in the New Year celebrations (*Lo gsar*) of Ladak.
- 5 See Lessing's *Yung-Ho Kung*, pp. 148-149
- 6 Waddell, *Lamaism*, pp. 484 and *Lamaism in Sikkim*, pp. 371-373
- 7 A list of names of 14 various thread-crosses is to be found in R. Stein's *Trente-trois fiches de divination tibétaines*, p. 318
- 8 About the *bTsan* see Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, II, pp. 718-720
- 9 About this ancient Tibetan god see Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, II, pp. 734-736, and Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 'Das tibetische Staatsorakel', *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, Vol. III, Vienna 1948, pp. 136-155 (Bibliography).
- 10 See Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, note no 283
- 11 About the use of this important religious object see the comprehensive notes given by W. A. Unkrig in W. Filchner's *Kumbum Dschamba Ling*, Leipzig 1933, pp. 291-398
- 12 Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, p. 740, note no 33, and *Indo-Tibetica I*, Rome 1932.
- 13 J. F. Rock: 'The Birth and Origin of ²Dto-¹mba ³Shi-²lo', *Bull. École Française d'Extrême Orient*, t. XXXVII, Hanoi 1937, Plate XXVI
- 14 J. F. Rock: 'Studies in ¹Na-²Khi Literature, *Bull. École Française d'Extrême Orient*, t. XXXVII, Hanoi 1937, part II.
- 15 J. F. Rock: 'The Muan Bpo Ceremony', *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. XIII, Peking 1948, p. 53, note no 102
- 16 See J. F. Rock: *The Ancient ¹Na-²khi Kingdom of Southwest China*. Cambridge Mass., Vol. II, p. 389 and plate 389.- A ¹Na-²k'wai can be seen on Plate 229
- 17 The title of this MS is *Ju thig gi mo sgo phye bai dbang skor rgyas pa lags so*. It is now in possession of M. R. Stein (Paris)
- 18 Grünwedel, *Vaidūrya dkar po*, note 5; Lindblom, *Thread-crosses*, p. 94 and photograph on p. 93
- 19 See H. E. Kaufmann, *Ethnologischer Anzeiger*, IV, (5), Stuttgart 1939, p. 235; Kaufmann: 'Kurze Ethnographie der nördlichen Sangtam-Naga, Assam, *Anthropos* 1939, p. 223; Kaufmann: 'Das Fadenkreuz in Hinterindien, *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, XVI, no 15, Berlin 1939, pp. 193-195; and *Ethnologischer Anzeiger*, IV, (6), Stuttgart 1940, p. 329
- 20 About the Lepchas, their religion, customs, etc., see G. Gorer: *Himalayan Village*, London 1938 and J. Morris: *Living with Lepchas*, London 1938. It is interesting to note, that the Mun priests are divided according to the rites they practice - into "white" and "black" Mun, a division which corresponds to the "white" and "black" Bon.
- 21 Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, pp. 228-230; Morris, *Living with Lepchas*, pp. 152-162
- 22 This god who is mainly worshipped by the Buddhists of Sikkim, is depicted in Tibetan iconography as a king riding upon a white horse and holding a banner in his right hand, and a shallow bowl containing jewels in his left.
- 23 Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, Plate 16; Morris, *Living with Lepchas*, photograph facing p. 154
- 24 Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, II, p. 725
- 25 Other numbers used by the Bonpos with preference are 7, 13, 18 and 360
- 26 In Tibet as well as among the Lepcha coloured thread is used not only for the construction of thread-crosses, but also applied when making various charms. Thus, for example, two sorts of Tibetan amulets, called *Srung skud* and *Srung hkhor* consist mostly of coloured thread.
- 27 Tucci, *ibidem*, II, p. 718
- 28 Tucci, *ibidem*, II, p. 715
- 29 See the publication by S. Hummel, previously mentioned
- 30 Tucci, *ibidem*, II, p. 726

- 31 A number of local *bTsan* demons seems to be propitiated by the lamaists of Sikkim who regard them as spirits of diseased novices or ill natured lamas. Waddell (*Lamaism in Sikkim*, p. 356) mentions a demon, called *Zla ba seng ge*, as the *bTsan* of Pemiongchi, *Lha btsan pa* as dwelling at Yangong Gompa, etc.
- 32 This magic square, the sections of which are represented in various colours, is frequently used in Tibetan astrology. According to the well known Tibetan astrological work *Vaidurya dkar po* (leaf 452 a), the following supernaturals are supposed to dwell in the different sections of the square:
- On the first, white *sMe ba* dwells the Earth Goddess *Rab brtan ma*, the colour of her body is white and clear like a crystal, in her right hand she holds Mount Sumeru, lifting it up; with her left hand she grasps a vessel, filled with Amrta (nectar). She wears a robe with train, made of white silk. On her head she wears a diadem of gold.
- On the second, black *sMe ba* dwells the King of the *bDud*, his body has a brilliant black colour, in his right hand he holds a *Khram shing*, in his left a snare; he wears a garment made of black silk. On his head he has a golden diadem.
- On the third *sMe ba*, which is blue, dwells *Sa bsen gdug byed*, the colour of his body is sky-blue. In his right hand he holds a rosary made of skulls, in his left he holds the *lChag lchig* skull-cup. He wears a garment made of black silk.
- On the fourth, green *sMe ba*, dwells *kLu rgyal lba ru*. Her body is of brilliant green (blue) colour. In her right she lifts a precious vessel. She wears a garment made of green (blue) silk.
- On the fifth, yellow *sMe ba* dwells the King of the *Sa bdag, hjig rten bdag*. In his right hand he holds a precious vessel, with his left he lifts a white conch-shell. He wears a garment of golden silk, on his head he has a golden diadem.
- On the sixth, white *sMe ba*, dwells the King *sKye hgroi dpal*. The colour of his body is a brilliant white. In his right hand he holds a club with a thunderbolt on top, in his left he carries the precious victory banner. He wears a garment of white silk.
- On the seventh, red *sMe ba*, dwells the great red *bTsan*. The colour of his body is red, vermillion-like. In his right hand he holds a long lance, in his left the white-black die. He wears a garment of red silk, on his head a diadem of gold.
- On the eighth, white *sMe ba*, dwells the *Lha chhen dbang phyug che*. The colour of his body is a brilliant white. In his right hand he holds the trident, in his left a skull-cup filled with blood. He wears a garment of white silk, on his head he carries a golden diadem.
- On the ninth, red *sMe ba*, dwells the *Ma mo Dza mun ti*, who is dark-red. In her right hand she holds a sack, filled with diseases, in her left a coil of thread. She wears a red garment and on her head she carries a golden diadem.
- 33 These pieces of dough are called *chongbu tipku*; they are mostly waved over the invalid towards the end of the exorcism. They are used by lamas and Mun alike. The act of waving away the forces of evil is called *pek* by the Lepchas.
- 34 Butter is used in many ceremonies of the Tibetans and Lepchas; it serves also as material for making images, especially during the so-called "butter festival". Beautiful pictures (in colour) of such butter effigies, were published by J. F. Rock in his article 'Life among the lamas of Choni', *The National Geographic Magazine*, Washington 1928, Plates I, V, IX, XIII, XV, XVI
- 35 The Tibetan *Sa bdag* or "earth owners" are a group of minor deities, which was taken over into Tibetan Buddhism from the Bon faith. They seem to correspond to the *Sabdok moong* of the Lepchas, who are believed to live

in rocks and when disturbed by men can afflict skin diseases. The same is believed in Tibet.

- 36 Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, II, p. 722
- 37 Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, pp. 475-478 and Plate no 31
- 38 Compare Tucci, *ibidem* II, p.
- 39 Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, pp. 350-351
- 40 Morris, *Living with Lepchas*, photograph facing p. 130 and description pp. 128-133
- 41 For this and other information we are indebted to Mr. Nyima, former official of the Tibetan Government.
- 42 Gorer, *Himalayan Village*, p. 351

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ANCIENT FUNERAL CEREMONIES OF THE LEPCHAS

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The teachings and rites of the Unreformed School of Tibetan Buddhism - nowadays the dominant creed in the Sikkim State - have deeply influenced the beliefs and religious practices of the Lepchas, the main group of aboriginal inhabitants in the Sikkim area. In the course of four centuries, which passed since the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism into Sikkim,¹ the original Lepcha traditions became so closely intermingled with ideas and customs of Tibetan origin,² that it is now a most difficult task to separate these two groups from each other; this state is still more complicated by the fact that the Lepchas accepted - even if only in a smaller degree - also some of the traditions and customs of the neighbouring Mangars, Limbus,³ Nepalese and Bhutanese. Among many other customs also ideas concerning the human soul, death and its causes, life after death, etc., as well as the funeral ceremonies themselves were greatly changed under Tibetan influence. Thus the belief in a judgement of the soul by the Lord of the Dead, *Cho ge pã no*⁴ (Tb. *Chhos kyi rgyal po*), the migration of the soul through the perils of the Bar do⁵ (Tb. *Bar do*) - the stage between death and new life - and its rebirth in one of the "six worlds", the punishment of sinners in hell or *Nyó lyang* (Tb. *dMyal ba*), and other well known theories of Tibetan Buddhism are therefore today widely spread among the Lepchas. Oral tradition, however, preserved accounts of the early Lepcha customs and in some of the remote, scarcely accessible valleys of Sikkim the old funeral rites are said to be still observed.

According to the old Lepcha belief,⁶ the soul⁷ is given to a human being by *Fã gróng thing* and his wife *Nã zóng nyo*, the ancestors of the Lepcha race,⁸ at the moment of birth. *Nã zóng nyo*, who is also responsible for the conception, determines of which sex the child is going to be. The place from which the soul comes and to which it again returns after a man's death, is called *Rũm lyang*, "the place of gods". It is believed, that this place lies somewhere in the hills, close to Mount Kanchenjunga.⁹ The soul, once it has returned to the *Rũm Lyang*, will stay there with the spirits of the ancestors and not reincarnate in this world again. It also will not have to undergo any punishment for the sins, which the deceased might have committed during his lifetime.

At the time of birth, the soul is believed to be very small, but later on it becomes gradually bigger, keeping pace with the growth of the body. The soul of a living being is called *A pil* and it

changes at the moment of death into a spirit, named *Mūk nyam*; this change itself is termed *Hyit*. The *A pil* is said to get scared very easily and when frightened can even leave the body; the separation of the soul from the body results however in the instantaneous death of the human being. To protect small children from this danger, mothers often fasten round the neck or armwrist of the child a string with a snail shell on it, "as refuge for the soul".¹⁰

Illness and death are attributed by the Lepchas to a number of malignant demons who have to be propitiated by various ceremonies, in order to prevent their attacks or to rescue a victim from their influence. Among the host of these evil supernaturals, whose names and spheres of influence vary with the traditions of the different parts of the Lepcha land, there are some who are believed to be especially dangerous as they do not satisfy their greed by harming people through illness, but who try either to eat man's flesh or to destroy his soul. A few of these supernatural beings, as *Sang grong mung*, *Dūt mung* and his wife *Sū mo mung*, etc. who seem to have been at one time widely known and feared among the Lepchas, are believed to have vanished since man started clearing the jungle and to settle even in the remotest parts of Sikkim.

Sang grong mung and his wife, - the supernaturals of the Lepchas mostly appear in pairs - are said to have been half men and half apes. Their abode were deep, dark caverns in the hills. They lived on human flesh and to satisfy their hunger they often tried to get people into their power by offering them presents. The person, who had met the *Sang grong mung* or his consort, had no other choice than to accept the gift; however, he had to take it with the back of his hands and not with the palms as customary, otherwise his life was lost.

Dūt mung and his wife *Sū mo mung* - who was always accompanied by her servant *Sū mo thor* - had children and they lived in a house, just like men. Their hunting ground was the jungle, where they killed lonely travellers and ate their flesh. *Sū mo mung*, who was an ugly ogre with long matted hair and emaciated breasts, is said to have been very fond of seducing young men. To achieve her aim, she could change herself - by brushing her hair back and rubbing her body - into a lovely girl. She induced her victim, to follow her to her house, where she killed and devoured him; but sometimes, if she liked the man, she kept him with her for some time, hiding him from her jealous husband.

Another demon, frequently held responsible for the death of a person, is *Mă zóm mung*, who is said to appear in the form of a huge black dog with ferociously gleaming eyes and a flaming mouth. To

prevent this evil spirit from returning to a house, where he had just caused a death, the mourners on their way back from the funeral put hedges of thorns across the road, to prevent *Mă zóm mung* from following them. In some localities it is the custom to scare *Mă zóm mung* away by heating during the night after the funeral three huge stones on the hearth. The stones are later brought into the open and somebody of those present calls the name of this demon, asking him to come and eat some meat. The demon, who is believed to be very greedy, comes immediately and tries to swallow the stones, but he burns himself badly and runs away.

Shom mung is a malignant spirit, who causes people to commit suicide or murder. He creeps close to a man from the back and then suddenly enters his mind and taking possession of his victim, forces him ultimately to commit the evil deed. This demon is also held responsible for all accidental death.

A soul, which was captured by *Shom mung*, is unable to proceed to the other world unless it had been freed by a *Mün* from the power of the evil spirit. To perform this ceremony, a *Mün* has to come in the evening after the funeral to the victim's house. On this occasion, the *Mün* is wearing a red dress, with a head-band of the same colour. At the beginning of the ceremony, an animal is killed and its blood collected in a big, flat vessel in order to attract the bloodthirsty spirit. The *Mün* then takes her place in front of this vessel and goes into a trance. After some time she suddenly declares that *Shom mung* has entered the container and she throws now into the blood a grass whisk, which she had held ready in her right hand. Leaving the whisk in the vessel - "to keep the demon down" - she grasps a flat stick made from *Nyol kung*¹¹ wood, which is lying at her right side, and begins to beat frantically the surface of the blood pool, in order to "kill the demon". All those present, shouting and screaming, join her in this beginning, using sticks, stones and knives as weapons. After a while, the *Mün* takes the vessel outside the house and pours its contents into a hole, which had been dug previously in the compound, and then all weapons which were used during the ceremony, are also thrown into the pit, which is quickly closed. Only when this ceremony had been performed for somebody, who had fallen victim to *Shom mung*, can his *Mük nyam* be guided afterwards in the usual way to the *Rüm lyang*. It is believed that unless *Shom mung* is killed, he will become attached to the family which had omitted the rite just described, and he will kill its members one by one.

Another pair of dangerous supernaturals are the demon *Thing mung* and his wife *Nyo mung*, who are able to bring a man's life

to an end by cutting his “thread of life”.

There are however also some spirits, who guard people against the attacks of malignant demons. Among these benevolent supernatural beings, the *A bo a mo sa rum*, who protect the family and who transfer their protective power from one generation to the other, and *Mũn kung*, the guardian spirit of life, should be mentioned.

At the moment of death, soul and body, as the Lepchas believe, separate and the soul leaves its temporary abode. At first it lingers in the room for some time, watching the lifeless body. But later, feeling very light as it is not kept down anymore by the heavy human form, it leaves the room and strolls further and further away from the house. It goes now to all the places, which the deceased had visited during his lifetime, and it tries to speak to people it meets on the road, but nobody can hear or see the roaming soul. If no appropriate measures are taken, it might get friendly with the demons and induced by them, can return and start harming people. To prevent this, a *Bong thing* or *Mũn*¹² have to be called, to say the necessary prayers and invocations. The prayers start with an admonition to the deceased to realize, that his life has now come to an end and that he is not among the living anymore.

When performing this rite or any other funeral ceremony, a *Mũn* has to be very careful not to touch the corpse and also not to take any food in front of the dead, otherwise she would be afflicted by a severe illness. There are however no such restrictions for the *Bong thing*. If no Lepcha sorcerer is to be found in the neighbourhood, anybody who knows the necessary prayers may be called into the house. Also in case that a *Bong thing* or a *Mũn* died, this rite has to be performed, only in a more elaborate manner.

Those funeral ceremonies of the Lepchas,¹³ which had to be carried out at daytime, were called *Sũng bam*, while those which took place at night were termed *Sũng lyon*. The cost of these rites was considerable and thus it occurred frequently that people had to sell or pawn some of the family property in order to fulfil their duty towards the dead.

When preparing the corpse for the funeral, all jewellery as earrings and rings had to be removed and then the body was washed with lukewarm water; to use cold water was not customary, as “during lifetime, one would also not offer cold water for washing”. Later the body was smeared with some herbs and dressed in an old, but clean garment. To use a new, unworn dress is a custom, which came into vogue only in more recent times among well-to-do Lepcha families. At last the face of the dead was covered with a white cloth and a coin was placed

on the forehead to be presented by the spirit to *Fă gróng thín*, the male ancestor of the Lepchas. A half seer of rice was measured, wrapped in a piece of cloth and placed at the side of the dead, "to serve as food on the road"; while in common life always a heaped measure is taken, in this case the measure is linear.

The corpse was taken out of the house by an opening, which had been made either in a wall or in the floor, as the dead was not supposed to leave his former residence by the door. After the corpse had been brought into the open, it was placed on a bamboo stretcher or - according to Tibetan custom - its legs were bent, the knees drawn towards the chin and then fastened in this position with a band. In the latter case, the body was ultimately placed into an old basket and then carried on the back by anybody strong enough, to the cemetery. The top of the basket was usually covered with a piece of nice, embroidered cloth, which however was not buried along with the dead.

Today, in consequence of Tibetan influence, the dead are burnt on pyres and the ashes immersed in a river. The Sikkimese lamas, who introduced this custom, claim that by burning a dead one certainly avoids his soul becoming the victim of a malignant spirit and thus the old rites of freeing a soul from the power of a demon or the recalling of the *Mūk nyam*, which were formerly performed by a *Mūn*, became unnecessary. Nowadays, the majority of the Lepcha people burn their dead and only in a few very remote places some of the old funeral customs, like the recalling of the *Mūk nyam*, are still practised. Mostly however, lamas are called today into the house to conduct the necessary ceremonies and to guide the soul on the way to the other world, as prescribed by the Buddhist religion; very frequently however also a *Bong thing* or *Mūn* are fetched to say simultaneously some prayers according to Lepcha tradition.

In former times, very elaborate funeral ceremonies were performed and it was customary, to bury the dead in graves. Some details of these ceremonies as well as the form of the grave varied with the different clans and localities.

It seems, that at least three different types of grave were developed by the various Lepcha clans:¹⁴

- (a) The *cók*, a pit-grave with a circular base; the dead was placed in this grave either in a reclining or erect position, his face turned towards Mt. Kanchenjunga.
- (b) A pit-grave called *cók den*, - with a square base - into which the corpse was put in erect position and facing Kanchenjunga.
- (c) An oblong grave, the *cók bli*, in which the dead was buried in a reclining position, turned in the same manner as before.

On top of each grave a small hillock was made with a tombstone (*cók bum*) in the middle; the grave thus marked was called *cók de*. The inside of the pit was carefully laid out with stones, so that the earth would not touch the corpse. The reason, why the dead were always turned towards Mt. Kanchenjunga was that they “should see the mountain, from which the Lepchas originated.”

According to the custom of various localities, people were either buried in single graves, which were made in the fields, the jungle or - more frequently - close to a river, or on cemeteries, called *cók bróng lyang* or *cók bram lyang*. While the single graves were mostly destroyed in the course of time, the site of the ancient cemeteries is still often remembered. - Children below the age of ten were buried without the full ceremonial. Women, who died together with their child in childbirth, were buried jointly in one tomb.

When the funeral procession reached the freshly dug grave, the corpse was lowered into the pit and then, according to local custom, various things were laid near the dead. Besides the half seer of rice and the coin for *Fă gróng thing*, a bow and arrow were placed at the side of a man, or sometimes his knife (*ban*), the indispensable instrument of every Lepcha man. To a girl, her comb, and to a woman her sickle were given. Then a rope made of bamboo tissue and consisting of two parts, linked together with a loose sling, was lowered by a *Bong thing*, *Mün*, or a close relative into the grave. Shortly before the pit was closed, the person who held the rope called the deceased by his name, telling him that his “life spirit” is now being removed and that he should keep away from the living and not try to harm them; then he pulled hard on the rope, so that the sling opened and the lower half of the rope fell into the pit.

In order to close the grave, at first some stones were arranged in a kind of roof also above the basket, so that the corpse was surrounded now from all sides by a stone wall. Then earth was piled up, to form a small hillock and above the head of the dead, the tombstone was set. When heaping up this hillock, great care was taken to make its surface as smooth as possible, because three days after the funeral the relatives had to return to the grave, to see whether there were any traces on the hillock. If imprints of human feet were seen, it was regarded as a sign that the spirit of the dead had walked around the grave, but if traces of any animal were found, it was believed that they were left by the demon, who had caused the man's illness and death. - Then a grass whisk was taken and a magic circle was drawn with it around the tomb, to prevent any other soul from entering it. In some localities, if a man was buried, a “wild boar's nest” - a small shelter in form of a nest, as made

by wild boars during the rainy season - was erected with the help of some twigs and dry leaves, the idea probably being, that this nest should provide a temporary shelter for the *Mūk nyam* who according to the belief of some Lepcha clans, stays for seven days on the burial ground. When a woman died, a small hand-loom was sometimes placed near the tomb.

After closing the grave, an egg was broken on the tombstone and some rice as well as a bamboo container filled with Lepcha beer (*ci*) were placed on the hillock as a food-offering for the dead. Then all tools which were used for digging the pit were beaten against each other for a while and at last all the wooden handles of these instruments were removed and piled up near the grave, while only the iron parts were kept to be used again.

When returning from the funeral, the mourners had to put up obstacles - as already mentioned before - to hinder the demon *Mã zóm mung* from following them. When reaching the house, everybody who had attended the funeral had to undergo a ritual purification. To this purpose an ox was killed and some of its blood was poured into a vessel and strained with water; the right foreleg of the sacrificed animal was laid aside, to be used in the ceremony which commenced after darkness had fallen, while the rest was prepared as food for the guests. Then a *Bong thing* or *Mün* entered the house, in which the death had occurred and performed its cleansing, going into every room and sprinkling in all corners some of the ox blood, with the help of a whisk made of nine different kinds of grass. Then all foodstuff which had lain close to the dead, had to be removed and at last everybody before entering the house had to be purified by waving the grass whisk over his head; this action was known as *Phík* or *A phík*.

During the night the ceremony of "recalling the *Mūk nyam*" had to be performed and in some of the more outlying localities this rite is sometimes still practised. Only a *Mün* can perform this rite. In former times, before starting her invocations, the *Mün* had to walk in the evening to the grave and beat several times with a stick against the tombstone. Returning to the house, she took her seat with the back to a wall and facing the door; it was regarded as auspicious, if she could face in this position Mt. Kanchenjunga.

Then the right foreleg of the ox, which had been prepared previously, was placed in a basket and brought into the room. Only the upper part of the leg was used, while the part from the knee downward was cut away. The basket was set near the *Mün* and a rope wound around the joint of the leg, while the other end was fastened with a

loose sling to the little finger of the *Mñn*'s left hand. In her right hand she took a knife, as weapon against evil spirits.

After these preparations had been finished, the *Mñn* works herself gradually into a slight trance, and with a high, loud voice she begins her incantations. She calls upon the *Mñk nyam* to recognize, that he belongs from now on to the world of the dead, and that he should not hide in trees, stones, rivers, lakes or fire, but he should join the soul of the *Mñn* for a tour of the Lepcha land. The *Mñn* sings now for hours a long, rhymed account, the text of which she had learned by heart from her teacher during the time of initiation. She describes to the spirit the beauty of Sikkim, its snow mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes, the forests, fields and lonely dwellings of men. At last, the *Mñn* guides the spirit down the Teesta River and describing the source of this greatest river of Sikkim, she conducts the *Mñk nyam* across the Indian plains, "to show it the ocean". But she admonishes the deceased, that he should not gaze too long at the endless sea, as he has to return with her that very night to the Lepcha land. Then again the *Mñk nyam* is led to the Teesta and following the river upstream, the *Mñn* guides the spirit back to the house, from which they started the journey.¹⁵

In the early morning, when the darkness of the night begins to fade into the grey of the approaching day, the ceremony reaches its climax. At this time all the relatives of the deceased, who are present in the house, assemble in front of the *Mñn*. The dresses, jewellery and other personal belongings of the dead person, as well as numerous dishes with various foods are placed near the *Mñn*, who finishes now her incantations and falls into a full trance. Her eyes close, the face becomes ash-gray and mask-like. Suddenly, tears begin to flow from her eyes and the whole body begins to tremble. This is supposed to be the moment at which the spirit of the deceased enters the body of the *Mñn*, and using the sorceress as a medium, the *Mñk nyam* begins to speak through her mouth. He tells now to his relatives the cause of his death and expresses his last wishes, while members of the family in their turn frequently ask the deceased, whether he left perhaps any business unsettled in his lifetime, where some of his possessions, which could not be found are hidden, etc. Many of the older Lepchas who witnessed several times the recalling of the *Mñk nyam*, unanimously state that frequently most surprising occurrences take place during this ceremony. It often happens that somebody dies without having disclosed, where he had hidden his money or jewels, and the relatives were searching in vain for these things. If however this question is put to the *Mñn* in his trance, she usually answers it without hesitation

and then somebody of those present leaves the room immediately to search at the spot now indicated; he mostly returns within a short time with the missing objects.

While the family property is being inherited according to the old Lepcha law, the personal belongings of the dead are distributed among his closer relatives. This is usually carried out by the *Mün*, while still possessed by the *Mük nyam*. But not always is this way of dividing the heritage regarded as just, and it frequently leads to quarrels.

At the end of this ceremony, a food offering is made to the dead. A cup with some water is handed to the *Mün*, - who still remains in the trance - and she sprinkles some of the water on all the food which had been placed in front of her, thus making it "eatable for the deceased". Then all the members of the family step forward one by one and present a dish with food to the spirit and burn also some incense, together with traces of food, and a container filled with Lepcha beer is given to the *Mün* to drink. Shortly after this offering the *Mük nyam* leaves the body of the *Mün*, who soon returns to full consciousness, and then removes the rope from her left band. Some of the Lepchas claim, that when the *Mün* begins to complain of pain - usually in a part of her body corresponding to those limbs and organs of the deceased, which had been affected by the deadly illness or accident - it has to be regarded as a reliable sign, that the *Mük nyam* is about to leave the medium.

After a short interval, the *Mün* ties again the rope to her left hand and goes into a light trance, in order to guide the spirit of the dead to the other world. On the way to the *Rüm lyang*, an obstacle called *Lep*, which is imagined to be like a tremendous waterfall or a deep precipice, has to be crossed by the *Mük nyam* with the assistance of the *Mün*. Having overcome this barrier, the spirit is met by *The kung tek*,¹⁶ the first Bong thing, and his wife *Ne kung ngal*, the first *Mün*. They will enumerate to the deceased the line of his ancestors, mentioning on the seventh place the name of the mountain, with which his clan believes itself to be connected,¹⁷ and then they accompany the spirit, to meet *Fă gróng thing* and *Nă zóng nyo*, the ancestors of the Lepchas. In the *Rüm lyang* the spirits of all, who had died in more recent times, dwell in the form of shadows, while those who died soon after the world had been created, reside here in their bodily form, ready to return to the world should its inhabitants die out.

There are different accounts to be found among the various clans of the Lepchas regarding the way in which the *Mük nyam* is supposed to reach the *Rüm lyang*. The Chronicles of the Maharajas of Sikkim mention a belief of the Sengdenmos, that the spirit goes to

the “Place of Gods” via a subterranean passage, the entrance of which is a cave in the vicinity of Monphu, while the Heemos claim, that the spirit enters this way near a rock called Sing Dang, in the vicinity of the village Samdong. A different cave is said to be the entrance for the dead of the Lingsomo clan. This cave is called Dret gang and it lies near the hamlet of Rabdentsi. A legend current among the Namphagmo Lepchas claims that the dead of this clan do not go to Mt. Kanchenjunga, but to the Mennam mountain, which is specially sacred to this clan. They reach the mountain through a subterranean passage the entrance of which is the Phim Leb cave near Lingmo.

The funeral ceremonies end on the seventh day after the burial. At first, on the third day some rice, *cí*, and eggs were brought to the grave and after five more days had passed, a hen is sacrificed and then some prayers are said by a *Bong thing* or *Mün* in order to chase away all malignant spirits and to cleanse the house from all evil once more.

There was no difference between the burial ceremonies of the *Bar fong mo*, the Lepcha aristocracy, and the *A den* or common people, and the dead of both groups were treated alike. Only the funeral rites for a *Mün* or *Bong thing* were performed in a different way. Even today, a *Bong thing* or *Mün* is not cremated, but mostly buried according to the old custom. In his house, the dead person is dressed into the full garment of a Lepcha sorcerer and his face is covered, as customary, with a white cloth and also the coin for *Fă gróng thing* is placed on his forehead. Around the body, all his magical instruments and drugs are spread out, the latter being kept in flat, closed baskets. Furthermore, a small ladder - “to reach with its help the *Rüm lyang*” - dried fish and birds, the beak or at least some other part of a crane, the beak of a hornbill and numerous baskets containing various food-stuffs are laid all around the corpse. The body is later placed on a bamboo stretcher, together with all objects enumerated above and carried out by the door, - and not by an opening in the wall or floor, as done at the funeral of a common man. Then the body is carried to the grave and placed in the pit in a sitting position. On the left and right sides of the dead two magical sticks (*ceng pǎ ting*),¹⁸ as used by the sorcerer during his lifetime, are placed and then also all the various paraphernalia, which had been brought on the stretcher, is laid in the grave.

The rites which follow are just like those performed at the funeral of common people. After the ceremony of calling back the *Mük nyam* has been carried out, also the spirit of a deceased *Mün* or *Bong thing* is conducted to the *Rüm lyang*, to join the spirits of his ancestors.

1. The first and main propagator of Buddhism in Sikkim was Lama *Lha btsun nam mkha hjigs med* (shortly called *Lha btsun chhen po*) who belonged to the Tibetan *rDzogs chhen pa* Sect. He was later joined by a number of other learned priests, among whom the *rNying ma pa* Lama *Kha thog kun tu bzang po* and Lama *mNga bdag sems pa phun tshogs rig hdzin* were the two most outstanding personalities. It seems that the work of spreading Buddhism in Sikkim was begun in 1642, in which year also the coronation of the first Maharaja of Sikkim, *Phun tshogs rnam rgyal* is said to have taken place. After *Lha btsun chhen po's* death his first reincarnation, called *Mi bskyod dga ba*, was found at *hBum thang* in Bhutan.
2. The influx of Tibetan settlers began with the advent of *Gyad hbum bsags* the ancestor of the present ruling family of the Sikkim State, who reached this area via the Chumbi Valley (Tb. *Gro mo*) towards the end of the 16th century. *Gyad hbum bsags* was accompanied by a number of Tibetan retainers, who settled in Sikkim - which they called *hBras ljongs* the "Rice Country" - and who became known as "Bhutias". They were the ancestors of the eight clans, into which the local Tibetan population became later divided. In the following centuries, also other groups of settlers arrived in Sikkim, partly from the Bhutanese districts of Ha and Pharo, and some even from Assam. In connection with the account of the first encounter between the Tibetans and the aboriginal inhabitants, the Chronicles of the Maharaja of Sikkim mention an interesting episode: "as the (Tibetan) party happened to be riding on ponies, and some of the retainers had matchlock guns, which they went on firing along the road, the simple natives who had never seen ponies nor firearms, said to others, that the entire party rode on huge hogs, and some of them bore sticks, which produced great sounds."
3. The Limbus, who call themselves *Yakthumba*, are mentioned in the Tibetan Chronicles of the Maharaja of Sikkim, together with the Mangar tribe, under the collective name *Tshong*; the name 'Limbu' under which they are mostly known, is of Nepali origin. According to a doubtful oral tradition, they are supposed to have migrated into Sikkim from the neighbouring Tibetan province of *Tshang*. The Limbus, who were divided into ten clans, were living peacefully side by side with the Lepchas, who regarded them as distant relatives and even claimed, that the Lepcha and Limbu gods were related to each other. - The Chronicles mention, that Limbus sometimes occupied important positions in the administration of the Sikkim State, and a Limbu lady became one of the wives of the second Maharaja. At the beginning of the 18th century, under the rule of the fourth Maharaja, the majority of the Limbus left Sikkim in consequence of the heavy labour, which was being imposed on them, especially at times of the frequent raids of the neighbouring Nepalese and Bhutanese.
4. All Lepcha words, the orthography of which it was possible to ascertain, are printed in italics according to simplified romanization, similar to the system of transcription adopted in the Dictionary of the Lepcha Languages, by G. B. Mainwaring and A. Gruenwedel, Berlin 1898. Also all Tibetan words are rendered in an orthographic romanization.
5. About the Bardo and the beliefs connected with it see Evans-Wentz, W. Y.: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, London 1927, and Tucci, G.: *Il libro tibetano dei morti*, Milano 1949.
6. To all those among the Lepchas who supplied me with valuable informations concerning the subject here dealt with, especially to Mrs. D. Mohan of Kalimpong, Mr. K. P. Tamsang, the Mandal of Bong Basti and to one of the oldest living Lepchas, the 105 years old "Manibu Badschi" of Nyim, my sincere thanks are due; I would also like to acknowledge gratefully the valuable assistance, rendered to me by Miss Ray Williams of Kalimpong and Father J. M. Brahier of the Catholic Mission at Git.
7. I was unable to obtain a confirmation of the statement made by Kali Kumar Das in his *The Lepcha people and their notions of heaven and hell*, JBTS, Vol. VI, Pt. 1, Calcutta 1896, p. 4, that the Lepchas believe in the presence of eight different souls in the human body.
8. They are supposed to have been created from the ice of the Kanchenjunga glaciers by the foremost god of the Lepchas *Ta she thing* (or *Tuk bo thing*?). - It is today, with traditions quickly vanishing, rather difficult to establish the name of this God Creator. Due to the adoption of the name *Ta she* for Padmasambhava (Tb. *Padma hbyung gnas*) the main and widely venerated saint of the Unreformed Buddhist School of Tibet and the resulting

confusion of legends concerning Padmasambhava and the God Creator of the Lepchas, the traditions are today rather vague. According to some previous publications (e.g. Mainwaring, G. B.: A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) language, Calcutta 1878, p. XI) the name of the God Creator was *Ta she thing*. I heard however very frequently also the statement that the name of this chief god was *Tuk bo thing*, who was followed several thousand years later by another supernatural being called *Ta she thing*.

9. This most prominent mountain of Sikkim occupies a very important place in the ancient traditions of the Lepchas as well as in the religious life of all Sikkimese Buddhists. For accounts of the Lepcha ceremonies in honour of Mount Kanchenjunga see Gorer, G.: Himalayan Village, London 1938, pp. 201-203; Morris, J.: Living with Lepchas, London 1938, pp. 274-276; R. Nebesky de Wajkowitz and G. Gorer: The use of thread-crosses in Lepcha lamaist ceremonies, *The Eastern Anthropologist*, Vol. IV, No. 2, Lucknow 1951, pp. 70-73. Some notes, concerning the mountain god of Kanchenjunga (Tb. *Gangs chhen mzod lnga*, "The five glacier treasures") as venerated by the Buddhists of Sikkim, are to be found in Ribbach, S. H.: Vier Bilder des Padmasabhava und seiner Gefolgschaft, Hamburg 1917, and Hoffmann, H.: Quellen zur Geschichte der tibetischen Boen Religion, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Mainz 1950.
10. Compare Gorer, Himalayan Village, p. 192.
11. Compare Dictionary of the Lepcha Language, p. 114b.
12. The Bong thing and Mun are the main sorcerers of the Lepchas. A Bong thing is always male, a *Mun* mostly female, sometimes also male. The position of *Mun* and *Bong thing* is inherited within the family, one of its members being chosen for this task by the supernaturals, who protect and at times also possess him. With the help of their guardian deities the Bong thing and Mun are able to avert and counteract the influence of malignant spirits, cure illness, etc. It is also their task to perform the numerous ceremonies, devoted to the worship of benevolent deities and to the appeasement of demons, as well as to carry out all rites connected with the more important events of Lepcha life. They are believed to be in possession of strong supernatural powers, which at times were also used to harm people. Thus the Chronicles of the Maharajas mention, that at the beginning of the 18th century several Lepcha sorcerers tried to kill by black magic the reigning fourth Maharaja, *Phyag rdor rnam rgyal*. Also to his successor *Chhos rgyal hgyur med rnam rgyal*, who had ascended the throne in 1717, some Lepcha magicians tried to show their skill: they made a knot into the water of a fountain and suspended a stone from the sky, they draw figures on the surface of water, span sand into a rope and at last they made the roofs of the Maharaja's palace and a neighbouring temple meet. While the ruler with his retinue were very impressed by these miracles, some lamas who had also come to witness this spectacle, were not affected by the powers displayed and they subsequently killed the magicians, claiming that they were imposters.

Another group of Lepcha sorcerers are men called *Pa wo* (Tb. *dPa bo*) and their female counterparts, who bear the name *Nyen jo mo* (Tb. *rNal hbyor ma*). They are said to become possessed by Tibetan deities, who cause them to speak Tibetan in the trance and who advise them in matters of divination. The *Pa wo* and *Nyen jo mo* dress in Tibetan garments and they use Tibetan lama bell (*Dril bu*) and a small, two-faced drum (*rNga chhung*) as their main instruments. They preserved many traditions of the ancient, pre-Buddhist Boen faith of Tibet and their performances have therefore nothing to do with the ceremonies of the Sikkimese lamas, of whom they are entirely independent.

A third group of Lepcha sorcerers, also of minor importance, are the *Ya ba* and *Ya ma*, who are male and female respectively. They are supposed to become possessed by Limbu spirits and they therefore bear these two names, under which the Limbu sorcerers are known. Their main instruments are metal gongs and divination balls, called *Yak*. Certain similarities between religious practices of the Lepcha sorcerers and some ancient Tibetan customs are the reason for frequently occurring statements in books on Tibet, that the old Lepcha faith is identical with the Boen religion of that country. A comparative study of both beliefs shows however, that the Lepcha faith is certainly not identical with that form of the Boen religion, which it assumed after the commencement of its struggle with Buddhism. It seems rather that it corresponds in many points to the old shamanistic stratum of Central Asia, out of which in Tibet the Boen developed to a religion.

- 13 About Lepcha funeral ceremonies, especially those performed according to Buddhist rites see Gorer, Himalayan village, pp. 345-362.
14. The Chronicles of the Maharajas of Sikkim mention a number of different Lepcha clans. Among these the clans called Sengdungmo, Lingsom-mo, Heemo, Karthakmo and the descendants of the Thekung Salung family were of principal importance; other clans are Tugnyeemo (living near Chumthang), Sampa-putso-mo (Namtehn and Tsidam), Targokmo (Rinchenpong), Barmekmo (Barmiok), Namtseemo (Namtsi), Mangmungmo (Dentam), Taglongmo (Dallam), Samtrukmo (Samdong), Namphagmo (Namphok), Ratoomo (Richenpong), Kabeemo (Tumlong), Phogram-mo and Rungnyogram-mo (Lingthem), Rinyet-rambo (near the source of the Rangeet river), Rathongram-mo (near the source of the Radong river), Ringit rambho (near the source of the Radong river), Lasogmo (Tashiding and Lasog), Kalegram-mo (source of the Kaleg river), Rinagmo (Mangbro), Yogcham-mo (Phensang), Rimpingmo (Rumtek), Nebemo (Dikchu), etc. The Lepcha communities, residing in Ilam (Nepal) were called Rangangmo, Phengbo, Namchamo, Gholingmo, Samdurmo, Kotramo, Sungfungmo, Samlingmo, Lingdam-mo, etc. - The Ilam group of the Lepcha people seems to be of fairly recent origin. According to the historical material available, some 800 Lepcha households, who had taken part in an insurrection against the reigning 7th Maharaja, left Sikkim in 1826 under the leadership of their headmen Dathno, Jerong Denon and the Kazi Gorok, and settled with the assistance of the Nepalese in the province of Ilam. Two other names should be mentioned here: The *Na ong*, who lived near Dallam in Sikkim, but later died out, and a group of Limbus called Sanyit bho, who were classified as a Lepcha clan. A note on the *Na ong* see also in Kali Kumar Das, The Lepcha People, p. 5.
15. The Ilam Lepchas have a particular custom of keeping those assembled in the house awake during the long vigil. While the Mun chants her account, one man - usually somebody who is known as a witty story teller - takes his place in another corner of the house and tries to keep all present awake by telling them jokes and stories.
16. *The kung tek* and *Ne kung ngal* are said to have been the children of the Lepcha ancestors, *Fa grong thing* and *Na zong nyo*. This first pair of sorcerers is today surrounded by numerous legends, current among the Lepchas. One of these legends tells about their encounter with *Gyad hbum bsags*, the ancestor of the Sikkim Maharajas, who came to obtain their blessing so that sons might be born to him. About the way in which he and his retinue were received by *The kung tek* and his wife, the Chronicles say: "Entering his house they discovered the old man on a raised throne of bamboo. He had washed off the dust and ashes, which had covered his face during his work of clearing the jungle. He had put on his feather cap and the garland of teeth and claws of wild animals, interspersed with various shells and cowries. He sat with a dignified mien, while his wife *Ne kung ngal* was busily engaged in getting food and drink ready. When the strangers entered, a wide bamboo mat was spread on the ground" *Gyad hbum bsags* received the blessings and returned to his residence in the Chumbi Valley, where in the following years three sons were born to him. Later he went back to Sikkim to offer his thanks to *The kung tek* and to conclude a pact of friendship with him: "This friendship was cemented by a ceremony, at which several animals, both domestic and wild, were sacrificed and all the local deities invoked to bear witness to this solemn contract of friendship, binding the Lepchas and Tibetans in an inseparable bond. They sat together on the raw hides of animals, entwined the entrails around their bodies, and put their feet together in a vessel filled with blood, thus swearing the blood oath to each other." - This event is also shortly mentioned in Risley, H. H., History of Sikkim, JBTS, Vol. IV, Calcutta 1896. It is possible, that *The kung tek* was a person which once actually lived and which only later became enveloped in legends, as the Chronicles mention - besides a number of descendants, of whom only the names are given - also a certain Lepcha headman, called Tasa Aphong, who was a direct descendant of *The kung tek* and who served under the second Maharaja, *bsTan bsrung nam rgyal* (ascended the throne in 1670).
17. While the Lepchas in general derive their origin from Mt. Kanchenjunga and its immediate environs, the various clans later on established legendary relations to various mountains,

in whose neighbourhood they had settled, two or three clans often worshipping the same mountain. It became customary, that each clan had to perform an annual sacrifice to the spirit of its particular mountain. In regard to marriage, there is no obstacle - unless a blood relationship exists or that people belong actually to the same clan - that members of two clans, which venerate the same peak, should not intermarry. In case that bride and bridegroom belong to clans, which worship two different mountains, the wife will have to sacrifice after the marriage to the sacred peak of her husband's clan.

18. They are made from a certain kind of reed; on the top of the stick cuts are made in such a way, that these parts open in the form of a flower. These sticks are regarded as the symbol of the magical power, over which the sorcerer commands.

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VON R. DE NEBESKY-WOJKOWITZ

KALIMPONG

Der Einfluß stärkerer Nachbarn und ein angeborener Hang zur Nachgiebigkeit waren die Ursachen, weshalb die Lepchas - die mongoloïden Ureinwohner des Himalaya-Staates von Sikkim - in den letzten Jahrhunderten viel von ihrer völkischen Eigenart einbüßten und andererseits in beträchtlichem Maße fremdes Brauchtum übernahmen. So gelang es dem tibetischen Buddhismus, der um die Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts mit der Missionierung Sikkims begann, den hier einst heimischen schamanistischen *Mün*-Glauben stark in den Hintergrund zu drängen, während Sitten und Gebräuche der in das Land aus Tibet, Bhutan und vor allem Nepal einwandernden Siedler von den Lepchas übernommen und mit ihrem eigenen Brauchtum vermenget wurden. Eines der Elemente ihres Volkswesens jedoch, das die Lepchas bis in die heutige Zeit verhältnismäßig unberührt bewahrten, sind alte Gesänge, die bei festlichen Anlässen, insbesondere bei Hochzeiten, vorgetragen werden. - Im Folgenden seien nun drei der bekanntesten Hochzeitslieder der Lepchas übersetzt und erläutert. Der Text dieser Lieder wurde von G. Kabu, einem bekannten Volkssänger aus dem Dorfe Kafr, in Lepcha-Schrift festgehalten und mit der lebenswürdigen Hilfe des P. Jean M. Brahier von der Katholischen Mission in Git übersetzt. Die Orthographie der Lepcha-Texte wurde späterhin nochmals von dem Lepcha-Pastor P. S. Targain überprüft.

Das hier an erster Stelle wiedergegebene Lied wird von einem Sänger nach vollzogener Segnung des neuen Ehebundes vorgetragen. Er bemüht sich, mit seinem Liede etwaige Fehler der während des Festes aufspielenden Musiker - er nennt als deren wichtigste Instrumente die Flöte (*Pă lit*) und die Maultrommel (*Tüŋ dyu*) - zu entschuldigen. Sodann stimmt er eine Lobpreisung der Anwesenden und insbesondere

des Brautpaares an, und schließlich wünscht er allen Hochzeitsgästen, sich des Festes zu erfreuen. - Am Ende jeder Strophe dieses Gesanges rufen alle Anwesenden: «*A chu le*», eine Art Segensspruch.

Wir zehn Lepcha-Musikanten,
Selbst wenn wir die Kunst des Flötenspieles nicht gut beherrschen,
Auch wenn wir auf der Maultrommel
Wohlklingende Töne nicht hervorbringen können:
Immerhin, es ist eine Lepcha-Melodie
Das Lied, das wir nun spielen wollen.

Oh ihr Dorfältesten und Bekannten,
Ihr Verwandten von der Mutter Seite
Und ihr, erhabene Verwandte väterlicherseits, wir nähern uns euch
ehrfürchtig,

Denn wiederum sage ich:
Die Mutter, sie soll uns unserer Unerfahrenheit wegen nicht zürnen,
Nein, dies möge sie nicht.

Gestern Nacht, da hatte ich einen Traum voll Vordeutung,
Und wie es der Traum zeigte,
So sind nun alle,
Verwandte und Eltern, aus diesem einen Anlaß
Einem Meere gleich,
Hier versammelt.

Den Türkisen und Perlen,
Die voll Pracht erstrahlen,
Ihnen gleicht die Schar der Verwandten, die aus allen Dörfern,
Die Kunde vernehmend, hierher geeilt kamen.
Auch der Gatte, reif und klug,
Ist gleichsam dem Meere entstiegen.

Kostbaren Türkisen und Perlen vergleichbar
Ist die Braut von vergnügtem Sinn,
Die in diesem Hause weilt.

Über das neue Bündnis
Freuen wir uns mit dem Bräutigam
In unserem Innersten.

Oh Vater, Mutter und Verwandte,
Auch ihr, Nachbarn, voll Freude und Glück,
Heute, zu dieser günstigen Stunde,
Die Flöte und Maultrommel,
Sie laßt erklingen, die Speise und Getränke
Wir wollen nun genießen.

Der Bräutigam, er gleicht
Dem schneebedeckten Gipfel eines Berges,
Die Braut,
Der glatten Fläche eines Sees ist sie ähnlich.
Wir alle in den vier Weltgegenden Versammelten,
Beeindruckt sind wir von der Schönheit dieses jungen Paares.

Bei allen festlichen Anlässen wird das beliebteste Getränk der Lepchas, warmes, aus Hirse hergestelltes Bier (*chi*) genossen, dem man zur Verbesserung des Geschmacks verschiedene Gewürze beimengt. Das Bier wird jedem Gaste in einem mit Hirsekörnern gefüllten Bambusbehälter vorgesetzt, aus welchem die Flüssigkeit mittels eines dünnen Bambusrohres getrunken wird. Zuvor muß man jedoch nach buddhistischer Sitte eine Opferung an die Götter und Pretas, die von Durst gequälten Geister, vornehmen, indem man einen Finger der rechten Hand in die Flüssigkeit taucht und sodann einige Tropfen nach den vier Weltgegenden wie auch dem Nadir und Zenith verspritzt. Weiters verlangt ein alter Lepcha-Brauch, daß man eine kleine Menge Bier in das

Trinkrohr aufsaugt, das Mundstück mit einem Finger verschließt, sodann das Rohr aus dem Behälter herauszieht, es wendet und durch Abheben des Fingers etwas Bier auf den Boden ausfließen läßt. Erst nach Ausführung dieser Handlung darf man zu trinken beginnen. Leeren sich die Behälter, so wird mehrmals nach Bedarf heißes Wasser nachgegossen. Derjenige, dem beim Fest die Aufgabe eines Mundschenks zufällt, hat hierbei vor dem ersten Nachgießen ein Lied vorzutragen, mit welchem er im Vorhinein den vielleicht nicht sehr guten Geschmack des Bieres zu entschuldigen versucht, indem er behauptet, das Bier sei so schlecht, als wäre es aus den sauren, ungenießbaren Körnchen des *Täng hril*-Strauches hergestellt worden. Auch bittet er um Vergebung für seine Ungeschicklichkeit, und um dem Unwillen der Gäste zu entgehen, vergleicht er sich selber mit einem kleinen, unerfahrenen Kinde.

Der Text dieses Liedes, da verhältnismäßig kurz, sei hier sowohl in Lepcha-Schrift als auch in orthographischer Umschrift wiedergegeben.

- 1 Lyang sǎ pán song ngǎ, róng kǎ ti hryüm re
Kǎ fyók kyóp ban nün, khe ka ju gat güm
- 2 Lyang la tshen song ngǎ, lyang sǎ pán song ngǎ
Brap tǎng hril a chór, sǎ híp kat fǔ mǎ o
- 3 Po bóng chǔ wǔng sǎ, chí pǎ thyut pong lǎ
Na met chǔ wǔng sǎ, sak mǎ thak nüm bu
- 4 Brap tǎng hril a chór, je mǎ ryum grung lǎ
Lyang sǎ pán song rem, a ryam kat zuk mǎ o
- 5 Lyang sǎ pán song ngǎ, mǎ shám mat tǎ nün
An je bo o yong, kǔp go shǔ ding mǎ
- 6 Chóng tǎ fep al ka, a ká ryu lǎ chóng lǔng
Ung a hrún lók ban, kǔp go bǎ di mǎ o
- 7 Lyang sǎ pán song ngǎ, rüm ka fat tǎ lǔng
An pǎ híp tset ban, sǎ híp je bo o

- 8 Bǎr ma li sǔng kar, dung gyit sǎ je kar
Kung shang te plong ka, tho mǎ o yong shǔ
- 9 Kǔp go shǔ mǎ o, sǎ du mat tǎ nǔn
Ung mǎ zók la mat, ship lǎ je bo o
- 10 Pǎ yǎng sǎ pǎ híp, pǎ gryeng sǎ pǎ thyut
An mǎ ryu nǎ gong, kǔp kǎ sǔm sung bo
- 11 Mǎ ryu nǎ grung lǎ, ryu re zóng mat lǔng
Ma um na grung la, um re zong mat lung
- 12 Lyang la tshen song ngǎ, sak so la mat lǔng
Dóng bo o yong shǔ, shǔ mǎ o - a chu le.

- 1 Oh ihr Lepchas, Stammesbrüder, dem Brauche entsprechend
Am Platz der Vornehmen, mit gekreuzten Beinen laßt euch nieder.
- 2 Oh ihr Dorfältesten und Ortsansässigen,
Nur mit saurem *Tǎng hril* gefüllte Bambusrohre habe ich euch an-
geboten.
- 3 Die Trinkrohre aus Bambus und auch die Bierbehälter sind nur
klein,
Sie fassen nicht genug, um den Durst zu löschen.
- 4 Wohl sind die Körnchen des *Tǎng hril* sehr sauer, zum Genuß un-
geeignet,
Doch glaubt mir, Freunde, das Beste, was ich zu bieten habe, dies
gab ich euch.
- 5 Oh Freunde, ich, der ja nur wie ein Kind bin, bitte euch:
Genießt den Trank und weist ihn nicht zurück.
- 6 Der Bier-Schöpfer ist neu und wohl gesäubert,
Das Wasser, das ich, ein Kind, zum Nachgießen euch bringe, ist
kochend heiß.

- 7 Oh Freunde, wenn ihr den Göttern geopfert und das Trinkrohr gewendet,
Dann beginnt aus dem gefüllten Becher zu schlürfen.
- 8 Roten Pfeffer aus Burma und hierzulande wachsende Gewürze
Habe ich vor euch auf eine kleine Holzbank gelegt.
- 9 Wie ein Kind - um nichts auszuschütten - habe ich das Wasser so langsam nachgegossen.
Doch nun beginnt, den schäumenden Trank zu schlürfen.
- 10 Wenn vielleicht das aus *Pă yǎng*-Bambus gefertigte Trinkrohr oder der aus *Pă gryeng*-Bambus hergestellte Behälter
Nicht in Ordnung sein sollte, dann bitte sagt es mir, dem Kinde.
- 11 Falls ich einen Fehler beging, dann will ich diesen gerne verbessern.
Wenn aber etwas nicht schmackhaft sein sollte, dann bitte verhaltet euch, als würdet ihr nichts merken.
- 12 Ihr Dorfältesten, wenn ihr von diesem Tranke kostet,
Als ein gutes Omen werde ich dies deuten.

Das nun folgende Lied, zu den beliebtesten Hochzeitsliedern der Lepchas zählend, wird im Wechselgesang von einem Burschen und einem Mädchen vorgetragen, und nur die letzte Strophe singen alle Anwesenden gemeinsam. Der Text dieses Liedes spielt unter anderem auf eine alte Legende des Lepcha-Volkes an, die über die «Hochzeit» der beiden Hauptflüsse Sikkims, des Rangeet und der Teesta berichtet. Der Rangeet (*Rǔng nyit* auf Lepcha), der im südwestlichen Teil Sikkims entspringt, wird als ein «männlicher» Fluß angesehen. Die Teesta hingegen, deren Quelle im Norden liegt, wird als «weiblich» betrachtet. - Der heutige Name dieses Flusses ist vom tibetischen *bKra shis bkra* abgeleitet, während sein alter Lepcha-Name *Rǔng nyo* lautet.

Der Legende nach beschlossen einst beide Flüsse, gemeinsam nach dem Meere zu eilen. Um den verabredeten Treffpunkt rechtzeitig zu

erreichen, wählte jeder Fluß einen des Weges kundigen Führer. Die Teesta wurde von einer schwarzen Schlange (*Pă mól bū*) geleitet, die sich schnell, und ohne Hindernissen zu begegnen, durch die Täler wand, dem Fluß seinen Lauf zeigend. Der Rangeet jedoch hatte zu seinem Führer den blauen Vogel *Tát fo* gewählt, der unterwegs nach Nahrung suchend kreuz und quer flog, hierdurch den heutigen gewundenen Lauf dieses Flusses verursachend. Die Teesta kam früher am verabredeten Orte an und als der später eintreffende Rangeet bemerkte, daß sein Partner ihm zuvorgekommen war, wollte er wieder zurückströmen. Doch dann beschloß er, über das Wasser der Teesta hinwegzufließen und vereint eilten sodann beide Flüsse der See zu.

Bursche: Kalt, kalt, kalt, kalt, kalt,
Oh, wie friere ich
Habe Mitleid, «ältere Schwester»,
Erlaube mir, mich am Feuer ein wenig zu wärmen.

Mädchen: Wanderer, der du des Weges daherkommst,
Worum bittest du mich
Einen Feuerbrand will ich ergreifen,
Wie einen Totenschatten werde ich dich vertreiben.

Bursche: Oh tue dies nicht, tue dies nicht, «ältere Schwester»,
Behandle mich nicht so schlecht.
Wenn ich mich nur ein wenig wärmen dürfte,
Ein gutes Werk würdest du damit verrichten.

Mädchen: Oh Wanderer, mein Bruder,
Wenn du wirklich so frierst,
Dann tritt ein in das Haus,
Und beginn ein kluges Gespräch.

Bursche: Oh du gutherzige Schwester,
So ist es recht!
Doch erst war mir kalt, nun ist mir heiß:
Oh gib mir ein wenig zu trinken.

Mädchen: Oh Wanderer, Bruder,
Worum bittest du mich?
Alles, was es nur gibt, und selbst das, was es nicht gibt,
Dies will ich dir geben.

Bursche: Selbst wenn ich mich am Feuer erwärmte,
Selbst wenn ich nun Wasser getrunken habe,
Für mein Herz
War all dies keine Labe.

Mädchen: Oh Wanderer, Bruder,
Welch' doppelsinnige Rede führst du?
Deine Gedanken,
Ich kann sie nicht erraten.

Bursche: Oh Schwester, du Hüterin des Hauses
Du verstehst mich nicht:
Der Welt größte Gabe,
Dies ist die Liebe.

Mädchen: Die Worte meines Bruders,
Sie mögen wohl wahr sein,
Doch wenn ich jemanden liebe,
Welchen Nutzen wird mir dies bringen?

Bursche: Mein Herz ist offen,
Alles werde ich dir sagen, Schwester,
Mit Bedacht
Höre mir zu.

Mädchen: Gehör will ich dir schenken,
Deine Worte,
Sie klingen so süß,
Mich niederlassend, will ich dir lauschen.

Bursche: Wieviel auch immer gesagt wurde,
Eines wenigstens mußt du verstehen:

Wir sollen einander lieben,
Dies mußt du im Sinne behalten.

Mädchen: Ich bin nur ein einfaches Mädchen,
In den Dingen der Welt unerfahren,
Doch du bist klug und gewandt,
Du sollst mich gut lehren, dies alles zu verstehen.

Bursche: Nun will ich offen sprechen:
Du seiest wie das Wasser der Teesta,
Und ich wie der Fluß Rangeet,
So wie diese beiden sollen wir vereint sein.

Mädchen: Wahrlich, ich war wie die Flut der Teesta,
Immer seit meiner Geburt
Bis zum heutigen Tage
War ich ein unbeflecktes Kind meiner Mutter.

Bursche: Ich bin ein Lepcha-Junge,
Hoch droben, von den Gletschern, bin ich herabgestiegen,
Welch' Freude erfüllt mich,
Daß du mich erkanntest.

Mädchen: Ich bin eine Tochter des Lepcha-Volkes,
Daß du
Von den Gletschern herabsteigst,
Dessen habe ich geharrt.

Bursche: Wir beide sind von gleichem Stamme,
Wir kommen von der gleichen Quelle,
Der Schöpfer
Gab uns seinen Segen.

Mädchen: Du, ein Junge, dem Flusse Rangeet gleichend,
Und ich, die ich bin wie das Wasser der Teesta,
Daß wir zusammentreffen,
Dies war der Wille des Schöpfers.

- Bursche: Nun da wir beide vereint sind,
Gemeinsam wollen wir eilen,
Um im tiefen Meere,
Nach Türkisen und Perlen zu suchen.
- Mädchen: Wenn wir Türkisen und Perlen finden,
Dann werden sich
Unsere Nachkommen
Über die ganze Welt verbreiten.
- Alle: Oh Bruder, der du unter der Kälte gelitten hattest,
Oh Schwester, die du das Haus hüten solltest,
Euch beiden
Gab der Schöpfer seinen Segen.

Ist das Hochzeitsfest beendet, dann dankt ein Sänger mit einem kurzen Liede, dessen Text meist aus dem Stegreif verfaßt wird, allen Anwesenden für ihre Teilnahme an der Feier.

RENÉ DE NEBESKY-WOJKOWITZ

THE RELIGION OF THE LEPCHAS

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THE RELIGION OF THE LEPCHAS

[Dr. R. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, who writes here of the faith and customs of the Lepchas of Sikkim and neighbouring regions, has for some time been conducting research in the borderland between India and Tibet. A Research Associate of the Museum of Ethnology at Vienna, Dr. de Nebesky-Wojkowitz is recognized as a specialist in Central Asian and Himalayan cultures. He contributed to our November and December 1952 issues an article in two instalments on "Bon - The Pre-Buddhist Religion of Tibet." - ED.]

The Himalayan State of Sikkim is the chief home of the Lepchas, a Mongoloid tribe which numbers about 30,000 today. Nearly 23,000 Lepchas still reside in Sikkim itself, mainly in their reservation at Zongu, while the rest live scattered in a few villages of the neighbouring Darjeeling District, at Ilam in Eastern Nepal and in two valleys of West Bhutan. Increasing contact with racially stronger tribes, especially with vigorous and unscrupulous immigrants from Nepal, has resulted in the Lepchas having gradually lost the greater part of their characteristic tribal culture. Nepalese dress or even apparel of Western style has replaced the colourful old Lepcha costume; their ancient legends and traditions, their melodious songs and joyful dances have partly been forgotten, and many a member of the tribe speaks the Nepalese idiom with greater ease than his own mothertongue. Even the name "Lepcha", by which term the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim are now generally addressed, is Nepalese.

Very little is known about the origin of the tribe. Racially and linguistically the Lepchas or

"Rong", as they call themselves, are distant relatives of their northern neighbours, the Tibetans, but unfortunately nothing has so far been learnt about the way in which they reached their present homesteads. The earliest written historical evidence dates only from the beginning of the 17th century A.D., when a group of Tibetans led by their chieftain Gyebumse crossed the snowy barrier of the Himalayas and settled in the area known today as Sikkim. The immigrants from the north soon discovered that the region which they had selected for their new abode was already inhabited by the "Rong", who were at that time a tribe of jungle-dwelling hunters. The "Rong" claimed possession of this land which they said had been their home since time immemorial, but they readily agreed to share it with the strangers. A few decades later a relative of the chieftain Gyebumse was installed as the first Maharaja of Sikkim and his descendants have been ruling this remote Himalayan State ever since.

The advent of the Tibetans affected the life of the Lepchas in many ways, one of the profoundest con-

sequences having been their contact with Tibetan Buddhism. Coming in the wake of the Tibetan settlers, a group of lamas reached Sikkim and they soon began to convert the Lepchas to the Buddhist faith, an endeavour in which they received all help from Sikkim's new ruling class. To facilitate the work of the lamas, a Lepcha alphabet was modelled after the Tibetan script by Chagdor Namgyé, the third Raja of Sikkim (1700-1717) and with its help a considerable number of Tibetan religious books were translated into the Lepcha language.

The work of the Buddhist missionaries, however, was not completely successful, and remnants of the original Lepcha faith have survived in most of the areas in which members of the tribe live. Though most of the Lepchas nominally profess Buddhism, sorcerers of the old faith are still held in high esteem and in many a household it is customary to invite, in case of need, both the lamas and the Lepcha sorcerers to perform concurrently their appropriate ceremonies.

To study the existing religious concepts of the Lepchas is a most difficult and complex task, as Sikkim's Tibetan Buddhism and the original Lepcha faith have influenced each other considerably in the course of time. The problem is made even more difficult by the fact that the form of Buddhism which spread among the tribes comprised the still little-known doctrines of the "unreformed" Nyingmapas, Dzogchem-

pas and Kargyudpas, religious sects which have preserved in their teachings a great deal of the ancient traditions of Tibet's pre-Buddhist Bon faith. In addition to this, the Lepchas have also come into direct contact with adherents of the Bon, as remnants of the old Bon faith - both in its lower, Shamanistic form as well as in the more highly developed Buddhist-influenced form - are still extant in the Chumbi Valley, in Sikkim's immediate neighbourhood. Intensive research further reveals that the Lepchas have absorbed a number of traditions and religious practices of the Limbus and the Rais, two Mongoloid tribes, members of which are also living within the boundaries of Sikkim.

According to the concepts of the original, unadulterated Lepcha faith the world with all its living and supernatural beings was made by a Divine Creator, addressed variously as Talyang Rum, "the heavenly God", or Takbo Thing, "He who looks after everything." From the ice of Mt. Kanchanjunga - the third highest peak in the world, which dominates the scenery of Sikkim - Talyang Rum is said to have created the ancestors of the Lepchas, the man Fagrong Thing and his wife Nazong Nyo, who began living in the legendary country of Mayel, situated somewhere behind Mt. Kanchenjunga's ice-walls. Simultaneously with this pair, Talyang Rum brought into existence seven divine brothers and their wives, all of whom are believed to be still

residing in Mayel. Through Sakyu Rum, the god of fortune, the seven brothers dispense riches and fertility; and in the case of the world's entire population becoming extinct, the seven pairs of divine beings would create new men.

The first children who were born to Fagrong Thing and Nazong Nyo are said to have been abandoned in the forest by their parents and, having grown up without any proper guidance, to have turned eventually into evil spirits. Later, however, Fagrong Thing and his wife took better care of their offspring and thus eventually the hills and valleys lying at the foot of Mt. Kanchanjunga became the habitation of the descendants of this mythical pair.

Talyang Rum also created the benevolent deities of the Lepcha pantheon, the "Rum" as they are called, and to each of them the Divine Creator assigned a special task, e.g., Li Rum guards the dwellings of the tribe; Agek Alat Rum grants offspring; Komshi Rum helps the hunters to track down game and Nanglyenu Rum acts as the personal guardian of each man. Far more numerous than the "Rum" are the "Moong" or evil spirits, who live in rocks, and trees, on mountain peaks and in the waters of rivers and lakes. They are held responsible for all the misfortunes and accidents which befall men: Sagrong Moong kills lonely travellers and eats their flesh; Mazom Moong, whose voice can sometimes be heard at night, sends illness and death;

Shom Moong induces people to commit suicide; Nungo Moong raises evil passions, etc.

One of the strangest figures among the host of malignant spirits is Hlo Moong or Chu Moong, "the Goblin of the Snow-Mountains", who is regarded as the master and protector of all wild animals. His home is said to be the region lying above the line of eternal snow, and many a Lepcha hunter claims to have seen this mysterious being during a hunting trip to the higher tracts of the Himalayas. The description of Chu Moong, who is said to have the appearance of an enormous brown ape, resembles in many ways that of the legendary "abominable snowman" of the Sherpas and the Tibetans.

Out of the great number of Lepcha legends, at least the two most important ones should be mentioned. The story of the great deluge - told by so many peoples of the world, independently of the Bible's evidence - is well known also among the Lepchas, who narrate that, when the all-destroying flood came, a few members of the tribe found safety on Mt. Tentong in the south of Sikkim and that later, as the waters continued to rise, the benevolent deities caused the mountain to grow higher as well; and only after a bird with a twig in its beak had been seen did the survivors dare to descend from their refuge. Also the story of the great tower which was built in order to reach heaven - another parallel to an account in the Bible - is told

among the Lepchas. The legend has it that a Lepcha clan called Naong succeeded in erecting a high tower, but through a misunderstanding its base was cut and the collapsing structure killed most of the workmen. A newer version of this legend says that the tower was built out of pots on a sheltered plateau in Western Sikkim, and through a close investigation of this narrative I happened to discover a vast ancient urnfield at the spot mentioned in the legend.

The propitiation of the "Rum" and the "Moong", the performance of divination ceremonies and the conducting of the various rites at times of marriage, birth and death are the task of the "Bongthings", the sorcerer-priests of the Lepchas. A Bongthing is usually assisted by a "Mun", a sorceress, who acts primarily as a medium through which divinities and spirits of the dead speak to men. The practice of magical rites by the Bongthings and the Muns, mostly accompanied by animal sacrifice, induced many an Occidental or Tibetan writer to make the rather sweeping statement that the ancient Lepcha faith was identical with the Bon, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. A closer examination shows, however, that the Lepcha faith cannot be identified with the Bon, at least not with its now prevalent Buddhist-influenced form. The evidence so far collected makes it more probable that the original religious belief of the Lepchas is a remnant of the earliest, Shamanistic

stratum of Central Asia, out of which, in Tibet, parts of the old, unorganized Bon developed, under the pressure of Buddhism into a religious system. It is therefore not correct to say that the Lepcha faith and the Bon are identical; it would be more correct to say that both have sprung from the same root and that consequently they have a number of elements in common.

It would lead us too far to discuss in detail here all the observations which indicate that the old Lepcha faith is to be regarded as a remnant of Central Asian Shamanism, but at least a few interesting examples should be given. Just as the real Siberian Shaman is believed to be forced by an ancestral spirit to accept his office, so also among the Lepchas the belief is current that an ancestral deity compels a member of a family to become a Bongthing or a Mun. The person selected by the divinity suffers from attacks of fever and cramps - which are, however, well differentiated by the Lepchas from ordinary epileptic fits - and then remains in a state of painful semi-consciousness until he or she consents to accept the position of a wizard-priest or a sorceress. Should the person refuse - and to most people such a visitation is very unwelcome - the illness would continue and might eventually lead to death. The symptoms begin to disappear as soon as the person agrees to the ancestral deity's demand, and they vanish completely once an elder Bongthing or Mun begins to

initiate the candidate.

After the initiation rites have been completed the ancestral deity will start acting as a divine adviser and protector of the new sorcerer. Should two Bongthings or Muns fight each other by supernatural means, then their respective ancestral deities will meet in combat and the result of their encounter will decide the fate of their *protégés* - again a similarity to Shamanistic conceptions.

The characteristic rite of despatching a Shaman's soul in order that it may guide the spirit of a deceased person to the other world, or to free it from the power of a demon who has intercepted it, finds a corresponding theme in a rite of the Lepchas which is usually carried out by a Mun after a death has occurred in a family. In the course of this ceremony the Mun, while in a trance, conducts the soul of the deceased on a last journey through the Lepcha land and after the spirit has made known his last wishes through the mouth of the sorceress he is brought with the help of wild birds to the realm of the dead. Similar to the custom of binding some of the Siberian Shamans with a rope when they are entering into a trance, a rope is tied on such an occasion to the left hand of the Mun and its other end is fastened to the severed right foreleg of an ox which has been sacrificed previously. Should this rite be omitted, then - the Lepchas believe - the spirit of the deceased would probably fall into the power of a

demon and in that case the soul of the deceased too, might finally become a harmful spirit; a Mun will then have to be called in to free the captured soul and conduct it safely to the place of eternal rest.

Another striking analogy between Shamanism and the old Lepcha faith is the custom, when a Bongthing is buried, of placing a small ladder in his grave so that his soul "may ascend with its help to heaven"; the same conception is found in genuine Shamanism, where a ladder, real or symbolic, is used in various rites for the same purpose.

Besides the Mun and the Bongthing there are two other groups of sorcerers, who, though of foreign origin, occupy a firmly established position in the religious life of the non-Buddhist section of the Lepcha tribe. From the early, unorganized Bon religion of the Chumbi Valley came the "Pawo" and the "Nyen-jomo". Among the Lepchas the name "Pawo" is given to men who claim to become possessed by spirits of the ancient Tibetan pantheon. The Pawo dress in Tibetan robes and perform, with bells and drums, ecstatic dances in which the Nyen-jomo, their female assistants, participate.

More uncommon are the "Yaba" and the "Yama" wizard-priests and female magicians of the Lepchas, who are said to act as the mediums of spirits worshipped by the Limbus, and hence speak in Limbu during their trances.

In Sikkim and the Darjeeling District, the Lepcha faith is fast disappearing, while very little information is obtainable regarding the usages of the Lepchas who live in Bhutan. All signs, however, indicate that the Lepcha community of

Nepal has preserved most of the ancient religious traditions and research among this section of the tribe, which has its home in an area so far inaccessible to ethnographers, would certainly yield new and conclusive evidence.

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RENÉ DE NEBESKY-WOJKOWITZ

HUNTING AND FISHING
AMONG THE LEPCHAS

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Hunting and fishing among the Lepchas

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Hunting, which formed only a century ago a substantial part of the economy of the Lepchas - the aboriginal inhabitants of the Himalayan State of Sikkim - is at present gradually decreasing in importance, in proportion with the development of agriculture and the breeding of cattle. Many of the Lepcha men still pursue hunting occasionally, but more in the way of a useful pastime and only a few professional hunters can be found nowadays.

The animals hunted are birds - only those, which do not feed on carrion and meat in general, being considered fit for consumption - hares, deer, musk deer, stags, bear and wild pigs. Some of these animals are hunted not only for their meat but also in order to obtain some parts of the body which are valued as medicines, e.g. the bile and liver and liver of a bear, the bones of certain birds, etc. - Crows, rats and mice who attack the crops, are killed as well, but not eaten. Occasionally, a leopard or man-eating tiger is trapped, but their meat is not touched. The hunting of elephants and rhinos which was rather popular at one time, judging from the numerous accounts still circulating among the Lepchas, does not seem to be practised anymore.

A religious prohibition which is, however, not always strictly kept, exists against the killing, and especially the eating of monkeys, who frequently invade the fields and cause considerable damage. No other tabu seems to exist, except the prohibition of killing a white

elephant, a custom having its origin in the Buddhist religion, which began to spread among the Lepchas four centuries ago. Otherwise, all animals can be hunted at any time, except when having young.

The main weapon of a Lepcha hunter is the bow (*să lí*). It is always made of bamboo, with a string (*să lí grím*) made either of the same material or from a nettle plant, called *kũ ju*; the best bow-strings, however, are manufactured from the fibres of the *kă fit* tree. The bamboo, which is used for making the bow, has to be carefully selected. It should be cut at the height of the dry season (December - January) from a bamboo growing at a high altitude and in an open spot, where its stem has been frequently bent by the wind. Before using the new bow, it has to be smoked for some time and also later, the bow as well as the arrows rest always on a bamboo platform (*pũn hróp*), which one finds in Lepcha houses suspended above the open hearth. The bow is kept released and is only spanned when it has to be used.

Arrows (*tsóng*) are made preferably of a reed (*mók tu*) or, less frequently, of bamboo. Normally three steering feathers (*tsóng ro*) - the feathers of a kite or duck being preferred - are set into cuts made previously in the reed and are afterwards glued and fastened with strings. A deep, square or oblong cut (*dem*) is made to receive the bow-string and, lastly, the portion of the reed holding the steering feathers is painted black. To some of the hunting arrows, however, no steering feathers are attached. The barbed arrow head (*tsóng thyak*) is made of iron; it possesses either a short conical metal tube, which receives the shaft or has a short iron rod, which is pushed into the shaft. In the latter case, the end of the shaft is then tightly bound with a string and impregnated with resin. Arrows used to scare away thieves, and the toy arrows of children, do not possess iron points but carry instead a short bamboo tube on the front of the shaft, to render the missile harmless.

Sometimes poisoned arrows are used for hunting and formerly also for warfare. The poison most frequently applied for this purpose is aconite (*pă kí*). An aconite root is kept ready by the hunter and

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the poison is prepared only shortly before the hunt begins. The root is ground between two stones and then some water is added to form a thick paste. Lepcha hunters are very careful in handling aconite and should their hands show even a small cut caused during house or field work, they will refrain from using the poison on this day. Should an animal be killed by a poisoned missile, the hunter will wait until the body of the prey has grown cold - "the poison returns then from the heart to the wound" - and afterwards that part of the body, which had been wounded is cut off and thrown away.

Hunting weapons

Four different kinds of bow are used by the Lepchas:

1. The hunting bow in the average 140 cms long. This type of bow was also used in warfare.
2. A bow, in the average 180 cms long, used in marksmanship. The central part of the bow's shaft (*pyǎng shing*) is usually strengthened by a piece of bamboo, cut in a typical Lepcha design and fastened to the rod of the bow by resin and strings. The arrows, used for this bow, have a simple, conical iron point without barbs.
3. *Da bryó sǎ lí*, pellet bow, in the average 150 cms long, used for killing birds. The centre of the bow's rod is usually strengthened by a piece of bamboo. Four small, flat slivers of bamboo are bound together in the middle of the bow-string to form a small square, upon which a clay-ball (*da bryó*) can be placed. This central piece of the bow-string is called *sǎ lí hryeng*. The bow-string is fastened to the shaft of the bow in such a way, that it remains slightly turned to the right, allowing the missile to fly past the bow and the hand which holds it. - The clay-balls, used for the *da bryó sǎ lí* are usually burned to make them harder. The pellet bow can be seen very frequently in use during harvest time, when the fields have to be guarded against birds.

4. A small cross-bow is employed by the Lepchas in an automatic trap, which will be described later.

The bow is carried over the shoulder or in the hand, while a simple bamboo tube, which can be closed with a lid of the same material, serves as a quiver (*sǎ lu*).

It is customary among the Lepchas to handle the bow and arrow in the following way: The left hand grasps the rod of the bow in its centre and the upstretched thumb presses the shaft of the arrow gently against the bow. The first finger and the middle finger of the right hand together pull the bow-string, the stump end of the arrow resting between these two fingers. - To prevent injury from the released bow-string, the left armwrist is usually protected by a piece of leather, a woven bamboo bracelet (*tūk bya*) or by a ring, made of a cow's horn.

Occasionally Lepcha hunters use a spear (*sǔng hlyo*); its barbed iron head has in the average a length of 35 cms. The spear is mostly used when hunting bear or wild pig. Some Lepcha hunters even claim, that a poisoned spear can be used successfully for killing a rhino, which is said to have one weak spot in its back where a mortal wound can be inflicted.

Stories circulating among the Lepchas narrate that formerly pointed and poisoned wooden logs were used for killing elephants. After finding a passage in the jungle frequented by elephants - mostly near a place where elephants would come to drink - several hunters climbed on some high trees on both sides of the passage, suspending the log with the help of ropes above the trail. When an elephant passed below, the log was released at a favourable moment to wound the animal in the neck. The prey was then simultaneously attacked by other hunters with poisoned spears.

Traps

A great variety of traps are used by the Lepchas and only the most frequent types should be mentioned here.

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For catching jungle fowl, hares and other small game, a spring bow (*ver sak*) is set in the following way. A short piece of wood, with a broad notch in its upper part, is stuck firmly into the ground and then another piece of wood, which has a notch loosely fitting into that of the first piece, is placed into it in a horizontal position. A bamboo shoot or a small tree is bent, a string attached to it and, lastly, a sling is made, which is led over the upper, horizontal arm of the previously described device. The bait is placed on the sling and by pulling at it, the horizontal arm slips out of the vertical piece and thus releases the trap. - The same kind of trap, only in a larger size, is used for catching deer.

Another kind of sling trap used for catching jungle fowl is the so-called *ma ló*. It consists of a row of slings, made of the hair of a horse-tail, which are suspended from a fixed horizontal beam.

A Lepcha dead-fall (*kóp*) for killing jungle fowl, is constructed as follows: A string is fastened to a tree and then led over a flat stone; the string ends in a short bamboo stick, to which a bait is fastened. Then another short string is bent into a loop and its two ends are firmly fastened to the ground at the bottom of the stone and the bamboo stick with the bait is then pulled through the loop, formed by the lower string, the tension of both strings holding the stone in a tilted position. A slight movement of the bamboo piece causes the upper sling to slip out of the loop and the stone thus drops on top of the animal.

Another kind of dead-fall, which has to be set on a jungle path, is the so-called *shil*. It consists of a heavy wooden beam, supported on one side by a lightly placed stick, which might be easily knocked down by an animal running along the path.

For catching birds, a small grill is made out of a few bamboo sticks, and is afterwards smeared with tarry birdlime (*a' yók*), obtained from a *Ficus* tree. The birdlime is usually kept ready for use in a small bamboo container (*po tek*). The grill, already smeared with bird lime, is known as *a' yók pün grim*; it is placed over

troughs, filled with water, over springs, where birds come to drink or on the tops of trees.

An automatic spear trap (*sa lak*) is used for killing deer and sometimes a number of such traps are set, should a man-eating tiger roam around a settlement. In this case, people are warned to stay in the houses until the hunters have removed the traps again. The spear-traps are set with great care and at a certain height, the hunter calculating the size of the tiger from its footprints. The spear-trap is made as follows: A huge bamboo tube is cut lengthwise and firmly fixed at a certain height and position with the help of several bamboo supports. Then a long piece of bamboo is fastened horizontally above the ground - at the same height of the bamboo tube - and bent strongly backwards until one end of it reaches the bamboo tube, where it is then held in its spanned position by means of a simple cock. A string is fastened to the latter and stretched low across the jungle path. At last a strong piece of bamboo, the front-end of which has been cut to a sharp point and usually poisoned, is placed in the tube as a missile. - Usually another string, also connected with the cock, is spanned breast high and further away in the direction from which a man might approach. If somebody then stumbles unaware into the trap, the missile is released beforehand without causing harm.

A small cross-bow trap (*sǎ lak tyǎk*) is used for killing rats. It consists of a miniature cross-bow which aims into a bamboo tube, closed at its further end. The bow-string is cocked over one end of a movable bamboo stick, the other end of it, to which some bait is attached, reaching into the bamboo tube. By a slight pull at the bait, the stick, which holds back the bow-string, is moved and the arrow thus released. - It may be mentioned in this connection that poisoned food is also often laid out for killing rats, mice and other animals, who harm the crops.

Jungle fowl is sometimes caught with the help of a tent-like net. Its top is loosely hung up on a branch and its sides are fastened to the ground. On one side only, an entrance is left by lifting the flap

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of the net and supporting it with a stick. Some corn is placed as bait on the ground inside the net and the hunter then hides himself in a nearby bush. Should some fowl enter the net, the hunter hits the stick supporting the flap with a stone, thus closing the trap, or he simply begins to shout; the fowl flies up, the net is detached from the branch and falls on top of the prey.

While most of the before-mentioned traps can be easily handled by a single man, in some cases, especially in big game hunt, the cooperation of several hunters is necessary. Huge camouflaged pit-falls (*tǔng hóng*), mostly with sharp spikes at the bottom - made of a small, but very hard kind of bamboo (*po yóng tsu*) - were constructed for trapping elephants and rhinos. For catching the latter, a spot in the jungle had to be located first, where a rhino would habitually come to answer its call of nature. Lepcha hunters claim that the rhino then usually begins to walk backwards and easily falls into a pit.

To catch leopards or tigers alive, a heavy cage with a trap door was constructed; in this case, a living bait was used. Small cages with trap doors are sometimes placed in the fields, to catch monkeys who cause damage to the crops.

The hunting of wild pigs is often carried out by a group of hunters. At first, rows of huge bamboo spikes are erected under a cliff and a number of men, forming a beating line, try to chase the wild pigs towards the cliff, from where they eventually drop on the spikes set below.

Occasionally beating lines are formed to drive animals towards a line of archers. In the driving hunt, fire is never used as the Lepchas fear that a fire in the jungle might get easily out of control and become a danger to men and their property.

Fishing

A few among the Lepchas, mostly those whose dwellings lie close to a mountain river, practise fishing, but as in hunting, fishing also

serves only to supply some food in addition to that obtained by tilling the fields and raising cattle. The following fishing devices are used by the Lepchas:

An ordinary fishing rod (*vór ham*) of bamboo, with a string and an iron hook (*vór*), upon which a bait is placed. - Similar to this is a simple device, certainly more ancient, called *hryeng*. Here the hook is substituted by a short, sharp piece of bamboo, which gets stuck in the throat of the fish.

Sometimes, a series of baited hooks is immersed in a river. The end of every line is wound around heavy stones lying on the bank and each string is then bent to form a sharp angle, being held in this position by a small stone. Should a fish get caught, the line will be moved out of its position and the fisherman who after some time comes to control the trap will thus recognize that a fish has been hooked.

Various kinds of nets, mostly made of the fibres of creeper plants, are used; the most frequent type of net is the so-called *sǔng lí*, a conical throwing net. When spread out it is in the average some 140 cms high and its diameter measures approximately 160 cms. Around its opening, oblong pieces of lead are fastened and a long, strong rope is attached to its upper part. The fisherman, standing in the river, winds the rope loosely over his arm and then at a favourable moment throws the net quickly over the fish.

Tūk shor: A simple bamboo trap, in the average some 60 cms long and 30 cms in diameter. To construct this device, a strong piece of bamboo is cut lengthwise, to three quarters of its total length, into a great number of sections. These sections are then bent apart and held in this position by a woven bamboo ring, the trap thus taking the form of a funnel. - Usually, several *tūk shor* are placed in a row, near a stony barrier in the river, where fish are likely to jump and might thus fall into the trap, fig. 1.

Kūr vyo: A pocket, made of bamboo; also the *kūr vyo* is fastened to a barrier in the river, to catch the fish who are trying to jump the obstacle.

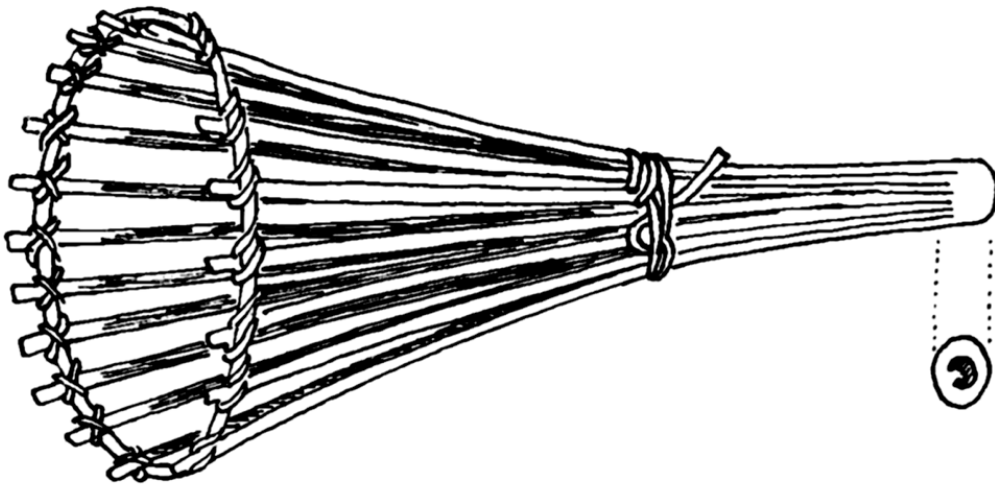


Fig. 1. A simple bamboo trap.

Ról or Yet: A huge chute made of bamboo, which is placed close to a small waterfall, above the surface of the river. Its planks are set wide apart to allow the water, which falls on it from above, to flow quickly away, while bigger fish are left dry on the boards.

Fit: A narrow-woven bamboo basket with long spikes at its opening, which are turned towards the inside of the trap, preventing the fish, which had entered the basket, from leaving it again. The *fit* is placed into the water and held down by a stone, placed on top of it. The fish, which has been caught, is removed through a slit in the bottom of the basket; this opening is afterwards closed again with the help of a bamboo string.

A heavy stone or hammer is used to hit the stones under which some fish have taken refuge. The dazed fish are then caught by hand or with the help of a net. This method is mostly applied during the dry season, when the streams are very low. - Occasionally, Lepcha fishermen use also bow and arrow to kill fish.

For the following methods of fishing, the cooperation of several fishermen is required:

A stone barrier is erected across a river, leaving only one opening

in the wall, into which a huge, narrow-woven basket is placed. A beating line is then formed and the fish are driven into the trap.

At a favourable spot, by diverting a river into a channel and then erecting barriers of sand and stone, a small artificial lake is made in the old river bed. Afterwards, huge quantities of a'ung el (*Artemisia vulgaris*) are collected, placed into the lake and pounded. Then cut pieces of a strong creeper (*brüng*) are thrown into the pool, and the juice of these plants dissolving in the water will poison all the fish which had been trapped in the artificially made lake.

All the catch, obtained by collective methods of fishing, is eventually divided equally among the participants.

NOTES

1. About the Lepchas see the following publications:

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2. The rites and beliefs, connected with Lepcha hunting and fishing, will be dealt with later in a separate publication.

RENÉ DE NEBESKY-WOJKOWITZ

DIE LEGENDE VOM TURMBAU
DER LEPCHA

ANTHROPOS, VOL. 48, No. 5/6, PP. 889-897, POSIEUX (FREIBURG),

1953

Die Legende vom Turmbau der Lepcha

VON RENÉ DE NEBESKY - WOJKOWITZ

Inhalt:

1. Erste Version
2. Zweite Version
3. Erklärungen
4. Nachtrag

Ein Teil des Sagengutes der im Maharajatum von Sikkim, am Fuße des Zentralen Himalaya lebenden Völkerschaften ist bereits verschiedentlich behandelt worden, und auch eine Anzahl von Überlieferungen der Lepcha, der größten Gruppe der Ureinwohner dieses Gebietes, fand in mehreren Veröffentlichungen Erwähnung¹. Eigenartigerweise hat jedoch eine der unter den Lepcha am besten bekannten Legenden - mit Ausnahme zweier kurzer Hinweise - in keiner der bisher erschienenen einschlägigen Arbeiten eine nähere Behandlung erfahren: Es ist dies eine Überlieferung, die von dem mißglückten Vorhaben des Lepcha-Volkes, einen bis an das Himmelsgewölbe emporreichenden Turm aus Tontöpfen zu bauen, berichtet.

Einer der Gründe für das Fortleben dieser Legende ist der Umstand, daß an der Stätte des angeblichen Turmbaues von der hier ansässigen Bevölkerung bei Feldarbeiten von Zeit zu Zeit Tonscherben ausgegraben werden. Die Funde erregten bereits vor zwei Jahrzehnten die Aufmerksamkeit eines Fachmannes; Sir Charles Bell, der damalige Political Officer of Sikkim, ließ sich einige der aufgefundenen Scherben vorlegen, und auf seine Weisung wurde auch die Turmbau-Legende schriftlich festgehalten. Leider gelangte jedoch dieses Material nicht zur Auswertung. - Durch das Entgegenkommen von Sri T. N. Pulger, dem Besitzer des Daramdin-Gutes, innerhalb dessen Grenzen der Ort des legendären Turmbaues heute liegt, konnte ich eine Wiedergabe des seinerzeit für Sir Charles Bell abgefaßten Berichtes erhalten und in vorliegender Arbeit mit verwerten.

¹ Cf. KALI KUMAR DAS : The Lepcha people and their notions of heaven and hell. *Journal of the Buddhist Texts Society (Calcutta)* 6. 1896. - C. DE BEAUVOIR-STOCKS : Folk-lore and customs of the Lap-chas of Sikkim. *Journal and Proceedings, Asiatic Society of Bengal.* N. S. 21. 1925 - G. GORER: *Himalayan Village.* London 1938. - J. MORRIS: *Living with Lepchas.* London 1938.

1. Erste Version

Die meisten Lepcha, denen die Legende vom Turmbau bekannt ist, sind der Überzeugung, dass dieses Werk von den Urahnen des Lepcha-Volkes ausgeführt wurde. Diese Ansicht kommt auch in dem hier nachfolgend in orthographischer Umschrift wiedergegebenen und übersetzten Lepcha-Text zum Ausdruck.

Ta-lom pür-tam sä sǔng ²

a'Ya a-a'yít ka mu-tün-tsi róng-küp-song chu-bi lom a'yít-lǔng chhül bát-lǔng yǔ-mǎ/ ne-mǎ-yel lyang a-re-pong gǔn róng-küp-song nǔn blen-mǎ/ o-tha hǔ-yu-do sä nóng-ka a-lom krut-mat-mǎ/ kǎ-yu-pong tǎ-lyang hryóm-ban hrón ün huk-ban hrya-ka yong krut-mat-mǎ/ krut a-re thep-lǔng hǔ-yu-pong fat-fyǔ-tyók tsük-shong krut-mat-mǎ// Lyang o-re hǔ-yu thit-bu re ta-lom pür-tam gǔm/ o-ba hǔ-yu-pong a-sher sam mat-ban a'yuk dzuk-shong nǔm-shi-myu rít-mǎ/ kat-re fat-fyǔ-tyók bük-bu a-sher nyet-re shel-bu ün a-sher sam-bu re fat-fyǔ-tyók tsük-bu tsük-shong cha ngun-mǎ// A-long hǔ-yu-pong fat-fyǔ-tyók tsük-bu cha tsük-mǎ/ tsük-bu a-tyet a-tho cha tsük-mǎ kam-pǎ-chak tal tǎ-lyang cha khyá-la non-mǎ/ o-tyet ka hǔ-yu-pong tǎ-lyang a-thól shi-mǎ/ a-re shi-lǔng tǎ-ba bam-bu-song nǔn tsing-mǎ kók-vím nyi-gong tá tǎ-lyang huk-shong-re/ tǎ-ba bam-bu-song nǔn a-bóng-ka bam-bu-song rem cha-lik-mǎ/ kók-vím tal kǎ-yu-pong tǎ-lyang huk-sho/ me-ba hǔ-yu-nǔn chek-tel-la chek-la yong thyo-mǎ/ tǎ-ba hǔ-yu nǔn dü-lik-mǎ kók-vím yang-tal kǎ-yu-pong tǎ-lyang huk-sho/ me-ba bam-bu-song cha-da thyo-mǎ chek-tel-la/ tǎ-ba bam-bu-song rem cha vyet mǎ chek-yóng á/ tǎ-ba hǔ-yu-nǔn lǎ sak-lyak nam-ka chek-tel-la chek-tel-la yong li-bi-mǎ// Me-ba hǔ-yu-pong tho pryít ün tǔng-gel bǔ-lǔng a-bóng-ka fat-fyǔ-tyók cha-gram-mǎ/ me-ba a-bóng bam-bu-song nǔn chek-tel-lél tet-ka cha-rom-ban glu-mǎ/ tǎ-ba hron-bu-pong ün a-bóng pun-ka bam-bu-pong gǔn fat-fyǔ-tyók thop-ban mak-non-mǎ/ a-long me-ba bam-bu-pong lǎ a-ring a-bóng kat-na kat sä cha-ko mǎ-khǔn ün ríng pat mǎ-khǔn ngun-non-mǎ/ a-re sä nǎ-han a-lom tsük-bu tsük-kǔng róng-song lyót tu-la mǎ-nyin-ne/ gǔn-len nǎ-han a-lom gyutsen a'yuk lóng-ten-bu róng-küp-song do gǔm/ tǎ-tsát o-tyet song-te gǔn-pong a-ring a-bóng kǎ-ta gǔm/ hǔ-yu sä byek-ka a-ring cha-pat mǎ-khǔn ne a-long hǔ-yu-pong bret-mǎ/ hǔ-yu bam-bu-pong a-flík thül a-flík tshül tsük-lat ün tsük-kyer kon bret-nóng-mǎ/ a-re hǔ-yu-pong bret-bu lom tyáng sük-dǔm ka blen-mǎ/ a-lo-ba o-re lom mi-gít mi-gít sä dung-gít ngun-mǎ/ a-re gǔn-pong thül chu-bi lom a'yít-lǔng yüt-bu ün sük-dǔm ka blen-bu gǔm/ lyang o-re a-lo-ba thül gren-jóng lyang-ka nyi-mǎ//

Die Geschichte der Ta-lom-Ebene

In lang vergangener Zeit, als die Schöpfung der Welt vollzogen wurde, stieg das Lepcha-Volk nach seiner Erschaffung, an Zahl anwachsend, von

² Der Text wurde mit liebenswürdiger Hilfe von Pastor T. S. TARGAIN (Kalimpong) übersetzt.

dem Gletscherberg herab³, und das Land von Ma-yel⁴ füllte sich mit jungen Lepcha. Zu jener Zeit beschlossen sie, folgendes auszuführen: „Wir wollen einen Turm bauen, um zu dem Himmel emporzuklettern und ihn mit einem Haken herabzuziehen“; dies hatten sie beraten. Sodann faßten sie den Beschluß, kleine Tontöpfe aufeinanderzustapeln (und auf diese Weise einen Turm zu bauen). Der Ort, den sie auswählten, war die Ebene von Ta-lom. Hier, um die Arbeit zu verrichten, teilten sie alle Leute in drei Gruppen ein: erstens eine Gruppe, die aus gestampfter Erde die Töpfe formte, zweitens (eine Gruppe) der Träger, und drittens diejenigen, welche die Töpfe in Schichten legten; so wurden sie eingeteilt.

Sie stapelten nun die Töpfe aufeinander und, sie in Schichten legend, erreichten sie nahezu den Himmel; zu dieser Zeit sahen sie den Himmel bereits sehr nahe. Diejenigen, die oben arbeiteten - als sie den Himmel so nahe erblickten - dachten: „Wenn wir einen gewinkelten Ast hätten, dann könnten wir den Himmel herabziehen.“ Da riefen sie von oben den unten Befindlichen zu: „Reicht uns einen gewinkelten Ast, wir wollen den Himmel herabziehen!“ Die unten aber hörten: „Reißt ein, schlägt um!“ Die an der Spitze des Turmes Arbeitenden riefen nun erneut: „Reicht doch einen gewinkelten Ast empor, wir wollen den Himmel herabziehen!“ Aber die unten hörten wiederum: „Reißt ein!“ Nun riefen die unten Arbeitenden: „Sollen wir einreißen?“ Da schrien die oben in Ärger: „Ja, reißt ein, reißt ein!“

So holten nun die unten Befindlichen Hämmer, Äxte und Keulen und begannen, die untersten Töpfe zu zerschlagen. Als sie mit ihrer Arbeit schon weit fortgeschritten waren, da kam der Turm plötzlich, alles zerschmetternd, herabgestürzt. Diejenigen, die nach oben geklettert waren, und auch die, welche nahe dem Fuße des Turmes gearbeitet hatten, wurden alle durch die auf sie fallenden Lehmtöpfe erschlagen. Die am Leben Gebliebenen konnten sich aber nicht mehr untereinander verständigen.

Doch einen Turm wie diesen zu errichten, war früher niemand fähig als nur die Lepcha und die erfahrenen Männer, die eine solche Arbeit lehren konnten, diese waren Lepcha. Bis zu jener Zeit sprachen sie alle die gleiche Sprache, doch nun, da sie sich nicht mehr verständigen konnten, schieden sie voneinander. Einige von ihnen gingen aufwärts (gegen Norden), einige abwärts (nach Süden), andere in östlicher und manche in westlicher Richtung. Infolge dieser Teilung besiedelten sie die ganze Welt, und so entstanden die heute bestehenden zahlreichen Völker und Stämme. - Der Ort, zu dem (die Lepcha) nach ihrer Erschaffung vom Gletscherberg herabstiegen, liegt im heutigen Sikkim, und es ist dies eine Ebene, auf der sich nunmehr ein großes Reis-Feld befindet.

3 Der Sage nach nahm das Lepcha-Volk seinen Ursprung von dem Berge Kanchenjunga, aus dessen Gletschereis das Ahnenpaar der Lepcha erschaffen worden sein soll.

4 Über das Land von Ma-yel cf. GORER, Himalayan Village, p. 235 f.

2. Zweite Version

Eine andere Version der Turmbau-Legende, die Anspruch auf größere Genauigkeit erhebt, besagt, daß die Errichtung des Turmes nicht von den Ahnen der Lepcha, sondern von einer zum Lepcha-Volke gehörigen Sippe vorgenommen wurde, die den Namen *Na ong* trug. Im heutigen Lepcha hat das Wort *Na ong* die Bedeutung von „Dummkopf“, wobei es allerdings wahrscheinlich ist, daß es seinen dekorativen Sinn erst späterhin durch die Assoziierung des Sippennamens *Na ong* mit der Überlieferung von dem unsinnigen, mißglückten Turmbau erlangte. Neben dem Worte *Na ong* wird auch mitunter der Ausdruck *Chelickchom* zur Bezeichnung dieser Sippe verwendet; letzteres Wort scheint aus der Sprache der Limbu, eines den Lepcha verwandten Volkes, zu kommen und würde somit die unter den Limbu anzutreffende Ansicht bestärken, daß die sogenannten *Na ong* oder *Chelickchom* nicht Lepcha, sondern Limbu waren.

Die Chronik der Maharajas von Sikkim - in der die *Na ong* in der Aufzählung der Lepcha-Sippschaften angeführt sind - als auch die wenigen wissenschaftlichen Veröffentlichungen, die den Namen *Na ong* erwähnen⁵, berichten übereinstimmend, daß diese Sippe schon vor langer Zeit ausgestorben sei. Diese Behauptung entspricht allerdings nicht ganz der Wahrheit, denn noch zu Beginn dieses Jahrhunderts lebte in der Nähe der Stelle, an der einst der Turm errichtet worden sein soll, eine Familie, deren Angehörige sich als letzte Nachkommen des *Na ong*-Stammes - sie gebrauchten bei der Eigenbezeichnung den Ausdruck „Stamm“ - betrachteten. Das Haupt dieser Familie, ein Mann namens Karandal, scheint jedoch der einzige gewesen zu sein, der die Überlieferungen der *Na ong* noch gut kannte, und er war es daher, der seinerzeit die entsprechenden Auskünfte für den an Sir Charles Bell weitergeleiteten Bericht gab. Den Mitteilungen des letzten Bewahrers der *Na ong*-Überlieferungen entsprechend, verliefen der Turmbau und die weitere Geschichte des Stammes wie folgt:

Es geschah in grauer Vorzeit, daß der Stamm der *Na ong* zur Welt kam. Die Stelle, die angeblich zur Geburtsstätte dieses Stammes wurde, liegt in Sikkim, nahe dem Zusammenfluß des Raman und des Lingkhim Khola, innerhalb des Bereiches des Daramdin-Gutes. Die Ahnen der *Na ong*, im Erdinneren erschaffen, kamen hier aus einem riesigen, ausgehöhlten Felsblock hervor, der noch vor einer Generation am Ufer des Raman zu sehen war⁶.

Nach ihrem Eintreffen an der Erdoberfläche ließen sich die *Na ong* an dem als Phugamdin bezeichneten Orte nieder, der heute im nordöstlichen Teil des großen, zu den Besitzungen von Daramdin gehörenden Reisfeldes

⁵ DAS, *The Lepcha people*, p. 5. - G. B. MAINWARING, *A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language*. Calcutta 1876, p. XX. - G. B. MAINWARING and A. GRÜNWEDEL, *Dictionary of the Lepcha Language*. Berlin 1898, p. 189b. - DE BEAUVOIR-STOCKS, p. 359.

⁶ Während der schweren Regenfälle des Jahres 1899 wurde dieser Felsblock tiefer in das Flußbett gerissen, wo er schließlich im Sande versunken sein soll.

liegt. - Eines Tages wurden sie des sich über ihren Köpfen ausbreitenden Himmelsgewölbes gewahr, und da sie meinten, daß dieses sehr niedrig sei, beschlossen sie, einen Turm aus Töpfen zu bauen, um den Himmel zu erreichen. - Da alle Angehörigen des Stammes sich mit diesem Vorhaben einverstanden erklärten, wurde sogleich mit seiner Ausführung begonnen, wobei das Fundament des Turmes auf der ebenen Fläche des heutigen Daramdin-Feldes errichtet wurde. Die Arbeit ging schnell vor sich, und der Bau wurde schließlich so hoch, daß nur noch zwei, drei Töpfe benötigt wurden, um das Werk zu vollenden. Darüber gerieten die am Gipfel des Turmes Arbeitenden in große Aufregung, und so riefen sie ihren unten arbeitenden Helfern zu, sie möchten schnell die benötigte Anzahl von Töpfen emporreichen. Der Befehl wurde nun durch die lange Kette der Helfer von Mann zu Mann weitergegeben, und als er schließlich bei den am Fuße des Turmes Arbeitenden anlangte, war sein Sinn bereits gänzlich entstellt; denn nun hieß es, der Turm würde nicht mehr benötigt und sollte eingerissen werden, weil die an seiner Spitze Stehenden bereits den Himmel erreicht hätten. Die zu ebener Erde befindlichen Männer, Frauen und Kinder gingen daher daran, die untersten Töpfe zu zerschlagen, was alsbald zur Folge hatte, daß das gesamte Bauwerk unter fürchterlichem Getöse einstürzte, alle Angehörigen des Stammes unter sich begrabend. Während des Sturzes zerbrach der Turm in drei große Teile, von denen einer auf den als Kajjalia bezeichneten Berg, innerhalb der Grenzen des heutigen Karmi-Gutes, fiel, während ein zweiter Teil des Turmes auf den Maney-Hügel im Bereiche des Relling-Besitzes stürzte und das dritte Stück schließlich in der Nähe des im nepalesischen Bezirk von Ilam gelegenen Dorfes Phedap niederging. Durch den Anprall wurden die genannten Berge stark eingedrückt, so daß sie heute eine deutliche Sattelform aufweisen.

Nur ein einziger Mann kam bei dem Unglück mit dem Leben davon. Erschreckt durch das Geschehene und den Zorn der Gottheit fürchtend, die seiner Ansicht nach die Vernichtung seiner Stammesgenossen herbeiführte, beschloß er, den Ort des Unglücks zu verlassen und auf nepalesischem Gebiet eine Bleibe zu suchen.

Er zog deshalb in das Dorf Phedap, wo er eines der Mädchen dieser Ortschaft heiratete. Im Laufe der Zeit bildete sich aus seinen zahlreichen Nachkommen erneut ein Stamm, der gleichfalls die Bezeichnung Na ong führte. Doch auch diese Generation der Na ong erwies sich als nicht viel klüger als ihre Vorfahren.

Eines Tages beschlossen die Na ong, die Fische in dem geheiligten Fluß Mai-khola, der in der Nähe des Ortes Phedap vorbeifließt, zu töten. Dieser Fluß wurde als der Sitz einer mächtigen Gottheit angesehen, der einst von der örtlichen nepalesischen Bevölkerung einmal jährlich Tausende von Tieren geopfert wurden, deren Blut den Strom für Tage rot färbte.

Die Na ong meinten nun, daß das einheimische Hirse-Bier, *marwa* genannt, wohl das beste Gift sei, um die Fische zu töten; denn wenn es einen starken Mann betrunken machen könne, so sei es sicherlich gut geeignet, alle in diesem Flusse lebenden Fische zu vertilgen. Sie gossen daher unge-

heure Mengen von Hirse-Bier in den Strom, doch die Gottheit des Flusses, erzürnt durch diesen Frevel, tötete auf der Stelle den gesamten Stamm. Nur ein Knabe und eine alte Frau entgingen der Vernichtung.

Die Frau nahm sich des Knaben an, und als er schließlich zum Manne gereift war, heiratete er ⁷, und seine Nachkommen lebten wiederum im Dorfe Phedap. Doch der Stamm gelangte nie wieder zur Blüte, was dem Unwillen der Flußgottheit zugeschrieben wurde, die trotz der ihr von späteren Generationen der Na ong dargebrachten Opfer sich nicht mehr besänftigen ließ. Als schließlich nur mehr wenige der Na ong am Leben waren, beschloß vor etwa 60 Jahren einer von ihnen, Kaipal genannt, die Siedlung am Ufer des Mai-khola zu verlassen und mit seiner Familie in die Nähe des Ortes zu ziehen, wo seine Urahnen einst den Turm bauten; denn hier - so meinte er - würde der Rest des Stammes dem Zorn der Flußgottheit entgehen und unter dem Schutze der Ahnengeister erneut an Zahl gewinnen. Sein Sohn Karandal, der Überlieferer dieser Legende, heiratete späterhin an der neu bezogenen Wohnstätte ein Limbu-Mädchen aus der Sippe der Nalboma; dieser Ehe entsprossen vier Söhne und drei Töchter, die jedoch offenbar in den Familien der benachbarten Limbu aufgingen, womit der Stamm der Na ong wohl nunmehr endgültig zum Erlöschen kam.

Der Ort, an welchem der Legende nach der Bau des Turmes vorgenommen wurde, ist ein etwa 2 km² großes Plateau, das im westlichen Teil Sikkims, nahe der indisch-nepalesischen Grenze, liegt. Im Westen wird es von einer Bergkette abgeschirmt, während zwei Flüsse es nach dem Süden und dem Nordosten abgrenzen. In der tief zerklüfteten Landschaft der Vorgebirge des Himalaya ist eine ebene Fläche von solchem Ausmaß eine große Seltenheit, und das Plateau ist daher von weitem gut sichtbar. Es wurde nunmehr fast zur Gänze in ein Reisfeld verwandelt, und nur seine äußerste östliche Ecke, die den Namen Phugamdin trägt und wo der Sage nach die erste Siedlung der Na ong entstand, ist unbebaut und dient heute den Limbu, die in neuerer Zeit in diesem Teil Sikkims ansässig wurden, als Bestattungsort ⁸.

Im Laufe der auf dem Plateau vorgenommenen Feldarbeiten, insbesondere während des im Frühjahr durchgeführten Umpflügens, werden immer wieder Tonscherben aufgefunden; verständlicherweise werden diese Funde von den Ortsansässigen mit der Turmbau-Legende in Zusammenhang gebracht. Trotz wiederholter Umfragen gelang es mir bis zum Augenblick noch nicht, einige der Funde zur näheren Untersuchung zu erhalten; es scheint, daß die ausgegrabenen Scherben von der Bevölkerung achtlos weggeworfen werden.

⁷ Die Überlieferung teilt nicht mit, welchem Stamme seine Frau angehörte.

⁸ Eine wissenschaftliche Beschreibung der Begräbnisarten der Limbu - wie eine eingehende Untersuchung dieses Stammes überhaupt - steht leider noch aus. Den bisher vorliegenden Berichten nach werden die Toten bei den Limbu meist begraben, mitunter jedoch auch verbrannt. Zweifellos können aber die in Daramdin aufgefundenen Scherben nicht von Grabbeigaben der Limbu herrühren, denn die Lepcha - die über die Gebräuche dieses Nachbarstammes genügend unterrichtet sind - hätten in diesem Falle den Funden keine besondere Bedeutung beigemessen.

Die im tibetisch-indischen Grenzgebiet gegenwärtig herrschenden Verhältnisse machen es vorläufig unmöglich, eine länger wählende Untersuchung an Ort und Stelle, und insbesondere systematische Grabungen vorzunehmen. Ich muß mich hier daher auf die Mitteilung beschränken, daß nach Aussage der Ortsansässigen die Scherben eine deutlich gewölbte Form aufweisen und von ungewöhnlich starken, aus gebranntem Ton hergestellten Töpfen herzurühren scheinen. Ob neben Scherben vielleicht auch manchmal andere Gegenstände wie Knochen, Geräte, Waffen etc. aufgefunden werden, konnte ich bisher nicht in Erfahrung bringen.

3. Erklärungen

Abschließend möchte ich nach einer kurzen Zusammenfassung versuchen, einige Erklärungen zu dem vorher Gesagten zu geben. - Die bei vielen Völkern der Welt vorzufindenden Erzählungen von der Sintflut und dem Bau eines bis zum Himmel reichenden Turmes gehören zu den ältesten und am stärksten verwurzelten Überlieferungen auch der Lepcha. Die gegenwärtig im Umlauf befindliche Fassung der Turmbau-Legende verlegt den Ort des Geschehens auf das Plateau von Daramdin, wobei sozusagen als Beweis der Richtigkeit dieser Überlieferung mit angeführt wird, daß noch bis zum heutigen Tage die Scherben der Töpfe, aus denen der Turm gebaut worden sein soll, hier auffindbar sind. Es erscheint mir jedoch fraglich, ob die zweifellos sehr alte Turmbau-Legende auch tatsächlich immer mit den in Daramdin gemachten Funden in Zusammenhang gebracht wurde. Ich vermute vielmehr, daß erst im Laufe der seit einem Jahrhundert in diesem Gebiete intensiver durchgeführten Feldarbeiten die ersten Scherben-Funde gemacht wurden, was alsbald eine entsprechende Abänderung der Legende zur Folge hatte. Einen Anhaltspunkt für diese Vermutung bietet eine Bemerkung, die in G. B. MAINWARING, *A Grammar of the Rong (Lepcha) Language* (Calcutta 1876), einer der ältesten Veröffentlichungen über die Lepcha, enthalten ist. Die betreffende, auf p. XX der Einleitung enthaltene Mitteilung lautet: „On the top of the lofty Sung li hlo, it is said, a foolish class of Lepchas (Na ong), now extinct, endeavoured to raise a building high enough to reach the heavens. Rock and blocks of stones as the ruins are shown on the place.“

Wie ersichtlich, ist hier in der vor mehr als sieben Jahrzehnten aufgezeichneten Version der Legende weder das Plateau von Daramdin noch die Verwendung der Tontöpfe erwähnt, und der Ort der Handlung wird auf den in der Nähe von Darjeeling liegenden Berg Sung li hlo versetzt.

Eine stichhaltige Erklärung der Art und Datierung der aufgefundenen Gefäßstücke zu geben, wird erst nach eingehender Untersuchung einer größeren Anzahl der Funde abgegeben werden können. Möglicherweise rühren die Scherben von einer frühen, später in Vergessenheit geratenen Siedlung her, für deren Errichtung das geschützt liegende Plateau einen sehr günstigen Ort geboten hätte. Es wäre gleichfalls nicht ausgeschlossen, daß es sich bei diesen Siedlern um Sippschaften der Lepchas oder eine ihnen nahe verwandte Bevölkerung gehandelt hätte, die Tontöpfe als Gebrauchsgegenstände verwendete.

In diesem Zusammenhang muß ich allerdings eine Ergänzung der die Töpferei der Lepcha betreffenden Feststellung, die in G. Gorer, *Himalayan Village* (London 1938, p. 67) zu finden ist, vornehmen. Wie in dem zitierten Werk angeführt wurde, besitzt die heute in der Reservation von Zongu lebende Generation der Lepcha keine Kenntnis der Töpferkunst, weshalb im Hausgebrauch Kupfer-, Messing- und Porzellantöpfe nepalesischen, chinesischen oder gar westlichen Ursprungs Verwendung finden; diese Aussage deckt sich mit den Beobachtungen, die ich bei einem Teil der außerhalb der Reservation lebenden Lepcha machte. Daneben konnte ich jedoch auch in Erfahrung bringen, daß noch vor zwei Generationen die Töpferkunst von einzelnen, in diesem Handwerk erfahrenen Männern ausgeübt wurde, die ihrerseits die übrigen Stammesangehörigen mit den Produkten ihrer Arbeit auf dem Tauschwege versorgten. Ihre Tätigkeit scheint allerdings auf die Herstellung einer Gefäßart beschränkt gewesen zu sein, die früher unter den Lepcha Verwendung fand. Diese, als *Tang ling fyü tyók* bezeichneten Gefäße waren zumeist henkellos, kurzhalsig und im untersten Drittel am stärksten vorgewölbt; an ihrer breitesten Stelle besaßen sie einen Durchmesser von etwa 30 cm. Sie wurde ohne Hilfe einer Töpferscheibe aus Ton geformt und anschließend gebrannt. Einzelne dieser Gefäße sollen noch an einigen entlegenen Stellen Sikkims in Verwendung sein.

Auch der Gedanke, daß die Scherben von Urnen oder Grabbeigaben herrühren könnten, ist nicht von der Hand zu weisen. Sollte diese Vermutung zutreffen, dann dürfte es sich allerdings bei den einstigen Siedlern kaum um Lepcha gehandelt haben, denn soweit auf Grund meiner Untersuchungen über die alten Bestattungsbräuche der Lepcha feststellbar ist, war das Verbrennen der Toten und eine Beisetzung der Asche in Urnen oder die Sitte der Beigabe von Töpfen mit Nahrung in das Grab bei den Lepcha nicht üblich⁹.

4. Nachtrag

Bereits kurz nach Drucklegung dieser Arbeit gelang es mir, einige der im Gebiet von Daramdin aufgefundenen Topfstücke zu erhalten. In der Mehrzahl handelt es sich um kleine Scherben mit bereits stark abgerundeten Bruchseiten aus mit Glimmer durchsetztem Ton bestehend, der je nach dem Grad der Brennung in der Farbe zwischen rötlichem Braun und Grauschwarz schwankt. Die Stücke rühren von Gefäßen verschiedenster Größe her, von dünnwandigen kleinen Schalen mit nach außen umgebogenem Rand als auch von größeren Behältern mit einer Wandstärke von mehreren Zentimetern. Möglicherweise entstammen die Funde verschiedenen Siedlungsschichten; denn bei einem Teil handelt es sich um Bruchstücke von Gefäßen, die mit Hilfe einer Töpferscheibe angefertigt wurden, während andere der Scherben Reste von dickwandigen grobförmigen Töpfen sind, die mit der Hand geformt

⁹ Cf. R. NEBESKY DE WOJKOWITZ, *Ancient Funeral Ceremonies of the Lepchas*. *Eastern Anthropologist* (Lucknow) 5. 1951.

worden waren. Die weitaus größere Zahl der Funde zeigt keinerlei Verzierungen, und nur auf einigen wenigen Stücken sind drei dunkelfarbige, horizontal an der Außenseite des Gefäßmundes verlaufende Streifen bemerkbar, während ein einziges kleines Stück ein nur schlecht sichtbares eingeritztes und ungefärbtes Wolfszahnmuster aufweist.

Über die Besiedlung des Daramdin-Plateaus konnte ich auch noch einige Angaben von den in diesem Gebiet lebenden Angehörigen des Limbu-Volkes bekommen. Ihrer Behauptung nach haben Limbu-Ackerbauer zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts den Urwald gerodet, der weite Teile dieser Hochebene bedeckte, und bei diesen Arbeiten stießen sie auf einen verfallenen Steinturm, den sie abtrugen, um Platz für ein Feld zu schaffen. - Es scheint sich um einen der alten steinernen Wachttürme gehandelt zu haben, von denen heute noch einige in diesem Teil des nepalesisch-tibetischen Grenzgebietes stehen, und die möglicherweise Befestigungen aus der Zeit des Großtibetischen Reiches (9. Jh. n. Chr.) sind.

Die ortsansässigen Limbu behaupten weiters, daß auch in den Tälern der zwei das Gebiet von Daramdin begrenzenden Flüsse öfters Topfscherben zu finden sind, die dorthin von dem höhergelegenen Plateau her vom Regen herabgeschwemmt werden.

