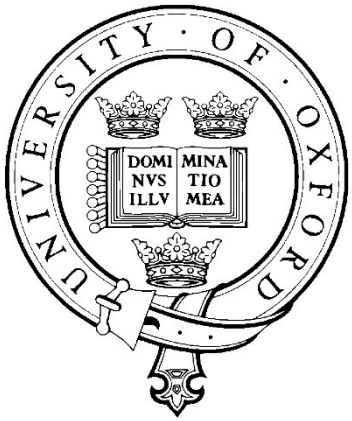
Dangkhar: The *rgyal sa* of Spiti

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Yannick LAURENT

Wolfson College

University of Oxford

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ABSTRACT

The river valley of Spiti is located at the western end of the Tibetan plateau in what is today the Indian hill state of Himachal Pradesh. From its incorporation into the Tibetan Empire in the 7th century until its annexation by British India in 1846, the Spiti Valley occupied a peripheral yet significant geographical position within the Western Himalayas by allowing contacts and cultural exchange between Tibet, Ladakh, and the Indian sub-continent. During this time, the Dangkhar settlement emerged as the political centre of this border valley. Based on a non-invasive archaeological investigation of its vestiges, together with an analysis of epigraphic and historical sources, this thesis describes and examines the constitutive elements of this site from its territory to its religious and political institutions. Over time, the Dangkhar settlement came to be referred to as the *rgyal sa* of Spiti, meaning 'royal seat' or 'capital', a Tibetan term that captures the long and singular history of this endangered heritage site. Sitting astride some of the most important trade and communication routes of the Western Himalayas, the Spiti Valley played a major role in both the diffusion of ideas and the transfer of goods within the Indo-Tibetan border regions. In tracing both local and trans-regional patterns of continuity and change, this research contributes to refining a periodisation scheme which illuminates the various political, religious, and economic interactions which have shaped the history of the Western Himalayas. As a result, this thesis presents the most detailed historical overview of Spiti to date.

To the people of Dangkhar

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Lastly, I wish to thank my parents and my beloved partner, Yury, without whose love and support this Himalayan journey would have been impossible.

Tibetan words given in this work are transcribed according to the Extended Wylie Tibetan System (EWTS). Capitalisation of root letters is used for proper nouns and titles of written works, unless given in parenthesis. Historical names are always given in transliteration with dates in brackets at their first mention in the text for each chapter. In some cases, however, I have retained the Romanised phonetic version of a word for well-known proper nouns commonly found in English texts such as, for example, Ngari (*mnga' ris*), Tashi Lhunpo (*bkra shis lhun po*), Gelukpa (*dge lugs pa*), Panchen Lama (*paṇ chen bla ma*).

The primary exception for using Wylie transliteration is in the case of place names, for which there are often many spelling variants. In Spiti, most place names possess more than one Tibetan spelling and are also known under a variety of Romanised forms; such as, for instance, the village of Kyi, Ki, Kee, or Key (*dkyil*, *skyes*). Given the complexity of this problem, it was felt preferable to adopt a single Tibetan transliteration and/or Romanized version whenever possible. The same applies to the main topic of this dissertation. Unless specified, the settlement under review is referred to as 'Dangkhar'. Likewise, the old monastery of this settlement is mentioned under the name 'Lagope Monastery'. Both names and their spelling variants are discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

Geographical designations

Western Himalayas	Mountain region covering Western Tibet, Himachal Pradesh, and Kashmir
Western Tibet	Tibetan area of shared linguistic and cultural influence comprised of West Tibet, Upper Kinnaur, Spiti, Lahaul, Zanskar, Ruthok, Ladakh, and Baltistan
West Tibet	Western part of gTsang, Guge, Purang, and Ruthok
Ngari	Guge, Purang, and Ruthok

Abbreviations

BCE	"Before the Common Era"
CE	"Common Era"
BP	"Before Present" means before 1950. The most commonly used convention in radiocarbon dating.
fig.	"figure" As in figure 10 in Appendix 4 (fig. 4.10)
b.	"birth"
c.	"*circa*"
d.	"death"
r.	"reign"
m.a.s.l.	"meters above sea level"

INTRODUCTION

> *The concept of a historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development, or a historic event.*
>
> *A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs.*
>
> *The restoration in any case must be preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument.*
>
> *The Venice Charter* (1964)

This doctoral dissertation investigates the history of a Himalayan settlement located in the Spiti Valley (Himachal Pradesh, India) based on a non-invasive archaeological examination of its vestiges, together with a historical analysis of epigraphic and written sources collected by the author during fieldwork. With this end in mind, the core of the present study traces the socio-economic, religious and political background of the Dangkhar settlement, a site typically described by its inhabitants today as 'the former capital of Spiti'. Based on new historical data, this study of Dangkhar attempts to move beyond the earlier historiography on the region in order to provide a more nuanced historical survey of the Spiti Valley.

Endangered cultural heritage and the Save Dangkhar *project*

In 2006, the World Monuments Fund listed the ancient monastery of Dangkhar in Spiti as an imperilled cultural heritage site, based on its advanced state of deterioration caused by geotechnical

instability as well as neglect and inadequate maintenance.[1] Precariously situated atop a two hundred metre cliff, this dilapidated edifice appears to be on the verge of collapsing, a feeling reinforced by the dramatic sight of ruined buildings and rubble in its immediate vicinity. Over the last two hundred years or so, the whole site of Dangkhar has changed quite dramatically. Old photographs taken in the 1860s illustrate all too clearly the ravages of time, along with the effects of erosion, seismic activity, and climate change on its historic monuments. In recent times, the village has extended eastwards at the foot of the escarpment and a new monastic complex named Dangkhar Tashi Chöling (*brag mkhar bkra shis chos gling*) has been established on firmer ground, leaving the old building exposed and subject to only the most minimal maintenance.

Benefiting from the attention received by the World Monuments Fund, the monastic community of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling has taken steps to raise awareness about the imminent danger posed to this historic site. In the years that followed, domestic and international NGOs dedicated to the conservation of cultural heritage approached the official and legal custodians of the old monastery of Dangkhar with project proposals of varying lengths, costs, and soundness. It is in this context that Markus Weisskopf, a Swiss entrepreneur and philanthropist, decided, upon his return from a trip to Spiti in the autumn of 2007, to direct financial and technical support for the study and safeguarding of its Buddhist architectural heritage. Taking counsel from the art historian and Tibetologist Dr Christian Luczanits (SOAS), a renovation project was assembled in collaboration with the Graz University of Technology in 2009.[2] For more than fifteen years, the Institute of Architectural Theory, Art History and Cultural Studies headed by Professor Holger Neuwirth, has been at the forefront of the effort to document and preserve the religious architecture of the Western Himalayas. Overall, Neuwirth and his teams have studied no less than fifty-seven buildings from eighteen different sites, culminating in one

[1] https://www.wmf.org/project/dhangkar-gompa .

[2] Amongst alternative initiatives, Kishore Thukaral's project proposal, "Restoration, Remediation, and Retrofitting" of the Dangkhar Monastery Complex ran parallel to the *Save Dangkhar* project I worked on. Benefitting from the Graz documentation, a study team composed of Rajendra Desai (structural engineer), Prof. K.S. Jagadish (structural engineer), Rupal Desai (architect), and R.K. Mukerji (geologist) carried out preliminary investigations and their results were also presented to Markus Weisskopf for consideration in 2011.

of the most comprehensive data pools for the typological classification and systematic interpretation of early Buddhist monuments from West Tibet, Ladakh, and Spiti.[3]

In the summer of 2010, preliminary fieldwork was conducted under the auspices of the *Save Dangkhar* project established by M. Weisskopf.[4] It aimed at providing a complete architectural documentation of the old monastic complex that would serve as the basis for planning future restoration work. Thanks to Luczanits, I was invited to join this project and welcomed Neuwirth and his team, composed of Carmen Auer and Dieter Bauer, in New Delhi, after which we all headed for the Indo-Tibetan border valley of Spiti where I acted as facilitator and interpreter. Once there, we meticulously surveyed and photographed the entire site, including both interior spaces and outdoor architectural features.

In accordance with the *International Charter for Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* ratified in Venice in 1964, a historic monument is regarded as "inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs", and its preservation and restoration must therefore be "preceded and followed by an archaeological and historical study of the monument".[5] It was therefore in my capacity as archaeologist that I started to assess the relevance of the architectural vestiges of the old monastic complex together with the position of Dangkhar within the historical development of the region.[6] As a cultural heritage site, however, the old monastic complex was more than just an imperilled Buddhist monastery, due to the fact that the Dangkhar settlement is also believed to have been the former capital of Spiti according to the inhabitants of this valley. For that reason, a large fortified building standing at the top of the ridge is regarded as the old residence of the so-called 'king' of Spiti thereby attesting somehow to the political significance of this Himalayan settlement. Living in India at the time, I had already had the opportunity to travel to Spiti but knew very little about its history beyond general knowledge concerning the monastery of Tabo and the 'Renaissance of Buddhism' in Western Tibet. There was thus something irresistibly attractive

[3] https://www.archresearch.tugraz.at/project/project.html .
[4] http://www.savedangkhar.com/ and its institutional platform http://www.savedangkhar.tugraz.at/ .
[5] *Venice Charter*, articles 7 and 9; see https://www.icomos.org/charters/venice_e.pdf .
[6] The author obtained a Master's degree in Greek Archaeology from the University of Lausanne in 2003.

about the Dangkhar site with its old monastic complex, its fort, and its reputation as the former political centre of the valley.

As a precondition for the mission set up by the *Save Dangkhar* project, the historical and archaeological study of the old monastery received approval from the monastic community of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling. A historic monument to some, and sacred architecture to others, the success of the renovation project, along with my own research, rested on a close and sincere collaboration with local communities. Having already experienced a number of well-meant but ultimately fruitless initiatives to save their cultural heritage, the monks at Tashi Chöling repeatedly and often anxiously expressed their support for the project over the years, showing the greatest kindness and assistance during my visits. By the end of the first period of fieldwork, my professional commitment had turned into a personal pledge. As such, this work is dedicated to the monks of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling in fulfilment of my promise.

A second period of fieldwork took place in the following summer of 2011. This time, it brought together an international team of architects from Austria and India, in collaboration with engineering geology experts from the Institute of Applied Geosciences (Graz), and a team of restorers from the University of Applied Arts (Vienna). The architectural documentation initiated in 2010 was completed and the first steps to be taken towards the renovation of the main building were discussed. Meanwhile, the geological assessment of the site confirmed the precarious position of the old monastic complex by revealing the formation process of its rugged topography and steep cliffs. Restorers for their part thoroughly assessed the condition of all murals preserved inside the assembly hall and in the upper temple, preparing the ground for their preservation and possible restoration. As for myself, I continued the archaeological and visual documentation of the old complex along with the digitalisation of its artwork and archives, assisted, as always, by the monks of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling. In the end, the interdisciplinary cooperation between architects, geologists, restorers, and the monks led to a number of fieldwork reports and specialised articles, culminating in the *Save Dangkhar* team publishing *The Ancient Monastic Complex of Dangkhar* in 2013.[7]

[7] Most reports and articles were made available online and printed copies were distributed to the monks of Dangkhar. Likewise, the 2010 fieldwork report along with my research article about the eighth-century Buddha

However, after two successful fieldtrips and a thorough architectural and geotechnical documentation, the *Save Dangkhar* project suddenly faced unexpected challenges. As the execution plans for a first renovation phase required legal assistance and implementation at regional and domestic levels, a room-by-room restoration schedule was worked out in close collaboration with the Romi Khosla Design Studios from New Delhi.[8] Regrettably, skyrocketing budget projections were accompanied by slow decision-making processes and growing problems of effective communication between the parties involved. As a result, with the negotiations stagnating, the first renovation phase scheduled for the summer of 2013 never came to fruition. With the renovation project thus falling apart despite my own repeated attempts to bring all the parties together, I continued my individual work on Dangkhar and submitted a DPhil research proposal on the subject to the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford.

In the years that followed, I conducted additional field research in the summers of 2014, 2016, and 2018. In the periods in-between, a considerable amount of time was allocated to post-fieldwork analysis and the painstaking study of the local archives from Dangkhar. These documents were then further discussed with Professor Dieter Schuh, the world's foremost expert on Tibetan legal and diplomatic literature, during two stays at the International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies (IITBS GmbH) in Andiast, Switzerland, in 2015 and 2017. It was also during that period that I took a close interest in Henry Lee Shuttleworth's papers at the British Library. A member of the Indian Civil Service and Orientalist, Shuttleworth oversaw the administration of Spiti on behalf of the British Indian Government in the first quarter of the 20th century and undertook the writing of the first ever *History of Spiti*, the manuscript of which was never published.

With a growing amount of new data and primary sources accumulated during those years, I decided to convene an international conference dedicated entirely and exclusively to the study of the border river valley of Spiti. The first of its kind, *The Spiti Valley: Recovering the Past and Exploring*

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bronze from Dangkhar were translated into Tibetan for the benefit of the community. The *Save Dangkhar* project secured full funding for *The Ancient Monastic Complex of Dangkhar*. It is the first volume of a series dedicated to *Buddhist Architecture in the Western Himalayas* published by the Graz University of Technology; see NEUWIRTH & AUER 2013.

[8] The Romi Khosla Design Studios is a consultancy led by architects Romi and Martand Khosla. The former is the author of a pioneering work on Buddhist architecture in the Western Himalayas; see KHOSLA 1979.

the Present conference was held in Oxford under the auspices of the Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Centre at Wolfson College on the 6th and 7th of May, 2016. It brought together about twenty scholars and researchers from the fields of archaeology, history, linguistics, architecture, art conservation, anthropology, and art history. By September of the following year, I had co-edited the conference proceedings volume, constituting the latest research available on Spiti. Thanks to the generous assistance of the *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, the digital publication of these proceedings can be accessed free of charge at all times and in all places, be it from Oxfordshire or from the barren dales of Spiti.[9]

Chapter summary

In spite of having been recognised as one of the most imperilled cultural heritage sites in the world, no comprehensive study of the Dangkhar site has assessed the relevance of its archaeological vestiges and its historic position as the former capital of Spiti. The present work is an attempt to remedy this situation. The main volume of the dissertation is organised in four chapters. This is complemented by a second volume comprising eight appendices of supporting materials; as archaeologists know all too well, context is everything.

The first chapter provides a survey and evaluation of the available secondary literature on Spiti. It is divided into an early research section, which reviews information recorded in colonial literature and pioneering studies, and a later research section, which discusses more historically grounded academic work produced in the past few decades. It also introduces the main types of available source materials, both visual and textual.

As a preamble to the analysis of the Dangkhar settlement, the second chapter locates the Spiti Valley within the geographical context and cultural milieu of the Western Himalayas. The second part of this chapter focuses on the history of the Indo-Tibetan border region of Western Tibet. It explores the etymological meaning of the place name 'Spiti' and reviews its different spelling variants in Tibetan language as well as their occurrences in epigraphic and literary sources. By doing so, it

[9] See LAURENT & PRITZKER 2017.

provides a larger historical context for understanding the geographical delimitations and territorial organisation assumed by Spiti and adjacent political entities through the centuries.

The third chapter constitutes the core of this thesis on the former capital and royal seat (*rgyal sa*) of Spiti. It presents and discusses the constitutive elements of the Dangkhar settlement: its territory and boundaries, cultivation and residential areas, district fort, and monastic complex. It seeks to trace the origin and historical development of these features based on material evidence, epigraphic sources, and textual information gathered during fieldwork. The analysis of these constitutive elements is equally concerned with the way in which the socio-economic, religious, and political conditions evolved through time thereby shedding new light on the status and function assumed by the site of Dangkhar.

The analysis of the Dangkhar settlement thus provides the basis for a re-evaluation of the history of the Spiti Valley. The fourth and last chapter of this work situates the royal seat and capital of Spiti in the wider historical context of the Western Himalayas. Paying attention to politico-religious forces and the institutions driving them, a new periodization scheme is introduced here to give a chronological overview of Spiti's history, reflecting local patterns of continuity and change. It traces the most significant events, religious and political actors, and economic developments which affected Dangkhar, Spiti, and the Indo-Tibetan border regions of the Western Himalayas more broadly, for each major period under review.

A final section offers some concluding remarks along with a discussion informed by the field of border studies.

CHAPTER ONE

PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND NEW MATERIAL FOR THE STUDY OF SPITI

> *In the absence of any local annals, many gaps in the history of the valley still remain to be filled, despite the fact that within the last twenty-five years, A.H. Francke and two or three local officials or missionaries have brought to light much new material, literary and otherwise, dating back to the eleventh century.*
>
> Henry Lee Shuttleworth (1930s)

In the 1930s Henry Lee Shuttleworth (1882–1960) had the ambition to write the first ever 'History of Spiti', but his manuscript was never completed. An Orientalist and former member of the Indian Civil Service, Shuttleworth rightly remarked that the history of the Spiti Valley suffered from serious gaps. Most importantly, he regretted the paucity of available primary sources. Although some later scholars have looked into the history of this region, Shuttleworth's assessment above remained largely unchallenged until very recently. An important observation about the state of the field of Spiti research must therefore be emphasised from the outset: that recent research on Spiti has tended to rely heavily on colonial-era ethnographic work based on oral informants to compensate for the absence of Tibetan primary sources. Historical research has also focused almost exclusively on the period of the late 10th-11th centuries, while taking relatively little interest in later periods. Such research has predominantly revolved around the study of Tabo, as a repository of courtly art and early Buddhist texts, while paying only residual attention to other sites. As a result, the broader history of Spiti remained understudied and patchy.

In light of this, it is fair to say that the history of the Dangkhar settlement has not been the subject of any serious scholarly enquiry before today. This so-called capital of Spiti did not go completely unnoticed, but was only discussed tangentially in both early and later research. However, a certain amount of historical information about the border valley of Spiti has been gathered by a variety of individuals and organisations over the past hundred years or so. For the sake of convenience, these may be divided into two categories: a) early works composed by representatives of European colonial powers, and b) later research conducted by researchers falling under the loose definition of Tibetologist (i.e. archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, and art historians). After a survey of these, the chapter is then concluded with a brief presentation of the further historical sources and archaeological material collected in the course of my own research. These data form a solid working base upon which it is hoped further research may be built in the future.

1.1 Early Research (1819–1935)

The nineteenth century documenting of the Spiti Valley was inseparable from the colonial administrative history of the Indian subcontinent. Access to and control of the Western Himalayas were goals firmly embedded in the commercial interests and political ambitions of British India, and required the participation of empire-building explorers. Men of many hats, these pioneering figures were almost exclusively employed as British military officers or Indian civil servants. A brief review of their presence and activity in Spiti will help to underline the cumulative nature of the information recorded about the region in the 19th century. Their written accounts not only contain a wide range of historical observations, but also offer detailed snapshots of the cultural and social life of Spiti in this period. The information provided by the accounts of colonial officers is also sometimes echoed in the works of other European travellers. These men–and one woman–often maintained complex relationships with the localities and cultures described in their narratives in which scientific exploration, missionary activity, and romanticism coexisted. However dated these colonial-era accounts may appear today, they still provide a lot of background information about Spiti in the not too distant past, which is useful for our investigation of the Dangkhar settlement.

1.1.1 Colonial accounts and narratives (1819–1847)

The first group of men to venture to Spiti did so between 1821 and 1846 when the border valley belonged to the Kingdom of Ladakh. Though the intentions of these men included some genuine scientific concerns, their expeditions were usually supported financially by the East India Company as part of its efforts to extend its commercial contacts into Tibet and Inner Asia, which depended on the exploration and extensive survey of those territories bordering West Tibet.

James D. Herbert (d.1833)

A first survey in the Indo-Tibetan border regions was conducted in 1819. Led by James D. Herbert, the then Deputy Surveyor General of Bengal, the overt purpose of this expedition was to determine the course of the Sutlej River in the hill state of Bashahr-Kinnaur 'within the limits of the British authority'. Herbert's cartographic expedition did not cover the Spiti Valley. However, having reached the junction of the Sutlej and Spiti rivers, he obtained information about the settlements located upstream up to the 'fort of Dankar'.[1]

Alexander Gerard (1792–1839) and James Gilbert Gerard (1793–1835)

Captain Alexander Gerard and his brother, the military surgeon James Gilbert Gerard, were the first Europeans to set foot in Spiti itself. Several accounts of their expedition were published between 1824 and 1842.[2] After an initial exploration of the Sutlej Valley in 1818, Alexander Gerard resumed his cartographical surveys with the help of his brother in 1821. Hoping to penetrate further into what they described as 'Chinese Tartary', they were stopped by Tibetan frontier guards brandishing a written order apparently issued by the district governor of Gartok. Turned back once more further north, their misfortune marked the beginning of a long series of courteous yet unyielding rebuffs from the Tibetan authorities preventing foreigners from entering West Tibet. Forced to abandon their plans, they fell back on Spiti situated only a day's march away, where they conducted an eight-day survey of the lower valley before heading back to Bashahr-Kinnaur (fig. 2.1). For the first time, the position of Dangkhar was

[1] HERBERT 1825.
[2] A. GERARD 1824; J.G. GERARD 1833; A. GERARD 1841; A. GERARD 1842.

reported on a map at the exact latitude of 32° 5' 30'', while a fairly accurate altitude of 13,014 feet (i.e. 3966 m.a.s.l.) was calculated using a barometric tube. Keeping an eye out for the local political and economic stakeholders, Captain Gerard also noted that there was a governor posted in Dangkhar representing the interests of the King of Ladakh, though his local authority was little more than nominal provided the punctual payment of tribute.

George Trebeck (1800–1825)

In the summer of 1822 George Trebeck was sent on a reconnaissance mission to Spiti by William Moorcroft (1767–1825). His stay in Dangkhar was by all accounts the longest time spent in the so-called capital of Spiti by any European in the 19th-early 20th centuries. As a result, Moorcroft's chapter on the *Excursion of Mr. Trebeck to Piti* is an unparalleled source of information and provides much grist to the mill for historical research on the settlement.[3] The young geographer and draftsman also made the first drawing of Dangkhar (fig. 3.1). This was later reworked by Louis Haghe (1806–1885) and reproduced as a lithograph in Moorcroft's work published in 1841. The very same year another drawing of this settlement was printed in Paris. This was the work of Victor Jacquemont (see below) which though lacking Trebeck's precision, nonetheless captured the essential layout and features of the site (fig. 3.2). These two images were the earliest visual depictions of Dangkhar to reach a Western audience. In the summer of 1853, Conway Mordaunt Shipley (1824–1888) painted several watercolours during a tour of the Western Himalayas, an expeditition that otherwise we know very little about.[4] At least two other paintings depicted the capital of the 'Piti or Spiti district', while many others showed various landscapes, villages, and scenes of daily life (fig. 3.3-3.5).

Victor Vincelas Jacquemont (1801–1832)

The flamboyant Victor Jacquemont toured Spiti in the late summer of 1830. A French botanist and geologist, Jacquemont had been invited to collect plants and specimens from India on behalf of the

[3] MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841.

[4] Lieutenant C. Shipley travelled extensively through the regions of Kinnaur, Spiti, Ladakh, Baltistan, and Kashmir, during which he painted a great number of watercolours. Two paintings depict Dangkhar exclusively, while some buildings of the capital can also be seen in the background of *Two coolies between Pok and Dunkur*. Most of his watercolours are accompanied by informative captions; see SHIPLEY 1854.

Jardin des Plantes in Paris. His *Voyage dans l'Inde pendant les années 1828–1832* in six large volumes was published posthumously in the early 1840s.[5] In it, Jacquemont's grand narrative is primarily concerned with botanical and geological observation, but it also offers valuable insights into the customs, institutions, languages, and economy of the regions he explored. The account of his journey is augmented by an impressive collection of private correspondence addressed to his friends and relatives, including letters composed in Spiti and Upper Kinnaur from which some useful information can be gleaned.[6]

Thomas Hutton (1806–1875)

In 1838, Lieutenant Thomas Hutton undertook an expedition into the Spiti Valley on behalf of the Asiatic Society of Bengal with the overt purpose of determining the geological formation of those regions. Upon return, his lengthy journal was divided into three parts and a geological report, all of which were published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* between 1839 and 1841.[7] For the most part, this travelogue is a pastiche of landscape descriptions, botanical references, ethnographic observations, political analyses, and sudden flights of poetry. Hutton's journal provides a valuable testimony for Spiti's political and economic history because throughout his journey he was witness to how deeply enmeshed these regions were in the trans-Himalayan trade in the much sought-after and lucrative pashm wool. The 'province of Spiti', however modest in size and economic value, was thus part of a wider network of trading routes connecting Ladakh, Kashmir, West Tibet, and Bashahr. In this particular context, Dangkhar served as a local mart for grain and wool under the supervision of the local authorities. The prospect of lucrative commercial opportunities and direct access to Tibet presented here, at the doorstep of British India, would lead to a realignment of political forces, further expeditions and, most importantly, a redefinition of borders.

[5] JACQUEMONT 1841. His Himalayan account and accompanying plates are found in volume 2.
[6] Letter LX was written at Tashigang in Upper Kinnaur. From Spiti, letter LXI was written near Gyungül, while letters LXII and LXII were sent from Dangkhar. In letter LXVIII, written from Karnal, Jacquemont reflects upon his entire Himalayan trip; see JACQUEMONT 1877.
[7] HUTTON 1839; HUTTON 1840; HUTTON 1841.

Joseph Davey Cunningham (1812–1851) and Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893)

The Cunningham missions to the Western Himalayas represent a defining moment in the documenting of the regions under review. The brothers Joseph and Alexander, both of whom were army officers in the East India Company, had gained a reputation as authorities in Punjabi and Himalayan history through their expertise in Sikh and Ladakhi cultures. Following the annexation of Kulu and Spiti by Gulab Singh in 1841, Joseph Cunningham was despatched to Bashahr-Kinnaur to monitor the situation along the border with Tibet. He is thought to have been in post for almost a year, including the winter of 1841-42, during which he became familiar with the work of his predecessors. As an official British agent, Cunningham was able to access local ledgers and trade reports. He also composed a multilingual English-Tibetan-Kinnauri glossary which was then revised and significantly extended by his brother.[8]

In 1846, Spiti was officially annexed by British India and its revenues were collected by the Raja of Bashahr, at least for a while. "The various claims on the people of Pitti," commented Cunningham, "are a good specimen of the complicated relations of the different districts along the Snowy Range, notwithstanding the approximation of the large and consolidated empires of England and China".[9] In 1846 and 1847, two commissions were thus appointed to confirm the ancient frontier between Tibet and Ladakh, and to define the boundaries between the respective territories of Gulab Singh and the British.[10] In both instances Alexander Cunningham took an active part in the process,

[8] The drafting of a multilingual glossary and phrasebook had already been undertaken by Herbert in a more modest and less systematic way; see HERBERT 1825: 417–422.

[9] J.D. CUNNINGHAM 1844: 212.

[10] The first boundary commission was conducted by Joseph Cunningham and Patrick Alexander Vans Agnew (1822–1848) who established the boundaries of Lahaul and Spiti. The second commission was led by Joseph Cunningham and included Thomas Thomson (1817–1878) and Henry Strachey (1816–1912) who had just returned from an unofficial expedition to Lake Manasarovar in West Tibet. The situation on the eve of this important territorial reorganisation is summed up by Alexander Cunningham in the introduction to his work on Ladakh: "Early in 1846, when the result of the first Sikh war had made Raja Guláb Sing the undisputed master of Ladák and its dependencies, and he had no longer to guard himself against the power of the Sikh chiefs, it seemed not improbable that the hope of plunder and the desire of revenge might tempt him to repeat the expedition of 1841 into Lhasan territory. Such an occurrence would at once have stopped the importation of shawl wool into our territory, and have closed whole of the petty commerce of our hill states with Tibet. It was possible also that our peaceful relations with the Chinese emperor might be considerably embarrassed by his Celestial Majesty's ignorance of any distinction between the rulers of India and the rulers of Kashmir. As it seemed desirable to prevent the chance of such an occurrence, the British Government determined to remove the most common cause of all disputes in the East – an unsettled boundary. For this purpose two officers were deputed, in August 1846, to the Tibetan frontier of Ladák, to ascertain the ancient boundaries between the two countries, and to lay down the boundary between the British territories and those of Mahárája Guláb Sing. The settlement of this boundary was one of some importance to the hill states (…) which received all its shawl wool from the traders of the eastern hill states, and not from Kashmir. Immediately after the war, I had pointed out that, by giving up to the Mahárája Guláb

conducting a reconnaissance survey of the areas of Kulu, Lahaul, and Rupshu. An account of his trip was subsequently published, albeit of little interest for this thesis as Alexander did not himself travel to Spiti.[11] His work on Ladakh however includes substantial information about the southern district of Spiti.[12]

Thomas Thomson (1817–1878)

Together with Joseph Cunningham, Thomas Thomson was one of the three British commissioners appointed in 1847 to define the boundaries of the Indo-Tibetan border regions. As a result of his appointment Thomson spent a year travelling across the regions of Kinnaur, Spiti, Ladakh, Baltistan, and Kashmir. From his peregrinations he brought back an account of nearly five hundred pages mostly concerned with the botany and geology of the Western Himalayas.[13] His prosaic work offers little more than an extensive description of its flora and the exact number of trees encountered in each village.

From Gerard's 1821 topographical survey to the boundary commissions in 1846-47, early travellers reporting on Spiti had directly or indirectly taken part in a commercial enterprise designed essentially, but not exclusively, to control trading activities and obtain the monopoly in the supply of pashm wool. As explorers, natural scientists, but above all as military officers, there was no uncertainty as to whom these men were accountable to, allowing Alexander Cunningham to state quite clearly: "Ladák is divided politically between Maharaja Guláb Sing and the East-India Company. To the former belong all the northern districts, to the latter only the southern districts of Lahaul and Spiti".[14] Likewise, in accordance with a comment reportedly made to Lord William Bentinck (1774–1839), the then

Sing the southern dependencies of Ladák, we had actually interposed a rival territory between our own provinces on the Sutluj and the shawl wool districts of Cháng-Tháng [i.e. *byang thang*]. The southern boundary of Spiti was, in fact, not more than thirty miles from Rámpur, on the Sutluj. As the annual revenue of the Spiti district, derived from all sources, does not amount to more than seven hundred rupees, no difficulty was experienced in making an exchange of territory with Mahárája Guláb Sing, and Spiti was added to the British dominions. It then became necessary to define the northern boundary of Spiti, with the other districts of Ladák"; see A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 12–13.

[11] A. CUNNINGHAM 1848a.

[12] A. CUNNINGHAM 1854.

[13] THOMSON 1852.

[14] A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 18.

Governor General of India, no European government would have gone to such expense as that of the Company for scientific research.[15]

1.1.2 British settlement literature (1847–1912)

The second important group of publications are those compiled by settlement officials after Spiti was ceded to British India at the conclusion of the First Anglo-Sikh war in 1846. With the incorporation of Spiti into the British Indian province of Punjab, and more or less until Indian Independence in 1947, the administration of British hill territories demanded periodic assessments of the districts in the form of assessment reports, settlement reports, district gazetteers, and codes of customary law. The establishment of this new political order in the region prompted a massive literature representing the cumulative colonial effort to detail every socio-economic factor pertaining to land revenues. Generally subsumed under the rubric 'settlement literature',[16] a great deal of information concerning Spiti can be found in such publications, mostly related to revenue assessment operations in the District of Kangra to which Spiti had been appended.

William Edmund Hay (1805–1879)

In 1847, Major William Hay was appointed Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, a sub-division of the Kangra District that included the three contiguous regions of Kulu, Lahaul, and Spiti. Taking up his position at the old castle of Nagar, the Scottish officer was not only compelled to inspect each and every settlement in these areas, but also to "collect facts with a view to a future Revenue Settlement". Having spent the winter in Spiti, his observations were published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* the following year.[17] Hay's *Report on the Valley of Spiti* is quite succinct, yet deserves consideration. In many respects, it pre-empts the content of later more detailed assessments aimed at identifying the social structures, rural economy, land rights, and stakeholders involved in land revenue.

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[15] "Je me rappelle avoir entendu dire à lord William Bentinck qu'il n'y avait pas de gouvernement européen qui eût fait autant de dépenses que celui de la Compagnie pour des travaux scientifique"; see JACQUEMONT 1877: 2: 3–4.
[16] For a comprehensive presentation and exhaustive bibliography of the settlement literature of Greater Punjab, see DEWEY 1991.
[17] HAY 1850.

The importance of Hay's activities for the history of Western Tibet has been the focus of Diana Lange's recent work on the maps of the Wise Collection. Preserved in the British Library, this collection consists of fifty-five ethnographic and cartographic drawings forming a 10-meter long panoramic view of the Tibetan plateau in the mid-19th century. During her research, Lange discovered that this anonymous set of maps and illustrations had been commissioned by Hay during his tenure in Kulu, while the amateur yet ingenious cartographer turned out to be a travelling Buddhist monk from Lhasa.[18] For many of Hay's contemporaries, the western Indo-Tibetan border region constituted the obvious entry point for a diplomatic rapprochement with Tibet and commercial expansion towards China. In particular, the location of mountain passes between Bashahr-Kinnaur, Kulu, and Spiti on the one hand, and even more so those between Spiti, Ladakh, and West Tibet, were subject of particular interest for Hay.[19]

George Carnac Barnes (1818–1816)

Hay's preliminary observations were soon to be included in George Carnac Barnes' *Report on the Kangra Settlement* released in 1855.[20] Settlement reports represented the core of the settlement literature under British rule. They were the fourth type of written accounts normally produced in the course of a settlement operation. These reports constituted the final statement of a Settlement Officer published at the close of his mandate. They were made public and acquired by most libraries in England and India at the time. As such, they still represent an important source of research material for historians today. Unlike his predecessors, however, Barnes did not visit the border valley of Spiti, not even in his capacity as Settlement Officer of the Kangra District.

After the demise of the Honourable East India Company in the late 1850s, the Government of British India vied to recruit the most capable 'civilians' for careers in the Indian Civil Service (ICS). Educated in the best public schools and universities of England, the members of the ICS came to constitute the backbone of the governmental apparatus, ultimately occupying key administrative

[18] LANGE 2017a; LANGE 2017b.
[19] A list of these passes is given *in extenso* in Hay's *Report*; see HAY 1850: 429–431 and figure 2.2 in Appendix 2. On the passes between Spiti, Ladakh, and West Tibet depicted on the maps commissioned by Hay; see LANGE 2017a.
[20] BARNES 1855.

positions in the two hundred and fifty districts of British India. Described by historian Clive Dewey as "scientific administrators if not scholars-*manqué*", these field men "were more reflective, and more industrious on paper" than the military political officials recruited from the regiments of the Company who had preceded them.[21] The introduction of a literate class of civil servants was to affect the overall tone of the settlement literature. Reports produced in the 1870s and 1880s, observes Dewey, became learned treatises informed by a combination of historical and comparative methods.

James Broadwood Lyall (1839–1916)

If the reports released by Hay and Barnes were somehow embryonic with regard to the former and superficial with regard to the latter, James Lyall's *Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Kangra District* published in 1874 constituted the most detailed work on Spiti produced in the 19th century.[22] His forty-six page chapter on *Lahaul and Spiti* became a standard point of reference in the administration of the border valley. A decade later, Lyall's findings were republished in the *Gazetteer of the Punjab*,[23] and quoted almost verbatim in later settlement reports and district gazetteers.[24] During his tenure as Settlement Officer of Kangra, Lyall acquired first-hand experience of the regions under his supervision with a first trip to Spiti in 1862, followed by a second inspection of the district in 1867, during which he revised the revenue assessment established by his predecessors. Moreover, he ordered a new population census to be carried out the following year. With fifty sub-headings describing all aspects related to Lahaul and Spiti, the variety and volume of information recorded in his settlement report provided a new basis for the calculation of revenue assessments. In particular, the local importance of land rights necessitated the comprehension of the traditional socio-economic organisation of Spiti, raising questions such as the distribution of properties, the different forms of land holdings, the nature of taxes and forced labour, and the customs of inheritance and land transfer. To establish clarity in these matters landholders in Spiti were strongly encouraged to assert their rights and have their landholdings recognised by the new authorities, as a result of which traditional records and agreements written in

[21] DEWEY 1991: 24, 26.
[22] LYALL 1874.
[23] IBBETSON 1884.
[24] For instance in Diack and Coldstream's reports; see below.

Tibetan were shown to the British. Henceforth, the analysis of villages for tax-assessment purposes was based on pre-existing land rights. With the assistance of local village officials and interpreters, the distribution of land was mapped out based on ethnographic oral enquiries and historical written records.

Philip Henry Egerton (1824–1893)

Acting in his capacity as Deputy Commissioner of Kangra, Philip Henry Egerton toured Spiti for three months in 1863. The primary purpose of his visit was to establish a line of communication with the governor of West Tibet in the hope of negotiating trade agreements between British India, Inner Asia and the Chinese Empire. As such the primary focus in his account of this mission is on the movement of pashm in the wider region, within which Spiti represented a direct border between Tibetan traders and the textile manufacturers of British India. Egerton was assisted in his mission by Augustus Wilhelm Heyde (1825–1907), a German missionary from the Moravian Mission of Lahaul who acted as his interpreter. Notwithstanding Egerton's blatant colonial prejudices, the events chronicled in his *Journal of a Tour through Spiti to the Frontier of Chinese Thibet* are of great value for the study of Western Tibet in the second half of the 19th century.[25]

His contribution is most apparent in the field of photography. Egerton had been urged by his superiors to use a camera during his mission to the westernmost fringes of the Tibetan plateau. To this end, the British officer secured the services of thirty-six porters to carry his photographic equipment across the Himalayas. Egerton was officially welcomed by the Nono of Spiti who, under foreign influence, was *de jure* the valley headman and a pawn in the service of British interests. Egerton bullied the hapless Nono into producing all documents and information pertaining to the administration of the district, and then made him pose for his camera along with his elder son and other family members (fig. 3.11-3.14). His portrait was soon to be sent to the judicial authority and filed "as the picture of the man recommended by [Egerton] to carry out the Civil and Penal Codes in Spiti".[26]

[25] EGERTON 1864.

[26] "Anything more inane and helpless than the old gentleman's face on this occasion it is impossible to conceive, and Sir Robert Montgomery, when he saw it, selected it to send over to our energetic (and rather exacting) Judicial Commissioner, as a picture of the man recommended by me to carry out the Civil and Penal Codes in Spiti". Moreover, the political power exerted by the British Deputy Commissioner on his local informant went well beyond the acquisition of data for the purpose of tax collection when the former decided to provide the Nono with

Egerton stopped in Dangkhar on two separate occasions, from the 18th to the 31st of July and again from the 7th to the 10th August, when he took the first ever photographs of the settlement. His main image of the site was taken from the same angle as Trebeck and Jacquemont's earlier drawings. His photograph revealed a line of multi-storeyed buildings ascending the ridge of an impressive spur (fig. 3.6). He also photographed the local congregation of monks following what seems to have been a procession involving the ritual performance of monastic dances (fig. 3.8 and 3.9). With Egerton's richly illustrated *Journal of a Tour*, photography became instrumental to colonial documentation and would soon participate heavily in the visual recording of Anglo-Tibetan relations.[27] Incidentally, it also marked the beginning of commercial photography and the search for picturesque views of Himalayan landscapes. More than any other site, the Dangkhar settlement helped to best transpose a Victorian aesthetic onto the barren land of Spiti.[28]

Samuel Bourne (1834–1912)

With approximately 2,200 photographs, Samuel Bourne's work constitutes one of the largest collections of images from the Indian subcontinent and a precious source of visual information for the study of the Indo-Tibetan border regions. In 1866, this commercial photographer undertook his third and last photographic trip into the Himalayas in the company of Dr. George Ranken Playfair (1816–1881) and a team of eighty porters. After entering the Spiti Valley via the Kunzom Pass in the north, the party travelled along the Spiti River until it reached Dangkhar. From this trip Bourne brought back a series of about thirty images. They show views of snow-capped peaks, mountain passes, and glaciers. Others linger on the Spiti River with its indented geological formations. The experienced photographer was also captivated by the architectural landmarks of the valley such as the monastery of Kyi, the village of

a new draft constitution: "We retraced our steps up the Spiti valley, and on the 22nd reached Dhunkar, where I drew out a code of instructions to guide the Nono in all matters connected with police, justice, and the internal economy of Spiti, prescribing certain periodical returns of the simplest nature to be prepared by him and submitted through the Assistant Commissioner of Koolloo [i.e. Kulu]. If Greece or Mexico require a Constitution on the soundest and most intelligible principles, I should be happy to let them have a copy of the laws of Spiti"; see EGERTON 1864: 57–58.

[27] Half of the thirty-six photographs were taken in Spiti in 1863. These images were paradoxically believed to be the first photographs ever captured of Tibet, and several albumen prints were proudly exhibited during the Punjab Exhibition of Lahore. On Egerton's photographic work and contribution to the visual documentation of Tibet; see MERCER 1864; EGERTON 2011: iii-v; HARRIS 2016: 16–22.

[28] On Himalayan landscape photography, see HARRIS 2016: 16–32.

Kyiber, and last but not least Dangkhar itself (fig 3.15-3.18). Bourne also contributed essays to the *British Journal of Photography* and privately published *A Photographic Journey through the Higher Himalayas* in 1909.[29]

Frank Mason-Good (1839–1928)

It was Francis Frith & Co, however, who achieved mastery of the genre with a series of views of the Kulu and Spiti valleys taken in 1869.[30] The identity of the photographer responsible for capturing these spectacular views of Spiti has been a matter of speculation. Photographic historians Clark Worswick and Hugh Rayner, however, argue for their attribution to Frank Mason-Good who travelled to the remote river valley in the late autumn of 1869.[31]

The views of Dangkhar in these photographs are distinct from those taken by Mason-Good's predecessors. Instead of positioning his camera below the site, the photographer now stands level with it, or even higher, thus offering views down towards the settlement, while simultaneously overlooking the Spiti Valley in the background. The result is spectacular: in balance on the crest of the cliff, the whitewashed houses of Dangkhar stand out from the desolate landscape with the Spiti River at the bottom of the valley and snow-capped mountains all around (fig. 3.19).[32] Mason-Good did not hesitate to bring his camera close to the buildings either, capturing close-up views of the monastery and the lower part of the settlement (fig. 3.20 and 3.21). Climbing to the top of the ridge, he also brought back a remarkable view of the district fort where European travellers were often put up for the night during their tour of the valley (fig. 3.22). Turning his camera 180°, the artist then photographed the lower houses from the south with the Manirung Pass on the horizon (fig. 3.23), thus providing an almost comprehensive photographic record of the capital in the late 1860s. After the turn of the century, the

[29] Most of these documents have been republished by Hugh Rayner who has painstakingly compiled a catalogue of Bourne's Indian photographs; see BOURNE 2004: 132–188.
[30] RAYNER 2015.
[31] RAYNER 2015: x–xi.
[32] The success of this image was quickly confirmed when a wood engraving of that photograph was reproduced in *A Universal Geography: the Earth and its Inhabitants* in 1883 (fig. 3.24). The plate 'Spiti. – View of Dankar' was realised by illustrator T. Taylor and French engraver Armand-Emile-Jean-Baptiste Kohl (b.1845); see RECLUS 1883: 8: 71. Framed prints of the same are still available for sale from various electronic commerce and online print stores nowadays.

photographic documentation of Spiti intensified with the arrival of pioneering figures in the field of Tibetology.

Alfred Frederick Pollock Harcourt (1836–1910)

By the time Lyall's settlement report was released in 1874, a new Assistant Commissioner of Kulu had already taken office and completed his own account of Spiti. Captain Alfred Frederick Pollock Harcourt came from the ranks of the Bengal Infantry and embodied the traditions of British military-political officials. The report of his inspection of Spiti, which took place in the summer of 1869, was published in 1871 in the form of an ethnographic account and comparative presentation of the districts of Kulu, Lahaul, and Spiti.[33] Harcourt's lively description of these regions was in fact largely indebted to the prior works of Gerard, Hay, Theobald, Egerton, and others, from which he abundantly and courteously quoted. His writing does not possess the breadth and quality of Lyall's report which was presumably pending completion at the time.

The last two British officials whose settlement reports deserve mention below did not contribute as much as their predecessors to the further documentation of Spiti. In spite of some notable improvements, subsequent reports became a matter of routine, the purpose of which remained essentially the updating of revenue collections.

Alexander Henderson Diack (1862–1929)

Observations made by Alexander Henderson Diack, who was Settlement Officer of Kulu from 1887 to 1891, were published in the *Gazetteer of the Kangra District* only in 1899.[34] Most of his writing on Spiti followed Lyall's benchmark report with whole passages reproduced line for line from that source. However his sections dealing with agricultural yield, land management, and the general administration of the district were further refined. The second chapter of his report, devoted entirely to the history of the valley, is perhaps of greatest interest. In British colonial history, historical research conducted by officials as part of routine district assessments, was often an auxiliary tool deployed as preliminary to

[33] HARCOURT 1871a; HARCOURT 1871b.
[34] DIACK 1899.

the annexation and exploitation of lands. This process is exemplified in the British historiographic record concerning Spiti, in which we can see how preliminary observations on the history of the Indo-Tibetan border regions paved the way for annexation. Later reports then tend towards a more professional and politically disengaged scholarship. Diack's historical chapter, albeit brief and tentative, may be viewed in this regard as the starting point for the identification of coherent periods of history (i.e. periodisation).

John Coldstream (1877–1954)

John Coldstream was posted in Nagar as Settlement Officer of Kulu from 1910 to 1913 after which he served as a judge at the High Court in Lahore and was later knighted. His report on the revision of the land revenue settlement published at the end of his mandate is concise, dispassionate, and mostly concerned with taxation records.[35] It includes a 'fiscal history' of Spiti starting with its inception as a British territory in 1846. Coldstream was assisted in his task by the Moravian Reverend Friedrich Eugen Peter (1869–1945) who acted as interpreter during his visit to Spiti in 1912. Alongside his official work as Settlement Officer, Coldstream had a passion for photography with which he captured and immortalised many dramatic scenes from the cultural life of the people of Spiti.[36] Coldstream's images are now part of a large photographic archive recently acquired by the British Library.[37] It constitutes an invaluable source of visual information for the study of the region, including several images of the Dangkhar settlement (fig. 3.16-3.33).

When the next Assistant Commissioner of Kulu came in in 1917, historical research would resolutely take precedence over the dreary administrative control of the Spiti Valley. Since its first appearance on Gerard's maps in 1821, and for about a hundred years thereafter, the small border valley had been toured by about forty European travellers, with on average one foreign visitor every three years (Table 1). However, not all travellers to Spiti were officers from the East India Company or members of the ICS. A small group of individuals, natural scientists for the most part, also comprised the first

[35] COLDSTREAM 1913.
[36] For instance, the ritual ceremony of breaking a stone on someone's stomach (*pho bar rdo gcog*/*gshag*) performed by the Buchen of the Pin Valley; see SUTHERLAND 2011: 8–12.
[37] Private conversation with former British Library curator John Falconer (Lead Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photography Collections).

sightseers and idlers. Briefly reviewed hereafter, their reports and narratives do not always make a significant contribution to historical research.

The British malacologist William Theobald (1829–1908) deeply regretted the absence of an interpreter during his scientific exploration of the Spiti Valley in the summer of 1861. It is perhaps for that reason that his narrative offers limited information about the history of the Western Himalayas. This notwithstanding, his *Notes* display a high degree of cultural awareness and a genuine appreciation of the people he encountered.[38]

Andrew Wilson (1831–1881) travelled to Spiti in 1873. His trip coincided with the opening of the valley to idle travellers and writers following the annexation of the region by British India. The narrative he brought back is a curious combination of descriptive writing, field observation, and anecdote.[39]

Harriet Georgina Maria J.C. Murray-Aynsley (1825–1913) is the only known woman to have written an account of her journey to the Indo-Tibetan border regions, which she toured in 1881. According to the author, her *Account of a Three Months Tour from Simla* had been written with a female readership in mind, and especially for women who wanted to follow her in discovering these regions.[40]

Finally, the German botanist Adolf von Schlagintweit (1828–1857) sent the Indian doctor Hărkíshen to explore Spiti on his behalf in 1857.[41] Geologists Ferdinand Stoliczka (1838–1874) and Frederick R. Mallet (1841–1921) toured Spiti on behalf of the Geological Survey of India in 1864, an expedition that ended tragically when the former died of altitude sickness.[42] Last but not least, Officer

[38] Unlike many of his contemporaries whom he often rebuked for their colonialist and supremacist attitudes, Theobald argued for decent remuneration to Himalayan porters and the necessity to evaluate situations in accordance with the cultural norms of each community as, he explained, "The morality or immorality of an action can only be truly estimated with reference to the habits of thought or motive with which it was committed"; see THEOBALD 1862: 507.
[39] WILSON 1875.
[40] MURRAY-AYNSLEY 1882.
[41] Together with Hermann and Robert, the Schlagintweit brothers are important figures of the exploration of Inner Asia. Their scientific investigations led them to travel up into the Western Himalayas, the Karakorum, and the Kunlun mountain ranges; see SCHLAGINTWEIT-SAKÜNLÜNSKI 1861.
[42] STOLICZKA 1865; BALL 1886.

H. Calvert from the Indian Civil Service left some *Notes on Customs and Beliefs in Spiti* published in 1909.[43]

1.1.3 Pioneering scholarship (1909–1935)

As seen above, colonial literature compiled throughout the 19th century paved the way for more in-depth historical research. Not surprisingly, the next two pioneers who undertook the first thorough studies of the region came from the ranks of the ICS and the Moravian Church.[44] Their studies of Western Tibet marked the beginning of a period in which colonial and missionary activities were to lead modern scholarship. They were in many ways transitioning Orientalists and pioneering figures in the field of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies.

Table 1
List of Western travellers touring and reporting on Spiti in the 19th-early 20th centuries

1819	James D. Herbert**
1821	Alexander and James Gerard
1822	George Trebeck
	Captain Mercer*
1825	Alexander Csoma de Kőrös
1830	Victor Jacquemont
1838	Thomas Hutton
1839	Arthur Broome*
1841-42	Joseph Cunningham
1846	Patrick Alexander Vans Agnew**
1847	Thomas Thomson
1849	William Edmund Hay
1853	Conway Mordaunt Shipley
1854	Johann Dettloff Prochnow
1857	Hărkíshen on behalf of Adolphe Schlagintweit*
1861	William Theobald
1862	James Broadwood Lyall
1863	Dr Garden, Superintendent of Hill Vaccination*
	Philip Henry Egerton and August Wilhelm Heyde
1863	James Ruthven Pond and Captain Henley from the Rifle Brigade*
1864	Ferdinand Stoliczka and Frederick R. Mallet
1865-83	Eduard Pagell*†
1866	Samuel Bourne
1867	James Broadwood Lyall
1869	Alfred F. Pollock Harcourt
	Frank Mason-Good
1873	Andrew Wilson
1881	Harriet Georgina Murray-Aynsley
1884	Louis W. Dane
1887-91	Alexandre Henderson Diack†
1904	H. Calvert
1906	F. Skemp*
1909	August Hermann Francke
1912	John Coldstream and Friedrich Eugene Peter
1917	Henry Lee Shuttleworth
1918	Henry Lee Shuttleworth
1924	Henry Lee Shuttleworth
1933	Giuseppe Tucci and Eugenio Ghersi

** did not leave a written record*

*** left a written record but did not enter Spiti*

† date(s) of travel unknown

[43] CALVERT 1909.

[44] Members of the Moravian church played a significant role in the study of Tibetan language and Himalayan dialects. They often acted as interpreters for British military officers and colonial administrators in the 19th century; see TOBDAN & CHERING DORJE 2008; BESZTERDA 2013.

August Hermann Francke (1870–1930)

August Hermann Francke's ground-breaking contribution to the overall history of Western Tibet is well-known, and there is no need to belabour it.[45] Often considered the founder of Ladakh Studies, this German missionary spent twelve years in Ladakh and Lahaul. In 1907, he penned *A History of Western Tibet* in which he established a tentative periodisation based largely on his reading of the *La dwags rgyal rabs*, a chronicle of the Kingdom of Ladakh compiled between the 17th and 19th centuries.[46] In June 1909, the Moravian scholar set off for a four-month archaeological survey of the Indo-Tibetan border regions on behalf the Archaeological Survey of India. During the course of this journey, he gathered a vast amount of information in the form of descriptions of places and buildings, artefacts, rock inscriptions, and folktales. However, he did not spend more than a fortnight in Spiti itself and his findings there were not extensive. The result of his survey is an eclectic array of historical and archaeological material, along with some personal narratives. They were compiled in the first two volumes of *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*.[47] The first volume was richly illustrated with photographs by Babu Pindi Lal and maps by Harold Hargreaves (fig. 3.25).[48]

Henry Lee Shuttleworth (1882–1960)

Henry Shuttleworth's appointment as Assistant Commissioner of Kulu in 1917 represents a turning point in the documentation of the valley. While Francke mostly focused on Ladakh, Shuttleworth was determined to write a historical account of the Spiti Valley. The British official and Orientalist undertook three different trips to Spiti in the summers of 1917, 1918, and 1924. On each of his visits Shuttleworth settled in Dangkhar where he held office on behalf of the British Raj. He also explored other settlements where he found votive inscriptions containing important historical information.[49] He produced the first

[45] WALRAVENS & TAUBE 1992; MEIER 1995; HUBER & NIERMANN 2007; BRAY 2008a.
[46] In his Preface to the 1907 edition, Francke acknowledged his debt to Cunningham's first outline of Western Tibetan history and to Marx's translation of the *La dwags rgyal rabs*. Francke was the first scholar, however, to edit the *Royal Succession of Ladakh* in full with an English translation; see FRANCKE 1907; FRANCKE 1914; FRANCKE 1926.
[47] FRANCKE 1914.
[48] Harold Hargreaves (b.1876) served as Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India from 1928 to 1931.
[49] See Appendix 5 and LAURENT 2017b.

archaeological and art historical study of the Golden Temple in Lhalung.[50] Shuttleworth did not publish much during his career but left an important number of notes and documents as well as an impressive photographic archive from his travels in the Western Himalayas (fig. 3.34-3.37).[51] His unpublished papers, preserved at the British Library, have been largely overlooked until the present study. I have already published some research on this material, including a general article on Shuttleworth's life, career, and contribution to the history of the Spiti Valley.[52] Many of his finds are discussed later in this thesis and several documents are reproduced in the Appendices. As illustrated by the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Shuttleworth was well aware of the inherent difficulties in studying the past of the Spiti Valley. The establishment of periodising criteria and chronological boundaries was still very much a work in progress. In this process, the turn of the first millennium would become the most clear-cut period in the history of this region.

Joseph Gergan (1878–1946)

Francke's and Shuttleworth's work would not have been possible without Joseph Gergan (*bsod nams tshe brtan yo seb dge rgan*), a Christian convert of Ladakhi and Tibetan origin who assisted both men during their research.[53] A member of the Moravian mission, Gergan was later to become a scholar in his own right and produced an account of the royal succession of Ladakh based on literary sources and ethnographic work. Most significantly for the present study, his *La dwags rgyal rabs 'chi med gter* also contains a chapter on Spiti with information gathered during his visits to the valley.[54]

Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984)

Giuseppe Tucci needs no introduction. There are hardly enough qualifiers to describe the Italian polymath, yet not all aspects of his multi-faceted personality have received unconditional approbation

[50] SHUTTLEWORTH 1929.
[51] Shuttleworth's photographic archive is divided between the British Library and the Royal Geographical Society in London; the National Media Museum in Bradford; the Ancient India and Iran Trust in Cambridge; and the Kern Institute in Leiden. His photographs comprise stunning panoramic views of Ladakh, Zanskar, Lahaul, Kulu, and Spiti. They also include photographs of monuments and art works as well as many portraits.
[52] LAURENT 2017a.
[53] BRAY 1994.
[54] GERGAN 1976.

and some of his methods have been criticised in recent times.[55] Tucci travelled to Spiti and West Tibet in the summer of 1933. He was accompanied by Eugenio Ghersi, a young medical officer and photographer (fig. 3.38 and 3.39).[56] An account of their journey was published in the form of a scientific travelogue.[57] It was later complemented by a landmark black-and-white newsreel footage.[58] Tucci's *Indo-Tibetica* series are of considerable importance for the history of Spiti. First, his work on *Rin chen bzang po and the Renaissance of Buddhism in Tibet* became a benchmark for the study of the 'later diffusion of Buddhism' (*bstan pa phyi dar*).[59] It brought to the forefront the remarkable achievements of the Tibetan translators of the 10th and 11th centuries while shedding considerable light on the artistic efflorescence that accompanied this literary revival thanks to the patronage of Western Tibetan monarchs. Tucci wrote further on this spiritual and cultural movement that uplifted the region in his *The Temples of Western Tibet and their Artistic Symbolism*,[60] which contextualised the remarkable religious edifices established at this time within their doctrinal and historical background. The section on Spiti, however, was limited to the artistic documentation of temples dating from the time of Rin chen bzang po's activity, namely Tabo, Lhalung, and Nako in Upper Kinnaur. So despite his invaluable contribution to our understanding of the art and cultural heritage of Western Tibet, he did not delve into the history of the Spiti Valley beyond the 12th century.

1.2 Later Research (1977–2018)

In many respects, Francke, Shuttleworth, and Tucci laid the foundations for most subsequent academic work on Spiti. From the 1970s onwards, Spiti started to be an object of study for scholars trained in the sub-disciplines of Tibetology who at least in theory had forsaken the colonial and Christian prejudices of their forebears. Nevertheless, some of the problems identified in this chapter persisted in later

[55] Regarding Tucci's questionable and sometimes dubious acquisition of artwork and manuscripts, see LINROTHE 2014a: 15–16.
[56] On Ghersi's photographic work in Western Tibet and personal diary, see BELLATALLA et al. 2008; BELLATALLA 2016.
[57] For the English translation of their account, see TUCCI & GHERSI 1935.
[58] TUCCI 1933.
[59] For the English translation of this work, see TUCCI 1988a.
[60] For the English translation of these works, see TUCCI 1988b; TUCCI 1989.

research. The Spiti Valley continued to be studied from a historical perspective determined by periodising patterns overlaid onto an extended geographical area (i.e. Western Tibet). Moreover, the use of primary sources remained limited, and the nuances of local history in Spiti were overlooked. Instead, modern research has tended to dwell upon specific events, people, or places, leaving the broader periodisation of Spiti's local history full of gaps. The following section will briefly review the most significant pieces of research on Spiti and its history, even if these works do not deal directly with the Dangkhar settlement.

1.2.1 Luciano Petech (1914–2010)

Unlike his predecessor, Tucci's most renowned student Luciano Petech did not personally undertake perilous journeys and explorations in the Himalayas. His meticulous and pioneering textual research, however, was to open whole new scholarly areas of Tibetan political history and historical philology. Petech's major contributions to the study of the Western Himalayas include his seminal work *The Kingdom of Ladakh*;[61] his article *Ya-ts'e, Gu-ge, Pu-hraṅ: A New Study*;[62] and a historical introduction to Western Tibet.[63] Based largely on his previous research, this last essay was mostly concerned with the early formation of the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet (*stod mnga' ris skor gsum*)– an offshoot of the Tibetan Empire–and its subsequent partition into different polities in the 10th-12th centuries. His attempt to trace each of these kingdoms over time was often rendered extremely difficult by a dearth of sources, as in the case of Guge, whose history from the second half of the 14th century is, according to the author, "a total blank". Despite sketching the history of several principalities of Western Tibet, Spiti does not feature prominently in this work. In fact, the Spiti Valley is rather inconspicuous in Petech's overview, remaining largely subsumed within the narratives mentioned above concerning the later spread of the Buddhist doctrine under the aegis of Western Tibetan rulers in the 10th and 11th centuries.[64] The reader must wait for Petech's last historical period (i.e. Guge and Purang down to the

[61] PETECH 1977.
[62] PETECH 1980: 85–111.
[63] PETECH 1997a. A much shorter historical introduction was also penned in 1999; see PETECH 1999.
[64] A first reference to Spiti is given in relation to the division of sKyid lde nyi ma mgon's kingdom in the 10th century. It is mentioned again with regard to the restoration of the main temple at Tabo under the king-monk Byang chub 'od in 1042, as well as being one of the many areas chosen by Rin chen bzang po to erect Buddhist monuments.

present times) to finally glean some further information on the later history of Spiti. In particular, Petech draws attention to the incorporation of the valley into the Kingdom of Ladakh after Seng ge rnam rgyal's victory over Guge in 1630. Then, for a brief period of time, Spiti became a protectorate of the dGa' ldan pho brang government of Tibet (1684–1708), before being returned to Ladakh, except for an "interlude" when it was ruled by the King of Purig (1734–1765). This series of political jolts led the Italian scholar to conclude that "control over Spiti was always a vague affair", an enduring and somewhat unwarranted formula which would be repeated by several later scholars to describe the political situation in Spiti from the mid-17th century until 1846. Focussed exclusively on state formation under royal dynasties, Petech's methodology was somewhat ill-equipped to take account of Spiti's local history over an extensive period of time, though his work did succeed in providing a general, albeit still patchy, historical framework.

1.2.2 Tabo Studies

Retaining a line of continuity from Tucci's earlier work on the subject, *Tabo: A Lamp for the Kingdom* was the first comprehensive study of the main temple at Tabo.[65] In it, Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter and her collaborators discuss the artistic significance of this religious edifice erected in 996 and renovated in 1042, emphasising the trans-Himalayan cultural encounter between the rulers of West Tibet and Indian Buddhism. Starting with this work, the site of Tabo also became the object of further art-historical and philological studies of this monastic complex and its early collection of Buddhist manuscripts.[66] Among these, the most significant publications for the history of Spiti are research articles on inscriptions and donor prefaces by Christian Luczanits,[67] Helmut Tauscher,[68] and Elena De Rossi Filibeck.[69] Overall, art historians and philologists working at Tabo have been committed to the deepening of knowledge about the later spread of Buddhism and the visual artistic monuments of West

[65] Already mentioned in colonial literature, the monastic complex of Tabo was first studied by Tucci in 1933. Modern research, however, was initiated by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in collaboration with a team of Austrian scholars led by Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter. The latter dedicated a word of homage to Tucci who had inspired her first trip to Spiti in the preface of her work; see KLIMBURG-SALTER 1997.
[66] SCHERRER-SCHAUB, STEINKELLNER & HARRISON 1999; SCHERRER-SCHAUB & HARRISON 2009.
[67] LUCZANITS 1999.
[68] TAUSCHER 1999.
[69] DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2001; DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2007.

Tibet at the turn of the second millennium.[70] Finally, it is worth mentioning Rahula's Tibetan-language work *Tabo: An Ancient Western Himalayan Repository of Age* published by the monastery of Tabo, which includes information on Dangkhar and other sites in Spiti.[71] In it, the author makes use of modern academic scholarship, Tibetan literary sources, traditional narratives and local lore.

1.2.3 Roberto Vitali

Another scholar who has contributed to the general history of Western Tibet is Roberto Vitali whose studies and translations are mainly based on newly-discovered Tibetan literary sources. Works such as *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*,[72] *Records of Tho.ling*,[73] and *The dGe lugs pa in Gu ge and the Western Himalaya*[74] have shed considerable light and deepened our understanding of the political and religious history of West Tibet during the periods of the late 10th-12th centuries, and the late 15th-mid 17th century. The Spiti Valley does not figure prominently in Vitali's research but is often discussed tangentially in the footnotes of these publications. In addition, in his *A Short Guide to Key Gonpa*, published on the occasion of the Kālacakra Initiation bestowed by the 14th Dalai Lama in Spiti in the year 2000,[75] Vitali writes that "the ancient history of Spiti can be divided into three great cultural phases". The earliest corresponds to the later spread of Buddhism in the Western Himalayas (10th–11th centuries). The intermediate period is when the members of the Kagyupa tradition were particularly active in the region surrounding Mount Kailash (13th century). And the later phase relates to the diffusion of Gelukpa teachings and the foundation in West Tibet of several monasteries belonging to this school (from the 15th century). In addition to sketching these clearly defined periodic divisions, in which sectarian Buddhist affiliations claim primacy, Vitali also observes that the 12th century was "a period marked by ravaging foreign invasions, leaving the land deprived of cultural energy"; a claim for which I have found no corroborating evidence as far as the valley of Spiti is concerned. A Sakyapa period (*c.*

[70] KLIMBURG-SALTER 2008.
[71] RAHULA 2013.
[72] VITALI 1996.
[73] VITALI 1999.
[74] VITALI 2012.
[75] VITALI 2000.

1250–1350) is also alluded to but is not elaborated. Vitali's rough historical sketch reminds us of the importance of a regionalistic approach to the political and religious history of Spiti.

1.2.4 Christian Jahoda

Social anthropologist Christian Jahoda has dedicated considerable research to the study of the socio-economic conditions in Spiti between the 17th and early 20th centuries.[76] His work develops the findings of Pedro Carrasco's *Land and Polity in Tibet*, in which the system of land tenure as related to political organisation in Ladakh and Spiti was based almost exclusively on colonial literature and early scholarship.[77] Jahoda's analysis, on the other hand, complements this with the use of Tibetan literary sources, ethnographic work, and the study of late archival documents from Tabo. His enquiry into the relationship between the monastery of Tabo and its ecclesiastical estates (*mchod gzhis*) led him to reconstruct the historical development of a broader system of economic support for the monasteries of Spiti. Additionally, his research is supplemented by a study of inheritance customs, marriage patterns, obligatory services, and a system of 'secular' taxation. With regard to Spiti, general economic conditions appear to have been contingent upon various political systems and shifting political centres in different periods, compelling the author to continuously re-evaluate the political status of Spiti over the centuries.[78] Despite many valuable findings, some of his conclusions need to be updated and nuanced in light of further historical documents retrieved during my field trips to Spiti.

1.2.5 Tashi Tsering

The social organisation of Spiti has also been looked at from the point of view of resource management by the environmentalist and Tibetologist Tashi Tsering.[79] In examining local systems of irrigation and land distribution, some aspects of local history have also been brought to light. In his highly original research, Tashi Tsering reconsiders the early history of the valley prior to the formation of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet in the late 10th century. In particular, he goes back over the conquest of Western Tibet (i.e. Zhang zhung) by the troops of Srong btsan sgam po in the 640s and the ensuing

[76] JAHODA 2007; JAHODA 2008; JAHODA 2015.
[77] CARRASCO 1959.
[78] JAHODA 2009; JAHODA 2017.
[79] TASHI TSERING 2014.

reorganisation of Spiti based on a system of tax-paying households.[80] Some of his observations are of great importance for the present research; as discussed later, the establishment of the Dangkhar settlement could indeed date back to this period.

1.2.6 Tshe ring rgyal po (1961–2015) and other Tibetan publications

Tibetan scholars and local history enthusiasts have also taken a keen interest in the history of West Tibet. These authors have tended to base their treatments on oral accounts which generally follow the traditional narratives found in Tibetan religious history, but without textual citation. One major exception is the research of Tshe ring rgyal po from the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences. A native of West Tibet, he dedicated himself to the study of the Kingdom of Guge from the 10th to the 17th centuries.[81] However the Spiti Valley has remained marginal in contemporary Tibetan scholarship since it falls on the other side of the politically-sensitive border between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of India.[82]

1.2.7 Pin Valley Studies

The Pin Valley is a side valley in Spiti with its own specific religious culture, the history of which has been explored on the basis of ethnographic research by Pascal Dollfus and Patrick Sutherland.[83] On this subject, it is also worth mentioning the work of Namgyal Henry who has investigated local traditions concerning Padma gling pa in this region.[84] In his doctoral dissertation, Henry provides an interesting overview of the history of Spiti, the details of which are however perhaps too reliant on colonial literature and the 'oral tradition' of Spiti.[85]

1.2.8 Dieter Schuh and Jörg Heimbel

A major break-through in the study of Spiti has come from Dieter Schuh in recent years. During a first trip to the Spiti Valley in 2015, the German Tibetologist and leading figure of Tibetan historical

[80] TASHI TSERING 2013.
[81] TSHE RING RGYAL PO 2005; TSHE RING RGYAL PO 2006.
[82] GRAGS PA et al. 1999; CHOS 'PHEL 2002.
[83] DOLLFUS 2004; DOLLFUS 2017; SUTHERLAND 2011; SUTHERLAND 2017.
[84] HENRY 2017.
[85] HENRY 2016.

philology photographed the private archives of Nono bSod nams dbang 'dus, the heir apparent of the nobility of Kyiling and so-called 'king' of Spiti. Schuh's treatment of these local sources–comprising tax records, diplomatic documents, and written agreements–is crucial for the history of the region in the 17th-19th centuries.[86] These sources are complemented by a second collection of documents from Tengyu Monastery which were photographed by Jörg Heimbel in 2017 as part of a research project on the Ngor tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in Spiti.[87] These latter archives include royal edicts and written agreements which have been analysed and discussed by the two German scholars working collaboratively.[88] Along with the further documents presented in the present thesis discussed below, the Nono family archives and the Tengyu collection together represent an extensive body of primary sources on the late history of Spiti.

1.2.9 Bibliographic work

Finally, readers looking for further knowledge and additional works on Spiti may consult Uttar Bahadur's "Works on Lahaul and Spiti" and Julie G. Marshall's chapter on "Western Tibet and the Western Himalayan Area 1800-1903".[89]

Further literature and research articles of minor importance for the present study will be mentioned in the course of the thesis where appropriate.

1.3 Historical sources and archaeological material for the study of Dangkhar

For the purpose of this research, the Dangkhar settlement is understood as an archaeological site, even though some of its structures are still in use today. The main objective of this work is thus to document and interpret its architectural structures, artistic remains, and written artefacts (e.g. inscriptions, archives, literary sources) in order to reconstruct the history of this Himalayan settlement. As a site history, this

[86] SCHUH 2016b.
[87] HEIMBEL forthcoming.
[88] HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.
[89] BAHADUR 1974; MARSHALL 2005.

thesis aims to understand, reconstruct, and explain the social, economic, and cultural conditions that pertained over time for the people of Dangkhar.

The data collected for this research constitutes the most comprehensive corpus of primary material available to date for the study of the Dangkhar settlement in particular, and to some extent for the wider history of Spiti as a whole. These materials were gathered during several fieldtrips and analysed in post-fieldwork periods. Most of the materials are reproduced here in the Appendix volume. In terms of scholarly significance, the documents presented there in many ways outweigh the present volume, since only a fraction of the information they contain could be treated in the main text of this thesis. I will now briefly outline the main types of documents highlighted by my research.

1.3.1 Architectural, artistic, and visual documentation

Appendix 2 includes an architectural documentation compiled by the *Save Dangkhar* project that enables the study of the main religious complex of the settlement. It contains ground plans, sections and elevations, spatial models, as well as photo montages of murals.[90]

This architectural documentation is supplemented in Appendix 3 by images produced between 1822 and 1968. This appendix constitutes a comprehensive collection of early paintings, drawings, lithographs, and photographs of the Dangkhar settlement and thus represents an invaluable visual record. In 1975, an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8 hit the neighbouring region of Kinnaur as a result of which many edifices in Spiti collapsed or were damaged and gradually abandoned. Many of the perspectives, features and monuments captured in these images are therefore no longer extant. The appendix also includes some previously unpublished images of Dangkhar.

Finally, the visual documentation compiled in Appendix 4 includes seventy-five out of hundreds of photographs taken during my own fieldwork. These detail every aspect of the Dangkhar settlement and its territory, from access roads to territorial features, and religious structures.

All figures referenced in the text are given by way of its appendix first such as, for example, appendix 4 figure 10 (fig. 4.10).

[90] NEUWIRTH & AUER 2013.

1.3.2 Epigraphic documentation and donor prefaces

Two types of written artefacts are presented in Appendix 5. The reason for grouping these together is that they all represent records of donations, and their contents are similarly organised. The first group consists of carved votive stones known as '*maṇi* stones' (*ma ṇi rdo*). These, without exception, were found in Spiti either by Shuttleworth (SI1, SI2, SI3) or by myself (SI4), and have been published in a separate article.[91] The second group consists of four donor prefaces written on paper. These prefaces were intended to be inserted inside copies of Buddhist texts produced at the request of local patrons. They originate from Tabo (DP1), Rangrik (DP2), Kyi (DP3), and Dangkhar (DP4) in Spiti. Except for DP4, these documents were first published by Elena De Rossi Filibeck, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, and Tobdan respectively yet still required careful further study and discussion.[92] The nature and function of these donative records is further discussed at the beginning of the appendix.

1.3.3 Legal and diplomatic archives from Dangkhar

The last group of documents are the historical archives preserved at Dangkhar Tashi Chöling. These are the legal and diplomatic records of Lagope Monastery, as the Gelukpa monastery of the settlement was formerly known. Reproduced and translated for the first time in Appendix 6, these local archives are the most important written sources for the study of the Dangkhar settlement from the 17th-19th centuries. They constitute a particular genre of literature which is further introduced at the beginning of the appendix. The seals contained in these documents are also studied separately in Appendix 7.

As a non-invasive archaeological and historical endeavour, this research gives precedence to material evidence and the use of Tibetan primary sources. It goes without saying that ethnographic data, in the form of interviews conducted among the local population during fieldwork, will also enrich the discussion. However, it often became apparent during fieldwork that oral narratives, traditional religious

[91] LAURENT 2017b.
[92] DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2001; SCHERRER-SCHAUB 2013; TOBDAN 2017.

history, and petty territorial conflicts can easily collude to create variant historical accounts. Navigating such variants in search of elusive objectivity has been a primary guiding principle in this research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RIVER VALLEY OF SPITI
GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

The history of the Himalayan countries cannot be forced into a common frame.

The smaller the unit, the less known is its history.

Luciano Petech (1997)

Historians and archaeologists have often noted the presence of early human settlements on the banks of large rivers. Access to fresh water, and thus the ability to cultivate land nearby, has contributed to the early geographical delimitation and historical periodisation of some of the most flourishing ancient civilizations; the Indus Valley Civilization being a prime example. This notion was not alien to Tibet's own historians who viewed the large plain of the Yarlung River (*yar klungs gtsang po*) as the cradle of their civilization and the centre of the Pugyel Dynasty (*spur rgyal*; *spu rgyal*) who ruled much of the Tibetan plateau from the 7th century CE. Hence for the Tibetans, the word 'valley' (*lung pa*) came to express the "idea of a country", with its rivers, fields, pastures, local traditions and dialects.[1] In contrast to the simplicity of this vernacular understanding of country as valley, modern historiography has struggled to clearly delimit and define the complex state formations and geographical extent of the many smaller kingdoms and polities of the Tibetosphere in pre-modern times.[2]

[1] STEIN 1972: 22.
[2] The term 'Tibetosphere' refers to the Tibetan area of linguistic and cultural influence. It was coined by linguist Nicolas Tournadre by analogy with the terms 'Sinosphere' and 'Indosphere' proposed by James A. Matisoff in 1990; see TOURNADRE 2014.

In his introduction to the history of Western Tibet, Luciano Petech observed how natural boundaries defined by the landscape have dictated regional trends and micro-histories.[3] This situation is essentially determined by the course of the largest river systems, the depth of the valleys, the location of meandering brooks, and the potential for upland farming by means of irrigation. Ecological sustainability therefore was the main factor determining the peopling of high elevation valleys, the development of societies, and their historical evolution and cultural imprint over time. In light of this, the following pages set the stage for a discussion of such an evolution in the river valley of Spiti. It provides a general description of the wider Indo-Tibetan border region of Western Tibet and explores some of the difficulties inherent to researching the history of a small Himalayan valley wedged between Tibet on one side and the Indian subcontinent on the other.

2.1 Regional Settings

2.1.1 General description

The Spiti Valley is a high mountain desert located at the western end of the Tibetan plateau, in what is today the north-eastern part of the Indian hill state of Himachal Pradesh (fig. 2.3). Since 1960, it forms the district of Lahaul-Spiti together with the adjacent valley of Lahaul in the north-west. It is flanked by the Indian districts of Kinnaur in the south, Kulu in the west, and Ladakh in the north. In the east, Spiti shares a sensitive geo-political border with the Ngari Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in the People's Republic of China. Lying between 3,400 and 5,600 meters above sea level, the river valley of Spiti is part of an impressive mountain range situated within the Tethys Himalayan unit. It is a cold alpine environment characterized by bare rocks, arid soil, sparse vegetation, and snow-capped peaks with some nearby summits reaching beyond 6,000 meters. Like most highland regions of the Himalayan frontal arc, the Spiti Valley is a highly unstable geological environment due to the ongoing collision and continued movement of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates. Spiti is situated in a pull-apart basin lying between several major fault systems and is therefore one of the most

[3] PETECH 1997a: 229.

seismically active regions in India.[4] Several earthquakes above magnitude 7.5 on the Richter scale have been recorded since the late 19th century.[5] The last cataclysmic seismic event in the region occurred in Kinnaur in 1975. With a magnitude of 6.8, the earthquake was felt in Spiti, Ladakh, and as far off as New Delhi. Ground motion induced severe natural disasters such as landslides, rock falls, washouts, snow avalanches, and falling boulders, causing human casualties and injuries, flattening hundreds of residential buildings, and disrupting transportation and communication. Several historic edifices, many of them situated in Spiti, suffered cracks, collapsed roofs, and irreparable damage to their works of art.[6]

The Spiti Valley itself consists of a main valley stretching from north to south over 150 km, and smaller lateral valleys among which are the Pin Valley (*sprin, spin, pin*) in the west and the Lingti Valley (*gling ti*) in the east (fig. 2.4). Although best characterised as a high mountain desert, the landscape of the region is rugged with a number of rivers and brooks along which are located the main human settlements. Giving its name to the region, the Spiti River flows through the valley from north-west to south-east. It originates on the slopes of the Kunzum Pass (*kun 'dzoms la*, *kun bzang la*) in the north and ends its journey as a tributary of the Sutlej River some 150 kilometres south-eastwards. Several tributaries, the most important being the Pin River and the Lingti River, swell its water along the way. Morphologically, the river valley of Spiti is divided into upper and lower Spiti; broad and braided channels with fluviolacustrine terraces are typical of the upper region, whilst meandering channels and deep gorges form the landscape of the southern tip of the valley. The region is subject to strong seasonal climatic variations with a long and cold winter and a relatively short summer, interspersed by sporadic and isolated monsoonal rains in the month of July. Accordingly, high elevation and extreme topographical ruggedness result in a low primary productivity. Local agriculture is characterised by the cultivation of terraced fields.[7] Until recently, this traditional agrarian mountain economy was complemented by small-scale animal husbandry and trading. Despite these challenging environmental

[4] KASPAR & KIEFFER 2015.
[5] KIEFFER & STEINBAUER 2013: 203.
[6] SINGH et al. 1977.
[7] Reports produced by British Settlement Officers in the 19th-20th centuries suggest that the scale of the economy in Spiti did not change much over the last two centuries. Their testimonies, however, may not necessarily reflect Spiti's earlier historical and cultural geography. Aerial imagery, for instance, has revealed vast areas of abandoned farmland in West Tibet. It has been argued that climate change and anthropogenic factors contributed to the desiccation of this region and the decline in its population over the past two millennia; see RYAVEC 2005.

conditions, the Spiti Valley has been inhabited for more than a thousand years as a result of a skilful utilisation of its natural resources. To this day, the population reside in about 47 villages and hamlets that are traditionally ascribed to four different geographical and administrative areas (fig. 2.5): the lower (*sham*), middle (*bar, bar cig*), and upper (*stod*) parts of the main valley, together with the side valley of Pin. According to historian and Tibetologist Dieter Schuh, the total lay population of Spiti can be estimated to about 2,475 people in the late 18th or mid-19th century,[8] a number which does not take into account the monastic population of the valley, which amounted to a few hundred.[9]

2.1.2 Religious landscape

The religious history of Buddhism in Spiti is not well-known beyond the activities in the region of the great translator Rin chen bzang po (958–1055) and his disciples during the 'later spread of the Buddhist doctrine' (*bstan pa phyi dar*) in Western Tibet. It is sufficient to note here the following phases of cultural and religious influence. The first monastery was established at Tabo by the monk-king Ye shes 'od (947–1019/24) in the year 996 and this had become an important translation centre and repository of Buddhist texts and art works by the mid-11th century. In the 13th century, the religious activity of monks from the Kagyupa tradition in the region of Mount Kailash likely inspired the presence of small hermit communities in Spiti. During a brief Sakyapa period of activity that we know little about, the monastery of Tengyu (*steng rgyud*) was founded at Gomik (*go mig*) around the mid-15th century. From the late 15th century onwards, the disciples of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) contributed to the establishment of dominant Gelukpa centres in the main valley of Spiti. Finally, the Padma gling pa tradition of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism flourished in the side valley of Pin in the 17th century. When the first Western travellers arrived in Spiti in the 19th century–as described in the previous

[8] Based on a methodical analysis of taxation records pertaining to the Spiti Valley, Schuh's estimate is generally in line with the census data gathered by British officials during this period; see SCHUH 2016b: 92. In one of the most detailed accounts produced in the 19th century, the Settlement Officer of Kangra James Broadwood Lyall reported that "By the last census taken under my superintendence the population of Spiti was 3,024; the women outnumbered the men by two only. At the census of 1855 the number returned was 2,087; the increase must be mainly due to better enumeration, for the population increases very slowly owing to the family arrangements which I have described, and the number of immigrants from Tibet has been inconsiderable"; see LYALL 1874: 198. In the last census that we know of, the population of Spiti numbered 3,629 people; see COLDSTREAM 1913: 3.

[9] In a document issued by the monastic estate of Tashigang in West Tibet on the 25th day of the 3rd month of an unknown year, the total of monks and nuns in Spiti amounted to 271 individuals; see Table 3 in Chapter 3 and BmK23 in Appendix 6.

chapter–, the religious landscape of the valley comprised five major monastic centres adhering to three different schools of Tibetan Buddhism: the Sakyapa monastery of Tengyu at Gomik; three Gelukpa centres at Tabo, Dangkhar, and Kyi; and the Gungri Monastery (*gung ri*) of the Nyingmapa tradition in the Pin Valley. These monastic congregations were also responsible for the maintenance of village chapels and cave hermitages located in other settlements of the Spiti Valley. Here as elsewhere in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan plateau, adherence to Buddhism did not deter earlier forms of popular belief and ritual practice.[10] Christian missionary activity in this region from the 19th century appears to have had relatively little impact on the local population despite the presence of two Moravian missions established in the adjacent regions of Lahaul and Kinnaur in 1856 and 1865 respectively.

2.1.3 The place name 'Spiti'

It may come as a surprise to some that the people of Spiti live in fact in a valley called Piti and go by the name of Pitiya (*pi ti ba*) according to the local pronunciation. The reason for this phonetic change is twofold: first of all, the name of their valley appears under different spelling variants in Tibetan language; and secondly, the pronunciation of these variants differs among the speakers of neighbouring dialects. Whatever spelling is adopted, the etymology of the word Spiti suggests origins in two different languages. According to a widespread but mistaken belief often promoted in popular publications and tourist websites, the place name Spiti means 'Middle Country' or 'Middle Land'.[11] This popular misconception first appears in print in the early 1920s.[12] In a public speech at the Royal Geographical Society in London on the 22nd of May 1922, Henry Shuttleworth declared, "the name Spiti, pronounced there and in Tibet as Piti, means the 'Middle Country' perhaps from its situation between Greater Tibet and Little or Western Tibet", and went on to explain that "the language [of this region] is that of Central Tibet, but it has a few resemblances to the Tibetan of Lahul".[13] His statement was all the more regrettable since he himself was to give a completely different interpretation of this term in a later work, albeit

[10] See section 3.4.5 in Chapter 3.
[11] KAPADIA 1989: 52–56; KAPADIA 1999: 209; VAN HAM 2015: 73; VAN HAM 2014: 18.
[12] In 1921, John Hutchison and Jean Philippe Vogel (1871–1958) published two small articles dedicated to the history of Lahaul and Spiti with the assistance of Shuttleworth. A reference to Spiti as meaning 'the middle country' is given without further explanation in a footnote; see HUTCHISON & VOGEL 1921a; HUTCHISON & VOGEL 1921b.
[13] SHUTTLEWORTH 1922.

unpublished. In a manuscript now preserved at the British Library, Shuttleworth listed the three most common spelling variants used for Spiti in the Tibetan language. Returning to the question of its etymology, he observed that the term is spelled "Spyi-ti, also Spi-ti, or Pi-ti, meaning *spyi* common or main, and *ti* water".[14]

As we shall see this later unpublished observation made by Shuttleworth on the orthography of the word Spiti is highly consistent with the spelling variants yielded from primary sources. The earliest reference to Spiti found in Tibetan literary sources is from the 13th century and gives the spelling *spyi ti*—we shall return to this point later. There are reasons to believe that the etymology of this name–whose meaning was correctly discerned by Shuttleworth–lie in a compound noun made up of the combination of two terms derived from two distinct languages, reflecting Spiti's location at a crossroads of early cultural and linguistic influences. The Tibetan word *spyi* has a broad semantic range, translatable as 'common', 'general', 'public', or 'all' to name just a few. Regarding the second vocable, the syllable *ti*, as observed by linguists, is identical to the reconstructed proto-Tibetan-Burman word for 'water' *ti,* the use of which is attested, for example, in Old Newar and more importantly in the so-called Zhang zhung language.[15] Currently believed to be spoken by less than three thousand people,[16] the Zhang zhung language was in former times spread in the south-western parts of the Tibetan plateau, before these regions became gradually Tibetanised after the mid-7th century.[17] Although the people of the Western Himalayan regions mostly adopted the Tibetan language, including its words for 'water' (*chu*) and 'river' (*chu bo*, *gtsang po*), the Spiti language still retained a few expressions attesting to its earlier connections to Zhang zhung. In his doctoral work on resource management in Spiti, Tashi Tsering notes the persistence of the Zhang zhung vocable *ti* in local compound nouns pertaining to irrigation matters.[18]

[14] Henry Lee Shuttleworth, 'MssD722: Papers of Henry Lee Shuttleworth, Indian Civil Service, Chiefly Relating to Tibet (1909–1946)' (unpublished). The manuscript reads 'mani' instead of 'main'. The translation of *spyi* as 'main' is yet conformed to Tibetan lexicology. Following the study of his archives, it transpires that Shuttleworth might have been subject to mild dyslexic dysgraphia. There are many instances in his handwritten notes when the order of letters in words is mixed up. In her autobiography, Shuttleworth's daughter confirms that her father's handwriting was not always clear; see A. SHUTTLEWORTH 2009: 115.
[15] MARTIN 2010: 88. Moreover, Sino-Tibetan linguist Robert Shafer observed that the word *ti* appears frequently in compound nouns of river names in Assam, northern Bengal, but also in the Malay Peninsula; see SHAFER 1967. On Nepalese hydronomy and river names ending in *ti*; see WITZEL 1993.
[16] MARTIN 2010: 6.
[17] DRIEM 2001a.
[18] TASHI TSERING 2013: 527; TASHI TSERING 2014: 139.

The term *ri ti*, for instance, is 'mountain water' used for agricultural purposes; presumably in contradistinction to the water of large rivers flowing along the bottom of a valley which cannot so easily be diverted towards terraced fields situated uphill. To this day, water running down from local mountain streams is collected in tanks as the main source of water. The word *zag ti* also designates the overflow from an irrigation reservoir.[19] Irrigation, as shown by Tashi Tsering, is carefully regulated during the crop-growing season in Spiti, and expressions like *sreg ti*, *gnyis ti*, and *gsum ti* designate the first, second, and third watering. Finally, the names of local rivers such as, for example, the Lingti (*gling ti*) also contain this Zhang zhung-derived phoneme. This reading is also consistent with Gergan's understanding of the terms *spyi* and *ti* in his description of Spiti.[20] In the light of this, the place name Spiti (*spyi ti*) may tentatively be etymologised as the main or general (*spyi*) water resource (*ti*) of the valley: namely the Spiti River itself.

2.1.4 The Spiti language

The people of the borderland river valley of Spiti did not live in isolation. Throughout history, the Indo-Tibetan border regions of the Western Himalayas have been subject to migrations, political realignments, cultural assimilations, and religious transformations. All these factors have influenced the languages spoken in these regions to various degrees. With the advent of Buddhism in Tibet in the 7th century, literary Tibetan (*bod yig*) gradually became a pan-Himalayan *scriptura franca*, at least among the members of the aristocracy and clergy. However, the most remote regions and valleys of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas were to preserve a plurality of languages and dialects, mostly confined to the

[19] Tashi Tsering gives the spellings *zag ti* and *rzag ti* (sic) for an excess of water. Phonologically, this term seems to be related to the Tibetan verb *'dzag pa*, meaning 'to leak', 'to drip', or 'to trickle'; see TASHI TSERING 2013: 527; TASHI TSERING 2014: 126.

[20] *dang por spyi ti'i ming gi sgra bshad ni/ spyi ni go na sla ste/ ti ni chu'i don te/ dper na/ kha ti/ sna ti/ ra ti dang/ chu mur ti/ tang ti/ tsha ti/ ti rid/ sbal ti/ ti ti (chang) las chu'i don yin pa ga ste/ chu mod pa yod pa'i chu mur ti dang nye 'dab[s] tu yod pa'i spyi ti na'ng chu mang bas spyi ti zhes thogs pa yin no/*; "First, and with regard to the etymology of the noun *spyi ti*, it is easy to understand *spyi*. As for *ti*, it means water like, for example, in 'saliva' (*kha ti*), 'running nose' (*sna ti*) […] and there are plenty rivers/water in the region of Chumurti but also in the nearby valley of Spiti, where the name *spyi ti* is given because it has many rivers/water" (translation mine); see GERGAN 1976: 320; DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2002: 320–321.

oral sphere.[21] As such the vernacular in Spiti today is the result of specific historical and geographical factors.

According to scholars of Tibetan linguistics, Spiti language (*(s)pi ti skad*) belongs to the Western Tibetan group of Tibetic languages. Also known as West Bodish or Tibeto-Kanauri, this group can be further divided into Western Archaic and Western Innovative.[22] Among the Western Archaic group are the non-tonal languages spoken in Ladakh, Purig, and Baltistan. An interesting phonological aspect of this group is the tendency among its speakers to pronounce some of the prefix, suffix, and superscript letters found in written Tibetan. This observation explains how the word Spiti–including the superscript *sa* from the Tibetan spelling–came to be recorded in early British written accounts. Local interpreters played a major role in scientific explorations, commercial activities, and governance surveys carried out in the Western Himalayas during the British Raj. The persistence with which one finds the term Spiti, rather than Piti, in colonial accounts and settlement literature, indicates that the interpreters used by the British were mostly speakers of the Western Archaic group, especially Ladakhis. A native from the Spiti valley itself valley would pronounce the Tibetan written form of *spi ti* as Piti, while a speaker from Ladakh would vocalise the superscript *sa* and pronounce it Spiti. The Western Innovative group is thus characterised by the use of register tone and other phonological features. The distinction between the two groups is observed when one moves from the north-western margins of the Tibetan plateau towards its centre. To the second group belong the tonal languages of Upper Ladakh, Zanskar, Lahaul, Upper Kinnaur, Ngari, and Spiti.[23]

The Spiti language or Spiti Tibetan has received varying degrees of attention from linguists but its evolution over time remains somewhat understudied. The issues are complicated by the fact that Spiti Tibetan is not spoken homogeneously throughout the valley, but in a number of dialect variants

[21] Tibetic languages are spoken in China, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Besides Tibetan itself, about thirty-nine other languages are spoken on the Tibetan-Qinghai plateau today. Incidentally, it is estimated that 3.7% of the 6.2 million ethnic Tibetans in the PRC do not speak Tibetan; see ROCHE 2014: 18–24.
[22] On the linguistic classification of Tibetic languages and Western Himalayan dialects; see BRADLEY 1997: 1–72; DRIEM 2001b; TOURNADRE 2014.
[23] The development of register tone or tonogenesis can be caused by a merging of old initial consonant clusters, or by the loss of a preradical. Philologist and Tibetologist Bettina Zeisler, however, draws attention to the fact that more prominent distinctions between the two language groups may lie in morphological and syntactic differences rather than phonology; see ZEISLER 2011.

distinguished by linguists.[24] In all cases, these dialects possess no written form. What is more, lexicographical undertakings have generally been confined to lists of words given in studies focused on phonology.[25] The use in most of these works of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) without Tibetan transliteration often precludes further philological investigation into the cultural history of Spiti.[26]

Despite the absence of specific research on loanwords in Spiti language, scholars generally accept that linguistic contacts have existed between Spiti language and the languages and dialects spoken in adjacent areas. Linguistic evidence for a Zhang zhung substratum in Spiti language is limited to a small number of words. In addition to the use of compound nouns relating to 'water' (*ti*) as discussed above, personal names recorded inside the vestibule of the main temple at Tabo also indicate nouns of non-Tibetan and possible Zhang zhung origin.[27] It is notable that despite the well-attested political influence of neighbouring Ladakh in Spiti's history, which is discernible in local songs and stories, linguistically Ladakhi language does not appear to have operated as a significant donor language.[28] Prior to the influx of Hindi words into the modern vocabulary of Spiti, older Indic loanwords (e.g. *ra dza* / *rāja*, for king) tend to be the same as those found in the wider cultural and linguistic region of Tibet and Ladakh. In later times, Hindustani/Urdu loanwords were likely introduced when Spiti came under the

[24] Dialect variants have been identified in specific areas within Spiti, but their characteristics have not been explored in great detail. In his overview of Tibeto-Burman languages, David Bradley speaks of four dialects that correspond to the three geographical areas of the upper, middle, lower valley, and the Pin Valley. To this he adds the dialect of Nyam (*mnyam skad*) spoken in Upper Kinnaur which he distinguishes from Kinnauri (*khu nu skad*). According to Bradley, the former is spoken in the area extending from the village of Pu to Nako, and further north towards Spiti; see BRADLEY 1997: 7. In her research on tribal languages, Devi D. Sharma concurs with this regional linguistic classification but also observes that dialectal differences are particularly important between the speakers of the lower valley and those of the Pin Valley; see SHARMA 1989: 5. The most extensive linguistic scholarship on this region has been undertaken by Veronika Hein, whose work has focussed in particular on the analysis of traditional songs. Based on data collected in Tabo, she coined the term 'Tabo Tibetan', which she recognises as being similar to Spiti Tibetan; see HEIN 2001; HEIN 2007a; HEIN 2007b; HEIN 2011; HEIN 2017; HEIN 2019.

[25] SHARMA 2001.

[26] See my attempt to translate a Spiti song recorded in IPA back into Tibetan; see document B in Appendix 8.

[27] These names include the local protectress Wi nyu myin along with clan names linked to the region of Zhang zhung, such as rHugs wer, gNye ma, and Rum. Noting that "the native inhabitants of Spiti and Kinnaur were ethnically and linguistically different from the new Tibetan ruling class", art historian and Tibetologist Deborah Klimburg-Salter suggests that some of the names written in Tibetan script inside the entry hall of the main temple at Tabo "may derive from the language of Zhang-zhung". In a later work, however, she is more circumspect, admitting that "the language associated with the non-Tibetan names cannot yet be identified"; see KLIMBURG-SALTER 2005: 21–22; KLIMBURG-SALTER 2008: 247.

[28] Personal communication with Veronika Hein, 16th August 2015.

jurisdiction of the British. This is attested, for example, in the local archives of Dangkhar.[29] Clearly, Spiti Tibetan did not evolve in a vacuum, but much linguistic research remains to be done before we can reconstruct its history in any detail within the Western Innovative group.

2.2 Historical setting and territorial nomenclature

In 1846, the British extended their protectorate over Spiti and undertook a border demarcation of their Himalayan territories. From this date onwards, Spiti's economic life shifted in orientation towards India and the people of the valley henceforth looked to British India on all political matters. In previous centuries, the Spiti Valley had occupied a critical position on the geopolitical map of Inner Asia. Like many small polities in Western Tibet, it had navigated the rise and fall of several powerful kingdoms and had been forced to swear allegiance to different political regimes. Detailing the precise political history of these lesser Himalayan valleys, as Petech's quotations at the beginning of this chapter highlight, is a difficult enterprise. Two major problems thus await the historian of Spiti: first, the variety of names under which the valley appears in Tibetan primary sources,[30] and secondly and more importantly, Spiti's political affiliations and territorial delineation in various periods. In order to help provide some clarity on this latter issue, the following table provides a general chronological overview. I will return to this periodisation scheme in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Table 2

Periodisation scheme for the history of the Spiti Valley

Before mid-7th century	Spiti and the Kingdom of Zhang zhung
Mid-7th–10th centuries	Conquest of Zhang zhung and Tibetanization of Western Tibet
10th–mid-12th centuries	The Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet and the later spread of the Buddhist doctrine
Mid-12th–15th centuries	The fragmentation of the Guge-Purang Kingdom and the establishment of hermitic communities

[29] In a document dated 1851, the Urdu term *koṭhī* or *koṭhā* (*ko gri*), meaning a 'house', 'granary', or a 'warehouse', is used to describe an administrative unit subject to taxation; see BmK11 in Appendix 6. The word *koṭhī* is identical to the Tibetan term *tshug so* which designates a group of villages placed under the supervision of a district headman (*rgad po*) in Ladakh. It is also reported by Gergan in his description of Spiti: *spyi ti lung pa 'ang tshugs so 'am ko khri lnga nang bgod nas 'dug /*; "The country of Spiti is divided into five groups of villages (*tshug so*) or *koṭhī*"; see GERGAN 1976: 321.

[30] This question has been variously addressed by Tibetan scholars; see BLO BZANG SHĀSTRĪ 2007; TASHI TSERING 2013; NYENTHAR 2017.

15th century–1630	Resurgence of the Guge Kingdom and diffusion of Gelukpa teachings in Western Tibet
1630–1684	Spiti and the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh I 1630–1647 King Seng ge rnam rgyal and the annexation of Ngari 1647–1684 Spiti and the Kingdom of Zanskar
1684–1708	Spiti and the dGa' ldan pho brang's interest in West Tibet
1708–1834	Spiti and the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh II 1734–1765 Spiti and the Kingdom of Purig 1765–1834 Spiti and the Kingdom of Ladakh
1834–1947	Age of foreign interests and occupation 1834–1846 The Dogra conquest of Ladakh and the end of the rNam rgyal dynasty 1846–1949 The East India Company and the princely state of Bashahr-Kinnaur 1849–1947 Spiti and British India

I will now review the occurrences of the place name Spiti and their historical significance. This outline does not adhere strictly to the periodisation scheme presented above. This caveat notwithstanding, the discussion here hopes to illustrate that the most common spelling variants used for Spiti in Tibetan sources generally reflect different historical periods, usages, and territories.

*2.2.1 The district of sPyi ti (*c.*7th–10th centuries)*

In the earliest period accessible to historians of Tibet, the Spiti Valley appears to have been part of the Kingdom of Zhang zhung until the troops of Srong btsan sgam po, the mighty Tibetan ruler of an expanding empire, annexed the region in the 640s.[31] With the integration of Western Tibet into the Tibetan Empire (*c.*610–842), Spiti underwent a progressive Tibetanization as well as a complete territorial shake-up. Governed by officials (*stong dpon*), regional leaders (*ru dpon*), and military commanders (*dmag dpon*), the complex territorial breakdown of the Tibetan Empire formed the basis of a military conscription system, whereby each and every household was required to provide a soldier to the imperial regiments. Incidentally, the creation of new administrative units and the founding of military colonies throughout the Tibetan Empire contributed to the widespread use of the Tibetan language. The Tibetan presence in the western margins of the plateau is evidenced by a rock inscription

[31] For a general overview of the westward expansion of the Tibet Empire, see DENWOOD 2007; DENWOOD 2008; DENWOOD 2009.There are currently no reliable written sources or archaeological evidence for a discussion of the period prior to the annexation of Spiti in the 640s. The Tibetan occupation of the Western Himalayas in the 7th century and the gradual cultural assimilation of Tibetan Buddhism in these regions thereafter, laid the foundations for durable cultural trends which are directly related to the present research on Spiti's later history. On its earlier history, the study of rock art in the form of petroglyphs and pictographs, though fraught with methodological difficulties, offers some hope of bridging the gap between pre-Buddhist and Buddhist eras. For a general introduction to the finds of Palaeolithic tools and rock art in Spiti, see CHAUCHEN 2017; BELLEZZA 2017.

from Ruthok (*ru thog*) (fig. 4.1). This epigraph is particularly important since it mentions the 'district of sPyI ti' (*spyI ti sde*) in reference to a member of the Khyung po family, a clan believed to have been highly influential in Western Tibet during the imperial period.[32] The inscription from Ruthok could therefore be the earliest occurrence of the place name Spiti to date.

The territorial reorganisation of Western Tibet under the Tibetan Empire is also discussed in two literary sources from the 13th century.[33] In the *lDe'u chos 'byung*, a work on religious history composed by lDe'u jo sras no later than the mid-13th century, the valley of Spiti is described as 'the sub-thousand district of sPyi ti' (*spyi ti stong bu chung*). The text also indicates that this small district, along with adjacent areas, belonged to a larger regional grouping named 'the five thousand-districts of lower Zhang zhung' (*zhang zhung smad kyi stong sde lnga*). The same description is repeated in the *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa,* a work composed slightly later than the *lDe'u chos 'byung*, and traditionally attributed to mKhas pa lde'u.[34]

It has recently been suggested by the contemporary scholar Tashi Tsering that the new administrative and military configuration of Spiti established in the wake of the Tibetan conquest of Western Tibet in the 7th century, formed the basis upon which the culture and socio-economic structures, including the taxation system of the valley, were to develop over time. According to Tashi Tsering, these structures included the five administrative units of the valley, along with language usage, social customs,

[32] The rock inscription found by John Vincent Bellezza at the petroglyph site of sNog sog seems characteristic of other inscriptions from the late imperial period as evidenced by the use of the inverted vowel *I* (*gi gu log pa*) and the intermediate position of the inter-syllabic dot (*tsheg*). It reads: *spyI tis de myang rmang la snang* (ln.2) *gis bris khyung po* (ln.3) *{tha} chun (=chung) gyIs brgyis (mod.=bgyis) pa'o*; "written by Myang rmang la snang of the SpyI ti district. Done by the youngest Khyung po" (transcription and translation are Bellezza's); see BELLEZZA 2017: 2–3.

[33] For a discussion on these texts vis-à-vis Spiti, their authorship, and dates of composition, see BLO BZANG SHĀSTRĪ 2007: 34; VAN DER KUIJP 1992; MARTIN 1997: 44.

[34] This is echoed later by dPa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba (1504–1564/66) in his *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* written in the 16th century. Here again, Spiti is mentioned as 'the sub-thousand district of *Ci di*' (*ci di stong bu chung*). According to these sources, the five-thousand districts of lower Zhang zhung were: 1) *Gu ge*, 2) *Gu cog* / *Cog la*, 3) *sPyir tsang* / *sPyi gtsang*, 4) *Yar rtsang* / *Yar gtsang*, 5) and *sPyi ti stong bu chung* / *Ci di stong bu cung*. Despite spelling variants, the disyllables *spyi ti* and *ci di* would have been pronounced identically according to the Central Tibetan system of pronunciation, and this notwithstanding a possible phonological alteration of the second syllable (i.e. from an unaspirated high *ti* to a voiced low *di*), as Tibetan disyllabic words can consist of two tonal morphemes or a first tonal morpheme followed by a second toneless morpheme; see DRIEM 2001b: 852. For a comprehensive analysis of these two passages and a study of the territorial and administrative organisation of the Tibetan Empire; see DOTSON 2006: 189–190; DOTSON 2009: 168–169. For geopolitical maps of the imperial territorial administration system; see RYAVEC 2015: 44–51.

and military practice, all of which were broadly maintained until the late 19th-early 20th century.[35] It is interesting in this regard that according to the oral traditions and lore of Spiti, the earliest settlers of their valley numbered two hundred and fifty households (*khang chen rnying pa*) in total, also known as the 'two hundred and fifty soldiers' (*dmag phyed dang sum brgya*).[36] A similar notion is also expressed in another popular expression whereby the valley initially possessed 'two hundred and fifty households, two hundred and fifty soldiers, and six hundred mouths to feed'.[37] Again, Tashi Tsering remarks that these two hundred and fifty tax-paying households (*khang chen*) were divided into five groups of fifty households (*lnga bcu lnga*), each group corresponding to one of the five administrative units of later historical periods. According to local tradition, this territorial organisation originated in the 7th century when these five groups constituted imperial subunits of fifty households–known then as *tshan*–from which fifty soldiers were conscripted, giving a total of two hundred and fifty soldiers.[38]

[35] In the mid-19th century, taxes and dues were levied from five different administrative units (*tshug so*) labelled *koṭhīs* by the British. They were the lower, middle, and upper regions of the main valley, the side valley of Pin, and the communal estates (*mchod gzhis*) of Spiti. Each one of them comprised an identical number of households (*khang chen*) that constituted the basic unit of agricultural production and taxation in the valley. Also referred to as tax-payers (*khral pa*), the men belonging to these households enjoyed full membership of their respective village council (*'dun ma*). Still in use in Spiti today, the term *'dun ma*, notes Tashi Tsering, is an archaism from the time of the Tibetan Empire denoting the council meeting of the ministers and soldiers. Likewise, he observes that the men of these initial households (*khang chen rnying pa*) also go by the name of 'army' or 'soldier' (*dmag*) since each household was once required to provide an armed man in times of war. In certain critical situations, these men could also convene meetings referred to as 'an assembly of soldiers' (*dmag 'dzom*), particularly in cases involving social tensions, communal threats, and infringement of traditional customs. Finally, a military alert system (*so sa*) is also believed to date back to the time of the empire as explained in the section 3.2.3 of Chapter 3; see TASHI TSERING 2013. The use of the terms *'dun ma* and *dmag* is attested in a written agreement (*gan rgya*) from Spiti studied by Schuh. The document is dated to the 1710s, when the King of Tibet and Qoshot ruler lHa bzang khan (r.1703–1717) retroceded Spiti to Ladakh. The resolution appears to have generated much anxiety among the 'people-soldiers of lower and upper Spiti' (*stod gsham gyi dmag*) who 'convened a council meeting of clerics and lay people' (*lha sde mi sde rnams 'dun ma byas*) in an attempt to avert the decision. The translation of this important document is given in full in the section 4.7 of Chapter 4; see document No-no 43 in SCHUH 2016b: 263–265.

[36] TASHI TSERING 2013: 537.

[37] This piece of information was gathered by Namgyal Henry who records its oral form as follows: / *grong phe rang gnyis brgya lnga / dmag mi gnyis brgya lnga bcu / bza' drug brgya* /; see HENRY 2016: 33, n.91. In Spiti, however, the syllable 'phe' is the pronunciation of the word 'half' (*phyed*), while *rang* is a related form of the comitative case 'with' (*dang*). The proper form in Classical Tibetan would thus be 'with a half it makes …' (*phyed dang*). In line with the idea expressed above, and without changing its general meaning, the first part of the sentence should therefore be amended as follows: / *grong ph[yed] rang [sum brgya] / dmag mi gnyis brgya lnga bcu / bza' drug brgya* /; I wish to thank Bettina Zeisler for clarifying the grammatical subtleties of this expression. This popular saying is also briefly discussed by Tashi Tsering who identifies the 'six hundred mouths to feed' with the majority of landless farmers (*dud 'thul*) who relied upon the main two hundred and fifty households to make a living; see TASHI TSERING 2014: 56–57.

[38] On the issue of households as conscription units at the time of the Tibetan Empire, see TASHI TSERING 2013: 147, 177.

The idea of a territorial organisation and a system of conscription inherited from the time of the Tibetan Empire, which formed the basis for the later administration of Spiti and the levying of taxes, does not appear unfounded. Historical sources show that each administrative unit of 50 tax-paying households (*khang chen pa*) was increased to 60 households over the centuries, while otherwise remaining faithful to the old territorial distribution of holdings. In the 19th century, each of the five administrative units of the Spiti Valley still comprised exactly 60 tax-paying households, each liable for an identical tax rate levied in silver coins. Observing these facts from local taxation records, Dieter Schuh stresses that the apparent permanence of these structures could not have been coincidental. Concurring with Tashi Tsering's presentation, the German scholar concludes, "Basically, the hypothesis which needs to be followed up is that Spiti with the above-mentioned political organisation was established as a south-western outpost of the Tibetan Empire, and maintained this form of organisation until the present time".[39]

*2.2.2 The three regions of Gu ge, Cog la, and (s)Pi ti (*c.*10th-17th centuries)*

In the 10th century, the Spiti Valley was integrated into a new geopolitical entity, and henceforth figured under different territorial designations in primary sources. Following the collapse of the Tibetan Empire in the mid-9th century, Tibet sank into a period of social unrest and political fragmentation (*sil bu'i dus*). Seeking asylum from dynastic dissensions, a branch of the old Tibetan monarchy settled in the west where they established a new kingdom stretching from Guge to Ladakh. From that time onwards, the history of Spiti would be closely tied to that of these two regions.

In 910, sKyid lde nyi ma mgon laid the foundations of a powerful kingdom, possibly with the support of aristocratic families from Central and West Tibet.[40] Within a couple of years, he conquered the regions of Guge, Purang, and Maryul (i.e. Ladakh), resulting in the creation of the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet (*stod mnga' ris skor gsum*). After the demise of sKyid lde nyi ma mgon in the second quarter of the 10th century, the kingdom was divided between his three sons, only

[39] "Grundsätzlich ist hier der Hypothese nachzugehen, dass Spiti mit seiner geschilderten politischen Organisation als südwestlicher Aussenposten des tibetischen Grossreiches eingerichtet wurde und in der damals geschaffenen Organisations form bis in die Neuzeit verharrte"; see SCHUH 2016b: 91–92.
[40] SNELLGROVE 1987: 471; PETECH 1997a: 231. For a chronological overview of events in the history of the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet from the 10th to 15th century; see VITALI 2003: 53–98.

to be reunited again at a later date. dPal gyi lde rig pa mgon inherited Ladakh-Maryul, bKra shis mgon received Guge and Purang, and lDe gtsug mgon took Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, Lahaul, and Zanskar.

Tibetan literary works that narrate the partition of the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet are not entirely in agreement with one another, and identifying Spiti in these narratives can be problematic at times.[41] In the *mNga' ris rgyal rabs* or *Royal Succession of Ngari*, a 15th-century chronicle covering the events of West Tibet, the Spiti Valley is reported alongside the Kingdom of Guge-Purang at the time of the later spread of the Buddhist doctrine.[42] The text gives the spelling Pi ti and specifies that the monastery of Tabo (*ta po*) was the ornament of a region known then as Cog la (*pi ti ta po cog la rgyan*).[43] As geographical entities, the regions of Pi ti and Cog la, or any of their spelling variants, seem to correspond to two adjacent areas, the territorial delineation of which has been addressed by modern scholarship, albeit in footnotes.[44] According to the *lDe'u chos 'byung* and the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* mentioned earlier, the three distinct regions of Gu ge, Gu cog or Cog la, and sPyi ti were separate administrative units prior to the formation of the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet in the 10th century (fig. 2.6). Inscriptions from Tabo Monastery, however, indicate that the names of these districts were still in use in the mid-11th century.[45] Geographically speaking, these

[41] A passage in the *Nyang ral chos 'byung* composed by Nyang ral Nyi ma'od zer (1124–1192) recalls how King sKyid lde nyi ma mgon's dominions in Western Tibet were divided between his three sons in the 10th century. The text goes on to explain that the descendants of the youngest son, named lDe gtsug mgon, were found among the people of Khumbu (*khum bu ba*) and Dingri (*ding ri ba).* Commenting on this passage, Roberto Vitali assumes that Khumbu designates Kinnaur (*khu nu*) and surmises that Dingri can be identified with Spiti, in comparison to similar accounts reported in other Tibetan literary sources. The reading of this passage is complicated not only by the existence of another Dingri to the west of Sakya in south La stod, but also by the fact that Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer himself elsewhere in the text appears to explicitly mention the monastery of Tabo in Spiti (*sil chog tu rta po*) albeit in a very peculiar form. If the term *sil chog* here refers to Spiti, as it seems to, why the people of Spiti then be referred to as *ding ri ba*. The passage in question reads: *chung ba lde gtsug mgon gyi rgyud ni / khum bu ba / ding ri ba / mon yul na ci rigs pa yod do zer ba rnams lags*: "As for the descendants of the youngest lDe gtsug mgon, it is said that they are amongst the people of Khumbu, the people of Dingri, and whatever races in the land of Mön" (translation mine); see VITALI 1996: 158, n.211–212.

[42] Vitali has produced a major study of this text which, he argues, was composed by Gu ge mkhan chen Ngag dbang grags pa in 1497; see VITALI 1996. The identification of its author and the proposed date of composition have been called into question by Petech and Van der Kuijp who, based on internal evidence, admit that the *Royal Succession of Ngari* was probably composed in the last quarter of the 15th century; see PETECH 1997b; VAN DER KUIJP 2018: 403–450.

[43] VITALI 1996: 233, 266; BLO BZANG SHĀSTRĪ 2007: 35.

[44] AHMAD 1968: 340, n.5; VITALI 1996: 252–254; PETECH 1997a: 252, n.20; KLIMBURG-SALTER 2005: 16; TROPPER 2008: 39, n.216.

[45] The portraits of local historical figures depicted inside the main temple at Tabo in Spiti highlight the close relation between the regional origin of these people and the former territorial administration system established during the time of the empire. Among the representations of donors portrayed by the entrance door on the north-eastern wall, which are securely dated to 1042, the monk Mos pa bSod nams grags is described as a native of the district of lCog la (*lcog la'i sde*), whilst a physician (*sman pa*) sitting to his right, whose name is partly illegible,

designations cover approximately the regions of Guge, Upper Kinnaur, and Spiti. In light of later textual evidence, it is generally agreed that the region of Gu cog / Cog la was located to the northwest of Guge down towards the Shipki Pass (*srib skyid la*, *srib skyes la*) along the banks of the Sutlej River, a region sometimes also referred to as Rongchung (*rong chung*). References to the regions of Cog la, Gug lcog, and Ngari are also made in the founding inscription for the Golden Temple (*gser khang*) at Lhalung (*lha lung*) in Spiti where the lord of Cog la is said to have made the area of Gug lcog the cultural hub or vital centre of Ngari (*gug lcog mnga' ris srog shing mdzad*).[46]

To complicate matters further, toponyms such as Pi ti pi cog, sPi ti spi lcogs, and sPi lcogs are also found in Tibetan literary sources up to the 16th century.[47] The territorial designations of these terms are open to interpretation, but are believed to reflect the morphology of the landscape.[48] It is noteworthy in this context that the great paṇḍita of Guge Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1415–1486) combined the 'two districts of Pi ti and lCog la' (*pi lcog sde gnyis*) in his hagiographic account of the monk-king Ye shes 'od, while also making use of spelling variants such as Sil chog and, more commonly, Pi ti.[49] Without further historical evidence, it is probably safe to say that the place name Pi ti pi cog likely encompassed both lower Spiti and north-eastern Rongchung (i.e. Cog la), thus comprising an area that extended to the southeast of Tabo towards Upper Kinnaur, the Shipki Pass, and the western rim of the Guge plateau.

After the fragmentation of the Kingdom of Guge-Purang in the mid-12th century, we lose track of the Spiti Valley almost completely, except for the activity of religious hermits and pilgrims in the

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comes from the district of Guge (*gu ge'i sde*). The use of the term 'district' (*sde*) was observed in other fragmentary captions, but its historical relevance has been partly overlooked by scholars. Luczanits, who translates it as 'region' rather than 'district', recognises however the historical ties between the use of *sde* and the 'thousand districts' (*stong sde*) of lower Zhang zhung. The combined use of the term 'district' to regional areas in the Tabo inscriptions may in fact denote the superimposition of territorial divisions and former administrative units. For a discussion on these inscriptions; see LUCZANITS 1999: 122. For images of these figures, see VAN HAM 2014: 24

[46] The relevant passage is given in the section 4.2 of Chapter 4; see TROPPER 2008: 39–42; n.216–217. For a different interpretation of the term *gug lcog* and its territorial implications, see PETECH 1997a: 252, n.20.

[47] For instance, one finds *pi ti bi lcog* in the *Chos rje rgod tshang pa mgon po rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa* dated 1540; see section 3.5.2 in Chapter 3. Also *pi ti pi skyog* in the *Jo bo dngul sku mched gsum gyi dkar cha grab dga'i glu dbyangs* written in the 16th century; see WA GINDRA KARMA n.d.: 15.

[48] Ahmad, for instance, argues that sPi ti and sPi lcogs were not different territories but corresponded to the lower and upper parts of the same territory. In his view, sPi ti would have been "the lowland of *sPi*", while sPi lcogs was "the highland of *sPi*"; see AHMAD 1968: 340, n.5. Vitali also offers an etymological reading of Cog la informed by topographical considerations. He suggests that "Cog.la renders well the peculiarity of Gu.ge's morphology, where eroded canyons lead to passes, which are long table-lands (Cog.la: "table-land pass")"; see VITALI 1996: 167, n.227.

[49] GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN 2013.

region. A notable example is the Drukpa master rGod tshang pa (1189–1258) who travelled through Pi ti bi lcog in about 1216. The resurgence of the Kingdom of Guge in the 15th century saw a limited development of Sakyapa monasteries in the region. But this was soon superseded by the new western Tibetan monarchy's interest in Tsong kha pa' s religious system as a result of which the Gelukpa school gained sway in West Tibet and Spiti. During this period, Tibetan authors of literary works such as royal genealogies (*rgyal rabs*), hagiographies (*rnam thar*), and religious historical accounts (*chos 'byung*) tended to use one of the spelling variants which corresponded to local usage and pronunciation, namely sPi ti or Pi ti.[50] It is worth noting that these authors were often Gelukpa scholars and natives of West Tibet like, for instance, Gu ge mkhan chen Ngag dbang grags pa (b.15th century) and Zhang zhung pa dPal 'byor bzang po (b.1552).[51] Based on their usage, the spelling variants (s)Pi ti were also adopted in later works by authors from Central Tibet over the following centuries.[52]

*2.2.3 The border river valley of sPyi ti or (s)Pi ti (*c.*17th–19th centuries)*

The next major historical period coincides with the rise of the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh and its annexation of Spiti in 1630 during of the reign of King Seng ge rnam rgyal (*c.*1590–1642). This period is relatively well-documented with regard to Ladakh, but less so for the border valley which from this time constituted the kingdom's southern-most province. Moreover, during this period Spiti was tossed back and forth between Ladakh and some of its regional offshoots. For short periods of time, it was controlled by the Kingdom of Zanskar (1647–1684), and then by the Kingdom of Purig (1734–

[50] A superscript *sa* (*sa mgo*) on the root letter *pa* is silent in the Central Tibetan system of pronunciation, so both variants would be vocalized identically in Central Tibet and among the speakers of the Western Innovative group of dialects to which the language of Spiti belongs.

[51] The place name Pi ti is found in the *Royal Succession of Ngari*. While dPal 'bjor bzang po uses Pi thi in his *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i yid phrog* completed in 1601. For more on these sources see section 3.5.3 in Chapter 3.

[52] The regent of Tibet sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) mostly uses the variant Pi ti–and a single occurrence of sPi ti–in the *Bai dūrya ser po* and in his pseudo-autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama. All these references are given in the section 3.5.3 of Chapter 3 and in section 4.6 of Chapter 4. Later, the Mongolian historian Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor (1704–1788) used the spelling variant Pi ti in his *Chos 'byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*, see BLO BZANG SHĀSTRĪ 2007: 37. On the other hand, the 55th abbot of Ngor Monastery, Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan (*c.*1830–1890), mentions both sPyi ti and sPi ti rong chung in his historical account of the three silver brothers of Kojarnath Monastery, combining once again the Spiti Valley and the territory formerly known as Cog la. There are two modern recensions of this text known to the present author that contain some minor discrepancies, in particular regarding the occurrence of the place name Spiti (*spyi ti*) in the 1988 edition; see NGAG DBANG BSOD NAMS RGYAL MTSHAN 1988; NGAG DBANG BSOD NAMS RGYAL MTSHAN 1996.

1765), before the reintegration of these territories into the Kingdom of Ladakh in 1765. Meanwhile, the dGa' ldan pho brang government based in Lhasa, Tibet, also made territorial claims over the area, which they possessed temporarily between 1684 and 1708.[53]

Primary sources from this period suggest the use of two different spellings for Spiti depending on the nature of the documentation. Official documents related to the legal and political affairs of Spiti, such as royal charters (*bka'*), confirmation letters of privileges (*rgyab gnon*), and written agreements (*gan tshig*), are mostly consistent in their use of the early spelling variant sPyi ti.[54] The same appears to be true in the political openings of donor prefaces composed in Spiti.[55] Literary works, on the other hand, continued to use the more colloquial forms (s)Pi ti.

Throughout the Ladakhi hegemony, the province (*khul*) of Spiti was generally understood as the territory lying between the villages of Lari (*la ri*) and Losar (*blo sar, lho shar, lho sar*), two settlements which formed the southern and northern boundaries of the valley respectively (fig. 2.4).[56] From Lari, those villages situated downstream on the Spiti River towards its junction with the Sutlej River were considered as belonging to Hangrang or Hungrung, a small area in Upper Kinnaur which fell within the jurisdiction of the princely state of Bashahr.

2.2.4 The British Himalayan district of Spiti (1836–1947)

This last historical period was characterised by foreign influence and competition in the pursuit of commercial interests in the Indo-Tibetan border regions of the Western Himalayas. It began with the

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[53] See section 4.6 in Chapter 4.

[54] Official correspondence was often addressed to the 'prefect of the fort of sPyi ti' (*spyi ti mkhar dpon*) and other high-ranking officials; see BmK02, BmK03, BmK07 and BmK29 in Appendix 6. In the legal and diplomatic documents from Spiti studied by Schuh, the use of sPyi ti is found across the board (No-no 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 19). Incidentally, the incongruous spelling variants sPyi bstis, sPyi brtis, and dPe sdis are reported in falsified documents and forgeries (No-no 4, 5, and 15); see SCHUH 2016b.

[55] See documents DP1, DP2, DP3, and DP4 in Appendix 5.

[56] It is not clear at this stage to what extent the Tibetan terminology used in official documents dating from the 17th-19th centuries accurately reflects these different jurisdictional claims over Spiti. Among the local archives kept in Dangkhar, the term *khul* 'province/district/area' occurs only in two documents issued by Tashigang (*bkra shis sgang*) in West Tibet, of which one was on behalf of the Tibetan government (BmK05 and BmK23). Other epigraphic documents use the term *chab srid* 'dominion/kingdom/territory', and *mnga' 'og* 'dominion/jurisdiction'; see Appendices 5 and 6. According to a document issued in 1851 the territorial delineations of Spiti were between Lari and Losar–literally "from Lari upwards and Losar downwards". These boundaries seemed to hold true for the previous two centuries and were often reported in colonial writings; see BmK11 in Appendix 6; J.G. GERARD 1833: 241; HAY 1851: 431–32; HARCOURT 1871b: 28; FRANCKE 1914: 37.

military campaigns of Zorawar Singh (1786–1841) in Ladakh (1834), Baltistan (1839), and West Tibet (1841) which precipitated the demise the rNam rgyal dynasty in Ladakh. With the growing influence of the East India Company and the formal takeover of the valleys of Kulu, Lahaul, and Spiti in 1846, the border valley of Spiti came under British administrative oversight, which continues for a hundred years until the Indian Independence Act of 1947. In the colonial literature produced during this period, the geographical description of the valley, its boundaries, and socio-economic organisation were thoroughly scrutinised. After some hesitation, the place name 'Spiti' became standardised in most English, German, and French writings.[57]

It will be noted from the foregoing discussion that the Spiti Valley occupied a marginal place in the geopolitics of Inner Asia throughout these centuries. As a south-western outpost of the Tibetan Empire in the 7th-10th centuries, it was then integrated into the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet and remained its western boundary until the fall of the reduced Kingdom of Guge in 1630. Henceforth, Spiti constituted the southernmost province of the Kingdom of Ladakh. In the aftermath of the Dogra invasions, and with the end of the rNam rgyal dynasty, the acquisition of the Spiti Valley in 1846 gave Britain a direct border with Tibet, until modern times when the river valley became a sensitive borderline between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China. Throughout these periods, as different powers claimed control over Spiti, this small Himalayan valley continued to act as a buffer zone between different cultures, languages, and belief systems. Seeking to expand their hegemony, the larger political entities bordering this region caused the fluctuating territorial breakdown of the Western Himalayas. But whether artificially created or corresponding to predetermined geographical areas, these divisions often obscured continuity in the local histories of small polities in this region, which have remained elusive to historians. The Spiti Valley is one such example.

[57] The earliest observation dates from 1817 when Alexander Gerard remarked that a few miles after entering Upper Kinnaur the Sutlej River is "joined by the Lee or Speetee", adding that the latter "flows through the district so called". He also explained that the Tibetan populations of these regions occasionally prefix the letter 's' to some words such "as Pooee-Spooee, Peetee-Speetee, Tango-Stango"; see A. GERARD 1841: 29–30, 99. In Alexander Cunningham's pioneering work on Ladakh, this British army engineer who participated in the boundary commissions of 1846 and 1847, reported how the Spiti Valley was "bounded on the north by Rukchu [i.e. Rupshu], on the west by Lahul and Kullu, on the south by Kanáwar [i.e. Kinnaur] and on the east by the Chinese district of Chumurti". Stressing that Spiti had been "added to the British dominions", he remarked that, "in Kullu and Kanáwar this district is generally called Piti, but the proper name is Spiti"; an opinion probably inherited from Ladakhi informants; see A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 13, 23–24.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DANGKHAR SETTLEMENT

> *The Dharma King of Guge graciously granted a religious estate from Dangkhar.*
>
> *In the time of the Sovereign of Guge, the monastic estates, the chapels, the assigned fields and households, the territory and borders, and so forth were graciously granted to Lagope Monastery of Tharpa Ling.*
>
> *BmK01* (1740) and *BmK08*

We saw in the previous chapter how Western Tibet was integrated into the Tibetan Empire by the armies of Srong btsan sgam po in the 7th century, as a result of which the border river valley of Spiti underwent progressive Tibetanisation, as well as a complete territorial shake-up. We also reviewed evidence suggesting that the organisation of the 'sub-thousand district of Spiti' (*spyi ti stong bu chung*) into five administrative units was maintained until the 19th century, when these traditional units were eventually renamed *koṭhīs* by British officials. From this evidence, we can infer that the Dangkhar settlement already belonged to the 'lower administrative unit' (*sham*) of these five prior to the turn of the first millennium, although it is currently not possible to specify in what form and under what name. By the 15th century, if not earlier, the Dangkhar settlement is attested in epigraphic and literary sources, while also leaving tangible and visual evidence of its human activity *in situ*.

In what follows, I shall describe the Dangkhar settlement from the point of view of its spatial organisation, architectural structures, socio-economic fabric, and politico-religious framework. Based

on materials collected during fieldwork and introduced in the first chapter, the description of the site history here gives precedence to primary sources in the form of material, artistic, and literary evidence. These data, although important, must often be supplemented by previous observations and scholarship. A significant obstacle to the success of this research, however, is the scarcity of securely datable evidence for early periods, with most findings here relating to the 17th-19th centuries. Often conflated with one another, the Dangkhar settlement and its monastery share a seemingly long history that we are only beginning to understand. In fact, it is not entirely clear what the earlier names of this settlement and its monastery were, at least as far as their spelling is concerned. Starting with a description of its geological setting and toponymy, we shall then move to an archaeological and historical analysis of the settlement and its constitutive elements.

3.1 Geological setting and toponymy

The mere sight of Dangkhar inspired awe in countless Western travellers and its memory was immortalised in numerous descriptions and visual depictions.[1] One of the reasons for this is its vertiginous location and breathtaking geological setting. Perched far above the valley floor, the Dangkhar settlement developed along the edges of steep rock cliffs overlooking the confluence of the Spiti and Pin rivers (fig. 4.2). Behind the settlement to the north-east, a sloping mass of rock fragments delineated a half-opened cirque interspersed with towering earth-pillars pointing towards the sky.[2] The first attempts to explain this formation of the river valley date back to the colonial era; not all explanations were scientifically sound as, for instance, Hutton's theory concerning biblical flood and antediluvian snow. It was only during fieldwork in 2011 that a team led by D. Scott Kieffer, Professor of Engineering Geology (Graz University of Technology), came to fully understand the topography of

[1] Andrew Wilson's description encapsulates the attraction exerted by this site on Western travellers: "It is similar strata which afford so extraordinary a position and appearance to Dankar, the capital of Spiti, which is a British Himálayan province, under an assistant commissioner who resides in the warmer and more fruitful Kúlú valley. This town is perched about a thousand feet above the Lee, on the ledges and towers of an immense ridge of soft strata which descends towards the river, but breaks off with a sudden fall after affording ground for the fort, houses, and Lama temples of Dankar. Its appearance is very extraordinary, but has only its picturesqueness to recommend it, for the interior is as miserable as that of the smallest Himálayan village. This place should properly be spelled "Drankhar," which means "the cold fort." *Khar*, with an aspirate, signifies a fort, as Dan-kar is, or rather was; but *kar* means white"; see WILSON 1875: 240–241.
[2] KIEFFER & STEINBAUER 2013: 197–227.

this part of the valley. Their findings had two major consequences for the history of the human settlement: firstly, they pointed towards the origin of a large number of caves and cavities, some of which would be used as dwellings; secondly, they helped to explain the geological instability of the site and the disappearance of a large number of buildings.

The Spiti Valley, it may be remembered, is a tectonically active region with several major fault systems situated in the vicinity of Dangkhar. Following a geological and geomorphic analysis of the area, Kieffer and his team were able to determine that the Dangkhar settlement is established on the debris of a landslide which occurred more than 8,700 years BP. This landslide covers an area of about 40 km^2 and was responsible for a sliding mass of approximately 17-20 km^3 of massive blocks and pulverized rocks "making the Dangkhar landslide one of the largest continental, non-volcanic landslides on earth".[3] This alone would explain the precarious slope stability of the site and its surroundings. Composed of a conglomerate of variably cemented deposits, the cliffs of Dangkhar are prone to erosion and other geological processes. The Austrian team of geologists also noted that the formation of earth-pillars visible all around, together with the occurrence of pits, vugs, and small caves, represented "the last vestiges of a landscape progressively eroded by water".[4] In the course of time, this dramatic geological setting was chosen to establish a human settlement, and came to be recorded under the name 'Dangkhar' in written sources.

Toponymy plays an important role in the study of Tibetan and Himalayan landscapes. Place names are rarely fortuitous and may serve as the basis for etiological legends, often attesting to various human conceptions of nature.[5] Dangkhar does not differ in this regard, and it may well be that its Tibetan name is a direct reference to its geological setting. However, a multitude of spelling variants militates against a definite understanding of its etymology. Occurrences of this place name were found in wall and stone inscriptions from Spiti, as well as in literary works and local archives. They display a broad range of homophonic and disyllabic combinations of terms, such as *brag mkhar*, *brag dkar*, *brang khar*, *brang mkhar*, *drang khar*, *drang mkhar*, *grag khar*, *grag mkhar*, and *grang dkar*. At the

[3] KASPAR & KIEFFER 2015: 891–894.
[4] KIEFFER & STEINBAUER 2013: 209.
[5] The oral tradition of Spiti claims that the site of Dangkhar was first established on top of a lotus flower in the middle of a lake; see documents B and C in Appendix 8.

outset, some of these compounds make more sense than others, starting with words suggesting the presence of a human settlement in the form of a dwelling place or encampment (*brang*), or in the form of a stronghold or ruler's place (*mkhar*). Two of these terms refer directly to a cliff (*brag*), or more specifically to a white cliff (*brag dkar*); a qualifying adjective that is not only fit to describe Dangkhar and its pale natural surroundings, but which is also attested in several other parts of the Himalayas as an auspicious epithet. Terms such as 'cold' (*grang*), 'upright' (*drang*), or 'audible' (*grag*) are less helpful here, although they could all in theory be applied to characterise aspects of the site. Finally, the spelling *khar* is likely to be a corrupted form of *mkhar* and, despite its frequency in written documents, must refer to a fortified place of residence.

Currently, the earliest mention of Dangkhar in Tibetan historical literature is in the *Royal Succession of Ngari*, a work dated to the last quarter of the 15th century by Vitali. In that work, the place name Brang mkhar is recorded in an episode alluding to the fate of King rTse lde's descendants. Following the death of the King of Guge-Purang, sometime between 1088 and 1092,[6] rTse lde's eldest son named Seng grags settled in Brang mkhar while his younger brother, dBang 'od, was eventually chosen to succeed their father. The site of Brang mkhar henceforth became the seat of a new royal line for at least three generations.[7] Notwithstanding Vitali's erroneous understanding of rTse lde's family lineage,[8] his suggestion that the toponym Brang mkhar refers to the site in Spiti is plausible.[9] Certainly

[6] VITALI 2003: 64–67.

[7] *// de la sras bzhi ste / seng grag / brang mkhar la bzhugs / de'i sras rtse 'od / de'i sras jo rtse / de'i sras rdo rje gdan dang gdung gsum / lha btsun dbang 'od / gdung tshab la bzhag te / dkar po'i te lder bzhugs / mjug tu khu dbon 'khrugs pa'i dus su / dbon mnga' bdag bsod nams rtse / tho gling gi thang gi 'od du dkrong[s] ngo /*; "The latter [i.e. rTse lde] had four sons: Seng grag[s] resided at Brang mkhar. The latter's son was rTse 'od. His son was Jo rtse, and the third generation was his son rDo rje gdan. The royal monk dBang 'od was designated heir apparent. He resided at dKar po'i te lder. In the end, when a dispute between uncle and nephew broke out, the nephew and sovereign bSod nams rtse killed [his uncle] on the Glowing Plain of Tholing". For a different translation of this passage; see VITALI 1996: 125.

[8] I follow here Nils Martin who has recently revised Vitali's reading of this important passage. Martin convincingly shows that rTse lde's four sons were Seng grags, the royal monk dBang 'od, Tsa me dwi ṭa, and Khri bKra shis 'bar lde btsan, also known as dBang lde. Following the premature death of both Tsa me dwi ṭa and dBang lde, the royal monk dBang 'od renounced his monastic life and succeeded to the throne of Guge-Purang. This event marked the beginning of a succession crisis between dBang 'od and his nephew bSod nams rtse (i.e. dBang lde's son) resulting in the violent death of the former, as recorded in the *Royal Succession of Ngari*; see MARTIN forthcoming.

[9] Vitali's identification of Brang mkhar is based on a misreading of the abovementioned passage. More specifically, he takes the name of rTse lde's eldest son, Seng grag[s], which he understands as *seng brag*–short for the 'leonine rock' (*seng ge brag*)–to be a toponymic reference to the Dangkhar cliffs "in consideration of the typical expression adopted in the *gnas bshad* literature, the aim of which is to describe localities in an

the geographical proximity between the two regions would not preclude such a hypothesis. To date, however, there is hardly any corroborating architectural, epigraphic, or artistic evidence related to the Dangkhar settlement that dates back to the 11th century.[10]

Another early attestation of the place name Dangkhar, from about the same time as the *Royal Succession of Ngari*, is found among the wall paintings of the Mandala Temple (*dkyil khang*) at Tabo. In the late 15th-16th centuries, the iconographic programme of this edifice was partially repainted to celebrate Tsong kha pa's newly established sway in the region.[11] To this end, portraits of Gelukpa masters and scenes of religious teaching were represented in the foreground of a depiction (*bkod pa*) of Tabo Monastery (fig. 4.3). Inside the sacred monastic compound (*chos 'khor*), several inscriptions allow the identification of historical figures who are believed by Vitali to represent members of the court of Spiti in those years.[12] Amongst the representations of monks, donors, high dignitaries, and royalties are king (*rgyal po*) dSod nams lde, his spouse lady (*jo co*) lHam 'dzes, the minister Rin rkyam, and another "minister from Dangkhar" (*blon po grang dkar*) (fig. 4.4).[13] This last figure is further described by the term *dbon gtsun*. With a slight emendation of the second syllable, this term of

ornate/Buddhist manner. In this genre, the lion (*seng ge*) is often used as a poetic allegory for rocks (*brag*)"; personal communication, October 2017, and VITALI 1996: 74, 125, 344.

[10] The notable exception is the spectacular Buddha image inscribed with the name of King rTse lde's uncle, the royal monk (*lha bla ma*) and translator Zhi ba 'od (1016–1111) (fig. 4.27). Safely kept by the monks of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling, the statue is nowadays cherished as the single most important image (*rten gtso*) in their possession, exhibited only once a year during a religious ceremony comprising the circumambulation of cultivation areas (*'bum skor*) by the whole community of Dangkhar, both lay and monastic. This exceptional bronze from Gilgit (*bru zha*), dated to 712 CE by inscription, was acquired by the royal translator only after 1056 when Yongs srong sde had his name changed into Zhi ba 'od. A matrimonial alliance formed between the royal families of the Buddhist kingdoms of Gilgit and Guge-Purang in the first half of the 11th century may perhaps account for the travelling of the statue to West Tibet. As a portable object, however, this image could have reached Spiti at any point in time after that time and can hardly constitute a definite evidence for the identification of Seng grags' seat as corresponding to the settlement of Dangkhar in Spiti; see LAURENT 2013; LAURENT 2017: 21–23.

[11] The iconographic programme and historical inscriptions of the Mandala Temple have been subject to several discussions and reassessments; see TUCCI 1988b: 109–113; VITALI 1996: 525–526; HELLER 2017.

[12] VITALI 1996: 525–526, n.896.

[13] My gratitude goes to Christian Luczanits who kindly shared with me his unpublished material on these inscriptions along with photographs taken during fieldwork in 1994. Alternative readings include Tucci's *rgyal po bsod sde*, *jo bo lham 'dzes*, *blon po rin rgyan*, and *blon po grang dkar spos sna khang*; Vitali's *rgyal po bsod nams 'bum*, *jo co lha lham 'joms*, *blon po rin rgyan*, and *grang dkar dpon btsun*; and Rahula's *chal po bsod nams lha*, *jo co lham mdzes*, *blon po rin rgyan*, *blon po grang dkar*, and *dpon btsun*. It is not clear, however, why the last author seems to believe that the epigraph *dpon btsun* refers to the figure seated behind the minister of Dangkhar; see TUCCI 1988b: 113; VITALI 1996: 525–526, n.896; RAHULA 2013: 480.

address could suggest that the minister was a nephew (*dbon*) and cleric of royal blood (*btsun*).[14] In any event, here we have an attestation to the place name Grang dkar on the walls of a local religious edifice whose paintings cannot be earlier than the end of the 15th century, and this must refer to our settlement. Moreover, it appears to be the residence of a minister and religious official who may well have been related to the royal family of Spiti, or that of a neighbouring kingdom.

Further epigraphic evidence was discovered in 2016 by the present author in the hamlet of Nadang (*na dang*) located a few miles from Tabo. A single *maṇi* stone preserved inside a small temple records the munificence and meritorious deeds of local patrons.[15] Traditionally, this type of donative records opens with a religious praise, and continues with a conventional literary trope whereby the place of enunciation, and therefore the document itself, is set into a well-established cosmic order:

> Hail! In the best continent, the southern Jambudvīpa, to the left side of the flowing Indus River, praise be to the great Dharma King Khri Grags pa lde! At Dangkhar (*drang khar*) under his dominion (*mnga' 'og*), praise be to lord Yid rgyal![16]

From this passage we learn that the stone had been engraved during the reign of bKra shis grags pa lde (r.*c.*1606–1630), the king of Guge under whose authority (*mnga' 'og*) an official or commander (*dpon po*) resided in Dangkhar.

On the basis of these two pieces of epigraphic evidence, it is reasonable to infer that Dangkhar was invested with some kind of political authority in the 15th-17th centuries. They also suggest that larger polities, such as Guge and later Ladakh, were significant political actors in the region. This trend is confirmed by yet another inscribed votive stone from Spiti captured on paper by Shuttleworth in July 1918, a copy of which is preserved in the British Library.[17] Found inside a chapel on top of the district fort in Dangkhar, this donor inscription praises offerings made by a local minister (*blon po*).

> Hail! May the helmet of the Dharma King Seng ge rnam rgyal be high on top of the Glorious Palace erected on the promontory of the Great capital of Leh (*ble*) on the right

[14] Vitali, however, argues that the term must refer to "a junior religious minister of royal descent" (*blon po grang dkar / dpon btsun*); see VITALI 1996: 525–526, n.896.
[15] See SI4 in Appendix 5 and LAURENT 2017b.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] See SI1 in Appendix 5 and LAURENT 2017b.

> side of the flowing Indus River. Hail! At the hilltop of Dangkhar (*grang khar*) in his dominion (*chab srid*) of Spiti (*spi ti*), let Ga ga Tshe ring rnam rgyal enjoy a long life.[18]

From the content of this passage, we can conclude that this inscription was carved sometime between 1630 and 1642, when the Spiti Valley was annexed by the King of Ladakh Seng ge rnam rgyal (*c.*1590–1642). After the fall of Tsaparang, the capital of the Kingdom of Guge, Seng ge rnam rgyal forcibly exiled King bKra shis grags pa lde, whose name was recorded in the previous inscription, and Spiti came under the jurisdiction of Ladakh. This inscription follows the same phraseology as that found at Nadang; only this time it praises Seng ge rnam rgyal and his senior official (*ga ga*), who resided at the hilltop of the Dangkhar settlement in the king's dominion of Spiti.

From the 17th to the mid-19th centuries, the Dangkhar settlement was mentioned repeatedly in a large number of official documents issued in West Tibet, Ladakh, Purig, and Spiti. A survey of these written documents shows that there was no tendency towards a standardisation of the place name Dangkhar in later periods, and thus they provide no clue as to how the name was understood locally.[19] In short, the toponym Dangkhar is attested in epigraphic sources from Spiti as early as the late 15th century, and we have no choice but to note that consistency in spelling was not important for stone carvers and artisans. Notwithstanding orthography, the cultural and historical context in which the place name Dangkhar was recorded in stone and onto murals seems already indicative of its function as a political seat. Given that it was a place of residence for the landed gentry and the ruling class, terms such as 'dwelling place-encampment' (*brang*) and 'stronghold-fortified residence' (*mkhar*) must likely be given precedence over the use of less descriptive and useful concepts, such as the word 'cold' (*grang*), for instance. In view of the topography of the site, it seems reasonable to maintain that the imperious cliffs (*brag*) of Dangkhar could have accounted for part of the place name. In the end, the most obvious reading would be to regard the Dangkhar settlement as the 'stronghold of the cliffs' (*brag mkhar*), a citadel dominating the Spiti Valley which we are now going to examine in more detail.

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[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Two different spellings can even be found within the same document; see document BmK11 issued in 1851 in Appendix 6.

3.2 Territorial organisation

The study of a human settlement does not limit itself to the analysis of residential areas but must encompass its whole territory. As the majority of the population must have been concerned with food production throughout most of its history, the initial questions to be asked are: why did people choose this spot, and what were the advantages and limitations of its territory? These aspects were vital in a high mountain desert environment where natural resources are distributed asymmetrically. Topography, water resources, arable land, and grazing potential are therefore critical considerations for the history of a settlement and need to be taken into account before focusing on built-up areas and institutions.

Generally speaking, Tibetan and Himalayan settlements often consist of a cluster of houses (*grong*), cultivable land (*sa rigs*), a village temple (*lha khang*), and hillsides composed of grazing areas (*rtswa ri*) and barren wasteland (*sa stong*).[20] Larger settlements may also include a monastery (*dgon pa*) and, in some cases, a regional political centre in the form of a stronghold (*mkhar*) or district fort (*rdzong*). All these constitutive elements are delineated by boundaries (*sa mtshams*) and contribute to defining the political territory of a settlement (*yul*).

In the case of Dangkhar, residential areas occupied a tiny fraction of the overall territory and were confined to the ridge of the cliffs until the first half of the 20th century (fig. 2.7).[21] The village was divided into three distinct clusters of houses located in the lower, middle, and upper part of the crag (fig. 2.11). Looming over the lowest part of the village, the old monastery was established on a rocky outcrop occupying the middle segment of the ridge. Erected at the summit of the ridge, the fort of the stronghold dominated all other edifices. As for the remaining part of the territory, it developed to the south-east of the cliffs; with field terraces stretching towards the floor of the valley, and a vast hinterland rising up to the east. Taking into consideration the extreme roughness of the terrain,

[20] The concepts of settlement and territory in Tibetan Buddhist and Himalayan communities are relatively well known. Strong structural similarities with the settlements of Spiti can be found for example in Zanskar; see GUTSCHOW & GUTSCHOW 2003. For the neighbouring cultural area of Highland Nepal, Ramble offers a description of a settlement in Upper Mustang informed by ethno-historical analysis; see RAMBLE 2008.

[21] The village of Dangkhar has now extended to the south-east of the cliffs inside the cirque situated downhill. It is believed that the first house established there was that of the Tshe ba family, as a result of which the new residential area is commonly referred to as Tshe; see LAURENT 2011.

anthropic landmarks, and the related principles of least effort and land rent, the territorial radius for Dangkhar in historical times cannot have been much more than 1.15 km as the crow flies.[22] Based on field observation and satellite imagery, it can be established that the land area of the Dangkhar settlement ranged from 3-4 km^2, of which ± 8% was occupied by residential areas and cultivated land (fig. 2.8). The people belonging to this territory (*yul*) were the people of Dangkhar (*brang khar yul pa*),[23] who were yet compelled to share it with other, less visible, living entities.

3.2.1 Access roads and boundaries

A village territory is defined not only by political boundaries, but also by religious structures, territorial shrines, and performative rituals.[24] Tibetan and Himalayan communities have complex contractual relationships with a plethora of territorial deities (*yul lha*) and autochthonous supernatural beings (e.g. *klu*, *sa bdag*) with whom they share the same habitat. In most instances, these numina have refractory and hostile responses to human presence and activities. Leaving little leeway to humans, a difficult coexistence must be traded on a regular basis through repeated propitiatory actions, often performed at predetermined locations. Access roads and boundaries are therefore often marked and protected by the presence of *stūpa* monuments (*mchod rten*), *maṇi* walls, altar-like heaps of stones

[22] In view of the physical relief, the theoretical centre of the catchment circle does not coincide with the residential base, which occupies an asymmetric position corresponding to the western boundary of the settlement, but must be placed further east in order to encompass water resources, cultivated land, and grazing areas, as is still the case today. To summarise Bintliff, the related principles of least effort and land rent show that the process of food procurement declines when the members of a community must travel further away from their residential base, due to time lost in travel return. An increase of productivity per square kilometre of landscape is rendered possible by the rearing of domestic animals and the development of agriculture. Agrarian societies thus tend to have smaller territories than pastoralist or hunter-gatherer communities. Topography also determines agricultural work, and food productivity can be diluted through time-consuming travel and rough terrains, as is often the case in high-altitude communities cultivating terraced fields. For an overview of methodological approaches to human territoriality with respect to the exploitation of landscapes; see BINTLIFF 1999.

[23] The local archives have preserved a single instance where the people are collectively referred to as those belonging to the territory of Dangkhar (*brang khar yul pa*). Likewise, their neighbours are called the people of the territory of Lhalung (*lha lung yul pa*); see BmK12 and BmK07 in Appendix 6.

[24] The annual ritual circumambulation of the fields (*'bum skor*) is a good indicator for determining the extent of the settlement territory in relatively recent historical times (fig. 2.9). In Dangkhar, this religious festival takes place around the month of May when the first sprouts of barley reach about 20cm. The procession is led by the monks of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling who stop at springs (*chu mig*) to perform cleansing rituals (*khrus gsol*). The most potent image of the community, the eighth-century bronze from Gilgit bestowed to *lha bla ma* Zhi ba 'od mentioned earlier is exhibited at the head of the procession while the heavy volumes of the Buddhist Canon are carried around by local villagers (fig. 4.27).

(*lha tho*), and prayer masts (*dar lcog*). These religious features are of great use in apprehending the extent of a settlement and its territorial organisation.[25]

In the case of Dangkhar, one of these boundary markers is the old entrance gate which contains remnants of protective images painted on its walls. Nowadays, easy access to Dangkhar is provided by a motor road that snakes up from the main Tabo-Kaza road over eight kilometres. In the first half of the 19th century, however, the site could only be reached via a limited number of trails and mule tracks. From the valley floor, the shortest footpath rose 400 meters over one kilometre towards the base of the cliffs before a bottleneck section which came out directly onto the cirque. It is right there that an entrance gate topped by a small *stūpa* (*rgyal sgo*, *kankani mchod rten*) had been erected between two large buildings, offering the only access into the settlement from the south-west (fig. 4.5-4.10). The area is now heavily disturbed; the houses on either side are in ruins and the gate was subject to structural modifications over the centuries; with a brand new 'enlightenment *stūpa*' (*byang chub mchod rten*) erected on top in recent times. Some features of the gate are worth mentioning. The interior passageway is restricted by the addition of a wall, leaving only a narrow corridor on one side and a chamber on the other. A pair of wooden columns with voluted capitals is placed inside the corridor and a similar column is situated in the chamber to support a ceiling made of reused logs and timbers. On the northern side of the entrance gate, a pair of wooden brackets in the shape of lions protrudes from the wall on either side (fig. 4.9 and 4.10). Leonine beam ends and brackets are common architectural features inside Tibetan Buddhist temples. They are also found, for instance, on the monumental gate (*seng ge sgo mo*) of the great palace of Leh in Ladakh.[26] In the absence of radiometric dating, it is difficult to make more than cursory observations. The lions of Dangkhar are

[25] According to a traditional cosmological hierarchy, a tripartite scheme and vertical division of the world comprises a subterranean realm inhabited by chthonic numina, the intermediate human sphere, and the superterranean realm of mountain deities (*btsan*) and gods. For a discussion on the realm of the spirits with regard to human existence, territory, and the re-ordering of cosmological domains in Ladakh, see DOLLFUS 1989; PIRIE 2007.

[26] Referring to the Palace of Leh built by King Seng ge rnam rgyal in the 17th century, art historian Paola Mortari Vergara pointed out that "The lions (senge) of architraves, unusual in a civil building, while playing a protective role may be an allusion to the name of a king. Their affiliation with ancient Indian models is evident through shrines built in the first centuries after the year one thousand" (translation mine); see MORTARI VERGARA 1987b: 366.

relatively well executed, with distinctive body parts and facial features. They generally conform to a style of carving well-established in Ladakh between the 13th and the 15th centuries.[27]

Overall, the position of the columns and brackets seems slightly at odds with the rest of the building. I would venture to suggest that initially the entrance gate cannot have been more than a pair of side walls placed two meters apart, which supported a flat roofing topped with a religious structure; like so many other gateway *stūpas* preserved in the Western Himalayas. It is likely that columns were then placed on either side to support the weight of the roof, before it was eventually decided to build a wall across the passage leaving only a narrow corridor. In the absence of architectural antecedents of a gateway *stūpa* with lion brackets, I suspect that the wooden beasts were added, or reused from another building, during one of the transformation phases of the gate. A small niche located inside the chamber to the south, however, still contains remnants of early wall paintings and must date back to the initial structure.

This niche can be accessed through an opening situated in the north-eastern facade. It is now used as a deposit for votive moulded clay miniatures (*tsha tsha*) and shreds of Buddhist manuscripts. From an architectural perspective, the niche corresponds to a recess on the south-eastern sidewall and must have been designed during the initial construction of the gate. Among the painted figures still visible is a representation of Four-armed Mahākāla (*mgon po phyag bzhi pa*) on the left sidewall of the niche (fig. 4.11). On the opposite side, two rows of three figures display wrathful deities (*krodha*); one of them is clearly identifiable as Raven-faced Mahākāla (*mgon po bya rog dong can*) (fig. 4.12).[28] Despite the heavy damage suffered by these murals, the depiction of the guardian deities against a blue-greyish background, the shape of the haloes, and the limited colour palette used (i.e. blue, red,

[27] Beam ends, brackets, and porticos with sculpted lions were used, for example, at Ensa in the Nubra Valley, Wanla, Kanji Lhachuse, and among edifices belonging to the Alchi group of monuments such as Sumda Chung and Mangyu. I am not aware of any radiometric dating conducted on these architectonic elements, which have not been subject to any typological study either. It is all the more problematic since in many instances there is no common agreement on the dating of the temples in which they are found.

[28] The iconographic programme of the niche can no longer be determined with accuracy from the extent of the remaining figures. The two rows of armed deities may well have been a group of eight or ten Krodhas who acted as protectors of space and cardinal directions. The presence of Raven-faced Mahākāla in this group, however, may suggest a different iconographic theme related to the figure of Four-armed Mahākāla. On *krodha* deities, see MALLMANN 1975: 219–222.

white) suggest that these figures were realised in the 13th-14th centuries.[29] Notwithstanding the addition of columns and lion brackets at a later date, the main gate with its wall paintings and *stūpa* atop must have been the principal entrance into the settlement for about eight centuries. Outside the gate, one can still find the remains of two small corrals (*rta ra*) equipped with mangers (*chag gzhong*) and wooden stakes (*phur pa*) to tie up horses and other mounts (fig. 4.5).[30]

To the east of the cliffs, a network of narrow trails and footpaths led to a mosaic of fields situated downhill. Photographic archives show that the upper limit of the cultivated area was situated in the lower half of the cirque, and was marked by two sets of religious structures, of which the remains of some *stūpa* monuments are still visible today (fig. 4.13 and 4.14).[31] Leading to the southern extremity of the territory, an old trail skirted the gully situated between the cliffs and the cultivated lands, and seems to have continued towards the valley floor in former times. Several of the drawings and photographs by Trebeck, Bourne, Pindi Lal, Ghersi, and Khosla appear to have been taken from this path.[32] Here, again, the access to the settlement was marked by the presence of *stūpa* monuments built by the side of the pathway, of which only one is still visible nowadays (fig. 3.32 and 4.15).[33]

From the upper cluster of houses a track ran north towards the settlements of Tsumrang (*gtsum rang, rtsub rang*), Rapang (*ra spang, ra ma*), Sanglung (?), and Lhalung (*lha lung*) situated in the side river valley of Lingti (*gling ti*). Incidentally, there is no trace of any religious edifice or territorial shrine-marking to protect the northern access to Dangkhar. This, I will argue, was not necessary since

[29] A similar style of wall-paintings and Krodhas can be observed in the 13th-14th-century murals of Pang gra cave in West Tibet; see NEUMANN & NEUMANN 2012. Based on stylistic and iconographic trends, Christian Luczanits has proposed a Drigunpa influence in accordance with the period and the development of that school in Western Tibet; personal communication, 2011.

[30] Located to the west of the entrance gate, the area is known as *g.yang ga gling** according to my informants. In winter, people used to keep horses and mules there so they could enjoy warmth and sunshine in the afternoon. While the use of horses at Dangkhar is well attested in local archives and colonial accounts, an incomplete and undated document reports that there was no horse boarding facility (*rta po sdod*) in Dangkhar; see BmK26 in Appendix 6.

[31] This series of three *stūpa* monuments that marked the access to the residential area from the North-East was collectively known as 'the three reliquary *stūpas*' (*gdung rten gsum pa*) by locals.

[32] See Appendix 3.

[33] The residents of Dangkhar believe that a pair of *stūpa* monuments protected the lower part of the stronghold (*mkhar 'og che*) from harms (*gnod*). As for the the footpath, it was then enlarged and used as a carriage road until it was eventually replaced by a motor road which now passes higher up. A *maṇi* wall was also set up below the enlarged path not far away from the last standing *stūpa*. This structure is not visible on any of the early photographs and is likely to be a 20th-century construction.

the most powerful and bloodthirsty custodian had taken up residence on top of the fort–an edifice which, in many ways, constituted the northernmost limit of the territory (see 3.4.5).

3.2.2 Fields and water resources

To this day, the fields of Dangkhar offer a stark contrast in colour during the summer with the monochrome and desolate Himalayan landscape of Spiti. A skilful exploitation of water resources, intensive earthworks, and the levelling of cultivable areas were necessary to ensure basic living conditions at high altitudes over the ages. Farming activities are still carried out from early April to late October. Today, as in the past, seven months are spent in the fields removing stones, levelling the ground, drawing water channels, ploughing, watering, sowing, pulling out weeds, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and spreading manure.

Based on colonial documentation, the village fields of Dangkhar amounted to 74 acres (0.3 km^2) in 1891 or 81 acres (0.32 km^2) after revision in 1912, a total acreage making this settlement only the fifth largest taxable land of the Spiti Valley.[34] Satellite imagery shows that the surface area of cultivable land is roughly similar in size today; topography and labour force remaining the main constraints for an expansion of cultivable acreage.[35] A small number of fields were occasionally established with great difficulty higher up in the hinterland. These plots of land are called hillside or mountain fields (*ri zhing*) and, according to Tashi Tsering, were subject to fewer customary laws.[36] A written agreement (*gan tshig*) preserved in the local archives of Dangkhar, however, offers a more nuanced view. This document was drawn up between the local monastery and two tenants who disputed the right to farm a hillside field locally known as 'earth sheep' (*sa lug*). In contrast with Tashi Tsering's ethnographic observation, this agreement indicates that the remote mountain field was cultivated on behalf of the monastery of Dangkhar. As such, one of the tenants had been compelled to

[34] COLDSTREAM 1913.

[35] After 1912 however, a large 'broken off' cultivation area (*bu brag*) of about 56 acres (0.23 km^2) was laid out on the banks of the Spiti River irrigated by the water of the Tshe Brook (*tshe grog po*) running downhill from the main settlement. It is now part of the yearly ritual circumambulation of the fields (*'bum skor*).

[36] In his study on resource management in Spiti, Tashi Tsering notes that, "village fields are the traditional or historical fields to which all irrigation and farming-related customary laws apply. Mountain fields (*ri zhing*) are located a few kilometres away from the village and are cultivated by one or few villagers. Although farmers of mountain fields irrigate and cultivate their fields according to customs, they are not obligated to follow every custom"; see TASHI TSERING 2014: 105.

pay ecclesiastical dues (*bon*) in the form of six loads (*khal*) of grain. Moreover, the document indicates that the irrigation of the field was closely monitored by the monastery with an equal partition of water between the two complainants.[37]

Returning to the main settlement, village fields were held by different classes of landowners. The social organisation of Dangkhar will be discussed later in the chapter. It will suffice to say here that as far as 18th-19th century documents allow us to judge, the majority of arable land was in the hands of the tax-paying members (*khral pa*) of large households (*khang chen*). As everywhere else in Spiti, the main landowners were compelled to pay either governmental taxes called 'barley tax' (*nas khral*) or ecclesiastical dues in kind (*bon*). With fields directly assigned to religious institutions, the local monastery owned cultivable land in Dangkhar, as well as fields in other settlements of the valley. According to a confirmation letter of privileges (*rgyab gnon)* issued by the Tibetan authority of Gartok in 1740, fields and households of tenants obliged to pay ecclesiastical dues were referred to as *bon zhing* and *bon khang*.[38] Apart from that, a monk could also enjoy the produce of a field (*grwa zhing*) set aside and farmed by his family. Other special holdings included plots of land held by blacksmiths (*mgar zhing*, *bzo zhing*) and Bheda (*'be zhing*), two groups considered to be at the lower end of the social scale.[39] In other instances, the produce of fields could be allocated to the maintenance of a village temple (*lha zhing*) or towards the upkeep of the irrigation system (*yur zhing*). British officials underlined that the produce of some fields was directly attached to the district fort (*mkhar gyi bon*) of Dangkhar in the 19th century.[40] It is worth noting that the agrarian taxonomy reviewed here is mostly derived from British accounts and recent ethnographical fieldwork. In contrast, the local historical archives only rarely specify the nature of the fields involved in disputes. When written documents mention fields, each plot is typically identified by a toponym based on its shape, usage, location, or

[37] See BmK20; other hillside fields are mentioned in BmK01 and BmK08 in Appendix 6.

[38] The terms 'assigned field' (*bon zhing*) and assigned households (*bon khang*) appear in apposition to 'purchased field' (*nyos zhing*) and 'purchased households' (*nyos khang*) in BmK01. The distinction is not entirely clear to me at this stage. Another direct reference to land owned by a monastery is given in BmK18 in the form of 'assigned property' (*bon gzhis*) and 'assigned households' (*bon khang*); see Appendix 6. In most cases, the land cultivated by tenants on behalf of a monastery, or a group of monasteries, was subsumed under the category of 'ecclesiastical estate' (*mchod gzhis*).

[39] Carrasco believed that the Bedhas of Spiti, unlike those of Lahaul, did not hold any land; see CARRASCO 1959: 39.

[40] LYALL 1874: 186; DIACK 1899: 117.

yield.[41] Farming activities were strongly embedded in social relations of power and authority between regional authorities, monastic estates, large landowners, and the remaining peasantry, which at times led to disagreements and quarrels. Amongst the local archives of Dangkhar, six documents at least deal directly with the adjudication of cases regarding land spoliation,[42] right to farm,[43] ownership dispute,[44] and use of irrigation water.[45] Many of these documents, as well as others, were also concerned with the appropriate payment of ecclesiastical dues to the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement.

According to Hutton, rain in Spiti was exceptional, "falling only like angel's visits", and human habitation was only made possible through considerable effort.[46] Since irrigation was a prerequisite for the development of upland farming, the presence of water resources was a necessity. Water supply in Dangkhar is plentiful, and is secured by an important number of mountain brooks (*chu grog*) flowing down the hills from the north and from the east, as well as supplementary sources of water, such as springs (*chu mig*) and wells (*chu dong*) located near residential and cultivated areas (fig. 2.10). In addition, two natural retention basins, the largest of which is nowadays called Dangkhar Lake, are situated a kilometre away in the hills. Since these bodies of water may not have been situated close enough to cover far-flung field terraces, the village fields depended on an intricate network of irrigation leats (*ma yur*), subsidiary channels (*yur*), and sluices in order to route water to the remotest plots of barley and wheat.

For a country with relatively few natural resources, the ingenuity of the water distribution system in Spiti never ceased to amaze western travellers in the 19th century.[47] Few, if any, of these

[41] The mapping and recording of all field names was outside the scope of this research. To compound the difficulties of attempting such an endeavour, fields that formerly belonged to the monastery of Dangkhar, and which are likely to be discussed in specific documents, were also cultivated by tenants in other settlements in Spiti. The mapping of field names has however been adopted in Zanskar and yielded interesting results vis-à-vis traditional nomenclature. Sixty plots of land, out of 189 fields belonging to the village of Rinam (*ri 'gram*), were carefully mapped and their names recorded; see GUTSCHOW & GUTSCHOW 2003.
[42] See document BmK07 in Appendix 6.
[43] See documents BmK16, BmK20, and BmK27 in Appendix 6.
[44] See document BmK21 in Appendix 6.
[45] See document BmK05 in Appendix 6.
[46] It is difficult to resist the temptation of sharing Hutton's flight of poetry in full: "Rain is here almost unknown, falling only like angel's [sic] visits, and even then so sparingly as to be of no use except to allay the clouds of dust for a few hours"; see HUTTON 1840: 949.
[47] J.G. GERARD 1833: 243; EGERTON 1864: 21; WILSON 1875: 244.

early witnesses were able to grasp the extent and complexity of the irrigation management customs and their social implications. In effect, access to irrigation water was regulated by the main landholders (*khang chen pa*) of each settlement according to a water allocation scheme (*chu res*). In times of scarcity, these men could make the sun shine or make it rain on the plots of smaller landholders, and this would also have been true of monastic estates and their tenants. Furthermore, the main landholders were themselves rarely involved in back-breaking drudgery, but relied on women from their own family and on local labour to conduct most of the farm work during the agricultural season, a situation which did not escape Egerton's notice in the summer of 1863.[48] Recent research on social inequality and resource management also underlines that women in Spiti were actively engaged in ploughing activities by lending a hand to male tillers (*thong pa*) by breaking up the leftover lumps of soil with hoes during the first ploughing of the year (*rol kha*).[49] From the drawing of irrigation channels in the spring, to the fifth and final watering (*smin chu*) of fields in the late month of July or early August, it behoved women irrigators (*chu pa*) to carry out the irrigation work of cultivated areas.[50]

Village fields were not only perceived as a means of subsistence, but also as the habitat of field deities (*zhing lha*), local guardian spirits (*sa bdag*), and subterranean serpentine beings (*klu*). Water springs and thickets were likely to host such reptilian creatures, who, if intentionally or accidentally harmed, would afflict humans with adverse weather conditions, leprosy, sores, and sterility. Thus, once a year, the women from the main households would propitiate the *klu* beings inhabiting their territory with large offerings of food and libation during a water source ritual (*chu rtseg*).[51] On that occasion, they wore traditional attire and covered their heads with a 'perak' (*pad*

[48] "The dress of the women is a long gown like that of the men, and a pair of long loose trousers tucked into the boots. (…) When working in the fields (for all farm-work except ploughing is performed by women) they remove the perak (which is heavy) from the heads, and let it hang down from the two ends, one of which is fastened to the shoulders and the other to the waist"; see EGERTON 1864: 26.

[49] TASHI TSERING 2014: 184.

[50] There are traditionally five main watering days during the agricultural season in Spiti: the first watering (*yur ma*) in May-June, the second watering (*sreg ti*) in June-July, the third watering (*gsum ti*) in July, the fourth watering (*bzhi ti*) in July-August, and the final irrigation (*smin chu*) in August preceding crop ripening. Other watering days do not have names; see TASHI TSERING 2014: 99–154. As mentioned in the first chapter, the use of the word 'water' (*ti*) is a reminder of the persistence of Zhang zhung terms in the local Tibetan vernacular of Spiti.

[51] On agrarian rituals and the propitiation of *klu* in Spiti; see TASHI TSERING 2014: 107, 131, 148, 185.

sbrags).[52] This traditional headdress, as formerly observed by Egerton, was probably worn or carried around by women at all times during the months of summer, especially when walking through the fields or in the vicinity of water sources. Made of several rows of turquoise stones, this ornate piece of jewellery of significant weight resembles a serpent's hood. Owned by women in Ladakh, Spiti, and West Tibet, the social prestige and economic value of this impressive headdress were no less important than its ritual and symbolic significance. Worn during farming activities and festivals, the headpiece would help transform the female body into that of a serpentine being, according to Aggarwal, thereby pacifying the subterranean denizens inhabiting the land.[53]

The importance of peaceful cohabitation with the *klu* creatures also required the active participation of monks. Once a year, on the 25th day of the first Tibetan month, the farmers of Spiti traditionally seek the assistance of monks to perform propitiatory rites (*klu gtor*), during which texts are recited and votive cakes (*gtor ma*) are offered at the shrines of these beings (*klu khang*). The historical existence of such shrines is attested in a notification letter dated 1729 attempting to resolve a conflict over the use of irrigation water. The statement of the case (*narratio*) is informative on a number of fronts and is given here in full:

> The irrigation channel (*yur*) in the area known as the riverbank of Rapang belonged to the ecclesiastical estate (*mchod gzhis*) of Lagope Monastery (*legs sgo spe*) at the time of the learned preceptor dGe 'dun yar 'phel. The meadows situated above Rapang having been flooded, the irrigation canal of the riverbank became littered with gravel. As water could not be conveyed to most of the fields, water from Rapang was used for the cultivation of a few assigned fields during three generations, while the rest of the water was to be drawn from the river itself. This year, when it was time to dig up the irrigation channels, the people of Gomik (*go mig*) falsely claimed the riverbank to be communal land (*spyi sa thang*). This is indefensible and beyond dispute as at the time of dGe 'dun yar 'phel the people of Lagope (*la sgo spe pa*) had even planted a prayer-flag mast (*dar lcog*) at the shrine of a serpentine being (*klu khang*).[54]

Established on the south side of the Lingti River, the village of Rapang belonged to the middle administrative unit of Spiti (*bar*) and as such was under the obligation to pay governmental taxes. The present document, however, suggests that some fields at least were cultivated by families of tenants on behalf of the Gelukpa monastery of Dangkhar. These lands, we are told, already constituted a monastic

[52] The Tibetan spelling retained here follows Aggarwal's research on the turquoise headdresses of Ladakh and literally means 'lotuses pieced together'. This ornament is also known as 'turquoise spread or headpiece' (*g.yu gdan*) in other parts of the Western Himalayas; see AGGARWAL 2005: 57–65.
[53] *Ibid.*
[54] See BmK05 in Appendix 6.

estate at the time of dGe 'dun yar 'phel, a Gelukpa master who lived in Dangkhar in the 17th century.[55] Moreover, the monastic congregation had had the foresight to set up a mast with prayer flags to keep the *klu* dweller there in check, for whom a shrine (*klu khang*) was also erected. To this day the maintenance of shrines and repeated propitiation of their hosts are generally perceived as a prelude to farming activities and the well-being of Tibetan and Himalayan communities. Discontinuing offerings and neglecting such shrines, on the other hand, are often thought to be the cause of diseases and natural disasters.[56] Although the document cited above does not suggest that the *klu* creature was responsible for flooding and clogging the irrigation channels of Rapang, it stresses that the establishment of this shrine acted as a territorial marker for the monastic community in charge of conducting propitiatory rites, albeit in another settlement of the valley.

In Spiti, the main households and landowners of each settlement, together with the monasteries, controlled the access to water resources, the maintenance of the irrigation system, and the water allocation scheme. Misappropriation of water and infringements of customary laws were likely to generate conflicts among users or between communities. Litigation over water usage is reported in a small number of documents preserved in the local archives. For example, in 1740 the water pipes of the irrigation canal (*chu sbug*) of Rapang were yet again the centre of a dispute between the Gelukpa

[55] See section 3.5.3.

[56] In a short introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, Kasptein reports a visit to an unidentified community where a string of misfortunes had been caused by a desecrated shrine associated with the village spring; see KAPTSEIN 2014: 6–7. On the propitiation of serpent spirits and other land denizens by a lama from Mustang, see RAMBLE forthcoming. The *gTsang ma klu 'bum* is perhaps the most widely known Tibetan work concerned with maintaining harmony with guardian spirits and subterranean serpentine beings; see STEIN 1971. Natural disasters, whether induced by upset *genii loci* or climatic reasons, are greatly feared by Himalayan populations in an environment where staple food commodities depend almost exclusively on agriculture. A similar incident as the one reported in BmK05 was witnessed by Trebeck during his stay in Dangkhar in the summer of 1822: "I have noticed above the two subterraneous watercourses from the pond on the mountains. On the afternoon of the 15th [of August] the one that supplied the village was choked: after some intervals its liberation was announced by a loud rattling noise, and presently an immense mass of mud, earth, and stones, came rushing through the gutter in such quantities, that the villagers were alarmed for their crops, and sought to arrest the fall, or turn it aside. Fortunately it ceased after a short time, but the effect was extraordinary, especially compared with the apparent insignificance of the rill. The stream seemed scarcely adequate to stir a stone of half a pound weight, but the slime brought down extended for several yards of the depth of three and four feet, and imbedded blocks of stone that could not have weighed less than a ton. The most liquid portion of the mass had been in the centre, and had run off, leaving a large drain between heaps of rubbish on either side. I had often before noticed similar accumulations rising in ridges along the slopes of the hills, and had been at loss to account for their origin"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 66–67.

monastery of the Dangkhar settlement and the Sakyapa monastery of Gomik (*go mig*).[57] As the opening of new fields could not be done without altering the irrigation network by routing water to the new plots of land, entitlement to irrigation water was a sensitive subject. In this respect, it transpires from another written agreement drawn up by the monasteries of Dangkhar and Kyi that the water irrigation systems of ecclesiastical estates were subject to inspection and ownership claims.[58] Water management was thus essential for many communities living in high altitude mountain deserts. As a commodity, its access was not only regulated but could also be traded. The commodification of water, to some extent, was already at work in the case of the mountain field of 'earth sheep' mentioned above.[59] It becomes even more apparent in an agreement between the villagers of Lara (*la ra*) and the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement, in which a sanction prescribed by the document stipulates that water should be granted to the people of Lara provided the return of a loan in kind. On the other hand, should the monastery fail to share water upon reimbursement, a fine amounting to two ounces of gold would be imposed on the latter:

> Whosoever violates this agreement shall make payment of an ounce of gold to the one mentioned above. In accordance with the content of this document, seal of Lara (*seal*). Seal of the monastic community of Lagope (*legs go spe*) (*seal*). If the loads of grain are returned to Lagope, the water at the time of irrigation (*chu res*) will be granted. If the water is not released, an ounce of gold is to be given to the people of Lara and to the one mentioned above.[60]

For a majority of farmers, the threat of being cut off from water must have been a far greater deterrent than any monetary penalties, albeit in gold. Water deprivation was in many parts of the Himalayas the

[57] See BmK01 in Appendix 6. The long lasting dispute between the two monasteries over assigned fields (*bon zhing*) and irrigation water in Rapang is also reported in the diplomatic and legal archives belonging to the Sakyapa monastery of Tengyu at Gomik. In a royal decree issued in 1741, the King of Purig bKra shis rnam rgyal arbitrated yet another dispute between the two monasteries over the establishment of a new field and irrigation facilities by the people from Dangkhar. The statement of the case (*narratio*) draws particular attention to the fact that, in the past, both parties were bound by a written agreement (*gcod rgya*) forbidding the cultivation and irrigation of new fields in the area. It goes on to state that the Gelukpa monastery of the Dangkhar settlement also seized uncultivated land (*sa stong*) at Ramang (i.e. Rapang) and laid out an irrigation canal springing from the Ku cave (*sku phug*); see document sTeng-rgyud 12 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.
[58] See BmK21 in Appendix 6.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.*

severest sanction that could be imposed. The impossibility of growing crops caused by a withholding of water could result in social alienation for the sanctioned farmers, or, even worse, to a forced exile.[61]

In the Dangkhar settlement, water was readily available from different spots within the residential areas. Based on interviews conducted in 2014, the former presence of a cistern (*chu dong*) is reported in the middle village. Likewise, the outlet of an underground canal still brings water to the upper village nowadays. Further north, a large spring (*chu mig chen*), said to be located behind the district fort, was possibly the one described by Trebeck in 1822.[62] Water would also have been a decisive element in times of siege by foreign armies and militias. Pragmatic considerations like water supply and strategic position must have been of concern to those who first settled on top of the Dangkhar cliffs. Thanks to a territory well-served by water, the villagers were able to set up an intricate network of irrigation channels, gradually transforming a barren landscape into a fertile area of cultivated fields.

3.2.3 *Fortification works and alert system*

Far from the ideals of peace and compassion inspired by Buddhism and often promoted by the Tibetan apologetic tradition, the history of Tibet is more often than not that of religious rivalries, political strife, and armed interventions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of architecture where the appearance of many vernacular and religious buildings share structural similarities with military works. Likewise, the siting of buildings is often indicative of periods of relative stability or turmoil. As far as can be discerned from archaeological vestiges and well-preserved monuments, the dominant traits of architectural development in the Western Himalayas can be characterised by 1) the construction of strongholds on high crags as a result of the expansion of the Tibetan Empire in the 7th-10th centuries; 2) the establishment of settlements and monasteries built on flat grounds and open valleys coinciding with an intense period of religious building activity during the later spread of

[61] Charles Ramble reports the case of a family who was cut off from water by the village council of Te in Mustang after a political argument in the 1990s. Two years later the family had left Te and resettled in another village down the valley; see RAMBLE 2008: 109–110.

[62] The itinerary followed by Trebeck, on the basis of which his description is made, is not entirely clear: "A pond is situated on this part of the rock, from the bottom of which two rills percolate the soil, and furnished water for irrigation. The hither one also supplies the fort with water, though inconveniently, as it lies far below"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 58.

Buddhism in the 10th-mid-12th centuries; 3) and the development of fortified settlements sometimes with the addition of defensive features, together with a 'palatialization' of royal edifices, district fortresses, and religious buildings in the 15th-17th centuries.[63] The border valley of Spiti, it would appear, is no exception to the rule.

Notwithstanding the limited number of studied cases, several sites and edifices in Spiti tend to reflect one or more of these phases. Now a comparatively poor region, the Spiti Valley was part of an important network of trade routes connecting Tibet, India, and Inner Asia as early as the 10th century, if not earlier. Within the border valley, the site of Dangkhar occupied an undeniably strategic position. From its lofty cliffs, it offered visual control over routes following the banks of the Spiti River from the South to the North, and over those coming from the West through the Manirung Pass and the Pin Valley. The accumulation of wealth by monasteries after the 15th century, and the proximity of Spiti to the growing power of neighbouring states, such as Ladakh, Kulu, and Bashahr, made the valley particularly vulnerable to external invaders in later periods. With its strategic position and citadel-like configuration, the Dangkhar settlement seems designed, in theory at least, to protect its people from external dangers. A small number of structures and testimonies recall that Dangkhar was, first and foremost, a stronghold (*mkhar*) in a distant past.

Few people have taken an interest in the history of military events and defence works in Spiti beyond the enumeration of forays and punitive expeditions carried out by its immediate neighbours. The French explorer Jacquemont, for one, stressed a few interesting features during his visit to Dangkhar in 1830.[64] He remarked, for instance, how clusters of multi-tiered houses, with their massive

[63] The architectural history for each region falling within this geographical scope has not been studied in a comprehensive manner. Among a wealth of works and studies, the fortifications of Ladakh have received a lot of attention with attempts at classification based on typological criteria; see DEVERS 2016. For general considerations on the architectural development in Western Tibet; see MORTARI VERGARA 1987a; MORTARI VERGARA 1987b. For preliminary remarks on architectural documentation in Spiti; see AUER 2017. For a general and visual introduction to fortress monasteries in the Tibetan cultural area; see HARRISON 2011.

[64] "The aspect of this village is most strange; all the houses, of which there are only twenty, form a system of defence. Built of stones at their base and large bricks of sun-dried clay in their upper floors, they have no openings accessible to the outside (...) The village has only two low and narrow gates. The so-called fort is, in fact, an edifice that is likely to stand the means of a low intensity attack that could be opposed to it (...) Several hundred men would easily be stationed there, whose musketry directed through the loopholes pierced in the support wall of all the terraces, would effectively defend the surroundings of the village. Of course, the absence of any garrison renders unnecessary the care given to the maintenance of this fort. (…) This three-storey fort and

stone foundations and absence of windows in lower storeys, formed a system of defence.[65] Examining the fort, he suggested that several hundred armed men could potentially withhold a low intensity attack thanks to loopholes pierced through the large supporting walls, but concluded that in the absence of a permanent garrison, the maintenance of this edifice had become unnecessary. A few years later, similar conclusions were reached by Lieutenant Hutton.[66] As a warning post to guard the valley, the defensive fortification had manifestly become obsolete by the end of the 18th century. Below the fort, for instance, the remnants of possible defensive works were photographed by Frank Mason-Good in 1869, and were subsequently turned into a small storage room in recent times (fig. 4.16 and 4.17).[67] As we will see, historical sources and testimonies dating from the 18th-19th centuries report several invasions and occupations of Dangkhar, which were met by the people of this settlement with the most foolproof response: flight.[68]

The possibility that the Dangkhar settlement had once acted as a strategic stronghold with a system of defence should nonetheless be considered here. In this respect, the remains of a watchtower attest that there were times when the people of Dangkhar might have offered concrete resistance (fig.

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the different rooms of each are not perfectly levelled (...) Dankhar is the *chef-lieu* [*italics mine*] of a small country called *Spiti*, which comprises about forty villages or hamlets, either in the Spiti Valley, or in the valleys of several tributaries. There are only five or six of them above Dankhar, which is already at 13,000 feet (3,962 metres)" (translation mine); see JACQUEMONT 1841: 2: 352–353.

[65] Geographer and Tibetologist Neil Howard defines a defensible settlement as "one in which houses are built very close together on a prominent site, with contiguous outer walls and only a few doors and windows to the outside. There are no specifically defensive structures such as walls and towers, and an attacker's entry is effectively barred by the walls of the peripheral dwellings"; see HOWARD 2016: 86.

[66] "The fort and village of Dunkur are built high above the Spiti, among the ragged spires which crown the time-worn rocks that form its bank. This rock is inaccessible on every side, with the exception of that by which it is connected with the main range of hills, of which indeed it forms a spur, or offshoot towards the river. A stream descends on one side of it from the heights, and in former days a covered way existed from the fort to its banks, by which the garrison were enable [sic] to obtain water unperceived by the enemy; this has however long since fallen into decay, and its ruins now alone serve to mark the line along which it formerly descended. As a place of strength, Dunkur was well calculated to hold out against the rude bow and arrow warfare, as once practised in these high tracts, but as a check to troops armed in the modern style, even without guns, it is insignificance itself"; see HUTTON 1840: 498.

[67] Based on photographic archives, the dimensions of this enigmatic building, with its quadrangular ground floor and high walls, can hardly be those of a domestic house. In recent years, a small antechamber was added to the south and the edifice is now being remembered as the 'Red Temple' (*lha khang dmar po*) by locals. Some elders seem to recall the presence of wall paintings inside. However, I was unable to observe any traces of paint upon inspection in 2014.

[68] During his stay in Spiti in 1822, Trebeck reported that "Every family subject to taxes [i.e. large households (*khang chen*)] possesses a matchlock, a sword, and a bow and arrows; but instead of employing these in defence as would have been supposed, no sooner was information of the attack given, than most of them were buried in the nearest piece of land convenient for the purpose, and the owners fled perceptively to the least accessible part of the hills, dragging after them as much of their household furniture as possible"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 64. A traditional narrative also recounts how the people of Spiti repelled Ladakhi invaders through cunning tactics and generous portions of booze; see document A in Appendix 8.

4.18). This seemingly insignificant detail did not go unnoticed by Moorcroft's young assistant who provided a brief description of the structure.[69] Located at the foot of the cliffs in the lower part of the cirque, the vestiges of this watchtower atop an earth-pillar are still remembered as a guard post (*skyong ra*) by locals today. Trebeck's description is also corroborated by a photograph taken by Egerton in 1863 (fig. 4.19). In both instances the structure already appeared as a relic of the past. Yet, the presence of loopholes does not lie; sentinels must have been stationed there once, securing the access to the lower residential area.

The oral tradition of Spiti also tells of a time when a network of watch-posts was designed to raise alarm in case of imminent threats. These stations were established on hilltops and functioned as a chain of fire beacons (*so sa*) lit up by men (*so pa*) to raise and send warning signals to other villages.[70] I was told by local informants during fieldwork that one such fire-raising station used to be located at the summit of a hillock about fifty metres to the west of the fort. They explained that the fire beacon of Dangkhar would send a warning signal to the settlement of Mani (*ma ni*), and from there to those of Pong (*spong*) and Tabo downstream. Likewise, it would be seen from Lidang (*li dang*) and passed on to the settlements of Kyiling (*skyid gling*) and Rangrik (*rang rig*) upstream. In his innovative research work on Spiti at the time of the Tibetan Empire, Tashi Tsering observes that the alert system used in the border valley of Spiti is highly reminiscent of a similar network of smoke-fire beacons reported in the *Old Tibetan Annals*.[71] These 'red fire-raising stations' (*zhugs long dmar po*) were established as hilltop lookouts (*ri zug*) where small units of watchmen (*tshugs*) were headed by a station official (*tshugs dpon*).[72] According to Dotson's analysis of this work, the three literary occurrences of 'red

[69] "Some of the defences are whimsically placed, particularly a small enclosure with loop-holes, large enough to contain ten or twelve men, which is perched on the top of an isolated pile of gravel, rising like a column from the rill at the base"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 59.

[70] For a similar network of watchtowers in southern Mustang used to communicate urgent information by means of fire and possibly bronze mirror; see SEEBER 1994.

[71] TASHI TSERING 2013: 542–543.

[72] It is worth pointing out that words in use in Western Tibet, particularly in Ladakh, seem to derive from, or to be related to, the action of 'setting up' (*'dzug pa*) an encampment or 'a station' (*tshugs*). According to Jäschke, the word *tshugs sa* or *tshug sa* refers to a "caravansary, or merely a level, open place near a village, where traveller's may encamp". He also noted how the term *tshug so* designates "all the households or villages placed under one Gopa [i.e. leader or village head (*mgo pa*)]"; see JÄSCHKE 1881. Interestingly, Gergan employed the same term when he described the five administrative units (*tshugs so*) of the Spiti Valley. Could the semantic proximity between these words reflect once again the persistence of structures dating back to the time of the imperial period when contingents of soldiers were stationed in Spiti? See GERGAN 1976: 321.

raising-fire stations' in the *Old Tibetan Annals* confine the term to a *hapax legomenon* whose exact meaning cannot be easily inferred.[73] One of these three occurrences, however, is particularly relevant to Tashi Tsering's hypothesis as it logs a rebellion that broke out in the neighbouring region of lCog la, south-east of Spiti, in 674/5, following which the 'red fire-raising stations' were activated. Taking into account the alert signal, the Tsenpo's ministerial council (*'dun ma*) convened and troops were presumably sent to crush the insurgency.[74] Based on interviews conducted in Spiti, Tashi Tsering also reports the use of fire beacons as a conscription device in Spiti for later periods and concludes that the old alert system had possibly been re-established by the people of the valley. This question needs further research. It would certainly be of interest to combine an ethnographic approach with an archaeological survey in order to establish a map of all beacon places (*so sa*) in Spiti and adjacent regions.

In view of the foregoing, it must be concluded that the site of Dangkhar offered noticeable advantages for the establishment of a human settlement. The steep cliffs overlooking the valley not only provided natural protection from raids and predatory animals, but also ensured the monitoring of, and control over, communication routes entering and running through the valley. In case of imminent threats, a system of fire beacons (*so sa*), perhaps dating from the 7th century, was used to send warning signals to other villages and mobilise local resistance. From the valley floor, few access routes led to the foot of the cliffs with its clusters of houses nested on top. Probably erected in the 13th-14th

[73] "Given that *zhugs-long dmar-po* can be calculated, and require conscription, presumably of troops, and in consideration of the etymology of the term *zhugs-long*, which seems to be the honorific for *me-long*, meaning "mirror", signalling may be more to the point. Still, "red mirror" does not immediately evoke a beacon station, and one wonders if the etymology of *zhugs-long* is somewhat different than simply the honorific for mirror. One possibility is that *long* comes from the verb *lang*, "to rise" of which it is a variant of the present tense stem, and that it acts as a verbalizer for fire similar to *me gtong* "to set fire," *me 'bar* "to blaze," or *me shor* "to catch fire." In this case the use of the honorific *zhugs* might distinguish a "fire-raising [station]" (*zhugs-long*) from a mirror (*me-long*). Then the term would indicate beacon stations that use fire and smoke to raise an alarm and communicate over distance, not unlike the Chinese beacons (*feng*), which had been operating for centuries, and indeed at Dunhuang. In fact, we find in the *Jiu Tangshu* the statement that"[w]hen the country is invaded the smoke-fires are lighted, there being a tower every hundred *li*" (…). Therefore I provisionally translate *zhugs-long* with "fire-raising [station]" and render *zhugs-long dmar-po* as "red fire-raising [station]," where red is a color associated both with fire and with soldiers"; see DOTSON 2009: 56–57.

[74] TASHI TSERING 2013: 542. In Dotson's edition, the passage reads: *60/8 # /: / khyI lo: la bab. ste / btsan. po: dbyard: zrId. na. bzhugs: shIng/ lcog. la: log. pa: dang/ dgun. tshang. bang. snar/ gshe 61/9 gste/ 'dun. ma: glag. gI. pu. cung. du: 'duste/ zhugs: long: dmar. pho. brtsIs: par: lo. gcig/*; "It fell on the year [of] the dog. In the summer the Btsan-po resided in Zrid. Lcog-la revolted, and in the winter [the Btsan-po] departed to Tshang-bang-sna. The council convened at Pu-cung in Glag. They took account of the red fire-raising [stations]. So one year"; see DOTSON 2009: 90–91.

centuries, the main entrance gate (*rgyal sgo*) of the settlement was partially walled up in later periods, leaving only a narrow passage to those entering the site from the west. At the foot of the lowest cluster of houses to the east, a watchtower perched atop an earth-pillar secured the access route coming from the fields. Moreover, a large hinterland rising up towards a summit ridge granted no access point to the settlement from the east. This hinterland was rich in watering places and mountain brooks, particularly in the vicinity of the settlement, and provided grazing areas for herds of goats and sheep further up. Overall, the residential and cultivation areas occupied only a tiny fraction of a territory otherwise comprised of barren lands and screes. Thanks to an ingenious network of irrigations leats, subsidiary channels, and sluices, members of the community could route water to a mosaic of terraced fields stretching downhill towards the valley floor. The management of the irrigation system was in the hands of the main landowners (*khang chen pa*), and the same was true of most of the fields subject to taxation, as we shall discuss below. Likewise, the monasteries of Spiti possessed ecclesiastical estates with fields cultivated by tenants, sometimes in more than one of the settlements of the valley. As noted above, 18th-19th-century documents, in the form of written agreements and confirmation letters of privileges, shed light on some of the tensions that arose between monasteries, villages, or individuals concerning farming activities and water resources.

3.3 Residential areas and social structures

In the words of social anthropologist and Tibet scholar Melvyn Goldstein, "no single village can exemplify Tibetan 'villages' per se".[75] Across the Tibetan plateau, regional particularism may often mirror different political structures and socio-economic organisations. The specific socio-economic organisation of the villages of the Spiti Valley are relatively well understood due to range of documentation relating to this area that has accumulated over two centuries.[76] In what follows, I shall

[75] GOLDSTEIN 1971: 526.

[76] Colonial accounts and settlement literature already sketched the outline of the social organisation, land tenure, and taxation system of Spiti during the 19th century. A review of the colonial documentation allowed Carrasco to devote a large portion of his work on *Land and Polity in Tibet* to the Western Himalayan regions of Spiti, Lahaul, and Ladakh. His presentation of the system of land tenure as related to political organisation and the role of monastic estates in Spiti was further analysed by social anthropologist Jahoda who focused more closely on the village of Tabo, using primary sources in the form of local 20th-century register books (*yig tho*, *bon tho*); see JAHODA 2007; JAHODA 2008; JAHODA 2015. More recently, Tashi Tsering has taken an interest in the

therefore limit discussion to the most salient points concerning the residential area and social structures of the Dangkhar settlement.

As a village (*grong chen*), Dangkhar was composed of three clusters of houses (*grong*) established along the ridge of the Dangkhar cliffs.[77] Taking their name from their topographical position, the lowest cluster of houses in the south was known as 'the large lower stronghold' (*mkhar 'og che*), the middle cluster was named 'the intermediate notch' (*la sgo bar ma*) or 'the intermediate horse gateway' (*rta sgo dbar ma*), while the third cluster located on top of the ridge was referred to as 'the upper stronghold' (*mkhar stod*).[78] Each cluster included the main 'large households' (*khang chen*), subsidiary 'small households' (*khang chung*), and other simple homes. The large households were fewer in number but generally larger in size, yet, all types of houses were built according to the same principles and construction materials. At ground level, large foundation walls consisted of neat courses of rough-hewn stones cemented with mud and chaff mortar. These walls were slanted inwards as a precaution against earthquakes and had very narrow windows, if any, as a protective measure against outside intruders. The main entrances were generally undersized with a wooden door. They were usually guarded by a display of apotropaic symbols and Buddhist representations.[79] Upper storeys were made of sun-dried mud-bricks or rammed earth walls, with windows becoming progressively larger. In the most opulent homes the uppermost storeys could be provided with wooden balconies or oriel windows (*rab gsal*). Roofs were flat and formed multi-levelled terraces on which firewood, woollen fabrics, and food were traditionally air-dried.

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social organization of the Spiti villages today with regard to farming land and irrigation water as an inequitable system of resource management; see TASHI TSERING 2014. Finally, the taxation system imposed by the local government on agricultural holdings has been studied by Schuh on the basis of documents belonging to the aristocratic family of Kyiling who assumed control of the Spiti Valley in the 18th century; see SCHUH 2016b.

[77] The Tibetan terms 'village' (*grong chen*), 'villager' (*grong pa*), 'village register' (*grong tho*), and 'village leader' (*grong dpon*) are attested in the context of Spiti in documents dating from the 17th-19th centuries: see Appendix 6 and SCHUH 2016b.

[78] The spelling of these residential areas is tentative and was established based on interviews conducted in 2014. My informants, however, were not able to explain the origin of the names given to the 'middle cluster of houses' (*la sgo bar ma*; *rta sgo dbar ma*). Based on the geological setting, it could derive its name from the gateway *stūpa* granting access to the settlement, a passage-like indentation (*la sgo*) leading to the summit of the cliffs, or perhaps from the monastery situated nearby whose name may also refer to a similar topographical feature; see section 3.5.1 of this chapter.

[79] These may include protective prints glued on doors as well as carved slates and miniature *stūpa* models placed above a doorframe. Dedicated to the 'protectors of the three families' (*rigs gsum mgon po*), namely Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Vajrapāṇi, a set of these *stūpa* models can be seen, for example, above the entrance door of a large house of the upper stronghold in two photographs taken in 1869 and 1912 respectively; see figures 3.22 and 3.33 in Appendix 3.

3.3.1 Households and taxation system

The distinction between the main large households and the remaining homes goes beyond the dimensions of these houses. Today, as in the past, different types of housing express a social organisation centred around a basic unit of agricultural production and taxation simply known as 'field-house' (*zhing khang*). These agricultural holdings consisted of the main households found in each village in Spiti. From one generation to the next, they were inherited by the eldest son of the household (*khang chen pa*) through a system of primogeniture designed to avoid the fragmentation of land and ensure the continuity of tax obligations. To this day, the people of Spiti believe that the main large households from each village community represent the founding families of the valley and their agricultural holdings are thus also known as the 'old large households' (*khang chen rnying pa*). As noted earlier, there are reasons to believe that the number of these households dated back to the time of the Tibetan Empire as a result of a territorial reorganisation and conscription system.[80] As such, the heads of these main households are also known as 'soldiers' (*dmag*) even today. Based on the local system of inheritance, these agricultural holdings were in principle never divided and their number and size changed very little over time. In the case of Dangkhar, eighteen such large households were logged in a local tax record dated 1845.[81] Enumerated and identified from photographic archives by my informants during fieldwork in 2014, four large households were located in the lower cluster of the Dangkhar cliffs, four other households belonged to its middle section, and the last ten households were all established at the foot of the district fort in the upper part of the ridge.[82]

Besides these large households, the remaining housing of the Spiti villages were composed of 'small households' (*khang chung*, *khang bu*), 'those even smaller' (*yang chung pa*), and 'those diffusing smoke' (*dud 'thul*). This last group comprised the landless peasantry and artisans who were

[80] See section 2.2.1 in Chapter 2.
[81] SCHUH 2016b: 61.
[82] I would argue that this distribution is informative insofar as the historical development of the Dangkhar settlement is concerned. With ten out of eighteen large households located in the upper part of the ridge, the cluster of 'the upper stronghold' (*mkhar stod*), which totalled thirteen houses and the district fort, may well have constituted the initial core of the settlement. This hypothesis is supported in part by the fact that three of these ten large households belonged to the members of the most prestigious families of the settlement, namely the medium (*lus g.yar*), the physician (*am chi*) and the minister (*blon po*) of Dangkhar, whose current descendants still occupy the place today, though the descendants of the minister family have since built a second house in the Tshe area while retaining their old property on the cliffs.

largely dependent on the large householders (*khang chen pa*) to make a living and, for that reason, were said to produce nothing but smoke. The occupants of the small and even smaller households, on the other hand, were the relatives of the main householders. They were the elderly parents and siblings who had a usufructuary right to small plots of land and were subject to fewer taxes and no compulsory services. The number of these subsidiary households was thus far less stable than the main agricultural holdings and tended to increase over time. In Dangkhar, for instance, we see that the number of small households went from eleven in the mid-19th century to twenty-five in 2014. Yet, only five of them could be securely identified among the old residential areas of the cliffs by local informants; with one in the lower cluster, one in the middle cluster, and three of them in the cluster of houses of the upper stronghold.

As units of agricultural production and taxation, the main large households were the most influential families of Spiti at the village level. The heads of these families derived their privileges and obligations from the age of their agricultural holdings. These privileges included substantial acreage of agricultural land, the control of the irrigation water scheme, and a seat on the village council. Proportional to these customary rights were their obligations which included the payment of taxes (*khral*), providing corvée transport labour (*'u lag*), and military service (*dmag khral*).[83] For these reasons, they were the main 'villagers' (*grang pa*) *par excellence*, as well as 'taxpayers' (*khral pa*) and the occasional members of a civilian militia (*dmag mi*) in case of emergency. As taxpayers, the main householders of the Spiti Valley were grouped under four different administrative units of taxation (*tshug so*, *koṭhī*) depending on where they lived in the valley. The village of Dangkhar, for instance, was tied to the lower administrative unit (*sham*) of the Spiti Valley, together with the settlements of Mani, Lari, and Pong.[84] Some villages and specific households of Spiti, however, formed a fifth

[83] Compulsory porterage and labour work were an intrinsic part of the tax system in Tibet, Ladakh, and in other Himalayan regions. For a review of the taxation system and a discussion about corvée labour in Ladakh and Spiti in the 19th and early 20th centuries, see GRIST 1994; BRAY 2008b.

[84] In the settlement literature, British officials reported six settlements for the lower administrative unit of the Spiti Valley: Po (i.e. Pong), Dangkhar, Rama (i.e. Rapang), Lari, Lithang (i.e. Lidang), Mani Gongma (i.e. Upper Mani), and Mani Yokma (i.e. Lower Mani); see John Coldstream, *Final Report of the Third Revised Settlement*. Based on the study of 19th-century tax records (*grong tho*), however, Schuh remarks that only the main households of the settlements of Pong, Dangkhar, Lari, and Mani were subject to the payment of governmental taxes. Of these four, the village of Mani does not appear to have been divided into two settlements; see SCHUH 2016b: 47. The two designations given for that settlement may suggest an expansion of the village of Mani in time, with an early Mani (*ma Ni gong ma*) and a later Mani (*ma Ni 'og ma*; *ma Ni yog ma*),

administrative unit independently of their geographical location. They contributed exclusively to the communal monastic estate of Spiti (*mchod gzhis*) through the payment of 'ecclesiastical dues' (*dgon pa'i bon*) or 'grain dues' (*bon*). Villages and households that were compelled to pay governmental taxes, on the other hand, fulfilled their obligations through the payment of a 'grain tax' (*nas khral*) or 'grain dues' (*bon*), and a 'silver tax' (*dngul khral*).[85] Every year, a portion of the harvest (*nas khal*) and some silver were levied from the main households by the local governement which sat at the Dangkhar fort. Between 1710 and 1842, these impositions were transferred to the royal treasury of Ladakh or Purig. As for their relatives, the small householders were not compelled to pay taxes in kind (*'bru khral*). However, they were still subjected to the payment of a small nominal amount of governmental tax in silver (*dngul khral*).

Based on three taxation records compiled by the ruling family of Spiti in the mid-19th century, the village of Dangkhar was the second most important source of revenue for the lower administrative unit of the valley, following the sister settlements of Mani. These records also show that all the main households from the Dangkhar settlement were tied to the payment of governmental taxes and dues. In theory, none of these households would have contributed to the monastic estates. The study of these documents by Schuh reveals that about 43% of the main households from Dangkhar and Mani were not accounted for between the years 1845 and 1851. Likewise, a reduction of about 32% of tax-paying households and revenues is also observed in the side valley of Pin for the same period. These figures led Schuh to suggest that the dramatic decline in the number of main householders in tax registers

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in particular since there is no substantial difference in elevation that would justify a distinction between a lower and upper settlement. Moreover, the local archives from Dangkhar mention the two sister settlements of Mani with reference to two different monastic communities (*dge 'dun*); see BmK04, BmK08, and BmK12 in Appendix 6. Likewise, there seems to have been some confusion concerning the settlement of Rama/Rapang in colonial literature where it appears under both the middle and lower administrative units of Spiti; see the commentary on BmK05 in Appendix 6.

[85] The local documents studied by Schuh and myself show that the term 'grain dues' (*bon*) was used indiscriminately for both governmental and ecclesiastical taxes, as already observed by British officials. The etymology of the Tibetan word *bon* is uncertain but could perhaps be related to the words 'grain/seed' (*sa bon*) and 'debt/loan' (*bu lon*). For that reason, I tend to use of the word 'dues' rather than 'tax' (*khral*) in my translations. In the last quarter of the 19th century, Alexander Henderson Diack remarked that "*na'-thal* [i.e. *nas khral*] and *pun*, or *bun* [i.e. *bon*], are practically synonymous: the former meaning 'grain tax' and the latter 'debt', 'obligation'. *Bun* is applied by the people to both the secular and the religious payment, the former being distinguished as *khar kyi bun* [i.e. *mkhar gyi bon*], or the 'fort due' and the latter as *gonpai bun* [i.e. *dgon pai'i bon*], or the 'monastery due'."; see DIACK 1899: 117.

must have been caused by localised catastrophic events, such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, or a disease outbreak (e.g. smallpox).[86]

3.3.2 Social stratification

The social stratification of Spiti is equally well-known thanks to 19th-century British settlement literature and 20th-century ethnographical works. While primary sources may not always reflect the details and complexity of the social structures in Spiti, it is reasonable to assume that the main strata or social classes must have remained more or less the same for the period following the annexation of Spiti by the Kingdom of Ladakh in the 17th century. From that time onwards, the population was essentially divided into two endogamous groups. Households of blacksmiths and traditional musicians represented the lowest social stratum across the Spiti Valley, a situation not unlike that of other neighbouring regions in the Western Himalayas. The second group constituted the majority of the population. It consisted of landowners and landless farm labourers (*gla pa*) who formed the main households, subsidiary households, and those said to produce only smoke. Until recently, these people identified themselves as 'chazang' or 'chechang', a Tibetan term whose written form does not appear in local sources.[87] At the top of the social hierarchy were some highborn families whose titles and prerogatives were often hereditary. Among the most prestigious and influent were aristocratic families who competed for the position of headman of Spiti (*rgya pa*), the minister (*blon po*) of Dangkhar, the traditional physician (*am chi*), the medium (*lus g.yar*), the astrologer or tantric lama (*jo ba, sngags pa*), and the assistant of the valley headman (*to ga che*, *da go che*). As for the village headmen (*rgad*

[86] SCHUH 2016b: 63. It is worth noting that among all possible causes, outbursts of smallpox were greatly feared by the people of Western Tibet. In 1849, the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, William Edmund Hay, stressed that smallpox was "the greatest enemy" of the people of Spiti. Colonial accounts report that people would destroy suspended bridges (*jhūlā*, *zam pa*) in order to prevent the epidemic from spreading from one infected area to the their own territory; see HAY 1851: 442; MURRAY-AYNSLEY 1882: 46; BOURNE 2004: 106. In the 1860s, the British launched a vaccination campaign against smallpox in Spiti. It was conducted by the Superintendent of Hill vaccination Dr A.M. Garden; see EGERTON 1864: 62. In 1847, Cunningham observed a decrease in the population of Ladakh which he estimated at 40,000 people. Among the causes of this decrease were 15,000 war casualties and 14,000 people carried off by an outbreak of smallpox that occurred in the year 1834; see A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 286–288.

[87] In the late-19th century, Diack noted that "the great mass of the peasantry returned themselves as *Chha-zhang* or 'middle class,' *i.e.*, midway between the Nono families above and the menial and artisan classes below". In his lengthy work on Spiti, social anthropologist Jahoda suggests the spellings *cha bzang* and *cha tshang* but also gives *cha g.yang* based on an interview conducted in Tabo; see DIACK 1899: 170–171.

po), they were traditionally elected by the village council consisting of the heads of the main households (*khang chen pa*).

The study of the social fabric of Dangkhar can rely on new archaeological and historical evidence. In the first place, the descendants of some of these families still occupy their ancestral homes or were able to identify their former residences on photographic archives (fig. 2.11). Not surprisingly, the valley headman and other high officials posted in Dangkhar held offices at the fort located on top of the cliffs (1). Next to this building were the ancestral home of the minister of Dangkhar (2); the house of the medium (3); and the physician's household slightly further down (4). These three residences occupied the most dominant positions of the settlement with the exception of a small household situated above them. The blacksmiths of Dangkhar had their home in the intermediate residential area of the cliffs (5). Likewise, the patrilineal household of the tantric lama was situated further down (6).[88] Among the lowest cluster of houses was also the home of the Bheda family (7).

Some of the groups and families discussed above figure more prominently than others in epigraphs and local archives. These documents are informative in that they give visibility to the opposite ends of the social scale with illustrious families at one end and marginalised groups at the other. Among the former, the most prestigious family was undoubtedly that of the minister.[89] As noted earlier in this chapter, the earliest reference to this family is found on the wall paintings of the Mandala Temple at Tabo in the form of a portrait and epigraphic evidence. In a scene illustrating a religious gathering taking place at Tabo itself, the 'minister of Dangkhar' (*blon po grang dkar*) is depicted and identified as such, alongside royal dignitaries and Gelukpa monks. Based on the figures

[88] The head of this household, who goes by the name Jo ba 'Brum* dkar po, was described to me as a tantric lama (*sngags pa*) of Nyingmapa affiliation. Among his children is the Gelukpa monk and author of a *Concise History of Dangkhar Monastery*, dGe bshes lha rams pa Thub bstan bstan 'dzin from Ganden Shartsé Monastery (*dga' ldan shar rtse*). Their forefather, the astrologer (*dbon po*) Jo pa/ba bSod nams, was exempt from taxes and compulsory services by the King of Ladakh in the 18th century. These dispositions were confirmed once again by King Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal in 1813; see document Jo ba 1A in Appendix 6.

[89] Petech pointed that in the Kingdom of Ladakh the word *blon po* designated an official in charge of a small district (*yul*). It was a hereditary title whose office was not automatically passed on from one generation to the next. In the case of Ladakh, Petech thus advised against translating the term *blon po* as 'minister', which is the usual meaning in Tibet. Schuh also expresses reservations when it comes to the translation of the term *blon po* in documents from Spiti. Often leaving the Tibetan title untranslated, he uses 'minister' in his translation of No-no 39 and, more frequently, 'local ruler' (Regionalfürsten) for the documents from Tengyu. In the present context, I retain the use of 'minister' as the existence of his household in Dangkhar predates the political influence of Ladakh by two centuries at least; see PETECH 1977: 156; SCHUH 2016b; HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

depicted, this pictorial representation is attributed to the late 15th century when the Gelukpa school had gained ground in the Spiti Valley. The portrait of the minister suggests, therefore, that the genealogical ancestry of this family goes back to this period at the very least, and was already connected to the site of Dangkhar at that time. The historical importance of the Dangkhar minister is further attested by a stone inscription copied by Shuttleworth *in situ* in 1918.[90] This epigraph can be dated by internal evidence to the last decade of King Seng ge rnam rgyal's life (*c.*1590–1642). The donative section reads as follows:

> Hail! The patron and minister Tshe ring bkra shis, whose noble ancestry is the minister family of Par ca, is praised for having accomplished the great deed of completing and accumulating two hundred of the supreme six-syllable mantras for the sake of holding high the helmet of the king and the ministers. His relative is from the immaculate lineage of 'Od gsal lha. The patron, Lady Jo co 'Dzoms lags, supplied sustenance, like a divine nectar, to the people, delighting those receiving the offerings. How wonderful![91]

In many ways, this passage sheds light on the prestige attached to the minister Tshe ring bkra shis and to the members of his household. First, it highlights the filiation of the minister family (*blon gyi brgyud*) by stressing the authentic origin of his paternal ancestors (*yab mes khungs btsun*). In doing so, the reference to Tshe ring bkra shis' forefathers effectively positions the Dangkhar minister in the continuity of his anonymous ancestor whose portrait is depicted on the walls of the Mandala Temple at Tabo. According to the donor inscription, the minister is then praised for upholding the power of the King of Ladakh and that of his ministers through his meritorious act. Likewise, his relative (**mched*) lady Jo co 'Dzom lags is also praised for her offerings and largesse. In this instance too, her family lineage (*gdung brgyud*) is duly mentioned. Accordingly, she is said to descend from an 'immaculate line of shining gods' (*dri med 'od gsal lha*), a family ancestry which, if not metaphorical, could connect lady 'Dzom lags to the royal house of Gung thang in West Tibet.[92] Following his trips to the

[90] See SI1 in Appendix 6 and LAURENT 2017b.
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] The English translation of the word *mched*–misspelled *chad* in the original–is open to interpretation since it usually refers to a sibling, a blood relative, or even a friend in some instances. In a previous translation of that passage, I boldly gave 'sister' for *mched*, a translation which now seems problematic. The family relationship between the two donors would seem to depend on whether the mention of 'Dzom lags' ancestry (*gdung brgyud*) is indicative of a matrimonial alliance between the minister of Dangkhar and a lady from a different family lineage. As already suggested in 2007, her peculiar family lineage could perhaps be related to the royal house of Gung thang in West Tibet. According to two documents issued in the 15th century, the patrilineage of both King Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa and King rGyal mtshan bsod nams' is said to be that of 'shining gods' (*'od gsal lha brgyud*). I wish to thank Dieter Schuh once again for drawing my attention to these documents; see SCHUH 1981: 349, 364. Likewise, the famous female incarnation and princess from Gung thang Chos kyi sgron ma

Spiti Valley in the 1920s, Gergan compiled an extensive list of local patrilineages (*pha spad, rus*). In it, the 'great minister family' (*blon chen pa*) occupies the top of the list.[93] The importance of this household was also noted by British officials, suggesting that the prestige attached to the minister family was maintained up until the first half of the 20th century.[94]

At the bottom end of the social scale were the blacksmiths and Bheda families of Spiti, two partially outcaste and endogamous groups for whom commensality and marriage with the dominant

(1422–1455/6) is "repeatedly defined as the queen of Ngari and a descendant of the Gods of Clear Light" (*'od gsal lha'i brgyud pa*) in her biography; see DIEMBERGER 2007: 41. Alternatively, one should consider the *rGyal rabs gser gyi me long*, a short chronicle about the royal succession of Ti nan in Lahaul studied by Francke, which also reports a 'clan of undefiled origin' (*mi rigs khungs btsun*) bearing the name *'od gsal lha*; see FRANCKE 1926: 211–215.

[93] A facsimile of Gergan's original list, now preserved in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, has recently been published and discussed by Jahoda. According to this document, the 'family lineage of lHa Nyi ma (*lha nyi ma'i gdung brgyud*) occupies the top of the list, while the 'great minister family' appears in second place. In the *Bla dwags rgyal rabs 'chi med gter*, however, Gergan adopted a slightly different enumeration and listed thirty-six 'bone lineages' (*rus*) found in Spiti. Each of them was numbered and sometimes grouped together under one particular rubric. Accordingly, the list begins with the five most common patrilineages of Spiti, namely the 1) *blon chen pa*, 2) *tum bo ba pa*, 3) *nil 'gro ba pa*, 4) *gnam ru pa*, and 5) *rgyan shing pa*. In sixth position comes a passage discussing 6) the 'family lineage of lHa Nyi ma'. It reads: */lha nyi ma'i gdung brgyud las/ bla dwags rgyal po dang zangs dkar rgyal po dang gar zha'i jo dang spyi ti'i no no rnams yin no zer/*; "It is said that from the family lineage of lHa Nyi ma are the kings of Ladakh, the kings of Zanskar, the lords (*jo*) of Lahaul, and the Nonos of Spiti". The syntax of the sentence, particularly the use of the word *zer*, has led De Rossi Filibeck and Jahoda to conclude that this passage was a direct quote from a historical text entitled *lHa nyi ma'i gdung brgyud* rather than the name of a particular lineage. However, no such text has ever been found or alluded to in any other Tibetan sources. Admittedly, for my translation, the speech particle *zer* should perhaps have been intercalated between the verb and the particle indicating the end of the statement (i.e. *yin zer ro*). However, in support of my interpretation, the exact same reported speech is used by Gergan further down and also in the previous section of the list. In all three cases, the use of *zer* is similar to *skad*. It is a common way of saying 'it is said that'. The speech particle *zer* was therefore employed to convey hearsay or popular belief and should not be confused with quotation marks. Given the numerical sequence employed in both lists, together with the use of reported speech, it is clear that the 'lineage of lHa Nyi ma' is not the title of a text but is indeed the name of a particular patrilineage from which the rulers of Ladakh, Zanskar, Lahaul, and Spiti are said to descend. I would therefore suggest that the name lHa Nyi ma may refer, in fact, to his majesty (*lha*) sKyid lde nyi ma mgon who founded the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet in the 10th century. Like the Indian kings who were addressed as *deva*, the Tibetan term of address *lha* was commonly used for members of the royal house of this kingdom. This hypothesis is also supported by Schuh's reading of the same passage. Notwithstanding the absence of historical evidence vis-à-vis the Nono of Spiti, the idea of regional monarchs descending from the erstwhile kings of Upper Tibet is a common trope among the smaller polities of Western Tibet. From a cultural and popular point of view, it is therefore entirely possible that the people interviewed by Gergan would have perceived the ruling family of Spiti as the current heirs of King Nyi ma mgon, a view still being upheld by locals nowadays; see document C in Appendix 8 and GERGAN 1976: 325; DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2002: 318; JAHODA 2016: 132; SCHUH 2016b: 6.

[94] According to Diack, "Though caste is almost unknown in Spiti there are tribal divisions: (1) Nandu, (2) Gyazhingpa [i.e. *rgyan shing pa*], (3) Khyungpo [i.e. *khyung pa*], (4) Lonchhenpa [i.e *blon chen pa*], (5) Henir, and (6) Nyeka. Marriage is forbidden within the tribe, but one tribe intermarries freely with another. A woman on marrying is considered to belong to her husband's tribe, and the children of both sexes are of the tribe of the father. The tribes (*rú-wa*) [i.e. *rus pa*] are not local: members of each may be found in any village. The members (*phaibat*) [i.e. *pha spus*?] of the tribe, wherever they may live, inherit in preference to the people of the village in default of natural heirs"; see DIACK 1899: 93.

class of the society were strictly forbidden.[95] Collectively regarded as 'outsiders' (*phyi pa*), these subordinate households were perceived as impure owing to their occupation and uncertain ethnic origin. Yet, they constituted specialised groups whose skills were essential to the social organisation of village communities. The history of these households is not well documented and generally relies on early European accounts and ethnographic works. According to these sources, the blacksmiths of Spiti were commonly referred to as 'artisans' (*bzo ba*), a Tibetan word that usually encompasses a wide range of craftsmen such as carpenters, stone carvers, and artists. Early on, British accounts praised the skills and ability of this group to produce various metal works from silver smoking pipes to ploughshares.[96] In addition to their wares of handmade craftsmanship, households of blacksmiths could also rely on small plots of land (*bzo zhing*) to feed themselves, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. During his stay in Dangkhar in the summer of 1822, Trebeck also remarked how the village blacksmith, whose house has been formerly identified, was to "exchange his anvil for a couple of drums" and entertain people at drinking parties.[97] In the *Bla dwags rgyal rabs 'chi med gter*, Gergan

[95] Marriages between members of the Bheda community and the main landowners and farmers of Spiti were contrary to social norms, and frowned upon. However, a private contract (*gan tshig*) from the local archives of Dangkhar seems to suggest that it may not have been entirely impossible. The document takes the form of a prenuptial agreement designed to record the betrothal list and financial implications in case of breach of contract. The document was countersigned by several members of the community including the village headman. The identification of the groom's social status rests on the reading of his father's name, Bheda (*be sta*) bsTan pa; see BmK17 in Appendix 6. In 1863, an altercation and slight scuffle between a group of blacksmiths and Bheda women was brought to the attention of the District Commissioner of Kangra. The crux of the issue was the intentional use of a blacksmith's smoking pipe by the two women musicians—a prohibited act in view of the 'low caste' status of the Bheda community; see below note 99.

[96] "I have already said that in Spiti, as in Tibet generally, there are no castes, if restrictions in eating and drinking together be the test,* but the landholding class (who in the census returns are called Kanéts) do not intermarry with the Lohárs, nor the Lohárs with the Bedas. The so-called Kanéts are pure Botiás [i.e. ethnic Tibetan], and constitute the whole population with the exception of 100 Lohárs (blacksmiths) and 46 Bedas. The Lohárs, whose Tibetan name is Zon [i.e. *bzo ba*], are skilful smiths; they make pipes, tinder boxes, bits, locks and keys, knives, choppers, hoes, plough-shares, and chains. Some of their work is of quaint and intricate pattern; the articles are generally made to order, the smith receiving food and wages, and being supplied with iron; these people are also employed to beat drums at marriages and at festivals in the monasteries. The Bedas answer to the Hensís of Láhould; the men play the pipes and kettle drums, while the women dance, sing, and play the tambourine; they are the only class which owns no land. 'The Beda no land, the dog no load' is a proverbial saying. * I think this is true, though practically all other classes would avoid eating food cooked by the Bedas who are with reason treated as a very low and disreputable set of people. So, again, they would not admit them to the equality conferred by a common use of the same pipe, or by dipping the hand in the same dish"; see LYALL 1874: 198–199.

[97] "On the 15th of August [1822] the approach of harvest was celebrated by a public festival, and at the invitation of Khaga Khan I joined the party at his residence early in the forenoon. I found his room crowded by the men of the village, and the whole party was engaged in emptying some large earthen vessels of chang, the contents of which diminished as briskly as might well be imagined. There was also abundance of smoking, abundance of noise, and better than all, abundance of good humour. I had not been long seated before three of the company rose to dance, to a tune played by the blacksmith, who had exchanged his anvil for a couple of drums. The

also noted two peculiar features concerning blacksmith and Bheda households. In his description of clan names and lineages, the Ladakhi scholar reported that the blacksmiths of Dangkhar were said to be descended from a family lineage wearing a conch shell earring (*dung gi sna lo can gyi brgyud*). Likewise, he observed that Bheda families acted as grooms (*rta bco mkhan*) on behalf of the people of Spiti.[98]

The Bheda community was indisputably the lowest-status group within the Spiti society; a situation shared with other Bheda households from Lahaul and Ladakh until quite recently.[99] The etymological origin of the name of this social and professional designation is unclear and does not seem to be related to any Tibetic languages.[100] Like their Ladakhi counterparts, the Bheda of Spiti were traditionally musicians and wandering minstrels. The musical instruments played by the Bheda

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performance precisely resembled what we often witnessed at Lé [i.e. Leh in Ladakh]"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 75.

[98] Normalised transliteration: /*spyi ti pa rta bco mkhan be dA yin no/ dung gi sna lo can (36) gyi brgyud las brang mkhar gyi mgar ba de yin zer ro/ de ltar spyi ti na rus sna so drug las lhag par yod shag*/; "The Bheda are the grooms of the people of Spiti. It is said that the blacksmiths (*mgar ba*) of Dangkhar are from the family lineage wearing a conch shell earring (36). Accordingly, there are more than thirty-six kinds of 'bone lineages' in Spiti". These two lines are found at the end of the section detailing the clans of Spiti, as discussed above in footnote 93. They were accidentally omitted from De Rossi Filibeck's translation. The numbering used by Gergan, given above in brackets, indicates that the Bheda families were not counted by Gergan as a formal patrilineage. Likewise, they are absent from the original list kept in Berlin; see GERGAN 1976: 325; DE ROSSI FILIBECK 2002; JAHODA 2017.

[99] In the summer of 1863, the Deputy Commissioner of Kangra reported an altercation between blacksmiths and Bheda musicians over an act of defilement involving the use of a blacksmith's pipe by two female musicians. The violent reprisals and the claims put forward by the former group are highly indicative of the Bhedas' social position within Spiti society: "The complainants were musicians [i.e. Bheda], who stated their case thus: – At an evening party two of them asked some blacksmiths to let them have a smoke at their pipes. The blacksmiths refused, saying that the musicians were *low caste*. The musicians snatched a pipe and smoked it. There was a slight scuffle, and the blacksmiths caught it rather severely from the *tongues* of the female musicians. A few days after, the blacksmiths of four of the five Kothees in Spiti, (Peen Kothee holding aloof), held a conclave, and resolved to vindicate their outraged dignity. Accordingly they assembled to the number of about eighty, attacked the musicians' house, plundered everything in their possession, and took two of them, the original aggressors, captive, and held them hostages for good behaviour. Defendants allowed the correctness, of this statement, even to the detail of plundered property, which (including as it did one item of seven horses), I had thought exaggerated. They asserted that the musicians were *low caste*, and that they could not smoke pipes with them (…). I convicted the whole lot, comprising forty blacksmiths and two musicians, and sentenced them to one month's imprisonment and two rupees fine each, awarding compensation to the plundered parties out of the fine. (…) A petition was put in afterwards by the blacksmiths, coolly requesting me to declare that the musicians are of low caste, and are never again to smoke a blacksmith's pipe! Of course I snubbed them, for I should be sorry if the curse of caste should become firmly rooted here. (…) There is, however, no doubt that the musicians of Spiti are a different race from most of the Zemindars or landowners, as the annexed photograph will show"; see EGERTON 1864: 27–28. On the origin, function, and discrimination of Bheda communities in Ladakh and Spiti; see TREWIN 1995: 166–167, 180–181; RATHER 1997; TASHI TSERING 2014: 58–64; ZIMMERMANN 2014.

[100] The term Bheda could come from the Sanskrit word for 'difference', 'rupture', or 'violation' (*bheda*), but more likely, given the Persian origins of the names of their musical instruments, is a derivation from the Persian word for 'low born', 'ill mannered', or 'something new or strange' (*beda-at*). Whatever the donor language, the multiple spelling variants recorded in Tibetan, the most common forms being *be da*, *be dha*, and *bhe da* to name just a few, underscore the non-Tibetan origin of this word.

are informative insofar as the historical background of their tradition is concerned. They comprise two percussion instruments known as 'dawu' and 'daman' in Spiti. The first one is a tambourine that resembles the Iranian frame drum (*daf*). The second instrument likely derived its name from the Persian bowl-shaped drum (*damameh*). Finally, a type of oboe known as 'surna' is likely related to the Persian word *sorna*, a woodwind instrument with a double reed played across the Indian subcontinent. With a possible Middle Eastern provenance for these instruments, the popularisation of ceremonial music (*gar*) at the royal court of Ladakh could explain the transfer of cultural influences to vassal polities during the 17th century. This idea has led Jahoda to suggest that "the music culture associated with low-caste populations in Spiti has been influenced by courtly traditions as practiced in Ladakh by the *mkhar mon* or royal musicians".[101] A similar view was expressed by an elder from Spiti who claimed that the first Bheda family to settle in Dangkhar did so in order to perform during ceremonies held at the fort.[102]

In addition to their role as musicians, Gergan's enquiry into the composition of the society specified that the Bheda were also the grooms (*rta bco mkhan*) of the people of Spiti. His observation fell on deaf ears in the literature describing the social structures of this valley, but now seems to be historically grounded as far as the Bheda household of Dangkhar is concerned.[103] Diplomatic and legal documents from Spiti shed light on the rights granted to a particular family of the Dangkhar settlement to look after horses. Although partly illegible, the first document takes the form of a confirmation letter of privilege (*rgyab gnon*) issued by the King of Purig bKra shis rnam rgyal (1734–1758) in 1753.[104] This letter is addressed to the people of Dangkhar (*brag dkar ba*) and stipulates that the

[101] JAHODA 2009: 54–55.

[102] This information is reported by Tashi Tsering who notes that "One of my informants had learned from a local elder that Bedas were introduced into Spiti when it was under Ladakhi rule (i.e., between 1630 and 1842) to play music for the Nono during ceremonial occasions at the Cliff Castle (*brag mkhar*) in Dhangkar village. Thus according to my field informant, the first Beda of Spiti Valley lived in Dangkhar village, which is where the fort of the Governor was situated. Gradually, the population of Beda increased and they moved to different villages"; see TASHI TSERING 2014: 63–64.

[103] A possible reference to the dual professional activity of the Bheda can perhaps be inferred from a passage in a short article about Spiti by the diplomatic historian Alastair Lamb: "The majority of the villagers are landless. Some are junior members of landholding families [i.e. *khang chung pa*] who work in the fields for their keep. Others are labourers [i.e. *gla pa*] paid in kind. In each village there are specialists, such as the blacksmiths [i.e. *mgar ba*, *bzo ba*], millers, entertainers and animal doctors [i.e. *bheda*?], who are kept by the community in return for their services" (Tibetan terminology in brackets added); see LAMB 1956.

[104] See BmK25 in Appendix 6.

groom-farrier of the fort (*mkhar gyi chibs bzo mkhan*)–literally 'the one who makes horses'–is the sole person allowed to exercise this profession on behalf of the local government (*mkhar*). Echoing the content of this document, another decree addressed to the government of Spiti by King bKra shis rnam rgyal in 1748 requested that no stallion (*pho rta*) should be sold unless permission was granted by the district prefect of the fort (*rdzong sdod*).[105] The relation between the Dangkhar settlement, horse trade, and the seat of the local government, albeit vague at this stage, is also expressed in an earlier royal document issued, this time, by the King of Ladakh Nyi ma rnam rgyal (r.*c*.1694–1729).[106] In it, the title of 'head groom' or 'royal equerry' (*chibs dpon*) figures among a list of local officials and functionaries indicating that someone was effectively responsible for supervising all matters relating to 'govermental' horses in Spiti.[107] Moreover, this document mentions different types tax burdens (*khral thebs*) among which one pertaining to the maintenance of horses (*chibs gsos*).

Thus far, none of the earlier documents mention any Bheda family by name. This situation changed under British rule with a bilingual permit issued by the Office of the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu in 1851.[108] Like the confirmation letter of privilege sent to the groom-farrier of the fort in the mid-18th century mentioned above, the British permit was also meant to ensure that no one but the petitioner should claim the right granted to his own family to deal with horses. Only this time, the statement (*narratio*) underlines that the Bheda (*bhe ta*) from Dangkhar named 'Byor rgyas had been in charge of equids for all the administrative units of the valley already in former times.[109] The nature of the work carried out by the members of this household, which was confirmed by the King of Purig in

[105] According to the notification (*promulgatio* or *publicatio*) of this royal decree (No-no 14), the document was addressed to the prefect of the fort of Spiti (*spyi ti mkhar dpon*), the steward (*gnyer pa*), the Do ga che, the leader of ten (*bcu dpon*), and the council of elders (*rgan las 'dzin*). It is not clear if the use of the term *rdzong sdod* in the passage concerning the sale of stallions refers to the prefect of the fort himself (*mkhar dpon*) or to his local representative. Another document studied by Schuh (No-no 16) shows that two officials bearing the titles *mkhar dpon* and *rdzong sdod* were possibly stationed in Dangkhar in 1785; see SCHUH 2016b: 174–180.

[106] See document sTeng-rgyud 1F in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[107] The head groom likely occupied a minor position within the local functionaries. He must have been in charge of tending horses used by officials, envoys, and messengers. The *chibs dpon* of Spiti is mentioned again in the notification (*promulgatio*) of a royal order (*bka'*) issued by the King of Ladakh Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal in 1818; see BmK02 in Appendix 6.

[108] See BmK11 in Appendix 6.

[109] Normalised transliteration*: § brag khar bhe ta 'byor (rgy)as 'dir [r]ta grid kho rang la ko gri [l]nga po sngar kyang 'dug pa/*; "The present Bheda (*bhe ta*) 'Byor rgyas of Dangkhar was in charge of horses (*rta grid*) for the five *koṭhīs* already in former times". With some spelling emendations, the compound noun 'horse-knife' (*rta gri*) could refer to the act of gelding; see document BmK11 in Appendix 6.

1753 and again by the British in 1851, becomes explicit in a report published by Major Edmund William Hay. In fact, Hay was none other than the Assistant Commissioner of Kulu who personally oversaw the procedure that resulted in the issuing of 'Byor rgyas's permit. Observing that horses were "bred chiefly for sale" in Spiti, he also noted that "the right of castration has usually been the right of one person, given under a seal from Ladak".[110] This last remark sheds a rather different light on the Tibetan expressions seen above. Thus, the groom-farrier of Dangkhar was very much 'the maker of geldings' (*chibs bzo mkhan*). Similarly, Gergan's comment on the stable grooms (*rta bco mkhan*) of the inhabitants of Spiti ought to be re-interpreted as being about those whose prerogative it was to castrate colts in the valley. That the Bheda household from Dangkhar in particular enjoyed the exclusive right of horse castration over the centuries was also confirmed by my local informants.[111] Incidentally, they also claimed that the members of this household used to carry out corporal punishment at trials.

The foregoing discussion of residential areas and social structures illuminates some important features of the Dangkhar settlement in historical times. Three different clusters of houses were established in the upper, middle, and lower parts of the cliffs forming the village of Dangkhar *per se*. In the 19th-20th centuries, the village council was run by the heads of the most dominant households.

[110] "But little attention, except in a few cases, is paid to the breeding of these Ghoonts [i.e. Himalayan horse]; a certain number of entire Ghoonts are turned loose amongst the mares, and the sire of a foal is seldom known. Such as are not required for breeding, are castrated when between two and three years of age. The right of castration has usually been the right of one person given under a seal from Ladak"; see HAY 1850: 441. Spiti horses are praised again and again in colonial literature for their sure-footedness and endurance, a result achieved through the removal of their genitalia. Lyall offered one the most comprehensive description of this highly prized animal: "Most of the Spiti landholders own one or two ponies; they sell some in Basáhir [i.e. Bashahr-Kinnaur] and a few in Kulu, but the great traffic is the neighbouring Tibetan province of Chamarthi [i.e. Chumurti (*chu mur ti)*]. The Spiti pony is a handsomely shaped animal, but very small; he is very sure-footed, and will carry you a long distance over bad roads in a short time at the pace he is taught, which is a kind of amble or running walk. In India, or on the southern side of the Himalayas, he is apt to get sluggish. A number of the ponies seen in Spiti are from Charmarthi, where the breed is of a larger size. The Spiti-men exchange one broken in four-year old pony for two Chamarthi colts; when the two are full grown, they sell one for cash and goods, and again exchange the other for two more colts; this is the great way in which they raise money to pay the revenue and buy tobacco, tea, &c. The price of a good pony in Spiti ranges from fifty to a hundred rupees. In the lower part of the valley they are out at grass most of the winter, while in the upper part they have to be stall-fed. Nearly all are gelded. In Láhoul it is only the Thákurs, or the more successful traders, who keep ponies; the great number of the landholders own one. Those who have them hire them out at very high rates to the merchants, who trade between Kulu and Léh and Yárkand"; see LYALL 1874: 196.

[111] The polluting nature and social stigma attached to the act of castration in the Western Himalayas is reported in a biographical work about the veterinary sergeant William Moorcroft. Having left the Kulu Valley for Ladakh in August 1820, "two ponies were such a nuisance on that first march that Moorcroft gelded them next day, an act of such impiety according to the locals that the rain fell all night and half the next day"; see ALDER 1985: 248.

These families were not only the largest landowners of the settlement, but also its most important taxpayers. With a total of eighteen main households (*khang chen*), these units of agricultural production and taxation were transmitted from one generation to the next by virtue of a right of succession through the eldest son. Traditionally, the main large households of each village were also viewed as representing the foremost founding families (*khang chen rnying pa*) of Spiti; a claim that seems to find its origin in the administrative and military organisation of the Spiti Valley under the Tibetan empire. In the case of Dangkhar, the spatial distribution of these main households appears to be suggestive of an 'urban development' of the site through time. Out of thirteen residential houses established in the upper part of the cliffs, ten belonged to the main householders of Dangkhar, suggesting that the cluster of houses known as 'the upper stronghold' (*mkhar stod*) must have constituted the initial core of the settlement. This hypothesis is somewhat reinforced by the fact that the ancestral home of the three most important patrilineal clans from Dangkhar, the households of the medium, physician, and that of the minister, belonged to this residential area.

Among the local nobility, the current minister's household could trace their ancestry back to the 15th century, when the then minister of Dangkhar was depicted as a member of the royal court of Spiti–or perhaps that of a larger polity of West Tibet–in the murals of the Mandala Temple at Tabo Monastery. Around the mid-17th century, a donor inscription copied in Dangkhar praised another member of this household, the minister Tshe ring bkra shis, for being a devout Buddhist and influential member of his community. The epigraph also commended him for upholding the Ladakhi regime according to a formulaic expression of political loyalty. Despite being conspicuously absent from diplomatic documents and local archives, the prestige of this household lasted until modern times.

The local archives from Dangkhar often mention the names of the otherwise silent actors of the village life, though the social landscape of the settlement is rarely foregrounded in these documents dealing with land disputes and other petty quarrels. One notable exception concerns the Bheda household of Dangkhar, whose existence was recorded for the first time in the mid-18th century. As an endogamous and partially outcaste social group, the Bheda community of Spiti has generally

been ascribed the role of traditional musicians in previous scholarship. Legal documents show that the Bheda household from Dangkhar secured another working position when they were granted exclusive gelding rights in Spiti. Members of this households were anxious, it would seem, to maintain the exclusivity of this entitlement over generations, particularly at times of political uncertainty when control over the Spiti Valley changed hands.

3.4 The district fort of Dangkhar and the local government of Spiti

As a political seat, the Dangkhar settlement was home to different officials some of whom may not necessarily have been natives of either Dangkhar or Spiti. The administrative functions and political power they assumed required that these men held office at the fort of the Dangkhar settlement for varying lengths of time. The historical and archaeological study of this edifice is not free from difficulties, starting with the absence of architectural documentation. To complicate matters further, the fort must have been subject to several renovation phases and even structural transformations over the centuries. In later times, this large building where British officials often stayed during their tours of the valley, and whose derelict state they often remarked upon,[112] was visibly repaired between 1866 and 1954 as photographic archives clearly show (fig. 3.22, 3.33, and 3.40). Then, in the late 1970s or early 80s, the main part of the building was turned into monastic quarters in an attempt to establish a nunnery with cells now being used as sheep pens and storage rooms (fig. 4.20).[113]

Topographically, the fort occupied the most dominant position of the Dangkhar settlement, overlooking most of the valley floor, and commanding views both upstream and downstream of the Spiti River. The south facing fortification stood on a rocky surface with high sloping stone walls and upper storeys made of mud bricks. The entrance door was located in the east, in a recessed corner of

[112] "A small rest-house has been this year [i.e. 1868] erected at Losur [i.e. the village of Lhosar in upper Spiti], and a room in the fort at Dhunkur is usually placed at the disposal of travellers in the valley"; see HARCOURT 1871b: 63.

[113] This initiative is attributed to dGe bshes lha rams pa Blo bzang legs ldan who was the incumbent abbot of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling Monastery between 1969 and 1986. During fieldwork in 2018, a male interviewee confided that it would be a valuable touristic asset, so to speak, to renovate the old fort back to its former glory. As we shall see, the importance of this edifice for the lay community is also related to the fact that it hosts the shrines of two territorial deities (*yul lha*).

the high walls forming the facade, which was equipped with loopholes as per Jacquemont's description.[114] A detail of a photograph taken by Bourne in 1866 gives some ideas of the size of this multi-storeyed edifice in comparison with other vernacular buildings established in the upper stronghold (fig.4.21). The fortifications of Spiti have not been formally studied. The same cannot be said, however, of the hundreds of fortified sites established in the adjacent regions of Ladakh, Zanskar, and Purig which have received considerable attention in recent scholarship.[115] In comparison with these sites, it is worth noting some particular features of the Dangkhar fort. The topographical setting of this edifice, located on a high cliff and difficult to access, is reminiscent of some of the earliest fortifications of Greater Ladakh. Its plan, dimension, architectural features (e.g. windows), and the diversity of construction materials used, in particular the use of wood and mud bricks, generally attest to a type of fortified buildings which may have been built in or around the 15th century.[116] Based only on photographic archives and in-situ observations, little more can be said about the chronology of this fort.

3.4.1 Problems of terminology: rtse*,* mkhar*, or* rdzong*?*

Following his archaeological survey of the Spiti Valley in 1909, Francke assumed that the establishment of a 'castle' on top of the Dangkhar settlement was the result of the Ladakhi occupation of the valley, thus placing its foundation in the first half of the 17th century.[117] If this was indeed the case, it seems quite certain that the fort established by the Kingdom of Ladakh at this site would have in fact been nothing more than an enlargement of defensive structures that already existed. In this regard it is worth stressing once more that the very name of the Dangkhar settlement, as reported in

[114] During fieldwork, local interviewees claimed the existence of a levelled area below the fort which was used as a horse enclosure in the past. This statement seems to be corroborated by Trebeck who reported "a yard close to the fort" in 1822; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 76.

[115] Vestiges of fortifications and defensive work in Spiti can be seen, for example, at Nadang near Tabo, Shelkhar in Hangrang, as well as at Khar and Bar in the Pin Valley. For a brief history of research on Ladakhi fortifications; see DEVERS 2016.

[116] Based on Quentin Devers' typological approach to fortified sites, the mud bricks used in the Dangkhar fort, with a length/width ratio between 1.9 and 2.1, can be found in similar buildings from in or around the 15th century, while bricks with a ratio under 1.7 are only used in structures dated from before the 15th century, and bricks with a ratio of 2.2 and above in buildings datable to after the 15th century; see DEVERS 2016.

[117] "The uppermost place of the rock is occupied by the castle which is now in possession of the Nono (chief) of Spiti. It was built by the Ladakhis who used to have a garrison here. There are tales current about the last days of Ladakhi rule, when the place was captured by the Spiti people, and its inmates were thrown down the rock. Judging from the ruins in the vicinity, the castle was much larger in Ladakhi times, than it is now. The present building, therefore, gives no idea of what it was like formerly"; see FRANCKE 1914: 44.

epigraphic writing as early as the late 15th century, is synonymous with a fortified place of residence or stronghold. The oral tradition of Spiti, on the other hand, claims that the fort (*mkhar*) was the residence of a monarch (*rgyal po*, *dpon po*).[118] It also suggests that King lDe gtsugs mgon established it as a royal palace and stronghold (*rgyal po'i pho brang mkhar*) in the 11th century.[119]

Specific references to the fort of Dangkhar are not always straightforward in local epigraphic and historical sources. The use of Tibetan terms such as 'summit' or 'hilltop' (*rtse*), 'stronghold' or 'fortress' (*mkhar*), and 'district fort' (*rdzong*) in documents spanning the 16th to the 19th centuries generally reference Dangkhar as the regional seat of local rulers and officials, thereby attesting to the existence of an edifice at the top of the ridge.[120] However these terms do not necessarily reference distinct types of defensive structures, architectural buildings, or socio-political practices, but have a variable usage depending on the time period and region examined.[121] While the word *mkhar* may generally describe the fortified residence of a local ruler, the term *rdzong*, on the other hand, tends to indicate a defensive and administrative outpost of a larger political entity. It is for this reason that in my translation of documents given in the appendices, I have adopted the translations 'fort' for *mkhar*, and 'district fort' for *rdzong*. However, in the epigraphic and written sources dealing with Dangkhar, there is no clear distinction in the usage of these terms, as can be seen, for example, from a document issued by the King of Ladakh in 1818 where both terms are used in reference to the fortified edifice of the settlement where a prefect held office.[122]

3.4.2 The district prefect of the fort: mkhar dpon*,* rdzong dpon *and* rdzong sdod*?*

This problem of terminology is also reflected *mutatis mutandis* in the titles borne by officials despatched to Spiti by the Kingdom of Ladakh or by the Central Tibetan government (*dga' ldan pho brang*). By the end of the 17th century, Tibet was divided into 'administrative districts' (*rdzong*)

[118] In the traditional sitting song *Dangkhar Pema* (*brag mkhar padma*), the term *dpon po* is understood as synonymous with the English word for 'king'; see document B in Appendix 8 and HEIN 2019.
[119] See document C in Appendix 8.
[120] See SI1, DP2, and DP3 in Appendix 5 along with BmK02, BmK07, and BmK25 in Appendix 6.
[121] Charles Ramble, for example, reports a local distinction between 'palace castles' (*mkhar rdzong*) and 'cliff castles' (*brag rdzong*) in his work on Mustang. Furthermore, in what he describes as a typical Tibetan context, "a *dzong* would have been an outpost of a state, and its principal inhabitant would not have been a local but someone sent by the central government (the verb *rdzong ba* in fact means 'to send') to represent it in the provinces"; see RAMBLE 2008: 106–107.
[122] See BmK02 in Appendix 6.

headed by a 'district prefect of the fort' (*rdzong dpon*) or by a 'resident prefect' (*rdzong sdod*, *gzhis sdod*), who was sent from Lhasa for a limited term in office, and whose headquarters were located in the 'fort' (*rdzong*) of a district.[123] Hence, when Tibet claimed jurisdiction over the border valley of Spiti between 1684 and 1708, two officials were subsequently assigned as 'resident prefect (*rdzong sdod*, *gzhis sdod*) and took residence in the Dangkhar fort.[124] A similar administrative system was in place in the Kingdom of Ladakh where 'prefects of the fort' (*mkhar dpon*) appointed at Leh seemed to have assumed the same functions as their Tibetan counterparts, albeit with a slightly different title. As Schuh rightly points out,[125] many documents from Spiti, including decrees issued by the chancery of Ladakh or by the Tibetan government, do not always strictly distinguish between the use of the title *mkhar dpon* and the terms *rdzong dpon* or *rdzong sdod*.[126] From the mid-17th to the mid-19th centuries, in addition to the three decades during which Spiti was distantly ruled by Tibet, the fort of Dangkhar also acted as the southern-most outpost and local headquarters for representatives of the royal courts of Ladakh, Zanskar, and Purig. In addition to their judicial and military duties, these 'prefects of the fort' (*mkhar dpon)* sent to Spiti by these various Himalayan states, were instructed to levy taxes mostly in kind,[127] and seemed to have reluctantly resided in the border valley, generally during harvest time, to

[123] The Tibetan government organised the region of Ngari in West Tibet under a system of four 'districts' (*rdzong*), namely the districts of Ruthok (*ru thog*), Tsaparang (*rtsa hreng*, *rtsa rang*), Dawa (*mda' ba*), and Taklakot (*dwag la mkhar*, *stag la mkhar*) in Purang. The prefects of these districts (*rdzong dpon*) were under the authority of the two 'governors of Gar' (*sgar dpon*) who resided alternately at their summer quarters (*sgar dbyar sa*) in Gartok (*sgar tok*) and winter quarters (*sgar dgun sa*) further north. The organisation of these districts also comprised many local rulers (*dpon po*) and postal station officials (*rta zam pa*) who supervised small territorial entities. This system was maintained until the 1950s. Charles A. Sherring gave an informative account and vivid testimony of the Tibetan administration of West Tibet at the beginning of the 20th century; see SHERRING 1906: 142–161. A useful description of the different officials operating in West Tibet can also be found in Henry Strachey's account; see STRACHEY 1848: 340–344, 545–551.

[124] See section 4.6 in Chapter 4.

[125] SCHUH 2016b: 121; HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming: 13.

[126] A decree from Tholing on behalf of the Tibetan government was addressed to the 'prefect of the fort' (*mkhar dpon*) of Spiti in 1685; see BmK03 in Appendix 6. It has been suggested that this title could have been borne by officials from Zanskar in which case the use of *mkhar dpon* would be coherent with positions held in Greater Ladakh; see introductory remarks to document sTeng-rgyud 5 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming. Likewise, two donor prefaces composed in Rangrik and Kyi during the Ladakhi hegemony in the 17th-18th centuries mention 'the great district prefect of the fort' (*rdzong dpon chen po*) and 'the great prefect of the fort' (*mkhar dpon chen po*) respectively, suggesting that both titles were understood to be quite synonymous by the people of the Spiti Valley at the time; see DP2 and DP3 in Appendix 5.

[127] Cartographer and military officer Alexander Gerard reported that "The fort of Dankur, in lat.32°5'30", situated amongst rugged projections of gravel, is the chief place, and contains about forty houses. The walls are partly stone, partly mud; there is water inside, and the site is well chosen. (…) A Garpun [i.e. *mkhar dpon*] or Governor stays here on the part of the Ludak [i.e. Ladakh] prince or Geapo [i.e. *rgyal po*]; but his authority is little more than nominal, and he receives the tribute. There are three divisions of Speetee [i.e. Spiti], Manes [i.e. Mani], Peenoo [i.e. Pin], and Losur [i.e. Losar]; each under charge of an officer called Lafa [i.e. *las pa*]. Money

collect this revenue, as observed by early travellers and British officials.[128] The copy of a document issued by the King of Ladakh Nyi ma rnam rgyal in 1720 is informative in this regard,[129] insisting as it does on restricting the absence of these prefects to the seasons of autumn and spring. It further stipulates that the king's delegates were to be supplied with food from the fort (*mkhar*) and the monastic residence (*bla brang*) in equal parts. For that reason, the yields of particular fields were assigned to the fort of Dangkhar.[130] Incidentally, this royal document also draws attention to the fact that the supply of water and firewood was the sole responsibility of the servants of the fort (*mkhar g.yog*).

3.4.3 The ruling elite and the Nono headman of Spiti

The prefects of the fort, when present in Spiti, were assisted in their functions by other officials (*las byed*). The hierarchical organisation of the local government is best exemplified in royal decrees and regulatory dispositions issued by the political authorities that controlled the Spiti Valley in the 17th-19th centuries. These documents were generally addressed (*promulgatio*), either in part of in full, to a number of officials and functionaries among whom figured: the 'district prefect of the fort' (*mkhar dpon*, *rdzong dpon*); the 'minister' (*blon po*); the 'village headman' (*grong dpon*); the 'steward' (*gnyer*

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is chiefly paid to Ludak; but to the Chinese [i.e. Tibet] and Kooloo [i.e. Kulu] the tribute is either blankets or wool"; see A. GERARD 1841: 147. Likewise, British agent Joseph Cunningham described how "The whole revenue of Pitti is collected in grain, by a measure called *khal* (…) In 1841-42, there were in Pitti about 250 paying houses, and of that number, the revenues of fifty-two or fifty-three were appropriated to the five monasteries of the district (…) Besides the above, the Rajah of Ladakh levied from all Pitti a tax named *Hortal* [i.e. *hor khral*], and a second *mattal* [i.e. woollen goods (*smad khral*)], amounting to 36 and 18 rupees respectively (…) The Rajah of Ladakh further demands a quantity of iron, cotton, goods, paper, madder, &. from the whole of the district, for which he gives 50 rupees, taking however 200 rupees' worth of goods (…) As my statement of the revenues differs greatly from the estimate of Mr. Trebeck, I may be wrong; that is, my informants may have purposely misled me"; see J.D. CUNNINGHAM 1844: 211–12.

[128] "The authority of the Raja of Ladakh, or rather that of the Khalun [i.e. *bka' blon*], is absolute, and is exercised through a chief [i.e. prefect of the fort (*mkhar dpon*)], who seldom visits Piti, except at harvest time, to collect the revenue. This office is therefore discharged by a deputy, who is rarely a person of much influence, and whose measures are completely controlled by the Gatpos [i.e. *rgad po*] (…) householders acting for a month in turn as elders of the villages"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 69.

[129] See document sTeng-rgyud 1f in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[130] "There are some fields at Dankar attached to the old fort there which are like it the property of Government. The Nono, in virtue of his office, provides for the cultivation of the fields, and takes the produce. He is bound in return to keep the fort in repair"; see LYALL 1874: 186.

pa); the Do kha che; the 'leader of ten' (*bcu dpon*); the 'head groom' or 'stable master' (*chibs dpon*); and the 'village elders' (*rgad po*).[131]

The third official in the list is the 'village headman' about whom we have no historical information whatsoever. He was perhaps appointed from among the householders (*khang chen pa*) of the village council, or possibly as a representative of an administrative unit of Spiti (*rgad po chen mo*).

The 'steward', on the other hand, was an important official who looked after the treasury and stores of the fort.[132] The identity and role of the steward of Dangkhar is rather inconspicuous in the local archives from Spiti. In a document dated to an unknown Wood-Ox Year, for example, he is accused of having withheld the distribution of grains assigned to the local monastery. Following a failed mediation process (*'dum 'grig*), the matter was brought to the attention of the monastic estate of Tashigang in West Tibet where it was ruled that from now on the stewards of the fort would ensure the annual supply of nine loads of grains to the Gelukpa monastery of the Dangkhar settlement.[133] It is worth pointing out that the name of two stewards were also recorded in local taxation records dating from the mid-19th century.[134] The first, called bSod nams dbang phyug was listed among the main householders (*khang chen pa*) of Dangkhar. The second, who also belonged to the main landowners of the settlement, was logged as steward Rama (*gnyer pa ra ma*), indicating that he may have been originally from the village of Rama/Rapang.[135]

In a similar way, the hereditary office of the Do kha che was held by a family from a different village.[136] According to James Lyall's settlement report, bSod nams stob rgyas from Mani assumed significant responsibilities in the local government of Spiti as a secretary and administrator in the

[131] These designations could also be found in Ladakh, Zanskar, and Purig at the time. However, functionaries in a Ladakhi context, like the Drag shos and the Zhal skyin, whose duties can only be vaguely defined, seem to have been absent from the local government of Spiti; see SCHWIEGER 2005.
[132] In his work on Ladakh, Petech specified that a steward "was in charge of the stores of wheat, barley, fruits and other foodstuff and kept the account of in- and outgoing items"; see PETECH 1977: 154.
[133] See BmK29 in Appendix 6.
[134] See documents No-no 1 and No-no 2 as well as Table 15 in SCHUH 2016b.
[135] During interviews conducted in the village of Rama/Rapang in 2018, Me me bla ma and dBang phyug rdo rje recalled that a steward from Rama held office in Dangkhar in the past. They claimed that the office was hereditary but became obsolete in the 1980s.
[136] The office of *do kha che*, also spelt *do ba che*, *do ga che*, *ta go che* is also reported in Ladakh and Zanskar. This term of non-Tibetan origin derives from the Mongol *darughachi* and corresponds to the Persian *dārugheh*. It designated an official in charge of taxes and administration of certain provinces; see SCHWIEGER 2005: 166.

1860s.[137] The importance of this office at a regional level is already apparent in a legal agreement drawn up in 1806. In it, the sale of a piece of land was conditional upon the approval and signatures of both the prefect of the fort and the Do kha che of Spiti.[138] Finally, Trebeck wrote that he was put up in the house of the 'Taoche' during in his stay at Dangkhar in the summer of 1822, suggesting that this high-ranking functionary must have had properties in the district capital of Spiti, too.[139]

By contrast, little is known of the 'leader of ten' and 'head groom', two minor positions in the local government of Spiti. The leader of ten was presumably some sort of military officer who commanded a small contingent of men. Despite the strategic importance of the Dangkhar settlement, there is no evidence that the royal courts of Ladakh, Zanskar, and Purig had any garrisons stationed permanently in Spiti. The leader of ten must therefore have been responsible for overseeing the rapid conscription of a local militia in the event of imminent danger.

As for the office of head groom, this appointed functionary had to supervise the stables of the fort. The importance of horses for the history of the Western Himalayas has been completely overlooked in modern scholarship, and I intend to devote a research article to this subject soon. It is sufficient to highlight here the following points. By the 18th century, if not earlier, the Spiti Valley was responsible for producing some of the finest steeds in the region. Mostly bred in the Pin Valley, the so-

[137] "Under the kings of Ladákh, a family in the village of Máni held the hereditary office of togochi of Spiti. The togochi was a secretary and keeper of the records and was associated with the wazír on an equal almost footing in all state business. The present head of the family, by name Sonám Tabgi [i.e. *bsod nams stobs rgyas*], has been in the habit of assisting the Nono as a secretary. I have appointed him patwárí [i.e. registrar or accountant (*paṭwārī*)] of Spiti, and recommended his receiving forty *khal* per annum out of the 'netal' [i.e. *nas khral*] collections"; see LYALL 1874: xxxxvi, 188. This was again reported by Shuttleworth in 1918. The British orientalist was of the opinion that the title of 'Togoche' was granted to an aristocratic family (*no no*) of Mani by the Kingdom of Zanskar. The dates put forward, however, are most certainly incorrect and the alleged Dog Year can only refer to the years 1658, 1670, or 1682 during which Zanskar ruled over Spiti: "The No-no family of Māṇi in southern Spiti under the Māṇi-raṅ pass and Kanaur [i.e. Kinnaur] had in its possession a number of orders from the Ladakhi kings as their relations, and among them one issued in the early dog year A.D. 1598 or maybe 1610 by Bstan-hdzin-rNam-rgyal [i.e. bsTan 'dzin rnam rgyal] from Padam [also Padum] in Zangskar gave the No-no an official appointment. This was that of To-go-che, which is equivalent to Secretary or Registrar. This official historic title is still used by the Mā-ṇi No-no. With reference to its survival at Leh, Francke writes 'The To-go-che used to be an official who ranked between a minister and a Grang-dpon [sic, for *grong dpon*], or mayor'. In Spiti he ranked next to the minister or Blon-po, who commanded the Drangkhar fort, as mkhar-dpon. The place from which the above order was issued shows that then, as often before and after, Spiti was administratively grouped with Zangskar"; see SHUTTLEWORTH MssD722/25.

[138] See document No-no 22 in SCHUH 2016f: 194–196.

[139] "I established myself in a house in the village to await replies to my letters. The house belonged to the Taoche, or head of the carriers, and he with Khaga Khan, the manager of the district, and the Pa-on or scribe, paid me every civility in the absence of the chief of Piti, Sultan Begh, whom I had left at Lé [i.e. Leh]"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 59–60.

called Chamurthi horses were traded outside Spiti and avidly sought by rulers of neighbouring countries.[140] As we have seen, these horses needed to be gelded to keep them docile, a menial job performed by the Bheda family of Dangkhar. Lastly, horse races were widely popular in Spiti among the landed gentry and main landowners,[141] and an area bordering the Dangkhar Lake is reported to have served as a race track in the 19th century (fig. 4.25).[142]

Finally, the 'elders' were the heads of the villages of Spiti. Their functions are mostly known to us thanks to ethnographic works. They presided over the village councils and were assisted by other 'elder-assistants' (*rgan las*). Five of them, known as the 'great elders' (*rgad po chen mo*), represented the interest of the main households (*khang chen*) from the five administrative units of the valley vis-à-vis the local authorities.[143] By the mid-19th century, however, these elders were subordinated to the authority of a 'Nono' (*no no*).[144]

Today, the so-called Nono of Spiti is affectionately introduced as the former king (*rgyal po)* of the valley to travellers and tourists.[145] The history of this alleged royal line is, however, shrouded in

[140] Two royal documents addressed to the local government of Spiti by the King of Ladakh Nyi ma rnam rgyal in 1720 and by the King of Purig bKra shis rnam rgyal in 1748 discuss horse breeding (*chibs gsos*) and the selling of stallions (*pho rta*) under the strict supervision of the prefect of the fort; see document No-no 14 in SCHUH 2016b: 174; and document sTeng-rgyud 1f in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[141] See *supra* note 110.

[142] The British officer Philip Egerton reported that the area was delineated by a low stone wall against which spectators would sit. The wall is still visible nowadays but may originally have been built for a different purpose; "The Nono invited us to some horse-races, and provided a number of ponies for us and our servants. The race-course was the dry bed of a small lake about 800 yards in circumference. We were preceded on our way there by a cavalry band, making the most discordant noise. The first thing our Spiti friends did was to seat themselves in a comfortable place, protected from the wind by a low wall, and commenced drinking châng"; see EGERTON 1864: 31.

[143] TASHI TSERING 2014: 82–84.

[144] "Spiti is divided fiscally into five 'Kothees' or subdivisions, each presided over by a 'Gyatpo' [i.e. *rgad po*] or elder, who collects revenue and settles minor disputes, and tells off coolies when required for travellers or for repairs to roads, &c. Hitherto these Gyatpos have been appointed and dismissed by the Nono at his own pleasure, but I have prohibited this for the future; the office is to be held during good conduct, and an order from the Assistant Commissioner of Koolloo [i.e. Kulu] will be necessary for dismissal"; see EGERTON 1864: 17.

[145] A similar idea was expressed by both Gergan and Petech. The former recalled the local tradition of Spiti according to which "the kings of Ladakh, the kings of Zanskar, the lords of Lahaul, and the Nonos of Spiti are said to be descended from the family lineage of lHa Nyi ma"; see GERGAN 1976: 325. Likewise, Petech drew attention to the fact that "We should distinguish the territory of Ladakh proper from those of the feudatory chiefs in the outlying regions. At the end of the kingdom, there were eight feudatory chiefs, all of them theoretically entitled to be called *rgyal-po*; but in actual practice the royal title was hardly ever employed. They were the four Muslim chiefs of Pa-skyum (in Purig), bSod (in Purig), Suru and Dras; usually they were styled *jo*, a title typical for those regions; then the king of Zaṅs-dkar, the only one for whom the royal title was normally employed; the No-no of Spiti; the chief of Nubra; and the chief of rGya, who was the only one situated within Ladakh Proper**.** The latter's usual title was *jo*, but, perhaps in remembrance of an earlier independent position, he was sometimes called 'king of Upper [Ladakh]' (*stod rgyal-po*)"; see PETECH 1977: 155; PETECH 1997a: 249.

uncertainty, power struggle, and possibly deceit. In 2015, Tibetologist Dieter Schuh met up with Nono bSod nams dbang 'dus who entrusted the German scholar with his family archives. The study of these documents has shed considerably light on the history of these local rulers prior to the annexation of Spiti by British India.[146] Moreover, Schuh's analysis of these documents has allowed corrections of previous observations and assumptions made in the absence of primary sources. In what follows, I will outline the information that is most relevant to this dissertation.

In Spiti, the age-old term *no no* simply designated a young male member of an aristocratic family, while an elder brother or head of the family would have been addressed with the title *ga ga*; as such, the same individual could have borne both titles in the course of his lifetime. It is believed that six aristocratic families were authorised to bear the title of Nono in Spiti in the 19th-20th centuries.[147] While fostering matrimonial alliances between them, not all these families seemed to have enjoyed the same political influence and prestige; one of them being referred to as the 'small Nono' (*chhoṭā no no*) in colonial accounts.

Two of these families, however, gained significant visibility in the 18th and early 19th centuries when they competed with one another for the position of headman (*rgya pa*) of Spiti.[148] According to documents studied by Schuh, Ga ga Kun dga' chos 'phel and bSod nams bstan 'dzin from the aristocratic family of Kyiling held this office between 1710 and the early 1750s. They were then deprived of their political powers by the nobility of Guling in 1776. The office of *rgya pa*, whose establishment is perhaps linked to the Ladakhi annexation of Spiti, implied that the headman of the valley enjoyed additional holdings and was exempted from taxes and corvée labour obligations. More importantly, the headman controlled the council of elders (*rgad po*, *rgan pa*) and came to be officially recognised as the 'representative' (*ngo tshab*) of the prefect of the fort in his absence. The official and

[146] SCHUH 2016b: ix–xi, 2–12.

[147] These six aristocratic families were 1) the Nono family of Kyiling (*skyid gling*), 2) the Nono family of Guling (*gu ling*), 3) the Nono family of Mani (*ma ni*), 4) the Nono family of Gyu (*rgyu*), 5) the Nono family of Gyungül or Demul (*rgyu dgnul*), 6) and the Nono family of Tsurup (*tshu rub*); see TASHI TSERING 2014: 52; JAHODA 2015: 169; HENRY 2016: 60.

[148] "In families of high rank the males enjoy the title Nono and the female that of She-ma; there are only two such families in Spiti, that of the Nono, a hereditary chief of the *wazíri* who administers it as *wazír*, and that of the Nono of Pin. The Pin family is said to have been ennobled because of its head having successfully repelled an invasion of Tibetans in the time when Spiti was attached to the kingdom of Ladakh. A Nono's daughter is called *jo-jo* and her husband, if not himself a Nono, receives by his marriage the title of *jo*"; see DIACK 1899: 92.

envious position of representative of the prefect thus required that the headman of Spiti spend time at the Dangkhar fort where the former held office.[149]

By 1835, Nono bsKal bzang from the nobility of Kyiling had managed to regain control of the position of headman by producing several forged documents, which were allegedly issued by the King of Ladakh Nyi ma rnam rgyal.[150] With the arrival of British military officers and settlement officials in the region, Nono bsKal bzang and his descendants were to secure their position as the main ruling family of Spiti once and for all,[151] in spite of claims put forward by other members of the nobility,[152] while gradually seeing their authority and prerogatives getting curtailed and restricted.[153] Another consequence of the British takeover was that the fort of Dangkhar ceased to be a Ladakhi outpost and the seat of the local government. As a result, many officials listed above must have been redundant to the new administration of the valley.

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[149] "The Nono keeps what he calls his record office in the Fort here, and (he says) always comes here when he has a case to try. His home however is across the river, about six miles higher up"; see EGERTON 1864: 25. And again, "There are some fields at Dankar attached to the old fort there which are like it the property of the Government. The Nono, in virtue of his office, provides for the cultivation of the fields, and takes the produce. He is bound in return to keep the fort in repair. The Nono also holds other lands equal to several ordinary holdings in extent, which are his ancestral property; they are rent free, and are mostly situated at Kuiling [i.e. Kyiling], where he resides. The Pín Nono also has rent free land, but not more than equal to an ordinary holding in extent"; see LYALL 1874: 186.

[150] See documents No-no 4-6 and No-no 12-13 in SCHUH 2016b.

[151] Acting in his capacity as Deputy Commissioner of Kangra, Egerton was officially welcomed by Nono bsKal bzang in the summer of 1863, who under foreign influence was *de jure* head of Spiti and a pawn in the service of British interests. During his stay, Egerton visited the Nono at his family estate: "On the 25th [of August 1863] we marched to Kuling [i.e. Kyiling], the Nono's residence, on the right bank of the Spiti, which we forded without difficulty, as it now contains considerably less water than it had in July. Here the Nono has a very nice compact little estate, with two good houses and plenty of out-buildings on it. The Nono himself lives in the smaller of the two houses, the larger one, together with the management of the estate, having been made over to the eldest son, in accordance with the Spiti custom, already mentioned"; see EGERTON 1864: 26, 57–58.

[152] In 1863, for instance, a man from the Pin Valley named Tshe ring put forward a claim to the Deputy Commissioner of Kangra for the office of prefect of the fort (*mkhar dpon*). It is likely that Egerton mistook the position of prefect with that of headman of Spiti (*rgya pa*) who, as we have seen, also acted as substitute of the prefect (*ngo tshab*). In any event, the claimant produced a confirmation letter of privileges to support his claim. According to that document, the requested office had been granted to his ancestors by the King of Ladakh in a Fire-Monkey Year. Nono bsKal bzang, who was assisting Egerton, failed to decipher the document and Tshe ring's claim was readily quashed by the British officer. This well-known episode was also reported by Harcourt in 1871 and further discussed by Schuh; see EGERTON 1864: 28–29; HARCOURT 1871b: 94; SCHUH 2016b: ix–x, 9.

[153] In 1869, Captain Harcourt met up with bsKal bzang's son, the then incumbent Nono of Spiti: "The Nono Tanzinnamgyal [i.e. *bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal*] succeeded his father in 1865; he is a well-meaning but very ignorant man, and has but little influence over the Spiti people; he is also unacquainted with any language but Thibetan". Harcourt remarked that the new "Nono of Spiti is also an honorary magistrate; but he has no civil powers, and can only fine up to Rs.10 on the criminal side (…) The Nono of Spiti, Tanzinnamgyal, is not much burdened by his honorary labours, and is but seldom called upon to exercise the very limited powers he enjoys"; see HARCOURT 1871b: 90, 94–95.

3.4.4 Judicial system and incarceration facilities

In the local archives from Dangkhar, several legal and private documents highlight social regulations and contractual relationships that existed between the members of the community, or between the different settlements and monasteries of Spiti. The circumstances leading to the writing of these documents were often petty quarrels and local power struggles which could not be resolved locally by elders nor through village councils.[154]

Among these archives, confirmation letters (*rgyab gnon*) reflected the need for an individual or institution to have some privileges confirmed or reconfirmed such as property rights, tax exemptions, or even office tenure. To do so, local authorities were approached. In the case of Spiti between the 17th and the 19th centuries, it entailed taking the matter to the courts of Ladakh, Zanskar, or Purig, or to the dGa' ldan pho brang government through one of its Western Tibetan representatives at Tholing, Gartok, or Ruthok, depending on which authority exercised control over the Spiti Valley at the time.

Other legal documents from the Dangkhar archives were structured as private contracts or written agreements (*gan tshig*, *gan rgya*). These were drawn up between two persons or bodies of people to set out particular arrangements. They could include land transactions, taxation, inheritance, resource allocation, communal obligations, and so on. Often moralistic in tone, these agreements followed a well-defined format that often comprised contravention and penalty clauses. In case of infringement, the matter fell under the purview of the Precious-Upholder-of-the-Law (*khrims bdag rin po che*), an expression that designated the representative and magistrate of one of the authorities abovementioned.

In Spiti, the function of magistrate (*khrims bdag*) was exercised by the prefect of the fort for the period relevant to our documents. It is not clear to what extent court rulings were enforced locally, especially within the oft-changing political configuration of Western Tibet. Likewise, the administration of fines and infliction of punishment were probably left to the discretion of the prefect

[154] On the legalistic forms of organisation of Tibetan villages, in particular in the case of Ladakh, see PIRIE 2007; PIRIE 2016.

of the fort. In view of his repeated absence from Spiti, his responsibilities often fell to his local representative in the person of the valley headman. A fake document produced by the aristocratic family of Kyiling is interesting in this regard.[155] Supposedly dated from the reign of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal, this forgery asserted that the headman of Spiti and his male descendants held the judicial power to iron brand (*lcag mtshan*) and cut the hands (*lag pa bcad*) of criminals owing to their function as representative of the Dangkhar magistrate (*khrims bdag brag mkhar*).[156] In a similar vein, there are grounds to believe that ordeals were conducted in Spiti to prove the innocence or guilt of the accused in doubtful disputes. One of these tests, it would seem, consisted in dipping the hand into boiling oil in order to extract a white stone without injury, according to a royal document issued in 1778/1838, and as reported by British travellers not long after.[157] By the mid-18th century, however, the judicial responsibility of the headman of Spiti had been considerably reduced by the British authorities as already mentioned.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Spiti was said to have no incarceration facility when Egerton attempted to throw forty-two people in jail in the 1860s.[158] However, in an apparent contradiction of Egerton's assertion, Gergan later noted the existence of a court of justice (*khrims ra*)

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[155] See document No-no 4 in SCHUH 2016b.

[156] Major William Hay, during his tenure as Assistant Commissioner of Kulu, remarked that "Bad crimes, as maiming, wounding or murder, have hitherto been punished by orders from Ladâk, generally by the cutting off a hand"; see HAY 1850: 444.

[157] See document BmK07 in Appendix 6. This particular ordeal was reported in the writing of Hay upon his visit to Spiti in 1849: "*Mode of detecting crime and oath* – When two parties are accused of crime, an oath is taken in the following manner. The names of each are written on paper or engraved on stone, then wrapped up in flour, and either thrown into hot oil, or water, a person then plunges in his hand, and the first name that comes up is considered the guiltless person"; see HAY 1850: 444. Similar tests of guilt or innocence were also reported in Ladakh by Cunningham: "In doubtful disputes, where the evidence was unsatisfactory, a decision was obtained either by casting lots, or by ordeal. In the latter case, the accused had either to draw a red-hot iron through his hand, or to take a stone out of a pot of boiling oil without injury. In Great Tibet both of these ordeals are practised; but the latter is rendered much more complicated and difficult by the immersion of two stones, one black and the other white, in the boiling oil. The extraction of the white stone, with an uninjured hand, is held as a complete proof of innocence; while the extraction of the black stone, with uninjured hand, is equivalent to the Scotch verdict of 'not proven,' of which the accused receives the benefit"; see A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 266–267. In 1820, Moorcroft witnessed a similar ordeal at Pipalkoti in the Alaknanda Valley–in today's Uttarakhand–when a woman had been falsly charged of adultery; see ALDER 1985: 224.

[158] "I convicted the whole lot, comprising forty blacksmiths and two musicians, and sentenced them to one month's imprisonment and two rupees fine each, awarding compensation to the plundered party out of the fine. There is no jail in Spiti and the greater part of the time would have been consumed on the road, had I sent them to Sooltanpur [i.e. the town of Sultanpur known as Kulu today], so I appointed men to guard them (paying the guards too out of the fine), and sent the whole gang to work on the roads, of which we and the public afterwards reaped the benefits"; see EGERTON 1864: 28.

and a prison (*btson ra*) in Dangkhar.[159] Today, the people of Dangkhar recall the existence of a lock-up established mid-air inside a vertical shaft formed by an indentation of the cliffs situated in the upper part of the stronghold, not far from the fort (fig. 4.26). This so-called "Nono's prison cell" was admired *de visu* by the Chief of Justice of the Punjab High Court Gopal Das Khosla in the 1950s. The latter gave an enthusiatic description of the place, explaining how prisoners were lowered into a cage-like room through an opening in the roof and had therefore no chance of escaping, being several meters above ground.[160] This small jail cell would have been, of course, too small to contain more than a couple of convicts at a time and was probably never mentioned to Egerton, nor to any other British officials for that matter. Alternatively, one must conclude that it was established at a later date.

3.4.5 Seb lha/bla ma: the bloodthirsty custodian deity of the fort

As mentioned earlier, the fort of Dangkhar had fallen into disrepair by the end of the rNam gyal dynasty of Ladakh and was gradually deserted by the local government of Spiti following the formal take-over of the valley by British India in 1846. A single room, however, had been maintained inside the fort to put up European travellers and British officials during their tours of the Indo-Tibetan border regions. More importantly, the people of Dangkhar had continued to look after a sacred shrine situated on the roof of the fort.

The main reason as to why the fort can still be visited today lies in the fact that this edifice has been a place of worship over several centuries. Today, as in the past, two altars (*la btsas*, *lha tho*) in the shape of stacked stones decorated with juniper branches and caprine antlers mark the highest point (*rtse*) of the fort (*mkhar*) while delimiting the northern boundary (*tho*) of the Dangkhar settlement (fig.

[159] *de'ang sha go thang dang a dar 'go'i thang dang/ dum le thang dang la ga dar cu thang dang brag mkhar gyi khrims ra nang byed dgos so/ khrims ra dang btson ra'ng nye bar 'dug go/*; "In this regard, courts of justice ought to take place at Sha go thang, A dar 'go'i thang, Dum le thang, La ga dar ci thang, and at Brang mkhar. There is a court of justice and even a prison in the vicinity"; see GERGAN 1976: 323.

[160] "The offenders, after conviction, were incarcerated in a horrible cell at Dangkar, which consisted of a small room built on the top of a tower of rock. Two sides of this cell were enclosed by a natural precipice several hundred feet high, and on the remaining two sides strong walls of stone had been built. There was no door to this room and a small hole looking over the precipice admitted a few rays of light and served as a ventilator. The prisoner was lowered into this dark hole through a small opening in the roof which was immediately covered with a large stone, and in this dungeon he served out his sentence alone and unattended. His food was supplied by the complainant, who lowered it down to him once a day through the opening in the roof. The rations, it may be expected, were scanty, and not infrequently the complainant was guilty of gross negligence in discharging his obligation (…). We paid a brief visit to the monastery, but the adventure proved unexciting. The prison cell, however, was every bit as impressive as the description we had heard. We could find no evidence of its having been used recently"; see KHOSLA 1956: 121–122, 126.

4.22 and 4.23).[161] Traditionally, a *lha tho* altar is considered the seat of an 'autochthonous deity' or 'god of the country' (*yul lha*). Dominating a particular territory, these deities belong to a set of beliefs and religious praxis often predating the introduction of Buddhism in many places of the Tibetosphere. In his pioneering work on Tibetan culture, Stein drew attention to the close ontological proximity between heaps of stones erected for 'warlike mountain deities' (*btsan*), 'warrior deities' (*dgra lha*), 'deities of the summits' (*rtse lha*), and 'patrilineal deities' (*pho lha*).[162] In general, these places of worship attest to a territorial and social organisation centered on the idea of might (*btsan*) and height (*mtho*) and the image of sovereignty (*dbu rmog btsan*/*mtho*). The seats of these deities, observed Stein, may also be referred to as 'warriors' fortress' (*dpa' mkhar*) and 'fortress of the *btsan*' (*btsan mkhar*).[163]

The Dangkhar fort was considered the seat of two territorial deities known as Jo dar and Seb lha/bla ma.[164] Notably, the latter was reported to have been the main deity of the whole valley of Spiti.[165] Today, the people of Spiti do not appear to pay much attention to this figure whose cult is regarded as the sole affair of the residents of Dangkhar. However, the importance of Seb lha/bla ma for the history of the region becomes apparent in a royal order (*bka'*) issued by the King of Ladakh Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal (r.*c.*1802–1840) in 1818.[166] According to this document, the five monasteries of Spiti petitioned the King of Ladakh for the alleviation of the imposed governmental tax

[161] Prayer flags (*rlung rta*) and votive scarfs (*kha btags*) can also be seen at the shrines of these local deities nowadays. Stein argued that the word *tho* means 'register' as well as 'boundary mark', see below.
[162] STEIN 1972: 203–208.
[163] Unlike Stein, who used the English word 'castle' in his translation of the Tibetan term *mkhar*, I have preferred a less culturally-loaded term to describe the fortified edifices erected in Tibet and in the Himalayas. As for the altar-like cairns, Stein also observed that Tibetans often hear and mistake the word 'register' or 'boundary' (*tho*) for the word 'high' (*mtho*) on the basis of a homophony between the two terms. I wonder if this might not also be the case between the words 'heroic' or 'courageous' (*dpa'*) (i.e. Stein's 'warrior') and the term 'glorious' (*dpal*) in the expression 'warriors' fortress' (*dpa' mkhar*). It is of interest of course to recall the name of the palace built by King Seng ge rnam rgyal in the 17th century, viz., the 'Glorious Palace on the hilltop of the great capital of Leh' (*rgyal sa chen po ble chen dpal mkhar rtse*); see documents SI1, DP1, DP2, and DP3 in Appendix 5. There are grounds, I believe, for suggesting that the fortress stands in a similar relation to the monarch as an altar does to the local deity of a given area. In this regard, a more literal translation of the compounds *dpa'*/*dpal mkhar* and *btsan mkhar* could perhaps be 'heroic/glorious fortress' and 'mighty fortress' respectively.
[164] Two other altars dedicated to these deities can also be found on top of the lower stronghold (*mkhar 'og che*) at Dangkhar. They do not seem to have been as important for the worship of these deities as those situated on top of the fort; see below.
[165] Gergan wrote in his description of Spiti: *(...) brang mkhar na jo dar dang seb lha/ seb lha ni spyi ti yul kun gyi lha (...)*/; "There is Jo dar and Seb lha in Brang mkhar. As for Seb lha, he is the deity of the whole land of sPyi ti"; see GERGAN 1976: 326.
[166] See document BmK02 in Appendix 6.

(*mkhar nas*) of twenty-four loads of barley grain.[167] It states in the *narratio* that this seemingly heavy due was levied to defray the purchase of a yak prior to the thanksgiving ritual performed at the Dangkhar fort in worship of the local deity (*lha gsol*).[168] The content of this document leaves little doubt as to the nature of the petition and its royal ruling. It intends to put an end to the ritual killing of yaks by the lay community to honour the common local deity (*spyi lha*) of the valley–a religious activity from which the Buddhist clergy were traditionally excluded.[169] The practice of blood sacrifice is a well-attested phenomenon within the Western Himalayas in former times, though it has not received much attention in modern scholarship.[170] During fieldwork, my attempts to gather further information on rituals associated with local deities were often met with reservation, especially from members of the local monastic community.

Based on currently available information, it seems that the royal order issued by the King of Ladakh in 1818 did not mark the end of animal sacrifices at the fort of Dangkhar. If yaks may no longer have been sacrificed after that date, the ritual killing of goats continued up to the mid-1970s, as local elders still remember.[171] The recipient of these 'red offerings' (*dmar mchod*) was Seb lha/bla ma,

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[167] The five monasteries of Spiti are the three Gelukpa monasteries at Dangkhar, Kyi, and Tabo; the Sakyapa monastery at Gomik, and the Nyingmapa monastery at Gungri.

[168] In the same way, the phrase *lha gsol* is understood in Central Tibet to designate the cult of autochthonous and territorial deities (*lha yul*). The regional specificities and propitiation of these deities (*lha la gsol mchod byed pa*) have been the subject of many studies; see, for instance, KARMAY 1995; KARMAY1996; KARMAY 2000.

[169] "In Tibet and especially in the bordering regions", observes Karmay, "the population usually gathers around two main cultural poles: a monastery which serves as an ecclesiastical centre and a mountain believed to be the abode of the local deity who is often regarded as the primary ancestor of the local population. (…) These two centres do not generally reflect a territorial division established by the local administration. Theoretically, the monks are excluded from the annual ceremony performed on the mountain, just as the laymen are excluded from the liturgies held in the monastery" (translated from French by V. Martin). For the original version, see KARMAY 1995: 171.

[170] The earliest reference to the ritual killings of animals can be imputed from the king-monk Ye shes 'od's ordinance (*bka' shog*) issued around the year 975. In this document addressed to the tantric practitioners of Central Tibet, the pious monarch from West Tibet severely condemns heretical views together with practices involving the killing of goats, sheep, and possibly humans; see KARMAY 1998. Several references to blood sacrifices can also be found in 19th-century British accounts attesting to the longevity of such practices in the Indo-Tibetan border regions of the Western Himalayas. Lyall, for example, reported the propitiation of local deities and animal sacrifices in Lahaul: "Without doubt there existed a very low kind of religion in Láhaul before Buddhism got hold of the people, and the latter has not been able to supress it entirely. That early religion of Láhaul is still known under the name 'Lung pe chhoi,' [i.e. *lung pa'i chos*] that is, the religion of the valley, when it was flourishing many bloody, and even human, sacrifices, seemed to have been regularly offered up to certain 'lhá,' [i.e. *lha*] that is, gods or even spirits, residing in or near or old-pencil cedar trees, rocks, caves &c. This cruel custom disappeared gradually after the doctrine of the Buddhists had influenced for a time the mind of the people"; see LYALL 1874: 205.

[171] When Blo bzang legs ldan was appointed abbot of Dangkhar Tashi Chöling in the mid-1970s, the dGe bshes from Tibet convinced the local population to stop the killing of goats and replace blood sacrifice with offering

a territorial deity and warlike mountain god (*btsan*), whose representation can be seen inside the small chapel situated in the fort (fig. 4.24). His cult was–and still is–the exclusive affair of the principal male members (*khang chen pa)* of the community. Once a year, on the third day of the New Year, these men renewed Seb lha/bla ma's altar (*lha tho*) on top of the Dangkhar fort and proceeded with the blood sacrifice. On this occasion, a goat was cut open and its heart removed.[172] The organ was then placed on a bronze platter, pumping up and down, and ceremoniously presented to the deity; it is believed that the animal remained alive for as long as its heart would beat. Later, those having attended the ceremony partook of the meat of the animal during a feast (*gsol ston*). The communal dimension of this event, restricted to the leading families of the settlement, is highly reminiscent of other cults of mountain deities in Tibet, where the identity and prestige of a given group is ensured by its participation in the annual propitiation of its territorial deity. The parental relationship between mountain deities and clans, as shown by Karmay, harks back to the origin myths of the early kings of Tibet, while the ritual killing of yaks finds resonance with the folklore of the Gesar epic.[173] In the 19th century, the close connection between the territorial divisions of a particular valley, its ruling groups, and the sacrifice of yak was also observed in the adjacent region of Lahaul.[174]

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cakes (*gtor ma*) made of flour and butter. The early character of Seb lha/bla ma's ritual was thus transformed into a more orthodox Buddhist propitiatory offering. Likewise, the identity of this autochthonous deity, and his association with the political centralization of territories, would have been modified, too. Seb lha/bla ma ceased to be the territorial deity of the Spiti Valley, as reported by Gergan, and his role was likely reduced to the protection of the Dangkhar settlement and the interests of its main householders. At the same time, the incumbent abbot of Dangkhar initiated the transformation of the old fort into a nunnery, altering furthermore the seat of the *yul lha*.

[172] On the customary and ritualistic practice of tearing the heart out of an animal, Walter Asboe reported that "At Yanaped [i.e. Jahlma in Lahaul?], a yak is sacrificed triennially. It is first well fed, and then on the day of sacrifice the beast is heavily loaded and driven hither and thither by the people, who abuse it atrociously by throwing stones, clods of earth, or anything they can lay their hands on, until it is reduced to a state of utter exhaustion. It is then seized, and its heart having been torn out, is immolated. Sheep are frequently similarly dealt with, a plank of wood being securely tied on its back, and finally sacrificed. At a marriage conducted on a large scale, a sheep is thrown headlong from the roof, and its heart torn out"; see ASBOE 1936.

[173] In his analysis of a *yul lha* cult in Amdo, Karmay looks more closely at the use of woollen yarn (*dmu thag*) by the participants of the ritual, recalling that "the *dmu thag*, of course, plays an important role in the origin myth of the king gNya'-khri btsan-po. (…) In fact, its association with *la btsas* is mentioned in the epic text entitled *'Dzam gling spyi bsang*. While Gesar, the epic hero, and his men are engaged in the *bsang* ritual on a mountain side, he feels threatened by the great demon of the north who, in this particular account, appears in the form of a terrifying wild yak. The beast is eventually shot and killed by the hero. The killing of this yak", concludes Karmay, "evokes the sacrifice of yaks that was a frequent practice in the *yul lha* cult till very recently"; see KARMAY 2000: 385–386.

[174] "It may be said that in Lahoul there are three religions – first, Buddhism; second, Hinduism; third Loong pai chos [i.e. *lung pa'i chos*] (…) Even where Hinduism is not rampant, respect is paid to Buddhist prejudices, and yaks can be and are allowed to be killed in sacrifice without remonstrance. Every three years in Yanamapell or

To sum up, the old fort standing at the top of the cliff was indisputably a key feature of the Dangkhar settlement in former times. Though the dating of this building remains difficult to determine, the very name of the settlement was synonymous with the establishment of a stronghold. It is certain that by the 17th century, if not earlier, the initial fortification had been enlarged to the dimensions of a fort, incorporating new construction materials and architectonic elements. In light of epigraphic and textual sources, this building did not only operate as the seat of the local government but also served as an outpost for more powerful political entities in the region. After the advent of the Gelukpa sect in Guge and Spiti, territorial claims over West Tibet were put forward by the 5th Dalai Lama's government. Meanwhile in Ladakh, the consolidation of the rNam rgyal dynasty, its rapprochement with the Drukpa, and the expansion of the kingdom in West Tibet, led to a protracted period of conflict between the two powers. Wedged between these regional powers, the border valley of Spiti was not immune from its neighbours' territorial ambitions, and during the period from 1630 to 1846 successively placed under the jurisdiction of Ladakh, Zanskar, Tibet, Purig, and again Ladakh. During this time, Spiti was controlled by officials and magistrates bearing the title in various permutations of 'prefect of the fort'. These prefects, whose position demanded that they reside in the fort of the settlement for a certain period of time, were assisted in their duties by local officials and functionaries. The practical local government of Spiti was thus placed largely in the hands of some aristocratic families and important landholders of the valley, whose offices were often hereditary. By the mid-18th century, a few high-born families could also contend for the office of headman of Spiti. The headman and his household was not only granted resources and privileges but was entitled to exercise extensive political and judicial control over the local affairs in the absence of the prefect. Two families were particularly active in seeking to establish themselves as the ruling family of Spiti. This was eventually accomplished by the nobility of Kyiling. With the waning of Ladakhi influence and the help of the British, the successive Nonos of Kyiling were then able to consolidate their authority in the valley and even see their family lineage elevated to the rank of royalty among locals. By the mid-19th century, the district fort and local headquarters of the Spiti government had fallen into disrepair. This edifice was, however, never completely deserted as it represented more than just a political seat. It was

Yampee [i.e. Jahlma in Lahaul?] a yak is slaughtered, and each *kothee* in Lahoul takes it in turn to supply the animal for the sacrifice"; see HARCOURT 1871b: 212–213.

also the residence of territorial deities whose altars dominated its rooftop. Among the two deities, the warlike mountain deity known as Seb lha/bla ma was not only worshipped there on behalf of the whole valley but also propitiated annually at the fort with an animal sacrifice in exchange of his granting protection. Though many questions regarding the cult of this deity remain to be addressed, the prominence of Seb lha/bla ma and the location of his altar at the top of the fort indicate the centrality of this edifice for the political and cultural history of the Dangkhar settlement over many centuries.

3.5 The monastery of Lagope

The establishment of a Buddhist monastery in the middle part of the Dangkhar cliffs represents another constitutive element of the settlement and acted as a major pole of regional influence. Yet, here again, the history of this edifice and that of its congregation cannot be easily followed over time. This section tries to unravel the puzzle of when and how this religious complex came about by taking into account archaeological, visual, and textual evidence. It addresses, for better or worse, the monks' claim that their monastery is the earliest of the valley, as already reported by Francke at the beginning of the 20th century. Less dramatically, but no less important, it reviews the institutional organisation and socio-economic conditions of a Buddhist monastery located in the margins of the Tibetan world as reflected in its archives.

3.5.1 Names and foundation narratives

Known as Dangkhar Tashi Chöling nowadays, the monastery of the settlement was recorded under a different name–'Lagope' or some variant thereof–in historical sources. Attempts to explain the origin of the monastery and the meaning of its name have involved a number of interpretations among locals and early scholars. There are at least seventeen spelling variants in the documents studied here, most of which do not occur more than once. These are *lags phel*, *lags spel*, *lags sgo spe*, *la mgo spe*, *la go pe*, *la go dpe*, *la go spe*, *la go spal*, *la mgo*, *la 'go*, *lags spe*, *legs sgo spe*, *legs sgo spel*, *legs spe*, *legs spel*, but also *la bor rne* and *bla lags bel*.[175] The more frequently recurring spellings are *la go spe* and *legs sgo spe*, both of which appear three times, and *lags spel* and *legs spel*, both of which are used four

[175] See Appendix 6.

times each. The earliest known written occurrence is *la go spal*, as found in sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's *Yellow Beryl* (*dga' ldan chos 'byung bai dūrya ser po*) completed in 1698. Other variants, such as *legs sgo spe*, *la sgo dpe*, *legs spel*, and *la'go*, appear in local archives dating from the 18th century. Few of these compound nouns convey a clear meaning, with the exception of terms like 'progress' or 'advance' (*legs spel*), 'peak' or 'mountain pass' (*la mgo*), and 'indentation' or 'low spot in a mountain pass' (*la sgo*). Whichever way we look at these spelling variants and their occurrences, none of them provides a definitive answer as to what the name of the monastery may have originally been or what it meant.

To compound our difficulties, references to the name of the monastery are few and far between in colonial accounts and early scholarship. The major reason for this is that the name of the monastery was often conflated with that of the settlement–a widespread phenomenon in this region. It was, however, recorded phonetically for the first time as 'Láwope' by James Lyall in 1874.[176] In 1913, John Coldstream noted that "the monastery at Dhangkhar is called Lhao (t) pai gompa", offering a partial and incorrect Tibetan transliteration which suggests that the British official was conveying someone else's opinion.[177] It is quite certain in fact that this piece of information was communicated to him by August Hermann Francke, who had surveyed the Spiti Valley on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India in the summer of 1909. The German scholar recalled that on the 31st July of that year:

> We arrived at Drangkhar called *Brang-mkhar* or *Grang-mkhar* in inscriptions. The monastery of this town, the capital of Spiti, is called *Lha-'od-pai-dgon-pa*. *Lha-'od* seems to be the local pronunciation of *Zla-'od*, the name of a famous lama who was born in 1121, according to the Reu-mig. Zla-'od-pa would the mean 'a follower of Zla-'od'. He is apparently the founder or renovator of the monastery which now belongs to the Gelugpa order. The monks assert that it was not only of earlier origin than the Tabo monastery, but also earlier than the times of Srong-btsan-sgam-po. They have, however, nothing to show of really ancient relics. They explain this fact by stating that the monastery was plundered many times, lastly during the Ḍōgrā war, which is in agreement with my History of Western Tibet.[178]

Francke's account is problematic in many respects. First, his Tibetan transliteration does not match any of the Tibetan forms found in primary sources. It is not hard to imagine that the name of the monastery could have been misunderstood by Francke or perhaps mispronounced, if not erroneously

[176] LYALL 1874: 210; COLDSTREAM 1913: 4.
[177] COLDSTREAM 1913: 4.
[178] FRANCKE 1914: 43.

communicated to him. In this regard, a phonetic change from *la go spe* to *lha 'od pa'i* is not impossible and is already apparent in Lyall's Láwope. As for his identification of the founding figure as a 12th-century Buddhist master called Zla 'od, it rested on yet another phonetic change and, as we shall see below, is untenable in light of Tibetan written sources. Francke's questionable interpretation did not escape Henry Lee Shuttleworth who, in the end, was the only Western scholar to correctly report one of the many spelling variants used for the name of the Dangkhar monastery.[179]

Strangely enough, the expression *lha 'od pa'i dgon pa* came up again in a conversation recorded during fieldwork. According to my interviewees, a first attempt at building a monastery at Rangrik had been met with hindrances and the site was abandoned in favour of the land of Dangkhar. Yet again, the construction project experienced a new series of difficulties and was eventually postponed; the place chosen at the time is now being referred to as 'small monastery' (*dgon chung*). Meanwhile, envoys were sent to Lhasa to seek the advice of the Dalai Lama. Following a divination (*mo 'debs*), the party was told to look for a spot covered with a grass plant in the shape of a sword blade (*rtsa ral gri kha*) that exudes the smell of onion.[180] This grass is apparently called *lha 'od* in the Spiti Valley. It was found by the local clergy among the rocks of the Dangkhar cliffs upon the return of the emissaries. For this reason, the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement was called 'the monastery of the sword-like grass' (*lha 'od pa'i dgon pa*).

As botanically plausible this first account may be, the oral tradition set down by bGe bshes Thub bstan bstan 'dzin tells of a different story. According to his *Concise History of Dangkhar Monastery*, the establishment of Legs 'phel Monastery was contemporary with that of the Dangkhar stronghold; an event which is said to have occurred during the reigns of sKyi lde nyi ma dgon and his son lDe gtsugs mgon in the late 10th century. The site chosen resembled a lotus and the monastery occupied the heart of the flower. Later, the royal monk (*lha bla ma*) Zhi ba 'od, another member of the

[179] In his unpublished *History of Spiti* Shuttleworth wrote: "Lha-bla-ma Źi-ba-hod's name is inscribed on an old bronze image of Śakya-muni, also found by the writer in 1924 in the Lha-hod-pahi monastery at Drangkhar (Graṅ-mkhar). This name of the monastery – for it has others, such as La-sgo – as also that given above of the ruined temple at Skyibar, connects it with the Gu-ge royal line, if not with the lama-prince himself. A.H. Francke's conjectured connection with a later lama Zla-hod is scarcely reliable, as zla is locally pronounced as Da, never La"; see SHUTTLEWORTH MssD722/25.

[180] Presumably some kind of chives (*ke'u*, *ri sgog*). A total of twelve wild and domesticated *allium* species have been documented in Spiti, Lahaul, and Kinnaur, among which *Allium tuberosum* is better known as garlic chives, Asian chives, or Chinese leek; see VERMA et al.: 2008; PANDEY et al.: 2014.

Guge royalty, enlarged the monastery after which it became known as lHa 'od Monastery. The local author also underlines that other people seem to believe that the monastery was named La 'od after the luminous (*'od*) quality of its location. Eventually, the monastery of Legs 'phel was renovated once more by a yogin from Rangrik called Rang rig ras pa at an unknown date.[181]

This second account offers interesting historical and chronological benchmarks, regardless of other less reliable and inaccurate facts expressed in the *Concise History of Dangkhar Monastery*. Placing the founding of the monastery in the late-10th or early-11th century, the narrative underlines the role played by several generations of royalty from West Tibet in supporting the monastic community at Dangkhar. In this respect, mentions of renovation phases should hold our attention in view of the discussion of the architectural development of the building below. Also worthy of note is another occurrence of the place name Rangrik in relation to the history of the monastery. This time, the settlement of the upper Spiti Valley is evoked as the place of origin of the cotton-clad yogin Rang rig ras pa said to be responsible for some renovation work. The identity of this important figure will receive more attention later.

3.5.2 Architectural development

The monastic complex is situated along the steep rock edges of the middle section of the Dangkhar cliffs. It comprises a main building with adjoining tower and a separate temple established higher up. The monastic complex was extensively surveyed by a team of architects from the Graz University of Technology together with their collaborators in 2010 and 2011.[182] The present study of this monument can thus draw on technical documentation that includes ground plans, sections and elevations, as well as spatial models, geotechnical data, and art conservation analyses (fig. 2.12-2.17). As it is, a room by room description of the main building would bring little to the discussion and the reader may refer to the work already published. A number of interesting features, however, are informative insofar as the architectural development of this religious edifice is concerned. They reveal different construction phases as well as an important expansion of the edifice over time.

[181] See document C in Appendix 8.
[182] NEUWIRTH & AUER 2013.

At present, the outer appearance of the main building is typical of religious structures built in Western Tibet after the mid-15th century.[183] These new monastic centres departed in plan and size from earlier temples established during the 'later spread of the doctrine', as exemplified by the sites of Tabo and Lhalung in Spiti.[184] Moving from the valley floor to defensive locations up on a hill or a rocky outcrop, they followed vernacular and military architecture developing into fortress monasteries.[185] By the 17th century, fortified monastic complexes were generally composed of multi-tiered buildings with chapels occupying the uppermost storeys. These imposing clusters of rooms, courtyards and terraces were accessed through narrow labyrinthine alleys and steep flights of stairs. The facades of these monasteries were generally whitewashed (*dkar rtsi*) with red friezes (*spen bad*) around the parapet. Windows had black painted frames and increased in size and number in the upper levels. Some of them were provided with wooden balconies (*rab gsal*).

Early photographs show that the general appearance of the main monastic building at Dangkhar did not change much between the 19th century and today; with the exception of a couple of openings that were bricked up. The architectural documentation, however, highlights an enlargement of this edifice culminating in a cluster of thirty-one rooms distributed over four storeys. Determined by the topography of the site, the core of the monastery consisted originally of three different and separate buildings together with some nearby cavities and caves carved into the rock cliff (fig. 2.15-2.17). The largest building was a single-storey assembly hall (*'du khang*) with a rectangular skylight (*gnam khung*) in the centre. Above, a group of four *stūpa* monuments had been erected at the north-western corner of the roof in a recession of the rock. To the north-east, a three-storey rectangular building consisted of two square rooms per floor; it is currently not possible to determine whether it was built in one go. The last building was located to the south of the assembly hall at the extremity of the spur. It was divided into two parts with a three-storey wing in the west and a single chapel in the east. The latter was dedicated to protective deities (*mgon khang*) and could only be accessed through a separate door at an intermediate level. Here, again, it is difficult to ascertain whether this last building was erected in several stages or all at once (fig.2.16 and 2.17).

[183] MORTARI VERGARA 1987b.
[184] AUER 2017.
[185] HARRISON 2011: 30–38.

Based on ground plans, it is clear that these three separate buildings came to be structurally connected to each other by means of a third storey to form a single edifice at some point. After that, a last storey was eventually added on top with rooms organised around a central courtyard. The four rooms on the last floor included a large audience and residential room (*gzims chung*) with its vestibule (*sgo khang*) in the north, a small propitiatory chapel (*rgyun khang*) in the south, a second and smaller residential room (*gzims chung chung ba*) at the southern end of the building, a functional room leaning against the rock in the west, and a passageway leading to a large cave carved into the rock face.[186]

The different building phases observed, from the initial and individual construction of three separate buildings to the final development of a four-storey edifice, cannot be easily dated. Nevertheless there remain some architectural features and datable elements of great interest for the history of this building. The first set of comments here concern the assembly hall. This particular room with its *stūpa* monuments on the roof is strongly reminiscent of other hermitages in the region. A similar configuration can be observed, for instance, near Chango downstream on the Spiti River where some rock shelters were turned into a small hermitage (fig.4.28). Like at Dangkhar, a group of small-sized *stūpa* monuments were built on the rooftop leaning directly against the rock. At both sites, the rock face at the back made it impossible to walk around these structures, pointing towards a funerary function for these religious features rather than the practice of circumambulatory worship. If this were to be the case, each *stūpa* could have been erected as a reliquary monument (*gdung rten*) by the local community to house the remains and relics of one of their deceased members. These monuments would thus have been of great religious significance, even more so if they contained the remains of founding figures, and as such could not have been removed nor easily relocated.

With the vertical expansion of the building at Dangkhar, an intermediate room was thus created above the assembly hall (fig. 4.29). This new room had a very low ceiling, determined by the elevation of the two adjacent buildings, so that a man of average height would not have been able to stand straight without stooping. As a result, the upper part of the largest *stūpa* reliquary came to be

[186] Today, the two residential rooms (*gzim chung*) are the designated apartments of the Dalai Lama and Lochen Tulku Rinpoche. They house various collections of thangkas, statues, and other religious paraphernalia. The functional room is used as living quarters by the appointed caretaker (*sku gnyer*).

embedded in the ceiling above, with its wooden axis (*srog shing*) piercing the floor to emerge in the upper storey. Another consequence of the architectural enlargement of the building was the installation of a second skylight in the floor of the courtyard to allow sunlight to reach the assembly hall two storeys below.

Inside the assembly hall, the iconographic programme currently only spans portions of the south-east, north-east, and north-west walls due to significant damage. These murals were realised *a secco* on mud-plastered surfaces. Faintly preserved protective deities can be seen on either side of the entry door together with two of the four guardian kings (*rgyal chen sde bzhi*) above its lintel (fig.4.30). Across the room, the paintings of the main devotional wall are almost entirely preserved. However, access to this wall is blocked by a floor to ceiling altar-cabinet allowing only for a cursory examination of the murals behind. The composition is centred on Buddha Śākyamuni flanked by his two main disciples (fig. 4.31). Other figures include a multitude of smaller Buddha images, portraits of Nāgārjuna (fig. 4.32) and other Indian and Tibetan Buddhist masters, as well as a depiction of Cakrasaṃvara in the upper left corner (fig. 4.33). Only two painted panels remain from the iconographic programme of the north-east wall. The first panel shows a large representation of Buddha Amitābha flanked by two standing bodhisattvas with additional narrative scenes on either side (fig. 4.34). The second panel to the right is devoted to a similarly large depiction of Green Tārā with smaller portraits of Atiśa (982–1054) and 'Brom ston pa (1004–1064) represented above her head (fig. 4.35). All figures from the north-west and north-east walls were painted against a dark backdrop of luxuriant blue-green foliage, branches, and bright flowers. Below the ceiling, portions of a painted frieze replicating a festooned banner (*sham bu*) can also be seen on each of these three walls.

Despite their fragmentary state, the paintings of the assembly hall can be tentatively attributed to the 17th century. Stylistic comparison with a thangka from Dangkhar (fig. 4.36), but more appropriately with the murals of the upper temple, show the use of a similar colour palette, decorative motifs, and figurative forms.[187] In particular, the style of drapery of the Buddhas' monastic robes; the

[187] This painting was acquired by Tucci during his expedition in the Spiti Valley in 1933. The image is mostly dedicated to Padmasambhava and his eight emanations. The composition of this thangka has been carefully described by Christian Luczanits and dated to the 16th-17th centuries; see KLIMBURG-SALTER 2015b: 132–

radiating rainbow-rimmed halos; and the use of a petrol-blue arborescent background, all suggest a regional painting tradition transmitted by local artists between the late 16th century and the beginning of the 18th century. Having said that, scientific analyses conducted on these murals by art conservators have also revealed the existence of an earlier primary painting layer.[188] A detail of Tārā's jewellery, for example, shows the depiction of a smaller pearl necklace beneath the 17th-century motif (fig. 4.37). It remains to be seen whether this earlier painting phase extended to the whole room.

Likewise, the murals of the protectors' chapel are important for the religious history of Lagope Monastery. Unfortunately, the surface of the walls here is covered with a thick layer of soot and access to this room has proved difficult due to religious restrictions. According to limited photographic evidence and information gathered during fieldwork, the shrine is dedicated to Ṣaḍbhuja Mahākāla, a six-armed form of the Great Black One (*nag po chen po phyag drug pa*), whose representation on the south wall is relatively well-preserved (fig. 4.38 and 4.39). Two of his generals figure among his retinue with Kṣetrapāla riding a bear (fig. 4.40 and 4.41) and red Jinamitra (fig.4.42-4.44). Other protective and wrathful deities include the depictions of Cintāmaṇi Sita Mahākāla (fig. 4.45), Yama Dharmarāja (fig. 4.46), Īrṣyāvajra Yamāntaka (fig. 4.47), and perhaps Vajrabhairava. Portraits of lamas were also part of the painting programme of this chapel. A first figure shows a monk wearing a yellow *paṇḍita* hat and winter overcoat (fig. 4.48). In contrast, the representation of a tantric master (*rdo rje slob dpon*) officiating at the foot of six-armed Mahākāla is rather puzzling (fig. 4.49). The officiant wears a blue and red upper vest and a yellow lower garment fastened above the waist with a green belt. His red shawl has a distinctive pink hem.

If the sectarian affiliation of this master may be difficult to ascertain, the murals of the protectors' chapel tend to reflect a Gelukpa environment, in which protective deities such as six-armed Mahākāla, White Mahākāla, Vajrabhairava, and Dharmarāja were highly revered. This assumption is further confirmed by the depiction of the lama with his yellow hat and yellow winter overcoat. A similar set of deities can also be seen, for example, at Tabo, where the iconographic programme of the

133. As for the upper temple, the study of the iconographic programme strongly suggests that this edifice was commissioned by a Ladakhi monarch in the first quarter of the 18th century. The murals of this temple will be discussed later; see LAURENT 2014.

[188] GRUBER et al. 2013: 247–281.

protectors' chapel also attests to the influence of the Gelukpa religious system in Spiti and the diffusion of the so-called Guge revival style in the late 15th-16th centuries.[189] However, in spite of some stylistic similarities in the treatment of fingers, clouds, leaf-shaped flames, and the use of a black outline, the wrathful deities at Dangkhar already represent a significant departure from the Guge revival style, no longer showing the same degree of execution and finesse. Caution should thus be exercised when considering the date of these paintings, even more so when the visual analysis rests on a fragmentary iconographic programme and poorly-visible figures. However, and as a working hypothesis, a comparison between the six-armed Mahākāla on the walls of this protectors' chapel and a representation of the same deity from the late 16th-century rGya 'phags pa temple in Nako (fig. 4.50), together with an 18th-century depiction of the same from the upper temple at Dangkhar (fig. 4.51), would suggest that the murals of the protectors' chapel were executed in the 17th century–a period for which little comparative material is available in this region. As we shall see, textual sources related to the sectarian history of Lagope Monastery give credence to this suggestion.

Besides religious considerations, the study of the architecture also highlights some socio-economic aspects that are characteristic of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. With the expansion of its core buildings, the monastic community could take advantage of additional corners, recesses, or even spaces at the back of the edifice. This proved to be useful and allowed for the construction of three large caches embedded in the walls and floors of the second and third storeys.[190] Remains of grains and dead maggots show that two of these caches at least were used as granaries until recent times. The largest storage chamber was located in the west corner of a room adjacent to the *stūpa* monuments (fig. 2.15). It could easily have contained several hundred kilograms of grain safely protected from rodents and germination. The construction of such storage chambers and granaries inside the building itself testifies to the role assumed by the monastery as a major landowner of the Dangkhar settlement. As we shall go on to examine, large quantities of grain stored inside these granaries came from

[189] KLIMBURG-SALTER 2005: 33; VAN HAM 2014: 216–220. For more images of these murals, see the Western Himalaya Archive Vienna website (WHAV): https://whav.aussereurop.univie.ac.at/ic/1862/

[190] A second storage chamber corresponded to a trapezoidal cache located between the north-east corner of the assembly hall and the two-room building adjacent to it. Its content could be accessed through the floor of the storey above. The third granary chamber to yield traces of usage opened on the third storey next to the small residential room in the south; see LAURENT 2013a: 118.

ecclesiastical estates. The storage of large quantities of grains played an important role for religious institutions whose income and growth depended mostly on agricultural domains and the collection of assigned yields.[191]

In view of the considerations set out above as part of the architectural and art historical assessment of the main edifice, there is strong evidence to suggest that the monastery of Lagope, as it stands today, evolved from a pre-existing complex of caves and individual buildings. This configuration is of course reminiscent of other hermit sites established under rocks or nestled in cliffs. That the geological setting at Dangkhar offered troglodytic opportunities is amply apparent all around the cliffs and earth pillars forming the landscape of the settlement (fig. 4.52). The incorporation of natural cavities into traditional architecture can be established, for example, from a series of beam holes and remnants of caves which once formed the back wall of a house flanking the north-western corner of the monastery (fig. 4.53). Some cavities, as we have seen, were directly integrated into the monastery itself. In other cases, the entrance of caves and rock shelters were simply walled-in to serve as monastic cells or meditation caves (*sgrub phug*). Two such caves, for example, are situated immediately at the north-western corner of the monastery, on the same level as the first and second floors of the building (fig. 4.54). Similarly, the remains of a meditation cave, known as Ra brag phug by locals, can be found at the foot of some massive earth pillars to the north of the ridge (fig. 4.55).[192]

Hermitages and meditation caves have not been systematically surveyed nor properly documented in Spiti, with the exception, perhaps, of the hermitage complex of Rin chen sgang located north of the village of Tabo,[193] and the caves of the Pin Valley where Nyingmapa practitioners have pursued their spiritual undertakings up until today. Remains of anchoritic sites can still be found in

[191] In 1913, British settlement officer Coldstream remarked that in Spiti, "The income of the monasteries consists of the produce of a few fields owned by them revenue free, the grain brought by the monks from their *khang chen* and the profits of begging and wizardry. The *pun* [i.e. *bon*] collections are spent principally on religious feasts and concerts in which the lay population joins"; see COLDSTREAM 1813: 4.
[192] The existence of another meditation cave called mKhar stod sgrub phug, the location of which could not be verified, was reported to me during fieldwork in 2014. The cave is said to have belonged to a family from the upper part of the Dangkhar settlement (*mkhar stod*).
[193] RAHULA 2013: 531.

many other places in Spiti (fig. 4.56), including previously unknown painted caves,[194] the occupation of which may date back to the 13th-14th centuries. According to the biographical account of rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1189–1258) completed in 1540, the Drukpa master travelled through Spiti around 1216, where he encountered recluses in their mountain hermitages.[195] It is known, moreover, that this period was marked by the arrival of successive waves of Drigungpa adepts in West Tibet, many of whom settled in the region of Mount Kailash and possibly further west. It is also significant that the religious imagery found inside the niche of the main entrance gate at Dangkhar dates to the same period, thus coinciding with a strong regional presence of Buddhist hermits and yogins in

[194] A hermitic site containing damaged paintings of large *maṇḍala* representations, Drigungpa masters, and epigraphic inscriptions was discovered by Jörg Heimbel in 2017. I am grateful to Heimbel for bringing this important find to my attention; see HEIMBEL forthcoming.

[195] *de nas zhang zhung gi yul brgal nas/ pi ti bi lcog gi stod na/ grub thob chen po kha rag pa bya ba/ lo sum cur dkyil krung ma zhig par rdzogs pa chen po'i dgongs pa la mnyam brje med pa/ kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa dang khyad med par bzhugs pa zhig dang mjal nas chos zhus pas 'bul ba dgos gsung/ nged sprang bo yin 'bul ba med byas pas/ 'bal ba med nag dam ngag mi ster gsung/ der yid kyis yan lag bdun pa gcig phul bas/ da byas pas chog pa 'dug gsung nas/ khyab gdal chen po rnam par snang mdzad kyi dgongs pa/ gsal la 'dzin med mi skyod pa'i dgongs pa/ mnyam nyid lhun grub rin 'byung gi dgongs pa/ bde stong blo 'das snang ba mtha' yas kyi dgongs pa/ phrin las lhun grub don grub kyi dgongs pa zhes dgongs pa lnga'i gdam ngag gsungs/ de nas yar byon pa'i gdon chung zhig na/ dge slong bgres po lhAum gcig po 'dren pa zhig 'dug /khong ni lhAum 'dren pa'i dus su/ rnam rtog thams cad rang 'gags la 'gro ba'i grub thob cig 'dug /de nas yar byon pa na/ grub thob chen po brag smug pa bya ba zhig dang mjal bas/ bla ma de ting nge 'dzin la dus rgyud du bzhugs pas/ mi la gsung skad gcig tsam yang mi smra /spyan dus rgyun du btsam pa/ dgung lo brgyad cu rtsa bzhi long kyang/ tsog pu'i 'phrul 'khor ma zhig par bzhugs pa zhig la chos zhus pas gsung ma byung/ mos gus dungs pa zhig byas gsol ba hur btab pas/ spyan rtsa hrig hrig byas nas/ sdig pa ci yang mi bya ste/ dge ba phun sum tshogs par spyad/ /ces pa la sogs gsungs/ nged dzA land ha ra la 'gro ba la bar chad mi yong ngam zhus pas/ yi dam ma nyams pa'i byang chub sems dpa' la bdud kyis bar chad mi tshugs pa chos nyid yin gsung zhing lung bstan/ de nas gar shar byon pas/* ; "Thereafter, having crossed the land of Zhang zhung, I met a great yogin called Kha rag pa in the upper part of Pi ti bi lcog who had sat crossed-legged completely still for thirty years. He was unrivalled in the realisation of the Great Perfection and was abiding in the realisation similar to that of Samantabhadra. Having to offer gifts in order to request teachings, I said, 'I am a beggar and have nothing to offer'. To which he said, 'Without offerings, oral instructions cannot be imparted'. I thus offered in my mind the Seven Branched Prayer. As it was considered sufficient he continued, 'The all-pervading state of the mind is the realisation of Vairocana. A clear mind without grasping is the realisation of Akṣobhya. The spontaneous equanimity of the mind is the realisation of Ratnasambhava. The unity of bliss and emptiness beyond the conceptual mind is the realisation of Amitābha. Spontaneous enlightened activities are the realisation of Amoghasiddhi'. The oral instructions he imparted are the five realisations. After that, I continued further up to a small hermitage (*dgon chung*) where an aged monk only recited HAum. The latter, while reciting HAum, found out that one must be a yogin to stop all conceptual thoughts. Proceeding further up, I met a great yogin called Brag smug pa. The lama had never uttered a word to anyone, sitting continuously in meditative absorption, the eyes closed at all times. He had reached the age of eighty-four, sitting in a crouching position completely still, and did not reply when I requested teachings. Out of admiration and full of love, I prayed with complete amazement. The veins of the eyes shivered, saying, 'Do not commit a single misdeed. Conduct yourself with utmost virtue'. Being on my way to Jālandhara I asked whether obstacles would arise. 'It is the very nature of things', he prophetically foretold, 'that Māra will not inflict harm to your bodhisattva vows'. After that, I departed to Lahaul"; see SANGS RGYAS DAR PO 1992: 71–73.

Western Tibet. Hermitic life remained part of the religious landscape of the Spiti Valley over the next centuries as later sources attest.[196]

In view of the above, it is reasonable to assume that a small group of hermits and yogins could have settled in the Dangkhar cliffs in the 13th-14th centuries. Taking advantage of natural cavities and caves, the recluses established a cluster of small rooms and cells, which grew in number over the years. There is no reason to believe at present that this hermitic complex could have reached the size of a full-fledged monastery before the Gelukpa takeover of the site. Judging from the murals of the protectors' chapel and the assembly hall, it is difficult to posit that the new school exercised much influence at Dangkhar before the 17th century. It is probably at the same time that the core buildings were subject to structural transformation in order to give rise to a larger and bigger edifice known as Lagope Monastery.

3.5.3 Founding figure and abbatial line

The conversion to Tsong kha pa's religious system and subsequent expansion of the monastery were the achievement of a Gelukpa monk called Sangs rgyas 'od zer. The religious, political, and economic conditions upon which the establishment of his monastery in Spiti was made possible are described in local archives and corroborated by literary works from the 17th century. According to the *Crown Register on Grain Collection* (*Sa bon zin bris mgo rgyan*), a lost manuscript whose title and content were partially reproduced in two documents kept in Dangkhar,[197] we learn that:

> In the Snake Year, the learned preceptor Sangs rgyas 'od zer renovated the Gelukpa monastery of Lagope (*legs sgo spe*). The Dharma King of Guge graciously granted from Dangkhar (*brang mkhar*) a religious estate the size of a plot of three loads, a *go*, and the water rivulets. In order to establish a monastic endowment, a plot worth thirteen loads of assigned grain was offered; and again, the full harvest of many more fields from Lhalung (*lha lung*) (…) Likewise, the Lady Sovereign of Guge graciously granted all the cultivable land of Ras chung pa (…) And again, Panchen Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan graciously granted a plot worth five loads of grain in Lara (*la ra*); in Lhalung, a plot of seven loads of grain was given towards the summer retreat (…) The Dharma King granted protection to Lagope (*legs sgo spe*) monastery of Thar pa gling by pacifying the

[196] For instance, the meditation caves of Ga tal pes phug bu, Mon 'brang phug, and Dong le phug situated in the inland above the monastery of Kyi in upper Spiti; see document No-no 5 in SCHUH 2016b: 121–122.
[197] The first document is a confirmation letter of privileges issued by the western Tibetan outpost of Gartok in 1740. The second document bears no date but offers a lengthier description of the monastic endowments granted to the monastic community established in Dangkhar by Sangs rgyas 'od zer; see documents BmK01 and BmK08 in Appendix 6.

> sanctuary hill together with its boundaries. (…) And again, the army commanders of Guge offered to the Lady Sovereign, her sons, and the troops the harvest of a good household towards a religious ceremony. Then again, the Dharma King graciously granted the hillside field of Zhing gcig ma and the hillside field of lHun grub lding in the south-west. Furthermore, the Lady Sovereign of Guge and her sons graciously presented the patrons from the time of the Drukpa, food offerings, novices, religious estate and the like (…). The patrons of Lhalung graciously presented food offerings and novices (…) Devout patrons offered assigned fields, assigned households, purchased fields and houses, and so forth as clearly established in the register of donations. In the time of the Sovereign of Guge, the monastic estates, the chapels, the assigned fields and households, the territory and borders, and so forth were graciously granted to Lagope (*legs sgo spe*) Monastery.[198]

Base on this source alone, the historic and founding moment when Sangs rgyas 'od zer renovated Lagope took place in an unspecified Snake Year. The date of this event, may however be inferred using internal evidence and other corroborating sources at our disposal. Information regarding the learned preceptor (*slob dpon, ācārya*) Sangs rgyas 'od zer are few and far between. One reference to his religious activities in Spiti is made in the work of one of his co-religionists. In the *dGa' ldan chos 'byung* composed by mKhar nag lotsawa dPal 'byor rgya mtsho around 1618,[199] the Gelukpa translator reported that Sangs rgyas 'od zer established an affiliated branch (*mched pa*) of Kyi Monastery in Spiti; the latter monastic complex being in turn an affiliated branch of Tabo Monastery.[200] Furthermore, mKhar nag lo tsā ba adds that Sangs rgyas 'od zer's younger brother, Blo bzang btsan pa'i rgyal mtshan, was the reincarnation of the former abbot of Tholing Monastery named Tshul khrims chos kyi rgyal mtshan. The latter was born in 1514 and had either died or resigned the abbotship of Tholing sometime before 1606.[201] Sangs rgyas 'od zer's younger brother, who was recognised as the incarnation of the great abbot, must therefore have been born around that time. Moreover, he was posthumously praised for having been an unparalleled scholar in Guge in a text

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[198] See BmK08 in Appendix 6.

[199] On the author and the date of composition of his religious history; see VITALI 2012: 5–15, 60–62.

[200] *pi thir sngon lo chen rin chen bzang pos rta po chos sde btab/ de las mched pa'i dkyil chos sde mngon dga' dang/ de las [m]ched pa sangs rgyas 'od zer gyis btab/ de'i chung po blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan ni/ chos rje tshul khrims chos kyi rgyal mtshan pa'i sku'i skye ba'o/*; "In the past, Lo chen Rin chen bzang po founded the Buddhist complex of Tabo in Spiti (*pi thi*), from which came the Buddhist complex of Kyi [at] mNgon dga', and from which came a sister [monastery] founded by Sangs rgyas 'od zer. The younger brother of the latter is Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan who is the incarnation of the great master Tshul khrims chos kyi rgyal mtshan"; see DPAL 'BYOR RGYA MTSHO 2016: 232.

[201] Tshul khrims chos kyi rgyal mtshan was a disciple of Śāntipa blo gros rgyal mtshan (1487–1567), who was the abbot of Tholing in the 1540s, and the teacher of Zhang zhung pa dPal 'byor bzang po (b.1552); see VITALI 2012: 167–168.

composed in the last quarter of the 17th century.[202] Based on the biographical sketch concerning Sangs rgyas 'od zer's younger brother, it seems reasonable to narrow down the building activities of the older brother to either the Wood-Snake Year 1605, or more likely the Fire-Snake Year 1617. If the earlier date cannot be completely ruled out, it is certain that the Gelukpa sect had assumed control over the monastery of Lagope by the summer of 1618.

The introduction of Tsong kha pa's doctrine in West Tibet was made possible through the ongoing support it received from the royal house of Guge over a period spanning the end of the 15th century to 1630. Although anonymous in the document cited above, the sovereigns of Guge were directly involved in setting up a permanent endowment in favour of Lagope Monastery by granting estates located throughout the Spiti Valley. Other patrons were also acknowledged, first and foremost the 4th Panchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662). As such, the enumeration of royal patrons and benefactors must relate to the year 1618 when the great scholar from Tashi Lhunpo was in West Tibet for nearly five months.[203] During this time, he gave numerous teachings and consecrated new religious edifices at the behest of the King of Guge Khri rNam rgyal grags pa bzang po'i lde and his uncle, the royal monk (*lha btsun*) Blo bzang ye shes 'od.[204]

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[202] *sku rjes ma la yang chos rje sku skye blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan ces bya'i mkhas grub chen po de'i lugs gnyis spy[i] sgos 'phrin las [b]skyangs pa ni gu ger '[g]ran zla dang bral ba mchis so//*; "[His] rebirth, the incarnation and great master named Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, was also an accomplished scholar, who safeguarded the efficiency and subtleties of the two systems. There was nobody to compete with him in Guge". A facsimile of the manuscript has been published by Vitali who dates this work to before the year 1684 based on the abbatial line of Tholing recorded in this text; VITALI 2012: 14–15, 89–95.

[203] The 4th Panchen Lama gave a short account of his journey to Guge in his autobiography; see BLO BZANG CHOS KYI RGYAL MTSHAN 2013: 1: 93–95.

[204] The uncle and nephew (*khu dbon*), the king Khri rNam rgyal grags pa bzang po' lde (*dbon*) and the royal monk Blo bzang ye shes 'od (*khu*), were both disciples of the 4th Panchen Lama. As for the king's brother, the royal monk Blo bzang ye shes 'od, he assumed the abbotship of several Gelukpa monasteries in Guge, among which were Tholing, Tsaparang, Dawa Tashi Lhunpo (*mda' ba bkra shis lhun po*), Mangnang (*mang nang*), and Shangtse (*shwang rtse*). Their involvement in the religious affairs of West Tibet was reported by mKhar nag lotsawa: *der bla ma mang du byon pa la gu ge ngag dbang grags pa nas bla rabs rim pa ltar chos rje tshul khrims bshes gnyen/ kun spang pa nam mkha'i mtshan can/ rje kun dga' dpal bzang/ rje rin po che dpal bzang/ paN chen shanti pa blo gros rgyal mtshan/ slob dpon seng ge rgya mtsho/ chos rje phyag rdor dpal bzang/ chos rje bde legs dar/ chos rje dpal bzang/ grags pa 'od zer/ tshul khrims rgyal mtshan/ lha btsun blo bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma/ lha btsun blo bzang ye shes 'od rnams so/ /khu dpon 'di rnams kyi paN chen blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan dpon slob spyan drangs nas mchod cing chos kyi 'khor lo bskor tshul dang bcas pa rgyas par ni ndag gis paN chen rin po che'i rnam thar du bshad yod de/ sngon lha bla ma khu dbon gyis dpal ldan a ti sha spyan drangs nas bstan dkar lam du mdzad pa bzhin no//*; "Many lamas went there (i.e. Tholing monastery). The abbatial succession after Guge Ngag dbang grags pa [included] the master Tshul khrims bshed gnyen, the one with the name of Nam mkha from Kun spangs, the venerable Kun dga' dpal bzang, the precious lord dPal bzang, Panchen Śāntipa blo gros rgyal mtshan, the preceptor Seng ge rgya mtsho, the master Phyag rdor dpal bzang, the master bDe legs dar, the master dPal bzang, Grags pa 'od zer, Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, the royal monk Blo

By the end of the 17th century, the monastery converted by Sangs rgyas 'od zer under the aegis of the royal house of Guge and the patronage of the 4th Panchen Lama had grown in importance. It then counted about sixty monks and had seen nine abbots succeeding to the abbatial seat. This information was recorded by sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) who completed his *magnum opus* on Gelukpa monasteries in 1698:

> As for Lagope (*la go spal*), it was founded by Sangs rgyas 'od zer from Rangrik. Thereafter came Bla rin, Nam mkha' lha dbang, sGra mi rtag pa, dGe 'dun yar 'phel from Shang rtse, Kun dga', mGon po tshe ring, Sangs rgyas chos 'phel, mGar phrug, Lha lung the Young, and presently bSod nams mchog grub from Mang rtse. There are about sixty congregants from the tradition of the Lower Tantric College.[205]

Elucidating Sangs rgyas 'od zer's origin, this passage further specifies that the Gelukpa master and founder of Lagope was a native of Rangrik in Spiti, a settlement of the upper valley where, it was believed, the Sakyapa and the Gelukpa monasteries of mNgon dga' were formerly located.[206] According to mKhar nag Lo tsā ba, these two institutions predated the founding of Nor bu dge 'phel Monastery at Kyi and that of Lagope at Dangkhar. This idea gained ground in the *Yellow Beryl* and was discussed more fully by sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho:

> The branch monasteries of the latter [i.e. Tabo] were the Gelukpa monastery and the Sakyapa monastery established at mNgon dga', both of which, however, had had to change location. The monastery at mNgon dga' is now in ruins and the Gelukpa monks moved to the monastery of Nor bu dge 'phel which was founded by the master Shes rab blo gros from Khri se [sic, for Khri rtse], who was the main disciple of Byang sems Shes

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bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma, and the royal monk Blo bzang ye shes 'od. The uncle and nephew, being the disciples of Panchen Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, invited their teacher. As for the details concerning the offering ceremonies and the turning of the wheel of teachings, I have described them in the biography of Panchen Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan. In the past, royal lamas, uncle and nephew traditionally practiced the wholesome doctrine in a similar way when they invited dPal ldan Atiśa"; see DPAL 'BYOR RGYA MTSHO 2016: 227–228; VITALI 2012: 13, 71, 239.

[205] *la go spal ni rang rig pa sangs rgyas 'od zer gyis btab/ de nas bla rin/ nam mkha' lha dbang/ sgra mi rtag pa/ shang rtse dge 'dun yar 'phel/ kun dga'/ mgon pot she ring/ sangs rgyas chos 'phel/ mgar phrug/ lha lung chung chung/ da lta mang rtse ba bsod nams mchog grub/ sngags rgyud smad lugs dge 'dun drug cu skor*; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 277.

[206] The site of mNgon dga' corresponds to a hillock situated to the south of the territory of Rangrik, where elusive remains of mudbrick and stone walls are scattered all around. In line with what Vitali calls "the hundred obscure years of Sa skya pa supremacy" in Upper West Tibet, information about the religious history of the Sakyapa sect in Spiti is hard to come by prior to the 17th century. Moreover, literary sources reflecting on the Gelukpa activities in Western Tibet often relish the opportunity to belittle the religious doctrines of other traditions, in particular those of the Sakyapa and Drigungpa. It is significant, however, that some Sakyapa and Ngorpa monasteries in Guge maintained their religious affiliation in spite of being branch monasteries (*dgon lag*) of Tholing in the 16th-17th centuries. What happened at mNgon dga' in Rangrik at the beginning of the 17th century is therefore hard to guess. We can only wonder whether two distinct monasteries from two different denominations really existed there. It is interesting in this regard that one of the two founding narratives recalls a change of location from Rangrik to Dangkhar. I wish to thank Jörg Heimbel and Lochen Rinpoche for confirming the location of this site; see VITALI 2012: 217, 228.

> rab bzang po. The abbatial line thereafter includes the capable *drung pa* bSod nams don grub from Khri se, sGra mi rtag pa, Tshul khrims bkra shis, Mang thos rgya mtsho from Rangrik in Spiti, bsTan pa rgya mtsho from Tabo, bSod nams rgya mtsho from Khurik, bZod pa rgya mtsho from Kyiber, bSod nams dpal 'byor, and presently dGe legs rgyal mtshan from Rangrik. There are about sixty-nine congregants from the tradition of the Lower Tantric College.[207]

The two entries from the *Yellow Beryl* are informative on many fronts. A comparison between the abbatial lines (*bla rabs*, *dgan rabs*) of Nor bu dge 'phel and Lagope underscores that both Gelukpa monasteries counted roughly the same number of abbots after their respective founding figure and the completion of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's work in 1698. This observation is not insignificant as it suggests that both institutions were probably established around the same time. In the case of Dangkhar, the abbatial line further suggests that each abbot headed the monastery for eight years on average, depending on whether the Gelukpa monastery had been transformed in 1605 or 1617.[208] Moreover, these lists also highlight the fact that sGra mi rtag pa held the abbacy of both Nor bu dge 'phel and Lagope monasteries–a reminder that these two institutions maintained special links.

Among the list of individuals who succeeded the abbatial seat of Lagope, the 5th abbot and learned preceptor dGe 'dun yar 'phel from Shang rtse (also *shwang rtse*, *shangs rtse*) is a name also

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[207] *de'i lag mngon dgar dge dgon dang sa dgon gnyis chags kyang gnyis ka spo dgos pa'i mngon dga' da lta dgon ro dang dge lugs pa rnams byang sems shes rab bzang po'i bu chen khri se slob dpon shes rab blo gros kyis btabs pas nor bu dge 'phel du spos/ bla rabs de nas khri se ba drung pa thub pa bsod nams don grub/ sgra mi rtag pa/ tshul khrims bkra shis/ pi ti rang rig pa mang thos rgya mtsho/ rta [p]o ba bstan pa rgya mtsho/ ku rig pa bsod nams rgya mtsho/ skyid spar pa bzod pa rgya mtsho/ bsod nams dpal 'byor/ da lta rang rig pa dge legs rgyal mtshan/ sngags rgyud smad lugs/ dge 'dun drug cu re dgu skor/*; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 276–277.

[208] A reference to a nameless 'abbot from Las mgo' (*las mgo mkhan po*) is given in a chapter of the *mKhas pa'i yid phrog* devoted to the religious history of Upper West Tibet in the 16th century. The text was composed by Zhang zhung pa dPal 'byor bzang po in 1606. It is difficult to determine whether the name Las mgo may actually refer to the monastery of Lagope in Spiti. The only mention of a Gelukpa monastery in Spiti by dPal 'byor bzang po shows that the author may not have been entirely familiar with the geography of the region: *mkhas grub rje dang/ dge 'dun grub dang blo gros chos skyong sogs kyi dngos slob snyel wer ba chos rje lha dbang (blo gros) kyang gu ger chos sde btsug/ mar yul du likkir dang/ pi tir bar skyog gi dgon pa btab/*; "The great master lHa dbang blo gros from sNyel wer was a close disciple of mKhas grub rje, dGe 'dun grub, Blo gros chos skyong and so forth. He too established Buddhist complexes in Guge. He founded Likkir in Mar yul (i.e. Ladakh) and Bar skyog Monastery in Spiti (*pi ti*)"; see DPAL 'BYOR BZANG PO 2015: 124, 144. The settlement of Bar skyog (also *bar kyog*, *bar skya*, 巴尔觉, Ba'erjue) is located about 15km north-east of rGyu as the crow flies, on the other side of a mountain range marking the border between Spiti and the Zanda county (*rtsa mda' rdzong*) of Ngari in West Tibet (fig. 2.4). For that reason, the entry for Bar skyog in sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's *Yellow Beryl* was given under mNga' ris mang yul. It is believed that the monastery was first established by Bla ma dKon mchog rgyal mtshan from lCang lung who was a disciple of rGod tshang pa mGon po rdo rje (1189–1258). It was then converted into a Gelukpa institution in the 15th century, taking the name of Phun tshogs rab brtan gling, and was placed under the spiritual authority of Tholing Monastery. From the 17th century onwards, it became customary to send a couple of monks to Tashigang Monastery in West Tibet for higher education; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 280; TSHE RING RGYAL PO 2006: 280–284.

mentioned, albeit in passing, in an archive document dated to 1729, as previously discussed.[209] The Gelukpa monastery of Rab brtan byams pa gling at Shang in Guge was one of the twenty-five affiliated branches (*dgon lag*) of Tholing Monastery and counted about seventy-two monks at the end of the 17th century. Some of the most illustrious abbots of Shang rste were Śāntipa (1487–1567), the royal monk She rab 'od zer (1518–1594), and the royal monk Blo bzang ye shes 'od who, as we have seen, received the 4th Panchen Lama in 1618.[210]

It is clear that from the moment of its inception as a Gelukpa centre, Lagope fell within the orbit of the prestigious mother monastery (*ma dgon*) of Tholing with its network of sister monasteries established in Guge, Purang, Ladakh, and Spiti in the course of the 16th century. This affiliation allowed the most diligent and brightest novices from Lagope to study with distinguished scholars and climb the ladder of a spiritual career. For those Gelukpa monks living in the western margins of the Buddhist Tibetan world, this often meant undertaking the long and arduous journey to Central Tibet, the bastion of Tsong kha pa's doctrine, and perhaps even to the supreme throne of Ganden (*dga' ldan khri*). It was in this way that a monk from Dangkhar reached the pinnacle of the Gelukpa hierarchy in the mid-17th century. In the words of sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho:

> The fortieth successor to the throne of Ganden was dPal ldan rgyal mtshan. He was born in Dangkhar (*grang mkhar*) in Spiti (*spi ti*) which is part of Upper West Tibet. Due to past virtuous predispositions, he went to Central Tibet, the cradle of Buddhist teaching. He joined Ngari College–one of the five monastic colleges of Chos 'khor rgyal where many scholars convene like a vast lake of swans–, and the Lower Tantric College [in Lhasa], where he devoted himself properly to *sūtra* and *mantra* teachings. Having learned and studied *tantra* he gradually moved his way up to Byang rtse College and sat on the golden throne of the great lord Tsong kha pa. He turned the wheel of dharma for seven years. Having retired he settled at mNgon dga' and acted as benefactor and invigilator at Rwa sgreng, gSang sngags mkhar, gSal khang, and Zhogs dgung mngon monasteries. He passed away at the age of seventy-three. A *stūpa* of Enlightenment was made of silver [as a reliquary] and installed in the north side of the bDe gshegs temple [in Ganden]. His reincarnation was quickly found and is reported to be at Byang rtse Monastery at present.[211]

[209] See document BmK05 in Appendix 6.

[210] SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 278; TSHE RING RGYAL PO 2006: 234–238; VITALI 2012: 203–204.

[211] *khri thog bzhi bcu pa dpal ldan rgyal mtshan ni/ stod mnga' ris kyi cha spi ti grangs mkhar du bltams/ sngon gyi bag chags bzang po sad de bstan pa'i 'byungs khungs dbus phyogs su phebs/ chos 'khor rgyal gyi grwa tshang lnga'i nang tshan mkhas mang ngang pa 'du ba'i mtsho chen po mnga' ris grwa tshang dang/ rgyud smad du mdo sngags kyi thugs gnyer yang dag par mdzad/ rgyud kyi 'chad nyan dang byang rtse rim pa bzhin nas rje btsun btsong ka pa chen po'i gser khrir phebs/ lo bdun gyi bar chos 'khor bskor/ mngon dgar zur du bzhugs nas rwa sgreng/ gsang sngags mkhar/ gsal khang/ zhogs dgung mngon rnams zhal 'dzin gnang/ mthar*

This dPal ldan rgya mtshan (1601–1674) was born in Dangkhar at the beginning of the 17th century. He was still a young boy when Sangs rgyas 'od zer transformed the local monastery into a Gelukpa centre and could have, in theory, started his religious education with the latter. He then went on to study at Chos 'khor rgyal, a monastery in Central Tibet (*dbus*) located about 160 kilometres southeast of Lhasa founded by the 2nd Dalai Lama in 1509. There, he enrolled at Ngari College (*grwa tshang*), a regional monastic unit set up by the King of Guge 'Jig rten dbang phyug pad dkar lde in 1541, where the brightest students from West Tibet were traditionally sent.[212] After successful tantric studies in Lhasa, he eventually joined Ganden Monastery where he held a tenured position as the head of the Gelukpa sect from 1655 to 1661.[213]

In view of the foregoing discussion, one can confidently conclude that the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement was converted into a Gelukpa institution by Sangs rgyas 'od zer at the beginning of the 17th century. Based on local archives, the two transumpts of a lost manuscript known as the *Crown Register on Grain Collection* provide a detailed inventory of endowments bequeathed to the newly established Gelukpa centre in the form of estates, patrons, novices, and material offerings. In particular, the munificence shown by the King and Queen of Guge towards Lagope illustrates this intense period of patronage in West Tibet. The establishment of religious buildings (*mchod khang*) and ecclesiastical estates (*mchod gzhis*) at Dangkhar under the purview of the royal family of Guge, was in all likelihood contemporary with the visit of the 4th Panchen Lama to West Tibet in 1618. According to the Dangkhar archives, the latter is said to have transferred the usufruct of agricultural domains located in Lara and Lhalung to the monastery of Lagope. The content of these documents strongly suggests that the King of Guge Grags pa'i dbang phyug lde and the 4th Panchen Lama were instrumental in setting up the economic provision necessary for Sangs rgya 'od zer's conversion of Lagope Monastery which must have taken place in the Fire-Snake Year 1617. Judging from Tibetan literary sources composed by Gelukpa authors in the 17th century, it emerges that Sangs rgyas 'od zer and his younger brother Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan were natives of Rangrik in Spiti. There is

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dgung lo don gsum thog gshegs shing/ dngul las bskrun pa'i byang chub mchod rten bde gshegs lha khang gi byang phyogs su bzhugs/ sprul sku la mor byung ba'i da lta'i byang rtse bar grags/; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 92.

[212] VITALI 2012: 161, n.82.

[213] SAMTEN CHHOSPHEL 2010.

however currently no early textual evidence to support the idea that Sangs rgyas 'od zer had been considered a cotton-clad yogin (*ras pa*), as often reported by locals–including those at Dangkhar–today.[214] In fact, there is every reason to believe that the two brothers were staunch Gelukpa proponents, with Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan being recognised as the reincarnation of a famous abbot from Tholing in the first decade of the 17th century.

Another rather obscure tradition traces the origin of the monastic community of Lagope to the Gelukpa monastery of Nor bu dge 'phel at Kyi. Though this question remains to be clarified, the record of the abbatial line of Dangkhar in the *Yellow Beryl* does show that Lagope maintained contacts with other Gelukpa monasteries of West Tibet–including Nor bu dge 'phel in Spiti–throughout the 17th century. Some Gelukpa abbots assumed the abbotship of more than one monastery of West Tibet concurrently. Ambitious young monks, on the other hand, were encouraged to travel to Central Tibet to pursue higher studies, as in the case of dPal ldan rgyal mtshan, a native of Dangkhar who rose up the ecclesiastical ranks in Central Tibet and eventually occupied the highest position in the entire Gelukpa sect in the mid-17th century.

The collapse of the Guge dynasty in the 1630s, and rising tensions between Lhasa and the King of Ladakh in the years that followed, would soon result in a reshuffling of political cards in Western Tibet. Yet, the economic foundations necessary for the survival of Gelukpa monasteries in Spiti had been securely laid through the priest-patron relationship established between the royal house of Guge and Tsong kha pa's disciples between the late 15th century and 1630. Finally, it is important to stress that, contrary to what sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho reported in the *Yellow Beryl*, the two documents preserved in the local archives agreed that Sangs rgyas 'od zer did not simply establish (*btsug*) nor found (*btab*) a new monastery *ex nihilo*, but that he was responsible for the renovation or reconstruction (*gsar rgyag*) of a pre-existing complex; a lexical subtlety which is in accordance with the architectural assessment of the building.

[214] The oral tradition of Spiti conveyed by local clerics suggests that the identity of Sangs rgyas 'od zer could have been conflated with that of one or many religious teachers like, for instance, the Drukpa yogin from Rangrik (*rang rig ras pa*, *rang rig ras chen*) Kun dga' blo gros (1619–1683), on account of being native of Rangrik. For another dubious identification of Sangs rgya 'od zer as a 14th-century master from Rangrik; see HENRY 2016: 180–181.

3.5.4 Congregational units, monastic council, and ecclesiastical estates

As the following section will show, the transformation of a hermitage into a fully fledged monastery under the control of the Gelukpa sect led to a redistribution of resources, as a result of which the monastic community of Lagope became the owner of extensive fields and ecclesiastical estates. Using local archives, it is possible to trace this institutional evolution as well as some of the problems faced by the monks of Lagope Monastery in 17th-19th centuries. During most of this period, the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh and its regional offshoots were in control of Spiti, establishing new legal and administrative frameworks for the people of the valley. Meanwhile, the monasteries of Spiti remained tied to the larger Gelukpa centres of West Tibet with which they shared more than just ecumenical bonds.

According to the copies of the *Crown Register on Grain Collection*, the monastery of Lagope was now known as a 'place of liberation' (*legs sgo spel dgon thar pa gling*), as only Tsong kha pa's system could legitimately offer in the eyes of his disciples. Besides soteriological considerations, the monks of Lagope were deeply involved in the socio-economic organisation of local communities; relying mostly on tenants, benefactors, and the transfer of goods to ensure their livelihood and the maintenance of their religious institution. As previously mentioned, the royal house of Guge was responsible for laying the economic foundations necessary to ensure the existence of the monastery in Dangkhar. The practice of establishing monasteries under royal patronage through the donation of land and subjects had long precedence in the region, and can be traced back to the 10th century when the monk-king Ye shes 'od founded the monastery of Tholing with the assistance of the great translator Rin chen bzang po in the year 996.[215] At the end of the 15th century, economic provisions were laid down once again when the King of Guge appointed Ngag dbang grags pa, the renowned Gelukpa

[215] According to the *Royal Succession of Ngari,* the regulatory dispositions laid down by Ye shes 'od were as follows: *dge 'dun gyi gsol dgongs dang/ mchod pa'i rkyen/ nam bza'/ phyags/ [r]tsa rkyen la sogs pa tho gling gi mgo byas khal stong ny[a][g]a bcu sa bon 'gro ba'i zhing/ dang/ tshwa dang/ zhing la gtogs pa'i bsha' thang gang yod dang/ yul 'brog nang gi dkor nor la sogs pa dge 'dun la phul nas/ nyi zla nam gnas su 'jog par mdzad pa 'di rnams la 'brid 'gal byed/*; "The intended provisions of the monastic community, the circumstances of donations, the robes, the boots, the basic conditions, and so on are under the supervision of Tholing. One thousand loads and ten measures of grains for cultivable fields, salt, whatever rations is set aside per field, pastures, monastic properties, and so on are offered to the monastic community. For as long as the sun and the moon preserve their position, the revision [of these dispositions] shall be prohibited". For the Tibetan and a different translation of this passage; see VITALI 1996: 56, 111.

scholar from West Tibet, abbot of Tholing.[216] By the 17th century, Gelukpa communities in West Tibet had received unprecedented economic support and could rely upon ecclesiastical estates (*mchod gzhis*) to turn their proselytizing ambitions into action, as reported in contemporaneous historical sources.[217]

Likewise, the archives of Lagope show that the monastery benefited from ecclesiastical estates (*mchod gzhis*) in about eight different settlements of Spiti, namely in Mani and Pong in the lower part of the valley, and in Dangkhar, Rapang, Lhalung, Lara, Lidang, and Kyiling in the middle valley.[218] These estates comprised households (*bon khang*) and fields (*bon zhing*) which in the great majority of cases had been transferred to the monastery by an external authority. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these agricultural lands were cultivated by tenants who were liable for the payment of taxes in

[216] In 1606, Zhang zhung pa dPal 'byor bzang po explained: *de nas rje ngag dbang grags pa mchod yon mtho gling du gzhi phab/ chos rgyal gong ma blon 'bangs dang bcas pas chos dbang zhus/ des nas rje ngag dbang grags pa de nyid lhag par lotstsha ba'i khri la bzhugs su gsol te gu ge bdang pos ral ba'i cod paN gyis/ rje ngag grags pa'i zhabs kyi rdul phyis/ gtsug rgyan rin po che bla ma nyid la mdzad/ 'bangs grong bdun gzhis dang bcas pa phul/ pus mo'i lha nga sa la btsugs te 'dug pa la paN chen gyi legs bshad kyis bdud rtsis tshim par mdzad do// 'di ni mnga bdag ral pa can gyi paNDi ta dang lotstsha bar al pa dgan du btings/ 'bangs mi khyim bdun phul to/ chos skad gsar bcad kyis gtan la phabs nas nyan bshad mdzad pa dang dngos su 'dra'o/ /de'i tshe nyan bshad kyi srol phun sum tshogs pa yar ngo'i zla ba bzhin dar bar mdzad pa'i snyan pa las brten nas gu ge bdag pos rje ngag dbang grags pa la chos zhus so zhes pa'i sgra skad paN chen gyis sa steng khyab cing gu ge 'dir bka' gdams spyi dang khyad par rgyal bat song kha pa'i bstan pa'i rgyun tshugs pa'i byed po dam pa yin no/*; "Thereafter, the master Ngag dbang grags pa settled in Tholing as the patron's chaplain. The supreme Dharma King, the ministers, and the subjects requested religious empowerments. Then, the master Ngag dbang grags pa was personally and expressly asked to sit on the translator's throne. The sovereign of Guge swept the dust off the feet of master Ngag dbang grags pa with the crown of his braided hair, thereby making the lama himself the precious ornament of his head. Seven hamlets of subjects and their estates were offered. To those who knelt on the floor, the eloquent teaching of the Great Paṇḍita was similar to the satisfaction procured by nectar. In the same way, the paṇḍitas and translators of the sovereign with braids placed their hair on the seat. Seven households of subjects were offered. By consciously simplifying the religious terminology, he delivered teachings that were seemingly close to reality. Thereupon, the most excellent way with which he imparted teaching, like the waxing of the moon, became widely spread. As a consequence of his fame, it is said that the sovereign of Guge requested religious instructions from master Ngag dbang grags pa. The Great Paṇḍita was the patron saint through whom Tsong kha pa's teaching and the subtleties of the Kadampas had filled the land and were established here in Guge"; see DPAL 'BYOR BZANG PO 2015: 132.

[217] And again, Zhang zhung pa's entries on Be and dGe thang dga' ldan rtse monasteries: *ber dang por kun spangs/ de nas gtong ba dpal bzang/ de nas sangs rgya rgyal mtshan/ der rje legs dpal sogs yin no/ /phun tshe khang dmar gyi mchod gzhis las brten nas dge ldan pa'i bstan pa'i gzhis zin pa yin no/*; "At Be [monastery], the first [abbot] was Kun spang, then gTong ba dpal bzang, Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan, the master Legs dpal, and so forth. Relying upon the ecclesiastical estate of Phun tshe khang dmar, the teaching of the Virtuous Ones had settled in the land". Likewise: *dge thang dga' ldan rtser/ dang por grub chen chos skyong dpal/ de nas karti pa/ de nas slob dpon tshe dbang/ de nas brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan/ de nas sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan/ de nas mtho gling gi mkhan po res gdan sa mdzad/ de lta kho bo la dgon pa 'di'i 'dzin 'bras dgos pa byung/ dge thag dpal gyi byang chub dang kirti ba gnyis kyi mchod gzhis la brten nas nyi ma shar phyogs su dga' ldan pa'i bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan tshugs shing mtho gling gi le lag yin no/*; "At dGe thang dga' ldan rtse, the first [abbot] was the yogin Chos skyong dpal, then Karti pa, the learned preceptor Tshe dbang, brTson 'grus rgyal mtshan, Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan, thereafter the abbots of Tholing assumed the charge in turns. As such, it behoved me to become the holder of the monastery. Relying on the two ecclesiastical estates of Byang chub's dGe thang dpal and Kirti ba, the victory banner of the teaching of Ganden was established where the sun rises, along with the branch monasteries of Tholing"; see DPAL 'BYOR BZANG PO 2015: 145.

[218] See documents BmK01, BmK08, BmK19, and BmK21 in Appendix 6.

kind termed ecclesiastical dues (*dgon pa'i bon*) or simply grain dues (*bon*). These ecclesiastical estates, however, should not be confused with the entire villages whose agricultural produce was assigned to the communal estate (*mchod gzis*) of Spiti, which formed one of the five administrative units (*tshugs so*, *koṭhī*) of the valley.[219] In effect, the ecclesiastical estates of Lidang, Kyiling, and Pong totalled no more than four and a half households. Moreover, it is also apparent that some estates attached to Lagope were located in villages whose remaining households and fields were solely subject to governmental taxes, as in the case of a contested ecclesiastical estate located in Rapang.[220]

The reason for the existence of two types of religious estates, both termed *mchod gzhis* in the legal documents from Spiti, is unclear at this stage. It could perhaps reflect a progressive transfer of land tenure or the establishment of new cultivated land by tenants. An example of the latter is given in an agreement drawn up between the monasteries of Lagope and Nor bu dge 'phel in Kyi. This document was written in an unknown Water-Pig Year when a disagreement broke out between two farmers belonging to these monasteries vis-à-vis the exploitation of newly-established fields:

> We, as clearly named below, have drawn up of our own free will an unalterable written agreement made without reservation. In essence: about nine new fields were established by 'Al pa from Lagope Monastery (*lags spel*), and one fourth of the irrigation water was diverted. This year, the governing council (*bla spyi*), after inspecting the place, asked 'Al pa bying about sGu lu's perception of the situation. At that point, the lamas, officials (*las sne*), and monastic congregation (*dge 'dun*) of Kyi Monastery (*dkyil*) of all ranks, together with the lamas, officials, and monastic congregation of Lagope Monastery of all ranks, convened at Lagope Monastery to get the truth out of 'Al pa bying and sGu lu. It has been found that six fields of sGu lu belong to Kyi, while Lagope owns nine fields and one fourth of the irrigation water. As the myrobalan producing well-being, the lamas and congregations of both Lagope and Kyi monasteries gathered to settle the case.
>
> From the Water-Pig Year onwards, sGu lu is assigned to deliver eight loads of grain (*bon*) to Kyi Monastery and eight loads of grain to Lagope Monastery for as long as the present eon lasts.[221]

[219] "Certain fields are the full property of the monasteries; they pay no revenue, and are generally either near the monastery to which they belong, or in adjacent villages. The land of the Dankar monastery is cultivated by six tenants, land-holders in Dankar, who pay half produce as rent; that of the Pín monastery is cultivated gratuitously by the Nono of Pín; the men of Chuzí Kothí [i.e. monastic estate as administrative unit (*mchod gzhis koṭhī*)], as the special clients of the monks, cultivate the lands of the other monasteries, but the monks are expected to give the men who actually do the work something for their trouble. In many villages there are one or two fields known as 'lházing' [i.e. *lha zhing*] or God-land attached to the village 'Lhákang' or temple"; see LYALL 1874: 186–187.

[220] See documents BmK01, BmK05, and BmK08 in Appendix 6.

[221] See document BmK21 in Appendix 6.

Despite the brevity of the statement (*narratio*), the document indicates that the establishment of new plots of agricultural land by the tenant of Lagope demanded an adjustment of the irrigation system. It then emerges that the tenant of Kyi Monastery took advantage of the situation but was eventually found guilty of farming lands–or using water–that did not belong to him. At the end of a discussion the entire congregations of both monasteries were brought together, and it was decided that the tenant of Kyi should pay ecclesiastical dues to both monasteries equally.

Each year, ecclesiastical dues were thus levied at the end of the harvest season. Grains were either stored in the granaries built inside the monastery or processed into flour. British records suggest however that these food supplies were not used for the quotidian needs of the monastic community and that monks had to support themselves through other means such as, for instance, the farming of a private field (*grwa zhing*), usually by a third party.[222] As collective goods, a monastic council (*bla spyi*) could decide to give these seeds on loan, or to allocate them as resources in the organisation of religious events.[223]

Due to the very nature of private contracts, some of the documents preserved in the archives relate to a variety of exceptional cases regarding the management of agricultural lands, the levy of ecclesiastical taxes, and the economic support received by monasteries. In the following agreement,

[222] In the 1860s, Lyall observed during his two stays in Spiti that: "In most holdings also a plot of from one to half a *khal* will be found in the occupation of the láma['s] brother or uncle of the head of the family. It is ploughed and sown by the latter, but the láma provides the seeds and gets the whole produce (…) This maintenance land of a láma is called táo or tázing [i.e. monk's field (*grwa zhing*)], and reverts of course to the head of the family on the death of the láma". And again in more details: "The refectory or public kitchen is only used on the occasion of certain festivals, which sometimes last several days, during which special services are performed in the chapels; while these festivals last, the monks mess together, eating and drinking their full of meat, barley, meat, butter and tea. The main source from which the expense of these feats is met is the 'pun,' [i.e. *bon*] which is not divided among the monks for every-day consumption in the separate cells. To supply his private larder, each monk has, in the first place, all he gets from his family in the shape of the produce of the 'láma's field' or otherwise; secondly, he has his share, according to his rank in the monastery, of the 'bula' [i.e. offerings (*'bul ba*)] or funeral offerings made to the monasteries on the death of any member of a household consist of money, clothes, pots and pans, grain, butter, etc.; the harvest alms consist of grain collected by parties of five or six monks sent out on begging expeditions all over Spiti by each monastery just after the harvest. They go round from house to house in full dress, and, standing in a row, chant certain verses, the burden of which is – 'We are men who have given up the world, give us, in charity, the means of life; by so doing you will please God whose servants we are.' The receipts are considerable, as each house gives something to every party. On the death of a láma, his private property, whether kept in his cell or deposited in the house of the head of his family, goes not to the monastery, but to his family, first to the lámas of it, if any, and in their default, to the head or káng cimpa [i.e. *khang chen pa*]"; see LYALL 1874: 186, 212.

[223] For a possible loan of fourteen loads of seeds from Lagope to the people of Lara; see document BmK13 in Appendix 6.

for example, the purchase of a field was conditional upon the annual donation of crops towards the celebration of religious events:

> On a day and month of the Water-Tiger Year. As for the field purchased (*nyos zhing*) by lDum bu, the benefactor (*sbyin bdag*) of the doctrine shall offer out of piety, from the best part of the harvest, two loads of eighteen units for the great *dgu gtor* offering at Lagope Monastery (*la go pe*) and two loads of eighteen units for the celebrations of the Sa ga month at Tabo Monastery (*lta pho*) for as long as the doctrine prevails; aside for which not even the tiniest kind of tax (*khral*) shall be levied. There is no provision for a raise of ecclesiastical dues (*bon*) by the two monasteries. There is no provision for a reduction of these amounts by the benefactor. There is no necessity to transport the assigned amounts of grain (*bon*) from here elsewhere. Should any concern arise due to unforeseen events, the two monasteries should take leadership in resolving the dispute.
>
> Accordingly, whosoever does not implement this donor-donee (*yon mchod*) agreement, shall be looked upon by the Three Rare and Sublime Jewels, and by the guardians and protectors of the doctrine.[224]

With this contract, the owner of the said field was protected against the imposition of additional taxes while remaining committed to the payment of grain dues to both Lagope and Tabo monasteries. The reason as to why the owner and benefactor was legally bound under the present document to support two Gelukpa monasteries is hard to guess. Was it due to the status of the field (e.g. field of a deceased monk), its location, or any other factor not explicitly discussed in the agreement?

Of similar interest is a grain missive (*bon yig*) that describes the donation of crops to Lagope Monastery on behalf of the rNam rgyal dynasty of Purig-Ladakh:

> The following was distributed on the occasion of the great bKra shis rnam rgyal's memorial service (*dgongs rdzogs*) and for the longevity of King Mi dbang Tshe dbang rnam rgyal, together with the ministers, as a means towards sustaining the lamas and monastic community of Lagope Monastery (*lags spel*): fifteen loads of assigned *rtsa bon* on behalf of sMan bla rin chen from Sumling (*gsum gling*), together with eight loads of *rtsa* barley and four loads of *gra* on behalf of Tshe ring dbang phyug from Po (*bog*) were donated. Likewise, it is for the stability of the life of his offspring. This was prepared to accomplish the longevity of Mi dbang Tshe brtan rnam rgyal mi 'gyur rdo rje dbang gi sde, father and son, and to prevent them from departing to another spiritual realm. We, the two prefects of the fort, were instructed to help transmit this grain missive (*bon yig*). Therefore, in accordance with the seal the amount should not be reduced even by one *bre* measure. (*seal*)[225]

Based on internal evidence, this grain missive would have been dispatched to the prefects of the fort of Spiti between 1779 and 1782.[226] In exchange for a generous donation in kind, the congregation of

[224] See document BmK06 in Appendix 6.
[225] See document BmK30 in Appendix 6.
[226] Amongst the three members of the rNam rgyal dynasty mentioned in this document, the King of Purig bKra shis rnam rgyal died in 1758 following which his kingdom was reunited with Ladakh in 1765. As for the King of

Lagope was requested to perform a memorial service (*dgongs rdzogs*) in honour of the late King of Purig along with rituals for the stability and longevity of the Ladakhi monarch and his newborn son. Two households were appointed to this end, presumably from among the regular tenants and tax-payers (*khral pa*) of Spiti. One can imagine that other farmers were equally compelled to offer large quantities of crops to the remaining monasteries of Spiti for similar reasons.

As mentioned earlier, the monasteries established in the Spiti Valley also derived revenue from households grouped into an administrative unit (*mchod gzhis*) which were bound to support religious institutions through the payment of ecclesiastical dues.[227] Only five such monasteries have been mentioned as recipients of ecclesiastical dues in previous colonial accounts and studies. Two documents from the local archives, however, list seven different institutions supported in this way, including one Sakyapa, one Nyingmapa, and five Gelukpa monasteries.[228] In the following agreement, discrepancies of income (*dngul 'bab*) between these seven monasteries were addressed, resulting in the division of property between monks (*bla ma*) and monasteries (*dgon*) on an equal basis:

> In all humility, the lamas, abbots, and monastic congregations of the five Gelukpa monasteries together with the Sakyapa and Nyingmapa monasteries of Spiti (*spyi ti*) have drawn up a written agreement without reservation. In essence: a large amount of disagreements occurred between the lamas over financial revenues (*dngul 'bab*) in former times.
>
> Therefore, from now onwards, half of whatever large or small revenues should be the joint share of the lamas irrespective of rank, and half should be given without hesitation to the monasteries irrespective of their size.[229]

On the whole, Gelukpa monasteries were numerically the largest in Spiti from the late 17th to 19th centuries. A comparison between the relevant entries of the *Yellow Beryl* and a document issued on behalf of the Central Tibetan government (*gzhung sa*) is indicative in this regard (Table 3). The comparison shows a small increase in the number of Gelukpa monks after 1698 and gives for the first time the number of Sakyapa and Nyingmapa clerics in Spiti.[230] The latter document is also important

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Ladakh Tshe dbang rnam rgyal, he ruled with his ministers (*rgyal blon lhan rgyas*) from the late 1750s until his abdication in 1782. His elder son Tshe brtan rnam rgyal was born in 1779.

[227] CARRASCO 1959: 175–178; JAHODA 2007. JAHODA 2008; JAHODA 2015.

[228] See documents BmK23 and BmK24 in Appendix 6.

[229] See document BmK24 in Appendix 6.

[230] Document BmK23 reports the existence of five Gelukpa monasteries (*dge dgon lnga*) but mentions only four of them by name. Likewise, the *Yellow Beryl* lists some Gelukpa institutions in Spiti, or adjacent areas, whose

as it attests that the ecclesiastical dues of all monasteries of the Spiti Valley, independently of their sectarian affiliation, were administered by Tibet. Surprising as it may seem considering that the latter had forfeited most territorial claims over Spiti after 1708, the dGa' ldan pho brang government still managed to retain some form of control over the monasteries of Spiti through the network of Gelukpa monasteries and Tibetan functionaries stationed in Ngari up until the mid-19th century.[231]

Table 3

Monastery	Denomination	Number of monastics *Yellow Beryl* (1698)	Number of monastics BmK23 *(c.*18th century)
Nor bu dge 'phel in Kyi	Gelukpa	69	75
La go spal /Legs spel in Dangkhar	Gelukpa	60	61
Theg chen chos gling in Tabo	Gelukpa	59	60
bKra shis sgang in Spiti	Gelukpa	-	15
sTeng rgyud in Gomik	Sakyapa	-	30
Pi ni sbug in the Pin Valley	Nyingmapa	-	30

This particular aspect of the economic and political relations between Tibet and Spiti is in accordance with colonial accounts but is now corroborated by several documents preserved in the archives of Lagope and Tengyu monasteries.[232] These documents are comprised of orders (*bka' yig*), notification letters (*gsung shog*), confirmation letters of privileges (*rgyab gnon*), and arbitration decisions (*'dum khra*). In most instances, they were issued or transmitted by the monastic residence (*bla brang*) of Tholing, the monastery of Tashigang in Guge, or the Central Tibetan outpost of Gartok in West Tibet. One of the most significant contributions to the study of the communal estates of Spiti is a document preserved by the abovementioned Gelukpa and Sakayapa institutions in two almost identical copies:

exact locations cannot be currently identified, such as Byang chub gling, Ram lo, and O ra ma monasteries; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 277.

[231] According to information reported by Trebeck in 1822: "The Lassan [i.e. Lhasa] government, at least that of Chan-than [i.e. *byang thang* or West Tibet], claims a jurisdiction over the south-eastern part of Piti, and a Lama, on the part of that province resides at Kih Gonpa [i.e. *dkyil dgon pa*], a day's journey from Trankar [i.e. Dangkhar]. The larger part of the district is, however, subject to Ladakh, and perhaps its political authority is extended to the whole, the charge of the Lama being religious rather than secular"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 67.

[232] See documents BmK01, BmK03, BmK05, BmK19, BmK23, and BmK29 in Appendix 6. Also, HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

> The prefect of the fort of Spiti (*spyi ti*), the Do ba che, the steward, the village headman, the powerful travelling emissaries in addition to the functionaries of local lords in Ngari and Central Tibet, all those holding offices must clearly obey.
>
> The monasteries of the Sakyapa, Gelukpa, and Nyingmapa traditions of Spiti, whose ecclesiastical estates (*mchod gzhis*) are established here, are the base for the performance of religious services for those whose leader is the wish-fulfilling protector and victorious lord (i.e. Dalai Lama) of the precious government of Tibet (*gzhung sa rin po che*). In this regard, you, the emissaries and powerful noblemen or whosoever you may be, exerted only inappropriate and autocratic measures. According to the circumstances, you levied new taxes as much as possible amongst the clergy and laity of the ecclesiastical estate (*mchod gzhis*) (…)
>
> In short, any new taxes and compulsory services shall not be imposed. With respect to this ecclesiastical estate (*mchod gzhis*), if this were to happen on the land of these border monasteries (…) it would not only cause the interruption of religious services of the government authorities (*gzhung sa ba*) but would also contribute to displacing the clergy and laity.
>
> Severe punishments under governmental law (*gzhung khrims*) shall be duly executed. In order to avoid that, you, who are mentioned above, whosoever you may be, shall let them in peace.
>
> This was issued from the monastic residence (*bla brang*) of Tholing in the Wood-Ox Year [1685].[233]

In light of the above, it emerges that the support received by the monasteries of Spiti came to be disrupted by the imposition of excessive new taxes in the aftermath of the so-called Tibetan-Ladakhi-Moghul wars (1679–1684).[234] It follows that thereafter the dGa' ldan pho brang government took a sudden interest in the western Himalayan border regions. Following the peace treaty of gTing mo sgang ratified between Ladakh and Tibet in 1684, Lhasa claimed jurisdiction over the monasteries of Spiti and their ecclesiastical estates, all denominations combined. This arrangement marked the beginning of a period of about three decades during which Spiti was distantly ruled by the Tibetan government who dispatched a district official (*rdzong sdod*) and resident officer (*gzhis sdod*) to Dangkhar on at least two occasions. By the year 1708, however, Ladakh had regained political control over Spiti, notwithstanding the fact that the monasteries and ecclesiastical estates of Spiti continued to be under the purview of the Gelukpa establishment. In view of this situation, "the continuation of support for the major dGe lugs pa and other monasteries of the area", suggests Jahoda, "might have been the precondition by the Central Tibetan government for the return of the rest of Spiti under the

[233] See document BmK03 in Appendix 6.
[234] For a detailed analysis of the historical circumstances leading to the writing of this document; see HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

political control of the kingdom of Ladakh".[235] As a result, the Gelukpa governor (*dpon slob*) of Tashigang Monastery in West Tibet became the highest legal authority (*gong ma khrims bdag*) over the religious affairs of Spiti while the rNam rgyal dynasty re-assumed authority over all secular matters.[236]

As regards the internal organisation of Lagope Monastery, the Gelukpa community was composed of four monastic congregations (*dge 'dun*). These congregations were somewhat similar to regional colleges (*khang mtshan*) as each one gathered monks from four different villages in Spiti, namely Dangkhar, Lhalung, Upper Mani, and Lower Mani. These four groups formed the general congregation (*dge 'dun*) of Lagope and were officially represented by the use of five different seals (*the mo*, *rtags*) in all legal matters. A governing council (*bla spyi*) consisting of the abbot (*mkhan po*), treasurer (*phyag mdzod*), disciplinarian (*dge bskos*) and other religious authorities (*dbu mdzad*, *rdo rje slob dpon*) stood at the head of the monastery. This main decision-making body possessed its own seal whose impressions can be found in many sealing clauses of written agreements preserved in their archives.[237] Drawing attention to occasional internal tensions, two of these documents sought to prevent the airing of dirty laundry in public and to ensure the cohesion and harmony of the monastic community. The first document is a good example of how the members of the governing council did not necessarily present a united front:

> In the presence of the Precious-Upholder-of-the-Law of the twofold system of governance.
>
> We, as clearly named below, have freely and willingly drawn up an unchangeable agreement.
>
> In essence: in the event of a dispute regarding the monastic estates (*mchod gzhis*), the chapels (*mchod khang*), the ecclesiastical dues (*bon gzhis*), the assigned households (*bon khang*), and the territory of Lagope Monastery (*legs spel*), and when the governing council (*bla spyi*) does not reach an agreement, private matters are not to be leaked outside for the sake of ensuring the unity of the council.
>
> If one were to accept to put aside five *bre* measures, to say it is he not I, or one is not one and two is not two, a penalty of three to five ounces of gold ought to be paid in full.

[235] JAHODA 2009: 51.
[236] On this bicephalous legislative power in Spiti after 1708, see section 4.6 in Chapter 4 and HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.
[237] The matrices or dies used by the five monastic congregations and the governing council of Lagope have been lost. However, their impressions on paper are visible in a number of documents preserved in the archives. They have been tentatively catalogued and discussed in Appendix 7.

> On the 8th day of the 3rd month of the Water-Dragon Year. Seal of the monastic governing council, passed from hand to hand (*seal*).[238]

Notwithstanding the ethical safeguards set out by Buddhist doctrine, Tibetan monasteries were not always immune from quarrels about worldly possessions. Though the circumstances leading to the writing of this document can only be guessed at, a penal clause allowing for fines of between three and five ounces of gold would have been a sufficient deterent against loquacious individuals to prevent indiscretions. The decision was validated by means of an impression of the council seal according to the customary practice of passing the stamp-die from one member of the council to the next, making sure that all signatories had touched the object with their hands before applying it onto the document.

The same type of binding procedure and penal clause can be observed, for example, in another written agreement whereby the monastic congregations pledged to work together should a dispute arise with the inhabitants of Dangkhar:

> We, as clearly named below, have drawn up of our own free will an unalterable written agreement made without reservation. In essence: if a disagreement arises among the people of Dangkhar (*brang khar*) over the area of *Ri res pas* of Lagope Monastery (*legs spel*), the assembly hall of all monastic congregations (*dge 'dun*) are to be united without taking sides. Since we speak with one voice, we must also gather information from outside.
>
> If internal information were to be spread outside, heavy punishment will certainly be carried out. If somebody brings anything mildly unpleasant into the heart of the monastery, a penalty of five ounces of gold shall be paid in full to the Precious-Upholder-of-the-Law without obstructing.
>
> Seal of the monastic congregation of Lower Mani (*ma ni*), passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of the monastic congregation of Lagope (*la go*), passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of the monastic congregation of Dangkhar (*brang khar*), passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of the monastic congregation of Lhalung (*lha lung*), passed from hand to hand (*seal*).[239]

This document draws attention to a hitherto unrecorded toponym designating an area situated in the heights across the valley on the west bank of the Spiti River. According to my informants, the area of Ri res pas refers to a high mountain pasture where villagers graze their yaks in the summer to this day. The reason why the people of the Dangkhar settlement would have argued over this pasture is not made explicit in the present document. It is significant, however, that the monastery of Lagope claimed ownership of this remote pasture. That Ri res pas belonged *de jure* to the monastery is also

[238] See document BmK18 in Appendix 6.
[239] See document BmK12 in Appendix 6.

stated in another written agreement drawn up by the different bodies of Lagope to enforce a hunting prohibition:

> To the Precious-Upholder-of-the-Law who is a source of benefits and happiness.
>
> We, as clearly named below, have freely and willingly drawn up a written agreement. In essence: Regarding Ri res spas of Lagope Monastery (*lags phel*), in former times the queen of the throne of Guge had looked at sentient beings with genuine compassion and agreed to offer Brag sdong Ri res spe as a hill sanctuary.
>
> Discussions were held as to whether it is acceptable for hunters to kill animals [there]. Although it was unanimously approved and repeatedly discussed that those individuals ought to be referred to the ecclesiastical estate, the people of the villages are hereby informed once again in order to ensure the understanding of good practice.
>
> But as the saying goes, "For the pillar to be steadfast, join its middle parts together. For the scholar to be steadfast, engrave the words in stone". In this regard, unauthorized and dishonest people have disclosed information outside and concealed public matters, disregarding the law of causality and instigating dissentions hither and thither.
>
> In order to encourage public order among these ignorant people, may the swift-acting wisdom protectors and tutelary deities Vajrabhairava, Yama Dharmarāja, Śrimatī Pārvatī Rājñī, the Great Guardian King Vaiśravaṇa, and the five supernatural and mighty Conquerors, kill and torment them, banish and expel them, bite, threat, terrorize them and so on. May all these protectors annihilate them and turn them into ash dust through their wrathful activities.
>
> Whosoever is cognizant of these facts yet was to put forward new arguments from memory, stir up sludge, shake the mountain, agitate the lake, foment disputes, have two tongues in one mouth, in such an event, a penalty of one ounce of gold should be paid to the Upholder-of-the-Law without objection.
>
> This was written on the 13th of the 5th Month of the Iron-Sheep Year. For the sake of the doctrine and the general interest, may this document be enforced for the duration of an eon.
>
> Seal of Lagope (*lags spel*) governing council, passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of Lower Mani (*ma Ni*) monastic congregation, passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of Upper Mani monastic congregation, passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of Dangkhar (*brang khar*) monastic congregation, passed from hand to hand (*seal*). Seal of Lhalung (*lha lung*) monastic congregation, passed from hand to hand (*seal*).[240]

As the foregoing document shows, the area known as Ri res spe or Brag sdong Ri res spe was allegedly bestowed on Lagope when the queen of the throne of Guge (*gu ge khri rgyal mo*) made it a hill sanctuary (*srung ri*). There is at present no way to ascertain whether the royal house of Guge granted the rights and control over this defined unit of territory at the same time as it transferred ecclesiastical estates to the Gelukpa monastery in 1617. If it is apparent that Ri res spe was not just a

[240] See document BmK04 in Appendix 6.

high mountain pasture, it is its status as a hill sanctuary which made the area a particular preoccupation of Lagope Monastery.[241]

Indeed, the content of the text is in all respects consistent with anti-hunting laws and other legal documents issued in pre-modern Tibet as studied by Toni Huber.[242] Among the most salient features of these were: the moral imperative for Buddhist monarchs to look after all sentient beings, including the protection of game animals (*ri dwags*); the establishment of sanctuaries through the 'sealing of hills and dales' (*ri klung rgya sdom*); the control of these areas by monasteries and important lamas; the invocation of guardian deities and wrathful protectors in order to punish hunters; and the call to prosecute offenders with sanctions such as fines, the confiscation of hunting equipment, and less frequently physical punishment. Stock phrases in the Tibetan anti-hunting laws, as observed by Huber, included the description of a monastic sanctuary for wild animals as being 'an island of freedom' (*thar pa gling*), an expression also affixed to the name of Lagope Monastery in the transumpts of *The Crown Register*.[243] In view of the above, it is quite certain that the wildlife inhabiting the territory of Lagope became the target of repeated hunting expeditions in the 19th-early 20th century. In fact, foreign visitors engaged in shikar (i.e. game hunting as a sport) might have been the reason for which the monastic community of Lagope felt compelled to issue the two documents related to the hill sanctuary of Ris res spe.[244] It is notable that a *Sportsman's Manual* published in 1893 listed 'the hills above Dankhar' as a good hunting spot for bharals (*gna' ba*).[245]

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[241] See document No-no 5 for a similar issue pertaining to another hill sanctuary (*srung ri*) in Spiti; see SCHUH 2016b: 121–123.

[242] HUBER 2004.

[243] The context in which the Tibetan phrase *la sgo dpe dgon thar pa gling* (also *legs sgo dpe dgon thar pa gling*) appears in these documents is rather vague. It is therefore not entirely clear whether the expression 'place of liberation or 'island of freedom' (*thar pa gling*) refers to the monastery itself or to a specific part of its territory as in the case of a sanctuary; see document BmK01 and Bmk08 in Appendix 6.

[244] Disruption caused by foreign presence and hunting parties was also experienced in Tibet, where "the conservative Tibetan government reacted by putting strong pressure on them not to hunt. Travel documents issued to visitors at this time [i.e. around 1920s-30s] stated that shooting was strictly prohibited in Tibet, and officials reminded them of this as they entered through the border regions"; see HUBER 2004: 50. Shooting expeditions in Spiti were common practice among colonial administrators and European travellers in the 19th century. These expeditions would have relied on information provided by local residents and hunters to find the best hunting spots and flush the game into the open. The earliest reference to local hunters is perhaps found in Trebeck's account. The young man sojourned in Dangkhar for three months in 1822. "On the 13th of August", he recalled that, "two Shikaris brought me a young goat, of the variety called Ra-dokh [i.e. a single individual (*ra rdog*) or wild goat (*ra rgod*)?] (…) The huntsmen say it seldom grows above five inches taller. If so it must be a different variety from the wild goat in the neighbourhood of Lé [i.e. Leh in Ladakh], as that is considerably

Finally, shrewd farmers, greedy officials, and foreign hunters were not the only people responsible for disturbing the peace of the monastic community in Dangkhar. From the end of the 17th century until the beginning of the 19th century, the inhabitants of the Spiti Valley were often victims of tension with their immediate neighbours who relished the opportunity to conduct raids and plunder the monasteries of the valley.[246] The princely state of Bashahr-Kinnaur, in particular, invaded Spiti on at least two occasions. A first attack was conducted in 1749/50. Then again in the 1760s or 70s, the troops of Bashahr launched a new military campaign against Spiti during which they are believed to have occupied the fort of Dangkhar for two years. The damage caused in Spiti by this unwelcome neighbour also extended to the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement, as reported in a document issued in 1778:

> This is addressed to all those contributing to the monastic properties (*dkor zas*) of Lagope Monastery (*legs spel*).
>
> In the past, the army of Kinnaur (*khu nu*) caused a lot of damage to the monastery there. Left in such a state, the excellent pure field of virtuous accumulation for all the local folk depends upon the monastic complex (*gtsug lag khang*) such as the monastic congregation (*dge 'dun*), the assembly hall (*'du khang*), the sacred images and offerings (*rten mchod*).
>
> As far as these are concerned, all necessary repairs must be undertaken by you all. Should the monastery remain in disrepair, there is great danger that disease, famine, conflict,

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larger; but there are a number of species, no doubt, in these mountains, of a character between the goat and the deer, which are new to naturalists". Likewise, Egerton met Captains Henley and Ruthven who were "nominally on a sporting tour" in the border valley in the summer of 1863. As for the Deputy-Commissioner himself, he did not begrudge a shooting party in his spare time: "Mr Heyde wished to pay a visit to the monks of Kee monastery, about four miles down the valley. We agreed accordingly that I should spend a day or two in the uplands in search of game, and overtake him afterwards. Taking a small tent and two days' food, I went up the hills on a pony. After wandering about all day we sighted a herd of wild sheep, here called nâbo [i.e. bharal (*gna' ba*)], about three in the afternoon. I stalked them to within 125 yards. There were about twenty-five in the herd. Aimed at the leader, but making too much allowance for my rifle, which carries a little high, I shot too low, and missed both barrels. We were here at a height of 14,000 to 16,000 feet, and respiration was rather difficult when going up hill"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 61–62; EGERTON 1864: 18–20, 27.

[245]The author of this manual provided the following observations regarding game hunting in the Spiti Valley: "The disadvantages of shooting in Spiti are: Firstly, that not a soul in the country, from the 'Nono' downwards can speak a word of Hindustani, so that an interpreter becomes necessary, and an interpreter on a shikarring expedition would be as much out of place as an umbrella. Secondly, there being no men in the country with shikarring instincts, it is hard to get any reliable information. Thirdly, that when settled in a Nala [i.e. a watercourse or ravine (*nālā*)] for sport, or out looking for game, you are constantly disturbed by people in search of brushwood, and scrubs for firewood. They go immense heights, and no place seems safe from them, unless you go far away from habitable portion of the country [where] supplies become a source of anxiety (…) The advantages, on the other hand, are that the country, lately at all events, has not been heavily tried, that it may be said of Spiti, as of Lahoul, that every Nala holds Ibex, and that it is probably the nearest country in which Ibex and Burrhel can be found"; see TYACKE 1893: 27.

[246] In 1686, the troops from the princely state of Kulu invaded Spiti but were defeated. Some clerics and members of the nobility of Spiti sought refuge in Lahaul among whom the astrologer (*dbon po*) Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho, Lady (*jo mo*) Srid thar, the monk Kun dga dpal ldan, the novice (*dge tshul*) sTang kha, and the master (*dpon*) lHun grub rgya mtsho; see SCHUH 2016b: 103.

> frost, hail and so forth will arise in the region. To avoid that, it is necessary to repair the monastery with due consideration to the sentient beings' happiness. Let there be no mistake between what should and should not be done!
>
> As of the 20th day of the 5th month of the Earth-Dog Year [1778] (*seal*).[247]

Judging from the above, the monastery of Lagope suffered heavily from the depredation caused by the troops of Bashahr-Kinnaur during their occupation of Dangkhar. Patrons and devotees were now urged to renew their support of the monastic community. The decision body responsible for issuing this directive has not been identified. It is certain, however, that it did not come from the governing council of the monastery based on a sphragistic comparison with the seal employed at the end of this document.

It has been important in this section to present in more detail some of the written agreements and documents preserved in the archives of Lagope Monastery. The socio-economic and political context that can be deduced from these documents reveals both local and global developments which affected the monasteries of the Spiti Valley in the 17th-19th centuries. Notwithstanding the protracted period of political change in both Greater Ladakh (i.e. Ladakh, Zanskar, and Purig) and in the Indo-Tibetan border regions of West Tibet (i.e. Ngari, Spiti, Upper Kinnaur) during this period, the monastic communities of Spiti continued to rely upon a double economic system of land tenure and tax-paying tenants, subsumed under the term 'ecclesiastical estate' (*mchod gzhis*) in primary sources. On the one hand, a communal estate composed of scattered villages offered economic support to all the monasteries of Spiti without distinction. While on the other, each monastic institution possessed in addition its own estates made up of households and fields dispersed in several settlements of the valley. Whether communal or institutional, the agricultural produce of these estates was collected by monks at the end of the harvest season. This religious tax was called 'grain due' (*bon*) and the amount of assigned yields varied from case to case. Grains were either stored or processed by roasting and grinding into a ready-to-eat flour which was often distributed during religious celebrations.

Accordingly, the Gelukpa monastery of Lagope in Dangkhar enjoyed the usufruct of agricultural lands which had been granted by the royal house of Guge and other benefactors at the

[247] See document BmK14 in Appendix 6 and section 4.9 in Chapter 4.

beginning of the 17th century. These estates and their tenants were situated in eight different villages including Dangkhar. Likewise, the hill sanctuary of Ri res spe had been placed under the supervision of the monastery in keeping with the wishes expressed by the Queen of Guge. The management of these properties was not without problems as amply illustrated by the content of the archives. Disputes over the exploitation of resources and the levying of taxes could and did break out with the tenants of monastic estates, the people of the Dangkhar settlement, or with other villages of Spiti. Similarly, quarrels among clerics over worldly privileges, partisanship, and internal strife would occasionally divide the monastic community. Whatever the reason, the settlement of disputes was often resolved through the ratification of written agreements between the opposing sides. In a few instances, recourse to a superior legal authority was necessary.

Regardless of the reintegration of Spiti into the Kingdom of Ladakh in the first decade of the 18th century, the monasteries of the Spiti Valley remained under the purview of the Tibetan government, especially those belonging to the Gelukpa tradition. As such, the governing councils of these border monasteries were to respond to directives sent from Gelukpa officials and Tibetan authorities situated in West Tibet. In particular the renowned religious centre of Tholing in Guge, the fortified monastery of Tashigang on the Ladakh-Tibet border, and the Tibetan outpost of Gartok acted as the most important relays of information between Lhasa and Spiti. It is only recently, however, that the complexity of cross-border relations between the representatives of the dGa' ldan pho brang government and the monastic communities of Spiti has started to be apprehended through the study of Tibetan legal documents. While much remains to be done, colonial accounts already scratched the surface of several problems affecting the region. Among the questions that deserve further investigation are the reasons for a transfer of a part of the ecclesiastical revenues of Spiti to the Gelukpa monasteries of West Tibet and the extent of the political and legal powers conferred on the latter. That Spiti was ruled by the kingdoms of Purig and Ladakh in the 18th-mid-19th centuries does not appear to have disrupted trading activities and pilgrimages to Tibet, nor did it interrupt intellectual exchanges between the two regions. Throughout this period, Gelukpa monks from Spiti continued to

travel to Ngari to study at Tholing and Tashigang, or further East to one of the major Gelukpa centres of Central Tibet.[248]

In this context, the Gelukpa tradition came to dominate the religious landscape of Spiti from the 17th century. The old monastery of Tabo, which first embraced Tsong kha pa's religious system in the late 15th-early 16th century, was renamed Theg chen chos gling and would once again benefit from the courtly patronage of the royalty of West Tibet, as amply evidenced by the sumptuous chapels painted in the so-called Guge revival style. Its monastic congregation, however, were to dwindle drastically by the time the first foreign visitors arrived in the region. The Gelukpa monastery of Nor bu dge 'phel at Kyi, on the other hand, established itself as the most important religious centre of the Spiti Valley, since it was recognised as the seat of the incarnation lineage of the great 11th century translator Rin chen bzang po (958–1055).[249] Simply known as Lochen tulku, the successive incarnations of the great translator (*lo chen*) enjoyed considerable prestige in both Tibet and in the Western Himalayas where they usually took rebirth. Ties were particularly strong with the hierarchs of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in south-western Tibet where many of the Lochen tulkus were educated. While much has

[248] Seeking a higher religious education in Tibet could be financially burdensome and was a long-term investment for aspiring Gelukpa monks from Spiti, as noted by Lyall in the 1860s: "When a lamá starts for Lhása to take his degree, his káng chimpa [i.e. head of the household (*khang chen pa*)] is bound to give him what he can towards the expenses of the journey, but only the better-to-do men can afford it; many who go to Lhása get high employ under the Lhásan Government, are sent to govern monasteries, &., and remain there for years; they return in old age to their native monastery in Spiti, bringing a good deal of wealth, of which they always give some at once to their families"; see LYALL 1874: 212. Like most Buddhist regions located on the periphery of the Tibetan plateau, Spiti was facing east looking towards the centre of the Tibetan Buddhist world, the holy city of Lhasa and the seat of the Dalai Lama. In 1863, Egerton met an old monk, a native of Dangkhar who had just returned from Tibet with other monks. His account of the meeting is most revealing for our present purposes: "Some Spiti monks arrived from Lhassa, where they had been studying. One of them, a resident of Dhunkur, had been about thirty years without ever visiting his home (…) The political news of Thibet excites great interest in Spiti, and on this the old monk was better informed. About two years ago it seems that the hereditary chief of Lhassa, who still retains authority under the Chinese, by the title of Gyalpo [i.e. the regent of Tibet, Ngag dbang ye shes tshul khrims rgyal mtshan from Rwa sgreng (1816–1863)], refused to continue the usual annual payments of grain to the monasteries. The monks could not stand this, and turned out in force. The Gyalpo however managed to bring over to his side the sect of Gelukpas, to the number of 5000 monks, who with the zemindars, or landowners, made his force a respectable one, but not able to cope with the opposite party, who numbered 10,000 (…) The Gyalpo, being worsted, fled to China, and is now, it is believed, returning with a force of 10,000 Chinese, who are said to be rapidly approaching Lhassa. The present Dalai Lamba [i.e. 12th Dalai Lama] of Lhassa is a child, but his advisers placed him at the head of the clerical party. The other grand lamba, who lives at Tashi Lhunpo [i.e. 8th Panchen Lama] took no part in the dispute (…) Asking him if he had not brought a good collection of books from Lhassa, I unintentionally rubbed a very sore spot. He had brought some valuable books and other sundries with him, but within twenty miles of Dhunkur, and after entering Spiti proper, the yâk which was carrying them fell off the road down a precipice into the river, and neither he nor his burden were ever seen more"; see EGERTON 1864: 36–37.

[249] VITALI 2000.

been written about Rin chen bzang po himself, the incumbent lineage of his Gelukpa incarnations has received far too little attention from scholars.[250]

Unlike the monastery of Nor bu dge 'phel, Lagope did not appear to have been the seat of a specific line of reincarnated lamas. Its monastic congregation, the second largest in Spiti, was composed of regular monks who were native of the villages of Upper and Lower Mani, Lhalung, and Dangkhar. Except for some names and indications of rank we know very little about these men of faith who do not seem to have left any written work besides a collection of tattered archives. As followers of Tsong kha pa's doctrine, the brightest students of Lagope could aspire to higher religious training provided they could afford to go to Tibet for further study. In effect, most monks at Dangkhar would have spent their entire lives in Spiti, attending to the needs of the lay population by performing all kinds of merit-making, healing, and apotropaic rituals, while ensuring the regular performance of ceremonies on specific dates of the religious calendar. Members of the governing council, for their part, looked after the running of the monastery, keeping a close eye on its resources and estates. In the end, what differentiated Lagope from the other monasteries of the valley was its proximity to the secular ruling authorities. All in all, Lagope was the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement, the seat of a political entity with a long and complex history of dependency upon outside powers.

[250] In the 1840s, Joseph Cunningham collected from Gerard and other sources the following information about the 16th Lochen Tulku Blo bzang btsan pa'i rgyal mtshan: "The Grand Lama of Lahassa, called Gealong Rimboche [i.e. *rgyal ba rin po che*], who resides at Potala, is the chief pontiff of all the Lamas. The next in succession to the Grand Lama of Lahassa is Panchin Rimpoche [i.e. *paṇ chen rin po che*], of Teshoo Loomboo [i.e. *bkra shis lhun po*]. The Third in order is Lochawa Rimboche [i.e. *lo tsā ba rin po che*], these three personages are all of Gellopa [i.e. *dge lugs pa*] sect. – *Gerard*, p.117-21 (…) The Lotchawa resides at Teshoo Loomboo, and for many years past he has appeared in Kunawar [i.e. Kinnaur], he then appeared in Nako, and two children had the same marks by which he is said to be recognized. – *Gerard*, p.121 (…) The true Lotchawa never rose to the rank of Gelong [i.e. *dge slong*]; but he nevertheless became the reader or household priest of one of the eight *dappans* [i.e. *dgra dpon*], or military commanders of Lassa; and who was engaged in the war with the Sikhs in 1841-42. Afterwards, the Lotchawa married, and in consequence lost in reality all his efficacy, although still considered as the vesture of a divinity. While I was in Hangrang, he also committed adultery; but so great is the superstition of the people, that these passes did not greatly reduce his sanctity in *their* eyes"; see J.D. CUNNINGHAM 1844: 185, 194–195. More recently, Vitali has remarked that the 15th Lochen tulku bsTan 'dzin rgyal mtshan assumed the responsibility for handling religious affairs at Tashi Lhunpo when the 6th Panchen Lama Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes (1738–1780) left for a visit to China in 1780. As for the 17th Lochen tulku Blo bzang dpal ldan rin chen rgya mtsho (d.1921), he was the tutor of the 9th Panchen lama Thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma (1883–1989) with whom he travelled to India in 1906; see VITALI 2000.

3.5.5 The upper temple and its politico-religious programme

The emergence of Dangkhar as a political centre under the influence of the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh is illustrated in the painting programme of the upper temple. Realised in the 18th century, the murals of this chapel articulated religious ideas and cultural elements which tied the polity of Spiti to the Kingdom of Ladakh. With over 230 painted subjects, the reader is referred to my previous work for a comprehensive presentation of the iconographic programme of this singular edifice.[251] In what follows, I will therefore summarize the most salient points for the socio-historical analysis of this monument.[252]

The upper temple was erected at the top of a rocky outcrop overlooking the monastery of Lagope (fig. 4.57). The chapel is square in plan and measures approximately 5.20 x 5.20 x 3.09m (fig. 2.18 and 2.19). Murals were executed *a secco* and cover most of the surface of the walls. They underwent significant damage and loss of paint over time as a result of which large areas were repainted by local residents in recent years with rudimentary skills, crude materials, and little understanding of the original iconography. Despite some regrettable alteration of its content, the overall pictorial organisation and execution of these paintings shows a high degree of sophistication and patronage (fig. 2.20-2.23). They were organised around fourteen figures of almost life-size dimensions.[253] Each wall of the room was divided in multiple registers delimiting the depiction of particular iconographic themes. Entering the room, the south-western wall is the main devotional focus of the religious programme. It shows Śākyamuni in the centre flanked by Atiśa on the right (fig. 4.58), Tsong kha pa on the left (fig. 4.59), and their respective disciples. On the opposite side, protectors and guardians are traditionally represented on either side of the door. In accordance with the

[251] LAURENT 2014.

[252] For the sake of completeness, art historian Melissa Kerin provides some succinct remarks on the wall paintings of this chapel in her study of art and devotion in the Western Himalayas. Not being aware of my research at the time of her publication, she raises the legitimate, albeit moot, question about the possibility of regional religious pluralism and inclusivism. While agreeing on an 18th century date for this temple, her identification of Nyingmapa influence on the basis of a single representation of Padmasambhava is problematic in the absence of a complete iconographic analysis of these murals and ultimately unfounded; see KERIN 2015a: 24–28.

[253] These fourteen figures consist of Buddha Śākyamuni, Atīśa, and Tsong kha pa on the south-western wall [No.10a, 18a, 6a]; the eight Medicine Buddhas with, presumably, Sunāman, Ratnacandra, Dharmakīrtisāgaraghośa, and Bhaiṣajyaguru on the south-eastern wall [No.4a-4d] along with Aśokottama, Śākyamuni, Suvarṇabhadravimala, and Abhijñarāja on the north-western wall [No.16e-16h]; and finally Mahāpīta Vaiśravaṇa on the north-eastern wall [No.14e]; see figures 2.20-2.23 in Appendix 2.

traditional way of visiting religious edifices in a clockwise direction, narrative scenes are depicted in the lower register of these murals which are to be read from left to right.[254]

A variety of doctrinal, symbolic, and historical themes are expressed throughout the painting programme, covering most of the essential aspects of the Buddhist tradition in its Indo-Tibetan form. They include, for instance, the representation of purification and longevity subjects,[255] apotropaic and protective figures,[256] wealth deities,[257] dharma protectors and meditational deities,[258] along with portraits of several Indian and Tibetan Buddhist masters.[259]

Faithful to the religious denomination of Lagope Monastery, the sectarian affiliation of these murals is distinctively Gelukpa in content. They contain the representation of Tsong kha pa and other masters of the Gelukpa tradition,[260] as well as the dharma protectors and meditational deities associated with the principal Tantric cycles adopted by this school. Oddly enough, his followers are not the only Tibetan Buddhist masters portrayed. The presence of a second tradition can be seen on the north-western wall with a depiction of the Kagyupa lineage (fig.4.60-4.62).[261] This is complemented

[254] Running on both lateral walls, the main narrative scenes illustrated are the twelve deeds of Buddha Śākyamuni (*mdzad pa bcu gnyis*) [12a-12f and 20g-20l]; see figures 2.20 and 2.22 in Appendix 2.
[255] For instance, the eight Medicine Buddha (*sman bla de gshegs brgyad*) on the lateral walls, the thirty-five confession Buddhas (*ltung bshags kyi sangs rgyas so lnga*) on the south-eastern wall [No.2a-2e], and Uṣṇīṣavijayā and White Tārā on the north-western wall [No.8 and 18]; see figures 2.20 and 2.22 in Appendix 2.
[256] These figures are mostly confined to the north-western wall. They include Sitātapatrā, Jāṅguli, Vajrapāṇi, Green Tara, and Parṇāśabarī [No.10, 12, 15, 18, 19]; see figure 2.22 in Appendix 2.
[257] A group of wealth deities are placed above the door. These include, for example, six-armed Vasudhārā, Jambhala, Mahāpīta Vaiśravaṇa, Vasudhārā, and Black Jambhala [No.14a, 14c, 14e, 14d, and 14f]; see figures 2.23 in Appendix 2.
[258] Depicted on the entrance wall, the most important Dharma protectors (*chos rgyal*) and guardians (*srung ma*) are six-armed Mahākāla, four-armed Mahākāla, Yama Dharmarāja, Śrimatī Pārvatī Rājñī, better known as Śrī dēvī (*dpal ldan lha mo*), and the guardian kings of the four directions (*phyogs skyong rgyal po*) [No.6, 10, 12, 15a-15d, and 23]. Meditational deities (*yi dam*), on the other hand, occupy the main wall of the chapel and include Vajrabhairava, Guhyasamāja, Hayagrīva, Kālacakra, Hevajra, Cakrasaṃvara and their consorts [No.2, 3 , 4, 13, 14, and 15]; see figures 2.21 and 2.23 in Appendix 2.
[259] A well-known group of Indian masters, for example, is the 'six ornaments and the two excellent ones' (*rgyan drug mchog gnyis*) composed of Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Guṇaprabha, and Śākyaprabha [No.4a-4h] of the north-western wall; see figure 2.22 in Appendix 2.
[260] In addition to the 'father and sons triad' (*yab sras gsum*) showing Tsong kha pa with his two spiritual heirs rGyal tshab rje (1364–1432) and mKhas grub rje (1385–1438), two unidentified Gelukpa scholars are also visible on either side of this group [No.5a-5b and 6a-6c]. Similarly, a group of five Gelukpa masters is depicted on the right hand side of the north-eastern wall. They have been tentatively identified as Brag sgo Rab 'byams pa Phun tshogs rgya mtsho, mKhar rdo bZod pa rgyal mtsho (1672–1749), sGrub khang pa dGe legs rgya mtsho (1641–1713), the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682), and the 5th Panchen Lama (1663–1737) [No.20a-20e]; see figures 2.21 and 2.23 in Appendix 4.
[261] The Kagyupa lineage of masters is replete with Vajradhara, Tilopa, Nāropa, Mar pa, Mi la ras pa, sGam po pa, Ras chung pa, Phag mo gru pa, and gLing chen ras pa [No.5a-5i]. In the present context, the figure of gLing chen ras pa introduces the sub-sect of the Kagyupa tradition which is represented by two pairs of unidentified

by portraits of four masters from the Drukpa Kagyu school, easily recognisable by their red hats and full beards (fig. 4.63 and 4.64). The latter sect is even more evidently attested with a representation of the famous Drukpa master sTag tshang ras pa (1574–1651) on the south-western wall (fig. 4.65 and 4.66).[262]

Within the largely prevalent Gelukpa environment of Spiti, the portrait of sTag tshang ras pa necessarily conveyed a well-chosen religious and political message. As we know, the visit of this Tibetan master to the Kingdom of Ladakh around 1616 created the necessary conditions for a rapprochement between the reigning dynasty and the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.[263] In Ladakh, sTag tshang ras pa eventually assumed the position of court spiritual adviser (*dbu bla*) of King Seng ge rnam rgyal. This special relationship between the rNam rgyal dynasty and Drukpa tutors was to be maintained over the following centuries. This provides the key to understanding the political and cultural context in which this upper temple was founded. In other words, the simultaneous display of two sectarian affiliations was the expression of Spiti's dual affiliation: on the one hand to Ladakh where the Drukpa tradition had been elevated to the rank of state religion in the 17th century; and on the other to the Gelukpa tradition and its associated religio-political network, to which most monasteries in Spiti belonged. Given the fact that the Drukpa had no monastic base whatsoever in Spiti, the depiction of Drukpa Kagyu masters in this temple, spearheaded by the seminal figure of sTag tshang ras pa, is highly indicative of external influences in the patronage and composition of these murals.

It is in light of this that we must read the lower register of the main devotional wall of this chapel (fig. 2.21). Running from the left to the right corner, a frieze is made up of three panels starting with the symbolic depiction of 'the seven precious possessions of a universal monarch' (*rgyal srid rin*

Drukpa teachers [No.9a-9b and 13a-13b] and the portrait of sTag tshang ras pa on the main wall [No.17]; see figure 2.21 and 2.22 in Appendix 2.

[262] Early images of sTag tshang ras pa from Ladakh tend to show the Drukpa master in the same attitude as that of the Tibetan yogi Mi la ras pa. The present portrait however conforms to a more conventional style of depiction as adopted at Shey (*shel*) and Hemis (*he mis*) in the 18th century. They show sTag tshang ras pa seated on a throne in front of a small table with ritual implements in the presence of one or more attendants. He is clad in a white garment, a white turban, and a red meditational belt across his right shoulder. He wears large black disc-like earrings and a necklace made of pearls. Finally, the Drukpa master is often shown with facial hair such as a moustache or a goatee. For a reproduction of the Shey and Hemis paintings; see SNELLGROVE & SKORUPSKI 1977: fig.1; GENOUD 1982: 75, fig.1.

[263] SCHWIEGER 1996; NAWANG JINPA 2015: 117–119.

chen sna bdun), followed by 'the eight close sons' or great bodhisattvas (*nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*), and ending with a narrative scene related to the consecration of the said edifice. The last panel is indisputably the cornerstone of the iconographic programme.[264] Situated not far beneath the portrait of sTag tshang ras pa, a donor tableau takes the form of a religious ceremony and a royal drinking scene (fig. 4.68). Framed by a curtained enclosure, a group of nine celebrants of different sizes and importance are seated in front of offering tables under the benevolent gaze of Buddha Amitāyus (fig. 4.67). On the left, the actual patron presides over the congregation (fig. 4.69). He holds a rosary in his hands and wears a long-sleeved Tibetan dress with a white shirt underneath. Regrettably, the rest of the figure is irremediably damaged. At his side, a senior monk performs a hand gesture with his right hand and holds a scripture on his lap with his left (fig. 4.70). Most significantly, he wears a Drukpa hat identical in all respects to those of the Drukpa masters on the adjacent wall. The remaining congregants are members of the nobility richly dressed in traditional Western-Tibetan attires. This pious and wealthy elite is attended by other laypersons carrying beverage containers and offering dishes. Groups of musicians and female dancers complete the scene, announcing the arrival of a convoy with its herald, foot soldiers, and beasts of burden (fig. 4.71).

The basic set up of this panel generally follows a conventional mode of depiction of donor tableaux and consecration scenes adopted in thangka paintings and murals from Western Tibet.[265] It goes a step further, however, if we take into account the previous two panels of the frieze. By placing the donor tableau after the 'seven possessions of a universal monarch' and the 'eight close sons', the founder of the temple was effectively elevated to the status of a *cakravartin* and that of a bodhisattva. This iconographic contrivance would thus establish the donor himself as a Buddhist monarch of great altruism. Similarly, the Drukpa master seated next to this royal donor could be interpreted as his court spiritual adviser. One way or another, the iconographic programme and patronage of this edifice point towards the neighbouring Kingdom of Ladakh.

[264] For a detailed description of this panel, see LAURENT 2014: 125–128.

[265] Some of the most well-known illustrations of temple consecration scenes come from the 'red temple' (*lha khang dmar po*) and 'white temple' (*lha khang dkar po*) of Tsaparang in Guge. For a general discussion on donor tableaux in Western Tibetan art, LINROTHE 2014b.

The precise identification of this royal figure remains tentative, resting on circumstantial evidence and speculation on historical developments. In the political context of Western Tibet in the 18th century, the construction of the upper temple could not have taken place before the resolution of tension between Tibet and Ladakh and the return of Spiti to the latter under the reign of Nyi ma rnam rgyal (r.1694–1729). Following the troubled times of bDe ldan rnam rgyal's reign (r.1679–1694),[266] the new King of Ladakh successfully managed to restore full diplomatic relations with Lhasa.[267] Like Seng ge rnam rgyal, he appointed an eminent Drukpa master as his spiritual adviser. Coming from Bhutan, Byams mgon Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan (1647–1732) arrived in Leh in 1706 and held his position at the court of Ladakh until 1712. While remaining faithful to the Drukpa Kagyu sect, Nyi ma rnam rgyal was a staunch advocate of religious pluralism.[268] As such, he was repeatedly praised as a

[266] The aggressive foreign policy of Tibet and the involvement of Ladakh in a dispute opposing Lhasa and the Kingdom of Bhutan–another Drukpa Kagyu supporting state–were allegedly coupled with bDe ldan rnam rgyal's hostilities towards the Gelukpa communities of West Tibet. A partisan point of view regarding the situation in Ngari was reported by the then regent of Tibet in 1698: *la dwags seng ge rnam rgyal phan grub mtha' ris med nas dge lugs la nye ba tsam yod 'dra yang / rigs brgyud zad kar bu ngan dang bsod nams zad kar bsam ngan skye ba'i dpe bzhin phyis skor zhal thur gzigs la thug pas 'brug phyogs su dad 'dun ches pa'i mnga' ris phyogs kyi dge dgon tshang ma nyag phra zhing / nye lam bod chos rgyal gyi gdung dri ma med pa lha sras mu tig btsan po'i skye srid lha bla ma zhi ba 'od kyis btab pa'i mtho lding gi chos sde 'di nyid mnga' bdag rnam rgyal lde dpal bzang pod dang chos rje ngag dbang grags pa mchod yon nas dge lugs rnam dag pa'i tshos mdog yin rung / bstan bcos las / sbrul gdug gnas pa'i sa phyogs su / / sgron me gsal kyang 'od mi 'byin / / zhes yul mi skya ser byings dge lugs la dad pa'i snang ba dkar kyang bde ldan rnam rgyal gyi gdug pa'i mun pas bsgribs te grwa pa sum cu skor tsam las chos srid gnyis ka shin tu nyag phra ba zhig 'dug pa*; "[The king of] Ladakh, Seng ge rnam rgyal, out of religious tolerance, was relatively fond of the Gelukpa tradition. But later on, in accordance with the saying that a wicked child comes from an extinct lineage and malevolent thoughts come from the decrease of merits, being lost in his own thoughts, his devotion towards the Drukpa order increased and all the Gelukpa monasteries of Ngari became impoverished. Lately, the descendant of the Dharma king of Tibet, the royal monk Zhi ba 'od, who is the reincarnation of the stainless prince Mu tig btsan po, established the monastic complex of Tholing where under the patron-priest relationship of the King of Ngari, rNam rgyal lde dpal bzang po, and the master Ngag dbang grags pa, the Gelukpa order took its true colour. But as the scriptures recall 'a butter lamp does not shine forth from a land infested with venomous snakes'. And although the local laity and clergy were largely and clearly faithful to the Gelukpa sect, the monastic community [of Tholing] was reduced to thirty monks due to the pernicious blindness of bDe ldan rnam rgyal who had cast the shadow of destitution upon the kingdom and the church alike"; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO 1989: 460.

[267] In what appears to have been a matrimonial alliance, Nyi ma rnam rgyal married a woman from the nobility of Central Tibet who was escorted to Ladakh by two representatives of the Tibetan government in 1694. As political tensions eased, the king's younger brother, Ngag dbang blo bzang bstan 'dzin, was able to travelled to Tashi Lhunpo Monastery where he was received by the 6th Panchen Lama some time between 1697 and 1699; see PETECH 1977: 81–100.

[268] *lha sa bsam yas kyi btsos pa'i (kyis gtsos pa'i) bod kyi gtsug lag khang thams cad la gser chab / dkar me / bla ma ris med skyabs rten / dge bdun sogs la mang skol / rang zhabs kyi chos lde che chung thams cad la / bsnyen bkur ris med / gser dngul gyi rgyu las / rang mos kyi lha sku / gsung rab / rdza nang gi ma Ni ring mo / sku gsung thugs rten bzheng rgyu'i gzung bar rgyas bsdus / 'jam sdud bzang gsum / 'jam dbyangs bstod pa gang blo smon lam / shes bya kha (mkha') dbyings / gser 'od g.yang skyabs / bka' sgyur ro cog / le bdun / par byas legs par bsgrub (bsgrubs) nas / skya ser thams cad chos sbyin / gser dngul zangs gsum gyis ma Ni the skor / chos kyi zung bar (gzungs par) sna mang bsgrub*; "The dharma king presented liquid gold and votive lamps to Lhasa and Samye in particular, and to every temple of Tibet. He made offerings to all lamas without preference and served tea and victuals to monastic congregations. He honoured all the monasteries placed under him, large and small,

'universal monarch' (*'khor lo sgyur rgyal*),[269] 'great dharma king' (*chos rgyal chen po*),[270] and 'great bodhisattva dharma king' (*chos kyi rgyal po sems dpa' chen po*) in epigraphic and literary sources from Ladakh.[271]

Nyi ma rnam rgyal's involvement in the political affairs of Spiti is also rather well-attested. On a popular level, it was expressed through the use of similar epithets in votive inscriptions in which Nyi ma rnam rgyal's political authority over Spiti was explicitly recalled.[272] According to other inscriptions allegedly studied *in situ* by Tucci, the monarch is said to have been responsible for renovating the Sakyapa monastery of Tengyu.[273] Diplomatic correspondence exchanged between the chancery of Ladakh and the local government of Spiti provides further tangible information. It is relevant that most royal decrees regarding the border valley were issued by Nyi ma rnam rgyal between the years 1710 and 1730.[274] One of these documents, as seen earlier, attempted to regulate the presence of the prefects of the fort during their stay in Dangkhar.[275] Nyi ma rnam rgyal abdicated in 1729, leaving the throne to his son bDe skyong rnam rgyal, before passing away in 1739. In 1734, however, the Spiti Valley was transferred to the Kingdom of Purig. Its final reintegration into the

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without discrimination. He voluntarily commissioned statues made of gold and silver, scriptures, and erected walls made of carved maṇi slates. He ordered the printing of consecration formulae, small, medium, and large, for the construction of sacred images. He had printed the *'Jam sdud bzang gsum*, a praise to Mañjuśrī *Gang blo smon lam*, the *Shes bya mkha' dbyings*, the *gSer 'od g.yang skyabs*, the complete Buddhist canon, and the *Le bdun*, and bestowed dharma gifts to all laypeople and monastics. Prayer wheels made of gold, silver, and copper, as well as a great variety of pious dhāraṇī prints were realised"; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 64–65.

[269] Stone inscription SI. No.2 from Phyang in Ladakh; see JINA 1998: 3–4.

[270] For instance, the stone votive inscriptions No.67, No.68, No.69, and No.71; see TOBDAN & CHERING DORJE 2008: 102–103.

[271] *nyi ma rnam rgyal gyis rgyal srid la mnga' gsol ba'i chos kyi rgyal po sems dpa' chen po'i thugs smon lam chen pos sku gsung thugs rten la sogs 'gro ba yongs kyi bsod nams bzhin* [sic, for *zhing*] *du mang du bzheng*; "Nyi ma rnam rgyal was bestowed the kingship and through his deep aspiration of Bodhisattva dharma king commissioned a great variety of sacred representations [to establish] all migratory beings in vast fields of merits"; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 63.

[272] For example, a *maṇi* stone from the settlement of Lower Mani is inscribed: "Hail! This continent is the southern Jambudvīpa. The snowy hillsides of Mt. Kailash are the dwelling place of Foe Destroyers. The tepid abode is Lake Manasarovar. On the right side of the flowing Indus River, up in the hinterland, is the charming village of Mani. May the great Dharma King Nyi ma rnam rgyal live long and his dominion thrive!"; see the inscription SI2 in Appendix 5 and LAURENT 2017b.

[273] TUCCI & GHERSI 1935: 41. However, this episode could also be related to Bla ma dPal ldan 'phrin las who, after the war between Ladakh and Tibet, renovated the Sakyapa monastery of Mang spro in Ladakh and improved the administration of its branch monastery in Spiti; see document Mang-spro 21 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[274] Based on Schuh's study of the documents No-no 11 (1710), No-no 7 (1711), No-no 8 (1727), and No-no 9 (1730); see SCHUH 2016b.

[275] See document sTeng-rgyud 1f in HEIMBEL & SCHUH.

Kingdom of Ladakh took place in 1765 and no other members of the rNam rgyal dynasty seems suitable for the commissioning of the upper temple at this stage.

As a result of the above, there are grounds to suggest that Nyi ma rnam rgyal was behind the patronage of the upper temple of Dangkhar. As the political centre of Spiti and southern outpost of the Ladakhi kingdom, the Dangkhar settlement would certainly have merited a concrete expression of the monarch's benevolent and virtuous kingship. Emulating the patron-priest relationship characterised by Seng ge rnam rgyal and sTag tshang ras pa, the senior monk depicted next to the royal patron of the consecration scene could perhaps be identified as Nyi ma rnam rgyal's spiritual advisor, the Drukpa master Byams mgon Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan. If these identifications are correct, the upper temple would have been built during the second or third decade of the 18th century, perhaps under the supervision of Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan himself, in which case we could narrow down the date of this edifice to the last years of his stay, between 1710 and 1712. What we know for sure is that the construction of this temple took place right after the controversial retrocession of Spiti to Ladakh by Tibet.[276]

Buddhism and politics were essentially inseparable in the Tibetan Buddhist world. Religious patronage could thus serve to establish the universal character of Buddhism, the legitimacy of the state, and the indivisibility between the two.[277] A last detail of the murals of the upper temple appears to do just that and deserves some attention. Immediately above the lintel of the entrance door stands a group of six riders. Among them, three mounted warriors with their distinctive white complexion, turbans, and weapons can be confidently identified as the autochthonous deities (*yul lha*) of West Tibet (fig. 4.72). These territorial warriors are called Mes ba'u, a noun derived from 'paternal ancestor' and 'forefather' (*mes po*) in Tibetan, and their depictions are generally confined to temples located in Ngari.[278] Riding along with them are three Western Tibetan ladies. They are dressed in the typical garments from this region and are richly adorned with jewellery and headdresses. One of these

[276] See section 4.6 in Chapter 4.
[277] On the symbiotic relationship between religion and politics and the use of artistic patronage as a primary medium of state sponsorship; see DEBRECZENY 2019.
[278] Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po remarked that these territorial warrior deities are not to be found anywhere else in Tibet. They are depicted, for example, at sNub bkra shis shos gling Monastery in Ngari; see TSHE RING RGYAL PO 2006: 250.

women carries a male child in her arms. The infant wears a white garment and a turban similar to those of the warrior deities.

This peculiar equestrian scene, I believe, is intended to represent the *patres genitores* of the people of Ngari. The symbolic kinship between the autochthonous warriors and the ladies of West Tibet was underscored by the depiction of a male heir; a theme also illustrated in the donor tableau of the consecration scene.[279] In the present context, namely the establishment of a chapel in Spiti under the patronage of a Ladakhi monarch, this visual contrivance and cultural reference would have been received as a reminder of a shared history and common patrilineal origin among the rulers of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet (*stod mnga' ris skor gsum*). In effect, it was a direct reference to King sKyid lde nyi ma mgon's s heirs who, after the demise of their father in the second quarter of the 10th century, inherited the whole Western Tibetan region. Collectively known as 'the three mGon or protectors of Upper Tibet' (*stod kyi mgon gsum*), dPal gyi lde rig pa mgon ruled over Ladakh, bKra shis mgon took Guge and Purang, and lDe gtsug mgon controlled Spiti, Kinnaur, Lahaul, and Zanskar.

So in addition to religious themes, the depiction of the territorial warrior deities and forefathers of West Tibet on the walls of the upper temple also offered the means to reaffirm the dynastic and political legitimacy of the royal donor. As such, Nyi ma rnam rgyal was portrayed as the rightful heir and ruler of both Ladakh and Spiti. That the king of Ladakh was perceived as the direct descendant of the early monarchy of West Tibet was in fact a popular trope. Set in stone as it were, a votive inscription from Lamayuru (*bla ma g.yung drung*) in Ladakh recounted:

> I respectfully pay homage to the translators and paṇḍitas, the compassionate Bodhisattvas, and to the Dharma King and Queen.
> Hūṃ! The Victorious One has blessed the three supreme [jewels] of Kailash from where came the three mGon kings of the Three Dominions.
> Their descendants, the Dharma King Nyi ma rnam rgyal together with his son, are now sitting on the great leonine throne of the mighty Kingdom of Ladakh-Maryul in the glorious and great fortress of Leh.[280]

[279] At the opposite end of the donor's retinue stands a noble woman holding a child in her arms. The depiction of lay female donors and aristocratic women with infants is not unusual in donor scenes from Western Tibet. Merits and benedictions were thus extended to all benefactors portrayed including their offspring; see figure 2.21 in Appendix 2.

[280] *thugs rje rmad du byung ba'i lo pan dang / chos rgyal yab yum rnams la gus pas 'dud / hūṃ rgyal bas byin rlabs gangs ri mchog gsum du / mnga' ris skor gsum rgyal po mgon gsum byung / de la rgyud rgyas de la dwags*

The upper temple of the Dangkhar settlement did not belong *sensu stricto* to Lagope Monastery. To this day, the maintenance of this religious edifice is still the shared responsibility of the monks and villagers of Dangkhar. Established under the high patronage of the rNam rgyal dynasty in the 18th century, the richness of its iconographic programme articulated visual elements congruent with the religious, political, and historical context of Western Tibet. Figures such as Śākyamuni and Atiśa, among others, traced the Indian origin of Buddhism and its transmission to West Tibet in the late 10th-11th centuries. The role of local rulers had been instrumental in this process, offering courtly patronage and a line of royal monks. Under their protection, the religious revitalisation of the teaching constituted a common denominator for the so-called 'new Tantra tradition schools' (*gsang sngags gsar ma*). The representation of this shared heritage on the walls of the chapel attest to the donor's intention of bringing the Gelukpa and Drukpa Kagyu schools together at a time that called for a strengthening of relations between Tibet and Ladakh. Meanwhile, and with the disappearance of the Kingdom of Guge in 17th century, the kings of Ladakh could claim themselves to be the last and rightful heirs of the Western Tibetan monarchy. The patronage of the upper temple, most likely by Nyi ma rnam rgyal, was therefore an expression of both religious piety and the desire for dynastic legitimacy. As for the choice of its location, it testified to the particular character of the Dangkhar settlement: a site which received repeated support by the royal house of Guge and then by that of Ladakh, and which, in many respects, had established itself as the capital of the Spiti Valley.

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mar yul gyi rgyal khab chen po [s]le chen dpal mkhar gyi / da lta seng ge'i khri chen la bsti ba'i chos rgyal nyi ma rnam rgyal yab sras bcas. Votive inscription SI. No. 6, lines 37-41; see JINA 1998: 6–8.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *RGYAL SA* OF SPITI IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS

> *In Tshe dbang rnam rgyal's great and vast kingdom lies the excellent dominion of West Tibet called Spiti. On the promontory of the capital Dangkhar, praise be to No rNam rgyal don grub.*
>
> *DP1*, Tabo (16th century)

From the end of the 16th century, documents produced in Spiti concur that Dangkhar was the *rgyal sa* of the valley, before the settlement was referred to as 'the capital of Spiti' by colonial administrators and early travellers in the 19th century. This idea that Dangkhar was the capital of the border valley of Spiti, which has survived among locals until present times, has however been dismissed out of hand by some colleagues on account of the subordinate political position that Spiti occupied within the wider political mosaic of the Western Himalayas.[1] It is quite clear, however, that the historic site of Dangkhar was no ordinary Himalayan village. A detailed analysis of its constitutive elements, as shown in the previous chapter, serves to highlight various functions assumed by this settlement over time. It was, simultaneously or in turn: a stronghold; the recipient site of royal patronage; and the district headquarters of the valley–three functions all of which can be subsumed under the category of *rgyal sa*. The importance of this site for the Indo-Tibetan border region of Western Tibet, as noted on more than one occasion in the course of this work, is a reflection of the sustained status of this valley as it fell under different territorial configurations and political regimes. In this last chapter, I will therefore try to offer a more comprehensive diachronic presentation of the Dangkhar settlement within

[1] SCHUH 2016b: 52.

the wider historical context of the Western Himalayas. Highlighting patterns of continuity and change, the periodisation scheme adopted here charts political, religious, and economic developments. In this overview, the 17th century constitutes a pivotal moment in the history of the Western Himalayas. The identification of early periods, as we shall see, is mostly drawn from the politico-religious forces competing in Western Tibet, while later periods tend to reflect transregional and cross-cultural processes dominated by long-distance trade.

4.1 The conquest of Zhang zhung and the Tibetanisation of Western Tibet (mid-7th–10th centuries)

In the 7th century CE, the Kingdom of Zhang zhung occupied the western part of the Tibetan plateau. The origin and evolution of this political entity is unclear.[2] With Guge as its centre, the territory encompassed the regions of Purang, Upper Kinnaur, Spiti, and beyond; the exact extent of Zhang zhung is not known with certainty.[3] The polity appears to have acted as an intermediary for long-distance trade and knowledge between the Indian sub-continent, Inner Asia, and China.[4] Its culture has generally been associated with pre-Buddhist beliefs, and notably for its sponsorship of Bön. It also possessed its own language, which is believed to be one of the earliest languages of the Tibeto-Burman group.[5] Only a few reliable pieces of evidence provide information about the Spiti Valley at this time. The persistence of non-Tibetan place names and local patronymics in Spiti, however, attests to its ancient relations to this culture, as does the local survival of the Zhang zhung word for water, *ti*, as in the name Spiti itself.[6]

With the growing hegemonic ambitions of Tibetan rulers, Zhang zhung became a political rival of the expanding Tibetan Empire, and in the mid-7th century, it was annexed through a combination of repeated military intervention and matrimonial alliance. The impact of Srong btsan sgam po's conquest of Western Tibet was hugely significant for the subsequent cultural history of the

[2] ALDENDERFER 2007.
[3] DENWOOD 2008; DENWOOD 2009.
[4] STEIN 1972: 35, 59, 236; LU et al. 2016.
[5] MARTIN 2010: 1–25; DRIEM 2001a.
[6] See section 2.1 in Chapter 2.

region, since by bringing the area under Tibetan administration it facilitated the dissemination of the Tibetan language. Western Tibet was from this time divided into Upper Zhang zhung and Lower Zhang zhung, with Spiti, Upper Kinnaur, and Guge belonging to the latter. These two administrative halves were each known as five 'thousand-districts' (*stong sde*), which contained smaller units used to levy taxes and raise militia. This new territorial and administrative arrangement could well have been responsible for laying the foundations of the socio-economic organisation of the Spiti Valley as documented in later periods.[7] In any event, epigraphic evidence found in Ruthok and Spiti shows that the district of Spiti (*spyI ti sde*), the district of Lower Spiti-Upper Kinnaur (*lcog la'i sde*), and the district of Guge (*gu ge'i sde*) were still known as such in the 10th-11th centuries. Likewise, post-imperial literary sources reflecting upon this period speak of 'the sub-thousand-district of Spiti' (*spyi ti stong bu chung*) around the mid-13th century.[8]

That Spiti was under Tibetan rule says little or nothing about the settlements of the valley at that time. We know that the Tibetans controlled their empire through local military governments (*khrom*) and garrisons (*tshugs*) established in frontier regions.[9] In light of this, one can surmise that the Dangkhar cliffs would have been an attractive strategic location on which to set up a hill outpost (*ri zug*) in order to monitor movements along the border valley. Mirroring its geological setting as much as its military purpose, the settlement could perhaps derive its name from the Tibetan words for cliffs (*brag*) and stronghold (*mkhar*), even if other interpretations remain possible. As discussed earlier, there is strong evidence to suggest that social norms and customs going back to this period were maintained up to the 19th century.[10] These included the notion of the two hundred and fifty original or 'old households' (*khang chen rnying pa*) of Spiti which are said to correspond to an equal number of soldiers, presumably in memory of a conscription system of a bygone era. As such, the male descendants from these households enjoyed a seat at the village council (*'dun ma*)–an archaic term also used to designate the political council of a Tibetan emperor–and occasionally attended an assembly of soldiers (*dmag 'dzom*) to deal with pressing issues. The people of Spiti today recall that,

[7] See section 2.2.1 in Chapter 2.
[8] See section 2.3 in Chapter 2.
[9] TAKEUCHI 2003.
[10] See section 2.3 in Chapter 2 and 3.2.3 in Chapter 3.

in the case of imminent threats, warning signals were sent through a system of fire-raising stations (*so sa*)–one of which was located in Dangkhar. This appears strongly reminiscent of networks of smoke-fire beacons (*zhugs long dmar po*), as reported in the *Old Tibetan Annals.*[11]

Last but certainly not least, the annexation of Zhang zhung by the Tibetan Empire and the ensuing gradual Tibetanisation of Western Tibet was to facilitate the diffusion of Buddhism to these western margins of the Tibetan plateau. This phenomenon can be best observed in Spiti in the late 10th century, when the region came to occupy a central role in the wider story of the development of Tibetan Buddhism at large.

4.2 The Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet and the later spread of the Buddhist doctrine (10th–mid-12th centuries)

The dissolution of the Tibetan Empire in around 842 was followed by a protracted period of social unrest and political fragmentation (*sil bu'i dus*) fuelled by the partisans of the last Tsenpo's rival heirs. Though these events did not lead to the complete extinction of Buddhist communities,[12] some of which did survive in Central Tibet, the most important regions for the continuity of the dharma during this troubled period were the far-eastern and far-western borderlands of the former Tibetan Empire. By the turn of the first millennium, a major religious impetus for the renewal of Buddhism came from West Tibet where descendants of the imperial bloodline had migrated. In 910, sKyid lde nyi ma mgon established a kingdom through matrimonial alliances with the local nobility. Assuming the title of 'sovereign' (*mnga' bdag*), he settled in Purang and adding the two regions of Guge and Ladakh, created the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet (*stod mnga' ris skor gsum*). After his death, this kingdom was divided between his sons by mutual agreement. These heirs, all of whom carried the name mGon, are collectively known as the 'Three Protectors (*mgon*) of Upper Tibet' (*stod gyi mgon gsum*), namely: dPal gyi lde rig pa mgon who inherited Ladakh; bKra shis mgon who received Gure and Purang; and lDe gtsug mgon who took Upper Kinnaur, Spiti, Lahaul, and Zanskar.

[11] See section 3.2.3 in Chapter 3.
[12] DENWOOD 2010.

By the third quarter of the 10th century, when the elder son of bKra shis mgon ascended the throne, lDe gtsug mgon's territories including Spiti had been reunited once again with the main areas of Guge and Purang. For its part, the Kingdom of Ladakh pursued a course of its own until it started to forcibly reclaim parts of West Tibet in the late 16th-17th centuries as we shall see.

With the expansion of the Kingdom of Guge-Purang the rulers of the new polity spearheaded an unprecedented cultural movement leading to the later spread of Buddhism (*bstan pa phyi dar*) in Tibet. Combining political legitimacy and religious piety, the cult of divine kingship (*lha sras*) was perfected by these monarchs who were known as divine lords (*lha btsun*) and/or monks of royal descent (*lha bla ma*). Thus "for the first time in Tibetan history", remarked Snellgrove, "an aristocratic family appears in the dual role of head of state and religious head, sharing these functions between them".[13] It was the monk-king Ye shes 'od (947–1019/24)–born Srong nge–who effectively set the stage for a revitalization of Buddhism. Two hundred bright young men from the regions of Guge, Purang, Ladakh, and Spiti were chosen to become the torchbearers of this religious revival.[14]Assisted by the charismatic translator Rin chen bzang po (958–1055), the devout monarchs of West Tibet together oversaw the construction of temples and the mass translation of Buddhist texts from India.[15] The site of Tholing in Guge became the new capital and religious centre of the kingdom. Likewise, royal patronage extended to Spiti where an imposing temple was established at Tabo in 996. Forty-six years after its foundation, Ye shes 'od's grandnephew, the monk-king Byang chub 'od (984–1078) ordered the complete renovation of the assembly hall of that edifice in 1042. The choice of a new

[13] SNELLGROVE 1987: 472.

[14] According to the biography of Ye shes 'od by Gu ge Paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan: *mnga' ris skor gsum nas gzhon nu shes rab che shing blo rno ba/ yid gzhungs shing snying stobs che ba/ nyis brgya tham pa btus nas thar par btang/ de'ang gu ge nas brgya tham pa/ pu hrangs nas bzhi bcu/ sil chog nas sum cu/ mang yul nas sum bcu rnams bsdus pa yin no/*; "Two hundred young men from the Kingdom of the Three Dominions, who were intelligent, sharp, honest, and of great fortitude, were chosen to be sent [on the path] to liberation. Namely, one hundred [young men] from Guge, forty from Purang, thirty from Spiti (*sil chog*), and thirty from Ladakh were called together"; see GRAGS PA RGYAL MTSHAN 2013: 37. Similarly in the *Royal Succession of Ngari*: *mnga' ris bskor gsum nas gzhon nu shes rab che shing blo gsal ba yid 'grus shing snying stobs che ba/ chos la dad cing/ dkon mchog la bsri zhu che ba/ nyi brgya bsdus nas thar par btang ngo/ de yang gu ge nas brgya/ spu hrang bzhi bcu/ mar yul sum cu/ pi ti nas sum cu dang/ nyi brgya bsdus pa yin no/*; "Two hundred young men from the Kingdom of the Three Dominions, who were intelligent, with a clear mind, diligent, with great fortitude, and who had faith in Buddhism and great reverence for the [three] rare and supreme [jewels], were chosen to be sent [on the path] to liberation. Namely, one hundred [young men] from Guge, forty from Purang, thirty from Ladakh, and thirty from Spiti (*pi ti*) were called together"; see VITALI 1996: 58, 113.

[15] KLIMBURG-SALTER 2008; VAN DER KUIJP 2015; VAN DER KUIJP 2018.

visual programme for this hall reflected the doctrinal and ideological disputes that the reigning dynasty was struggling to resolve.[16] Throughout most of this period, the monarchs of West Tibet implemented a series of corrective actions to curtail what they considered corrupted practices, heretical views, and apocryphal literature.[17] Religious orthodoxy and orthopraxis, on the other hand, were sought from a new translation tradition (*gsar ma*) engineered by the close collaboration of Indian scholars and Tibetan translators who travelled between North India and West Tibet. Kashmir in particular, served as a conduit for the transmission of both tantric literature and Buddhist art. Benefiting from the avid patronage of the Western Tibetan monarchy, Kashmiri scholars and artists were summoned to work at the newly-established temples of the kingdom. Geographically speaking, it is often forgotten that travelling back and forth between Kashmir and Guge was made possible by following the Chenab and Spiti rivers, instead of taking the northern route through Ladakh. By the time of its renovation in 1042, the monastic complex of Tabo had probably become an important translation centre as well as a staging post for merchants travelling along the Western Himalayan trade routes. The same year, the great Bengali scholar Atiśa Dīpaṃkara (982–1054) arrived in West Tibet upon royal request.

During the 11th-12th centuries, Spiti thus occupied a privileged position within the Guge-Purang Kingdom. A second monastic complex, smaller in size and importance, was then founded at Lhalung at a date that remains to be determined.[18] The founding inscription of the Golden Temple (*gser khang*) there suggests that it may have been another royal commission, while also confirming that the region straddling the areas of Spiti and Guge was indeed the cultural hub of the kingdom. The choice of the site was, however, most singular given that Lhalung was located in a side valley off the main communication routes. Somewhat overlooked, the historical significance of this edifice can be gauged by the fact that a branch of the royal family of West Tibet appears to have settled in Dangkhar, which was situated just about an hour's walk from Lhalung. It is therefore likely that the two sites were connected. As discussed in the previous chapter, this assertion is supported in part by a passage

[16] On the visual polemic between the local depiction of the old tradition and the new Buddhist orthodoxy endorsed by the Western Tibetan ruling elite, as expressed in the renovation inscription of that temple, see KLIMBURG-SALTER 2015a.
[17] KARMAY 1980; KARMAY 1998.
[18] SHUTTLEWORTH 1929; LUCZANITS 2004: 89–106.

of the *Royal Succession of Ngari* which alludes to events following the death of King rTse lde in the last quarter of the 11th century. In the midst of a succession struggle, the king's son and heir named Seng grags was forced to seek refuge in Spiti where he established his residency on top of the Dangkhar cliffs. The passage goes on to state that the royal bloodline continued for at least three generations afterwards, thereby offering a plausible explanation for the courtly patronage and location of the Lhalung temple as a religious edifice related to the royal seat of Dangkhar.[19]

Finally, it should be mentioned that rTse lde's uncle, the translator and royal monk Zhi ba 'od (b.1016), with whom the King of Guge convened the great religious council (*chos 'khor*) of Tholing in 1076, passed away at an advanced age in 1111. One may thus be permitted to wonder if the cleric maintained contact with his great nephew (i.e. Seng grags), or perhaps even sojourned in Dangkhar as

[19] I would venture to suggest that this temple was perhaps commissioned at the time of Seng grags' great grandson rDo rje gdan. The name of this monarch can be posited, yet only in part, preceding a topical particle *ni* at the beginning of the founding inscription (i.e. rDo rje). Given that his name is said to end in 'lde', which is fully congruent with Western Tibetan royal patronymics, it gives rDo rje lde rather than rDo rje gdan. There are thus some interpretative cautions that need to be borne in mind. Based on the phonetic proximity between the two names, it is not farfetched to imagine a mistake on the part of the *Royal Succession of Ngari*, where the name rDor rje gdan was first reported, and which contains other discrepancies among the names of members of the dynasty (e.g. queen lHan rgyas / lHa rgyan; see below note 23). A native of the region, rDo rje gdan/lde is described in the founding inscription as the 'common ruler' or 'lord' (*spyi rje*) of the people. The following two lines recall his contributions to the realm. The inscription then praises other members of the royal family and entourage, namely his mother (*yum*), the royal spouse (*bstun mo*), a maternal uncle and councillor (*zhang drung*), and a minister (*blon po*). These four people are mentioned again, in the same sequence, further down. They seem to have been responsible for establishing the gSer khang as "a lamp that dispels the darkness of the world" (*'dzam gling mun sel sgron ma bzhengs*)—a reference to and obvious parallel with the royal temple of Tabo which is described as 'a lamp for the kingdom' (*rgyal 'khams 'di'i sgron mar 'dir bzhengs*) in the renovation inscription dated 1042. Considering that rDo rje gdan/lde's great grandfather moved to Spiti in the 1090s, this would place the construction of the Golden Temple in the second half of the 12th century; an attribution already supported by a stylistic and iconographic analysis of its art. The following transliteration is a normalized edition based on Francke and Tropper's editions of the same.: *[...] rdo rje dang ni [3] lde mtha'i mtshan // mun par nyi shar ji bzhin du // [m]go nag spyi [4] rje lcog lar 'khrungs // gug lcog mnga' ris srog shing mdzad // [5] bstan pa rin chen tshul bzhin bskyangs // yum ni yid dam lha [...] // [6] btsun mo'i bkod snyoms phan tshun b[r]tse // zhang drung blo po rin chen dbyig // [7] gangs 'khor rnam la bu bzhin brtse' /*; "As for rDo rje whose name ends in lde, in the way the sun rises in the darkness, he was born lord of the black-headed [people] in lCog la. He made Gug lCog the centre of Ngari. He supported the precious doctrine most appropriately. As for the mother, (…) a tutelary deity (…).The lady sovereign's dispositions were affectionate towards all. The uncle councillor [and] the minister Rin chen dbyigs care for the subjects like [their own] children". For a different translation of this passage, see TROPPER 2008. I wish to thank Christian Luczanits for sharing his photographs of the inscription and Nils Martin for his remarks. For online images of the founding inscription: https://www.univie.ac.at/Tibetan-inscriptions/.

popular views have it.[20] Particularly noteworthy in this context is a remarkable metal sculpture housed at Dangkhar which bears Zhi ba 'od's signature (fig. 4.27).[21]

4.3 The fragmentation of the Guge-Purang Kingdom and the establishment of hermit communities (mid-12th–15th centuries)

The deaths of King rTse lde and his uncle Zhi ba 'od signal to some degree the end of a period of centralised power and lavish royal patronage in the region. Tibetan sources indicate at this point a fragmentation of the Guge-Purang Kingdom and a rise once again of regional polities. This political weakening was also accompanied by the return to the stage of Western Tibetan geopolitics of Qarakhanid forces (*gar log*), a Turkic dynasty from Transoxiana which launched several offensives against Guge in the 11th-12th centuries.[22]

In the first quarter of the 12th century, the three sons of King bSod nams rtse, whose father had ousted his own paternal uncles dBang 'od and Seng grags in a succession struggle, divided the kingdom between them. The eldest son bKra shis rtse reigned in Guge; Jo bo rgyal po founded the principality of Khunu (*khu nu*) in Upper Kinnaur; and 'Od 'bar rtse controlled Rongchung in between. The territory of Guge was then to be further divided into Northern Guge (*byang ngos*) and Southern Upper Guge (*lho stod)*. Meanwhile, the Khasa-Malla dynasty (*ya rtse*) ruled over western parts of Nepal, including Purang. The position of Spiti within this new political and territorial configuration is unclear. It seems reasonable to assume that the valley continued to be controlled by the dynastic branch established in Dangkhar by Seng grags. According to the *Royal Succession of Ngari*, he was succeeded by rTse 'od, Jo rtse, and rDo rje gdan/lde, bringing this lineage well into the second half of the 12th century.[23] The chronicle also reports that about the same time bKra shis rtse's son, rTse 'bar

[20] See document C in Appendix 8.
[21] See footnote 10 in Chapter 3.
[22] VITALI 1996; VITALI 2003: 53–98.
[23] MARTIN forthcoming.

btsan, was married to the Queen of Spiti (*jo mo*) lHan rgyas (aka lHa rgyan).[24] This source, however, remain silent about whether Spiti became formally integrated into the polity of Northern Guge as a result of this matrimonial alliance. It is not until the late 15th century that members of the nobility again appear in the epigraphic records of Spiti. In the meantime, as far as extraneous sources are concerned, the valley seems to have fallen into oblivion. Meagre archaeological evidence and occasional mentions in religious histories thus provide our only glimpses into the rest of this period.

In the 13th-14th centuries, the religious life in Western Tibet was largely dominated by the presence of Drigungpa communities. Established in Central Tibet by 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217) in 1179, this so-called 'minor' lineage of the larger Kagyupa tradition showed great geographical mobility in spreading to the borderlands of the Tibetan plateau. Encouraged to seek solitude in remote places, many Drigungpa monks and adepts settled in the Mount Kailash area in successive waves datable to 1191, 1208, and 1215.[25] With the economic support of regional powers, the development of hermit and monastic communities in Western Tibet was also replicated by other Kagyupa sub-schools including the Tselpa and Drukpa. The most important source of patronage, however, appears to have come from Ladakh where the Drigungpa order gathered momentum at sites like Wanla and Alchi, to name just a couple.

With the advent of Mongol power in Central Asia, Western Tibet became the theatre of tension and rivalry in the second half of the 13th century. Having expressed an early interest in Tibetan

[24] *de la sras bzhi ste/ pe ti la rgyal mo lhan rgyas la spyid lde bstan/ rtse ldan ngal/ cho chen blo ldan rgyal mo la/ dpal 'od btsan/ 'dul srid 'dul btsan/ slad nas yab rtse 'bar rtse grong sa nas sku 'das chen mo tho gling du mdzad pas/ chang btsos pa'i sbang ma ma skam la byang ngos kyi btsun pa 'ga' dang/ lho phyogs kyi mi 'dras [k]rugs nas rgyal mo lha rgyan dang/ blo ldan rgyal mo sde/ jo mo gnyis ma 'chams pa'i rkyen byas nas 'khrugs te mnga' ris bzang dpe gcig la phyogs ris ngan pa gnyis su gyes nas byang ngos la mnga' spyi lde btsan gyis mdzad/ mol mi mkhyen yang zer/ lho stod la dpal mgon btsan gyis mnga' mdzad/*; " The latter (i.e. rTse 'bar btsan) had four sons: in Spiti, Queen lHan rgyas had sPyi lde btsan and rTse ldan ngal; Blo ldan rgyal mo from [Che] chen had dPal 'od btsan and 'Dul srid 'dul btsan. Later, when [their] father rTse 'bar btsan died, a great funeral ceremony was conducted at Tholing. Ale dregs had not yet dried up when several monks from the north and different people from the south came to quarrel. As the two ladies did not get along, Queen lHa rgyan and Blo ldan rgyal mo got into a dispute and Ngari, which had been an example of excellence, was divided into wicked factions. sPyi lde btsan ruled over Northern [Guge]; he was also called the Inarticulate One. dPal 'od dgon btsan (i.e. dPal 'od btsan) controlled Southern Upper [Guge]". For a different translation of this passage, see VITALI 1996: 127–128.

[25] On the period of Drigungpa activity in the Western Himalayas, see VITALI 2003: 53–98; KERIN 2015a: chap.3.

Buddhism, the Mongol princes of different khanates and their Tibetan clerics engaged in territorial and sectarian infighting to control the plateau. Qubilai Khan (1215–1294), the founder of the mighty Yuan Dynasty of China, eventually brought Tibet under his administration with the help of influential members of the Sakyapa order in the 1270s. His authority was, however, disputed by the Chagatai Khanate (*stod hor*) centred further west who were strong supporters of the Drigungpa. Violence flared in 1285 when a Drigungpa militia completely destroyed a Sakyapa monastery and killed its abbot leading to a period of civil war. Retaliation came five years later when Qubilai gave orders for the main monastic seat of the Drigungpa to be razed, and sent an army to Western Tibet, which exterminated the Chagatai troops and their Drigungpa allies in a bloodbath.[26] Despite this apparent success, the Yuan-Sakyapa rule in West Tibet, which was often left in the hands of local rulers and feudatories, began to wane after the mid-14th century. The importance of this politico-religious alliance for the region is thus hard to evaluate, aside, perhaps, the establishment of a postal relay system (*'jam*) between Central Tibet and Ngari.[27]

How did these wider geopolitical events affect the remote river valley of Spiti? The period of institutional expansion of the Drigungpa-Drukpa-Kagyu traditions is fairly inconspicuous in Spiti. Firstly, it can be observed that the Spiti Valley was still an important axis of communication between West Tibet and the far north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent. This is evidenced by the fact that the Drigungpa tradition promoted pilgrimages to the sacred tantric sites (i.e. *pīṭha*; *gnas*) of Kashmir and Pakistan, as expounded in the *Yoginītantra* literature.[28] Embraced by other Kagyupa branches, these journeys brought pilgrims and religious travellers through the Western Himalayan regions of Ngari, Spiti, Lahaul, and Chamba. For example, around 1216, the Drukpa yogin rGod tshang pa (1189–1258) was crossing the Spiti Valley on his way to Jālandhara when he came across local yogins and hermits.[29] The presence of such anchoretic groups in Spiti has also been recently

[26] VITALI 2005.
[27] EVERDING 2002.
[28] HUBER 2008: chapt.4.
[29] See section 3.5.2 in Chapter 3. He was followed by his disciple O rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1229–1309) in 1254. The same route was also taken by another Drukpa monk, sTag tshang ras pa (1574–1651), in the 17th century. If none of the great tantric sites was situated in Spiti, the two major pilgrimage destinations of Gandhala (*dril bu ri*) and Triloknāth (*ras 'phags*) were located in the nearby valley of Lahaul.

established *in situ*. Murals photographed in 2017 by Jörg Heimbel inside a hermit's cave above Kaza convincingly show portraits of Drigungpa masters. Likewise, remnants of religious images datable to the 13th-14th centuries are also found at Dangkhar. As discussed earlier, the representation of protective deities depicted inside the main entrance gate of the settlement suggests that Dangkhar had developed ties with the Kagyupa tradition or one of its sub-schools.[30]

The Yuan-Sakyapa supremacy, on the other hand, does not appear to have exerted much influence in Spiti, if any at all. It is perhaps significant to note in this regard that the monasteries of that order located in West Tibet were, in fact, mostly established later by the disciples of Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po (1382–1456), sometimes by the means of conversion of former Drigungpa sites. These include the temple of Kojarnath (*kha char*, *'khor chags*) in Purang;[31] the monastery of Rab rgyas gling in Guge founded by Chos dpal bzang po;[32] and perhaps even the great monastic centre of Tholing.[33] A native of Ngari, Chos dpal bzang po is also said to have been active in Spiti where he helped establish the Ngor monastery of Tengyu in the mid-15th century.[34] On the secular side, the reunification of the Guge Kingdom in the late 14th century could perhaps account for the political and economic backing provided to these monasteries.[35] In any event, the success of the Ngor-Sakyapa school in the region was relatively short-lived. Economic support and royal patronage was soon to change again with the arrival of Gelukpa masters in Ngari.

[30] See sections 3.2.1 and 3.5.2 in Chapter 3.

[31] TSERING GYALPO et al. 2015.

[32] HEIMBEL 2017: 60.

[33] Tibetan sources report the existence of a Sakyapa congregation at Tholing, the branch of which is not specified, when the Gelukpa scholar Ngag dbang grags pa (b.14th century) was appointed abbot of the monastery in the first quarter of the 15th century; see VITALI 2012: 125, n.46, 226, n.165.

[34] HEIMBEL forthcoming.

[35] rNam rgyal lde left the throne to his son Nam mkha' dbang po phun tshog lde (1409–1480) in 1424. The new King of Guge invited Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po to Purang in 1436. It is believed that Nam mkha' dbang po phun tshog lde was ordained by the Ngor-Sakyapa master on that occasion. A scholar (*mkhan po*) from Spiti named Rin bsod (i.e. Rin chen bsod nams) is also reported to have attended Ngor chen's teachings in Purang. An important disciple of the latter was the great paṇḍita Grags pa rgyal mtshan (d.1486) from Guge. The Ngor tradition was, however, more prominently established in the kingdom of Mustang (*glo bo*), which had competed with Guge and Gung thang for the control of Purang in the 14th-15th centuries; see VITALI 1996: 510–511.

4.4 Resurgence of the Guge Kingdom and diffusion of Gelukpa teachings in Western Tibet (15th century–1630)

The resurgence of the Guge Kingdom is traditionally attributed to rNam rgyal lde (1372–1439). However, it was actually his son Nam mkha' dbang po phun tshog lde (1409–1480) who succeeded in reuniting parts of the former Guge-Purang territories and moved the capital to the high ground of Tsaparang. Defining itself in relation to its august predecessors, the new monarchy revitalised the old models of sacral kingship. Senior members of the royalty, usually including the king's brother, took the robe (*lha btsun*) and assumed control over the clergy. Likewise, queens and female donors were held in high regard for their piety and benefactions, as amply illustrated by the artistic representations of the period. Support for Drigungpa and Sakyapa communities did not stop altogether but was, by and large, diverted towards Tsong kha pa's followers. The takeover of the Gelukpa sect in West Tibet was largely due to the great scholar Ngag dbang grags pa (b.14th century), a native of Guge who was asked to sit on the pontifical throne of Tholing upon his return from Central Tibet.[36] Other Gelukpa luminaries such as Shes rab bzang po and dPal ldan shes rab also contributed to the diffusion of the new religious system in their native land of Ladakh.[37] They were later joined by lHa dbang blo gros, a renowned scholar and direct disciple of the first Panchen Lama, who appears to have been particularly active in Ladakh, Guge, and perhaps also in Spiti.[38] According to literary sources, the newly

[36] VITALI 2012: 147–152.

[37] Gu ge mkhan chen Ngag dbang grags pa, sTod mNga' ris Shes rab bzang po, and his nephew dPal ldan shes rab were natives of Guge and Ladakh. Disciples of Tsong kha pa, they underwent extensive religious training in Central Tibet before they were reportedly sent back to Western Tibet. They belonged to a missionary squad of six Gelukpa masters communally known as 'the six banners which propagate the teaching in the borderland' (*btsan pa phyog mthar spel ba'i dar chen drug*). Within this group, Ngag dbang grags pa is sometimes referred to as the 'cardinal banner' (*phyogs kyi dar chen*); see VITALI 1996: 90–91; VITALI 2012: 51, 211.

[38] A disciple of mKhas grub rje (1385–1438), gSang phu ba lHa dbang blo gros' building activity in Western Tibet is relatively well-attested. Many biographical details concerning the life of this important figure however still need to be filled in. His portrait on the walls of the Mandala Temple at Tabo has led Vitali to infer that lHa dbang blo gros founded a temple in Spiti based on an unwarranted association with, and faulty reading of, the following inscription: *ta po rgyan gyi gtsug lag khang gi [b]kod pa*; "This is an architectural depiction of the temple complex which is the ornament of Tabo", which he translates as "He (lHa dbang blo gros) founded the *gtsug.lha.khang* ornament of Ta.po". According to Tibetan literary sources, lHa dbang blo gros is said to have established the monastery of Bar skyog, which, however, is not located in Spiti *sensu stricto* as believed by Vitali; see section 3.5.3 in Chapter 3. The name of this Gelukpa master was also found engraved on votive stones in Spiti, alongside those of Tsong kha pa, mKhas grub rje, and dGe 'dun grub. This prompted Francke to remark that these stones "testify to the enthusiasm with which Tsongkhapa's reformation was welcomed in these tracts"; see FRANCKE 1914: 35–36; VITALI 1996: 524–526; BELLINI 2014.

established monasteries of that tradition could count on the usufruct and workforce of agricultural estates put at their disposal by the court of Guge. Courtly patronage also extended to the capital of the kingdom as well as to the great monastic centre of Tholing. New temples were decorated with sumptuous and lush wall paintings that combined various aesthetic influences from West and Central Tibet in what is often glossed as 'Guge revival style' by art historians.[39] At the height of the relations between the Gelukpa sect and the royal house of Guge, King 'Jig rten dbang phyug dpe kar lde established the Ngari College (*mnga' ris grwa tshang*) of Chos 'khor rgyal Monastery in Central Tibet in 1541. Then, in 1618, the 4th Panchen Lama was received in Guge with great pomp and ceremony by King rNam rgyal grags pa bzang po lde and his uncle the royal monk Blo bzang ye shes 'od. Having won the unconditional support of the royal house of Guge, the prominence of the Gelukpa order in West Tibet from this period drew the region into the orbit of Central Tibet–a rapprochement that would have important political consequences later in the 17th century. Throughout this period, the Kingdom of Guge derived economic benefits from gold mining (*gser kha phan*), the production of wool fabrics, and trans-Himalayan trade. In 1624, the Jesuit Father António de Andrade (1580–1634) established a mission at Tsaparang. Warning signs of political unrest were soon to be noted by this foreign observer.[40] After nearly two centuries of intellectual and artistic efflorescence, spanning the reign of twelve rulers, the Guge dynasty came to an end when the King of Guge bKra shis grags pa lde was deposed by the King of Ladakh in 1630.

The political affiliation of the Spiti Valley during this period is far from clear. Local epigraphic and literary evidence shows that while replicating cultural trends ubiquitous in West Tibet, Spiti may have belonged to the Kingdom of Guge only intermittently. Even after the advent of Tsong kha pa's teachings in the area, the visual representation of members of a royal court on the walls of the Mandala Temple at Tabo, depicted taking part in a religious gathering at the said monastic complex, underlines the possibility that Spiti remained a (semi-) independent polity in the late 15th-16th centuries. The inscriptions that accompany the figures portrayed in this scene, many of which are

[39] On the development of Buddhist art and styles in Western Tibet from the late 10th to the 17th century, see LUCZANITS 2015; KERIN 2015b.

[40] On the events of this period as witnessed by the Jesuit mission of Tsaparang, see WESSELS 1924.

illegible, provide only an incomplete subtext to the dynastic history of the region. Given that the line of descent of King (*rgyal po*) bSod nams lde and his spouse Lady (*jo co*) lHam 'dzes is currently unknown, one can only speculate whether the king depicted in this scene was descended from rTse lde's old royal branch established in Spiti at the end of the 11th century, or whether bSod nams lde had any blood ties with the ruling family of the newly-reunified Kingdom of Guge.[41] Of particular note is the inclusion of a minister (*blon po*) from Dangkhar, whose regal filiation (*dpon btsun*) remains a matter of debate, among the royal entourage, underscoring the importance of the settlement at that time.

Testifying to the speed with which the Gelukpa school was welcomed by the nobility of Spiti, is the relatively little-known figure dBang phyug dpal ldan. According to a historical account left by one of his disciples, this learned master (*slob dpon rab 'byams pa*) was highly regarded by the Gelukpa intelligentsia of West Tibet.[42] The same source states that dBang phyug dpal ldan was born among the descendants of the Lord (*jo bo*) of Spiti in 1544.[43] One is left wondering who these local rulers were, where they were based, and what their relationship was to the royal party depicted at Tabo.

As evidenced by architectural vestiges, the monastic complex of Tabo became a successful Gelukpa centre and the recipient of lavish artistic patronage. Despite the anonymous character of this courtly support, the murals and painted ceilings of the Golden Temple (*gser lha khang*), for example, display striking similarities with those of the Red Temple (*mchod khang dmar po*) founded in Tsaparang by the Queen of Guge Don grub ma in the third quarter of the 15th century. Also in Tabo,

[41] It is highly unlikely that this figure should be identified as the King of Gung thang, Khri rgyal bSod nams lde (1370–1404), who married a princess from Guge named Chos skyong rgyal mo. Other rulers bearing the slightly longer name bSod nams dpal lde were reported by Francke in minor chronicle pertaining to the principalities of bZang la in Zanskar and Ti nang in Lahaul; one of them is believed to have reigned in bZang la some time around 1560 and 1590; see FRANCKE 1926: 163–166, 211–215.

[42] dBang phyug dpal ldan studied with many great masters including the royal monk (*lha bla ma*) Shes rab 'od and the abbot of Tholing and Tashi Lhunpo scholar Śāntipa blo gros rgyal mtshan (1487–1567). He assumed the abbotship of several monasteries in Guge, such as Bye gar Monastery, as reported by his disciple dPal 'byor bzang po (b.1552) in his *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i yid 'phrog* composed in 1606; see VITALI 2012.

[43] *de'i rjes su slob dpon rab 'byams pa dan sar phebs/ rje 'di shing pho 'brug la pi ti jo bo'i gdung rgyud du sku 'khrungs/ gzhon nu nas rab tu byung/*; "Thereafter, the learned master [dBang phyugs dpal ldan] joined the monastic centre [as abbot]. This master was born amongst the descendants of the Lord of Spiti in the Male Wood-Dragon Year [1544]. He took monastic vows in his youth"; see DPAL 'BYOR BZANG PO 2015: 139.

the main temple was endowed with a new protectors' chapel (*mgon khang*) and a large 'Brom ston building adjacent to it in full Gelukpa livery.

Living up to its reputation as a literary centre, the monastic complex remained committed to the production of Buddhist works, and to the transmission of Tsong kha pa's teaching, and at some point in the course of the following centuries was renamed Theg chen chos gling. A donor preface from Tabo datable to the 16th century illustrates several features of that era. It was composed to commemorate the copying work of scriptures at the request of patrons from the local nobility. In accordance with tradition, the preface opens with Buddhist verses and words of praise to Tsong kha pa, his two spiritual heirs, and other disciples. Then remarkably, the preface provides a window onto the political context of our valley. For the first time, the Dangkhar settlement is formally referred to as the capital (*rgyal sa*) of Spiti over which reigned a man named No rNam rgyal don grub. The previous section makes it clear, however, that the Spiti Valley was then nothing more than a dependent territory and feudatory land:

> In Ladakh where the ten virtues and the two systems of governance converge, he conquers all hostile opposition and rules over his subjects from the palace, like lHa dbang rnam rgyal did. Praise be to the supreme conqueror, similar to the one who made a hundred water offerings, the protector of the earth Tshe dbang rnam rgyal. Upholding the intention of the latter, praise be to the supreme minister Ga dga' 'bum pa lde, who rules over the subjects with affection. In his great and vast kingdom (*chab srid*) lies the excellent dominion of West Tibet (*mnga' ris*) called Spiti (*spyi ti*). On the promontory of the capital Dangkhar (*brang khar*), praise be to No rNam rgyal don grub.[44]

Judging from the above, Spiti was placed under the control of Ladakh in the second half of the 16th century.[45] We know little about the reign of King Tshe dbang rnam rgyal (*c.*1575–1595) whose dates

[44] See document DP1 in Appendix 5.

[45] According to an inscription found at Alchi in Ladakh, King bKra shis rnam rgyal (r.*c.*1555–1575), who had usurped the throne by blinding his brother lHa dbang rnam rgyal, conquered several Western Tibetan regions, among them Spiti, during his reign. The spelling used for these places is not fully consistent with other epigraphic and literary documents dating from around that time. The *Royal Succession of Ladakh* is however in agreement with the fact that bKra shis rnam rgyal annexed the territories situated between Purig and Gro shod in gTsang, and by implication Guge and Spiti, although the last two areas are not mentioned explicitly in the chronicle. It is not clear at this stage why the king's nephew, Tshe dbang rnam rgyal, would have had to reconquer Guge upon his accession to power. Unless another document written or found in Spiti itself appears, similar to the one quoted above (i.e. a donor record), I would be inclined to relativise the importance of the Alchi inscription for the history of Spiti. *(...) mi dbang gong ma bKra shis rnam rgyal la [/ /]lus ngag yid gsum gus pas phyag 'tshal lo/ /bod yul bsod nams stobs las legs 'khrungs pa'i/ /spyan ras gzigs dbang s[p]rul pa'i rgyal po khyed/ /kun gyi gtsug tu khur bas skyid pa'i nyi ma shar/ /bkra shis rnam rgyal rtag tu rgyal 'gyur cig/ /e ma*

were tentatively put forward by Petech.[46] According to the *Royal Successions of Ladakh*, Tshe dbang rnam rgyal embarked on a territorial expansion of his kingdom.[47] He is said to have conquered many lands in the Western Himalayas including Mustang, Purang, Guge, and the Kulu Valley. Having subjected the rulers (*jo bo*) of these regions to his power, Tshe dbang rnam rgyal despatched officials (*sku tshab*) to their fortified political seats (*mkhar*) in order to administer his vassals. Although not listed in the chronicle, it is clear that the Spiti Valley fell, alongside its most immediate neighbours (i.e. Guge, Ruthok, and Kulu), under the authority of Ladakh, as corroborated by this donor preface. As a result, a junior (*no no*) emissary named rNam rgyal don grub was stationed at the Dangkhar fort on behalf of the Ladakhi monarch, setting a political and legal precedent for the centuries to come. The annexation of West Tibet by Tshe dbang rnam rgyal had no lasting effects however, since as the tradition recalls, "all vassal rulers rose up from all sides when that king died".[48]

By the turn of the 17th century, Guge must therefore have regained its independence and was no longer subject to the payment of tribute to the Kingdom of Ladakh. The following three decades

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ho/ /mon kha hor la sogs ba dgra rnam [b]tul/ /ru 'dog sbi ti man cad/ /sur u hem 'pab [g]yen cad/ /nang 'gong nub ra bzang skar tshun cad [m]nga[']ris [m]nga['] ['] og/ /; "We respectfully prostrate to the superior lord of mankind bKra shis rnam rgyal with body, speech, and mind. Well-born in Tibet by the strength of [your] merits, you are the regal manifestation of Lord Avalokiteśvara. Carried [in triumph] by all, you rise like an auspicious day. May bKra shis rnam rgyal be ever victorious! E ma ho! You defeated all the enemies from Mon, Kha, Hor and so forth. [From] Ruthog (*ru 'dog*) [and] Spiti (*sbi ti*) downwards, [to] Suru (*sur ru*) [and] Dras (*hem 'pab*) upwards, with Nang 'gong, Nubra (*nub ra*), and Zanskar (*bzang skar*) in-between, [the region of] Ngari is under [your] dominion" (translation mine); see inscription No.10 from the gSum brtsegs temple at Alchi in SNELLGROVE & SKORUPSKI 1980: 118–154.

[46] PETECH 1977: 31–33.

[47] *de nas sprul pa'i rgyal po tshe dbang rnam rgyal de rgyal srid la mnga' gsol nas/ sku na gzhon dus dmag mdzad pas/ shar ngam ring man chad/ blo bo dang/ pu hrangs/ gu ge la sogs pa mnga' 'od tu bsdus/ lho phyogs ''dzum lang/ nyung ti gnyis/ nub phyogs she dkar dang/ kha dkar tshun chod mnga' 'od tu bsdus/ byang hor la dmag rgyab gsung ba la/ nub ra sa rnams kyis zhu ba phul nas/ ma mdzad/ gzhan de rnams kyi jo kun dang/ ngan med pa'i bka' byas gte pa la khyongs/ mkhar rnams la sku tshab bzhag nas/ mar yul thams cad dar zhing rgyas pa yin no/ gu ge nas khral dang dpyad 'bul ba la/ lo re la gser zho gsum brgya/ dngul dang/ tsher mo brgya dang/ chibs gcig/*; "Thereafter, the divine King Tshe dbang rnam rgyal ascended the throne of the kingdom and waged war while he was in his youth. In the East, he brought [the district of] Ngam ring along with Mustang, Purang, Guge and so on under his control. In the South, he annexed 'Dzum lang and Kulu. In the West, he conquered She dkar and Kha dkar. He expressed [the intention] to wage war against the Mongols in the north (i.e. Eastern Chagatai Khanate), but as the people of Nubra petitioned him, he desisted. Thanks to words devoid of malice, all the rulers (*jo*) of the other [lands] were brought to swear allegiance. Emissaries were stationed in their forts and the whole [Ladakh-]Maryul flourished. Taxes and tributes were received from Guge [amounting to] three hundred golden coins, silver, one hundred young sheep, and a horse per year"; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 48–49.

[48] *rgyal po de sku bde bar gshegs so/ de dang rgyal phran rnams phyogs phyogs nas langs/*; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 49.

were marked by two important events for Spiti: the border valley was formally placed under the jurisdiction of the royal house of Guge, which supported the establishment of new religious foundations, thus leading to a second spread of Gelukpa monasteries in Spiti. Until then, the religious landscape of the valley consisted of the monastic centre of Tabo, the temple complex of Lhalung, the Sakya monastery of Tengyu, and perhaps some lingering Drigungpa hermitages. A similar increase of Gelukpa institutions was also at work in Guge and can be credited to the reign of King rNam rgyal grags pa bzang po lde who, together with his uncle the royal monk Blo bzang ye shes 'od, invited the 4th Panchen Lama to Ngari. Around 1617, the Gelukpa monastery of Lagope was thus formally established in Dangkhar on earlier infrastructures by a native cleric of Spiti named Sangs rgyas 'od zer. According to the archives of Lagope, the royal house of Guge and the Panchen Lama contributed directly to setting up the economic and social conditions necessary for the sustainability of this monastery through the grants of agricultural estates as discussed earlier. Shortly before its establishment, the monastery of Nor bu dge 'phel had been founded at Kyi by Shes rab blo gros. By 1630 therefore, the Spiti Valley was largely under the sway of the Gelukpa sect, their royal patrons, and the local nobility. Finally, the archaeological and epigraphic record from Nadang, a hamlet located a few kilometres north from Tabo, confirms the existence of yet another Gelukpa temple during the reign of the last King of Guge, Khri bKra shis grags pa lde (r.*c.*1606–1630), whose authority over Spiti was exercised by an official (*dpon po*) stationed in Dangkhar named Yid rgyal.[49]

4.5 Spiti and the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh I

4.5.1 King Seng ge rnam rgyal and the annexation of Ngari (1630–1647)

[49] See SI4 in Appendix 5. In conformity with other donor records, the epigraph from Nadang praises the role played by local benefactors (*yon gyi bdag po/mo*) in supporting the 'community of the temple' (*lha khang gi tshogs*). As is customary with this type of public document, it situates the place of enunciation (i.e. the hamlet of Nadang) within the larger political context of the region, hence providing references to the Guge dynasty and the Dangkhar settlement. The wall paintings of this single storey temple, although very damaged, still reflect the iconographic choices of the Gelukpa tradition and can be dated to the 17th century (fig. 4.73 and 4.74). In 1909, Francke noted that "On the other bank of the Spiti river, we saw the large monastery of Nathang with many terraced fields round about it, some under cultivation, but most of them bare. The monastery is built in three stories, the one above always a little narrower than the one below it, like a pyramid of three steps, thus reminding me of Alchi (and also of the mTho-lding) monastery"; see FRANCKE 1914: 43.

Inspired by his uncle's military achievements, and following rising tensions with the royal family of Guge, the King of Ladakh Seng ge rnam rgyal (*c.*1590–1642) embarked on a vast operation to (re-) conquer West Tibet.[50] In 1630, his troops laid siege to Tsaparang, which capitulated after the king's brother and monk (*lha btsun*) convinced bKra shis grags pa lde to surrender. The deposed ruler of Guge, his son, and his royal cleric were forcibly exiled to Leh where they spent the rest of their lives. After several military campaigns, it is said that the regions of Mustang, Purang, Guge, Ruthok, Spiti, Zanskar, and Purig were all annexed by Ladakh thereby encompassing most of Western Tibet.[51] Other developments of Seng ge rnam rgyal's reign included the construction of the Glorious Palace of the great capital of Leh (*ble chen dpal mkhar rtse*)–a nine-storey building and a visual expression of Ladakhi power–and the rapprochement between the rNam rgyal dynasty and the Drukpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, most notably through the king's spiritual advisor, sTag tshang ras pa (1574–1651).

[50] Several reasons have been given to explain the conflict between the two kingdoms and Seng ge rnam rgyal's territorial expansion; see PETECH 1977: 38–56; PETECH 1997a. A short passage in the *Royal Succession of Ladakh*, seemingly overlooked by Petech, is informative in this regard by suggesting that the King of Ladakh felt justified in his military ambition by virtue of his uncle's earlier conquests: *de nas seng ge rnam rgyal gyi dgongs pa la/ yab chen tshe dbang rnam rgyal gyi shar byang ngam ring tshun la mnga' mdzad kyang/ sku sthe thung bas/ yab 'jam dbyangs rnam rgyal gyi dus su rgyal phran thams cad langs 'dug/ slar yang/ byang ngam ring thug dmag la chas pas/ sngar gyi gtsod mtshams na dbus gtsang po tshun mnga's zhabs su bsdus*/; "Thereafter, Seng ge rnam rgyal thought: '[my] ancestor Tshe dbang rnam rgyal ruled as far as Ngam ring in the North-East. But as he did not live long, all the vassals rose up at the time of [my] father 'Jams dbyangs rnam rgyal. So, once again, he went to war against Ngam ring in the North but settled in Shi ri dkar mo. Thereupon an emissary arrived from Tibet. As for the former line of demarcation, its control was kept on this side of the Tsangpo River (i.e. Brahmaputra) in Central Tibet"; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 55.

[51] *gu ge la dmag brgyab nas/ jo bo dbag po phab nas/ gu ge rtsa brang dang los long phyag tu bzshes/ ru thog gi ang pa yang phab nas/ ru thog yang phyag tu bzhes/ dbus gtsang la dmag mdzad nas/ shi ri dang kyar kyar smar chag la gtang nas/ dbus gtsang gi rgyal po sde pa gtsang pas gser dngul ja sogs pa dre'u'i sgal mang po phul ba la/ thugs mgu nas la dwags kyi dmag dang bcas phyir phebs kyi/ lho mo sdang mnga' 'od tu bcug/ bu rang gu ge zangs dkar spyi ti bu rig yan chod/ shar gyi mar yum la man chod/ rut hog dang gser kha phan chod mnga' 'og tu bsdud nas/ la dwags dar zhing rgyas pa yin//*; "Having fought in Guge, the sovereign of the land was deposed. Tsaparang in Guge and Los long were thus seized. As the Ang pa of Ruthok also stepped down, Ruthok was annexed, too. While they waged war in Central Tibet, [the troops] were sent to Shi ri and Kyar kyar smar chag, so the King of Central Tibet, sDe pa Tsang pa [i.e. Kar ma bstan skyong (1606–1642)], dispatched mules with many loads of gold, silver, tea and so forth. Having shown magnanimity, [Seng ge rnam rgyal] and the Ladakhi troops departed; Mustang was integrated into his realm. Purang, Guge, Zanskar, Spiti, up to Purig, as far as the Mar yum Pass in the East, [together with] Ruthok and the gold mines which lie beyond, were brought under his sway"; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 56.

As for the epigraphic records from Spiti, we only possess a single document from this period which attests that the valley was effectively governed by Ladakh through a senior (*ga ga*) official stationed in Dangkhar, who bore the name of Tshe ring rnam rgyal.[52]

4.5.2 Spiti and the Kingdom of Zanskar (1647–1684)

A few years after the death of Seng ge rnam rgyal, the Kingdom of Ladakh was eventually partitioned among his three sons and widow in 1647. His oldest son, bDe ldan rnam rgyal, became the King of Ladakh; Indra bodhi rnam rgyal took Guge; the youngest son, bDe mchog rnam rgyal, received Zanskar and Spiti; and the dowager queen, bsKal bzang, was given some estates which included Purang.[53] There is regrettably no information available regarding Spiti during this period so we do not know what role, if any, Spiti played in the conflicts between Ladakh and Tibet during this period. As far as can be discerned, Spiti remained governed by the royal court of Zanskar until 1684.

4.6 Spiti and the dGa' ldan pho brang's interest in West Tibet (1684–1708)

In 1684, the three regions of Ruthok, Guge, and Purang were formally ceded to Tibet as part of a peace treaty signed between Ladakh and the dGa' ldan pho brang government of Tibet. The Kingdom of Zanskar, while being separated from the Kingdom of Ladakh, remained under Ladakhi sovereignty. As for the Spiti Valley, it was *de facto* placed under the authority of Lhasa and a district officer was assigned the administration of the valley. The events that had led to the Treaty of Tingmosgang are known as the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal War (1679–1684) and have received extensive coverage in academic literature.[54] It will suffice here to recall the most salient points concerning the power struggle that broke out between the two states over the control of West Tibet. The expansionist policies of the rNam rgyal dynasty, the control of long-distance trade, resources, and pilgrimage routes

[52] See sections 3.1 and 3.3.4 in the previous chapter as well as SI1 in Appendix 5. Incidentally, Petech reported that a senior official (*ga ga*) and district of the fort (*mkhar dpon*) from Dangkhar named bsTan 'dzin rnam rgyal is mentioned in a colophon reproduced by Gergan (pp.392-394) as well as in a stone inscription from Spiti documented by Francke (F.173). Unfortunately, the first reference appears to be incorrect while the second can no longer be found; see PETECH 1977: 55, n.3.

[53] PETECH 1977: 57–59.

[54] PETECH 1947; AHMAD 1968; PETECH 1977; EMMER 2007; NAWANG JINPA 2015.

in the region, as well as tactless diplomatic relations with the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (1618–1707), whose Islamic proselytism could already be felt in Ladakh, became a cause of concern for the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) and his Gelukpa theocracy. To these were added problems of territorial expansion, border control, economic contraction, and sectarian bickering between the Drukpa and Gelukpa communities of West Tibet which were soon amplified by Ladakh's support for Bhutan which at that time was at loggerheads with the new Gelukpa ascendancy in Tibet. Despite two diplomatic missions sent to Lhasa, the relations between Ladakh and Tibet further deteriorated under bDe ldan rnam rgyal's reign. In the summer of 1679, the Fifth Dalai Lama ordered Tibetan and Mongol troops to march to West Tibet under the command of dGa' ldan tshe dbang, a Gelukpa monk of Mongol origin. On the way, this Tibetan-Mongol force gathered an additional contingent of soldiers from the princely state of Bashahr-Kinnaur and quickly defeated the Ladakhi armies. In response, the Ladakhi king requested the assistance of Aurangzeb who dispatched Mughal forces from Kashmir, compelling dGa' ldan tshe dbang's troops to retreat to Tashigang. With the help of reinforcements from Tibet, the Tibetan-Mongol armies fought back and crushed the Ladakhi armies in 1683.

The terms of the treaty negotiated the following year say a great deal about the political and economic reasons behind the conflict. Ladakh was to remain part of the Tibetan Buddhist world and act as a buffer zone with the Mughal Empire and its alien faith. This was partly achieved by surrendering Baltistan and enforcing the monopoly of Kashmiri wool merchants–the Western Tibetan pashm wool was henceforth to be exclusively funnelled down to the weaving workshops of Kashmir. Moreover, Ladakh had to return West Tibet to the Tibetan government by virtue of the 10th century partition of King Nyi ma mgon's Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet, thereby losing half of its territory. As a reward for military assistance during the war, Upper Kinnaur was given to the Raja Kehri Singh (*c.*1639–1696) of Bashahr.[55] Finally, Ladakh committed to the payment of a triennial tribute (*lo phyag*) to the Tibetan authorities.[56]

Soon afterwards, reports of unrest in West Tibet reached Lhasa which, in the absence of the Fifth Dalai Lama whose untimely death was being kept secret, spurred the regent of Tibet to send

[55] HALKIAS 2009.
[56] BRAY & GONKATSANG 2009.

three district officers (*rdzong sdod*) to the western borderlands with the utmost urgency.[57] In 1686, an official named Thang grong pa was thus stationed in Spiti. That the border valley was in a state of disarray is evidenced by directives issued in Tholing on behalf of the Tibetan government that same year, presumably by the hand of Thang grong pa. Introduced in the previous chapter, the relevant document from Tholing shows that Lhasa was alarmed by new excise duty being levied unscrupulously on ecclesiastical estates.[58] It is possible that these abuses of political and economic power impacted Gelukpa monasteries, such as Tholing, which received economic help from Spiti in the form of grain dues, as attested in later periods.

Incidentally, the document from Tholing refers specifically to the Gelukpa, Sakyapa, and Nyingmapa traditions of Spiti, thus attesting the existence of a monastery of this last sect for the first time. Confined to the side valley of Pin, the Nyingmapa tradition of the Bhutanese master Padma gling pa (1450–1521) had only recently been established by Byang chub bzang po (b.16th century) and Padma bsam gtan. The latter is believed to be responsible for setting up the hermitage of gSer gling.[59] It would appear that the arrival of the new sect was detrimental to the Sakyapa monastery of Tengyu which used to possess estates and benefactors in the Pin Valley. This led to a dispute between the Sakyapa and the followers of what is referred to as the 'degenerate' tradition (*snyigs ma*) which was resolved by the prefect of Dangkhar, as related in a document recently found by Heimbel.[60]

Despite the presence of a Tibetan official in the Spiti Valley from 1686, the situation in the western reaches of the Tibetan plateau did not improve significantly. In 1687, Thang grong pa was

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[57] According to the pseudo-biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama completed by the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho: *gnam gang la mar yul gu ge rtsa hrang gi rdzong sdod du khang dman ba tshe brtan rdo rje dang/ stag la mkhar du blo bzang don yod/ pi tir thang grong pa dgos dgos rnams rdzong bda' byas/*; "On the day of the new moon, I dispatched Tshe brtan rdo rje from Khang dmar to Guge [in] Maryul as the district officer of Tsaparang, Blo bzang don yod to Taklakot, and Thang grong pa to Spiti as their [presence] was much needed"; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO n.d.: 2: 104v.

[58] See section 3.5.4 in C hapter 3 and document BmK03 in Appendix 6.

[59] Namgyal Henry places the activity of Byang chub bzang po and Padma bsam gtan in Spiti between 1609 and 1663 based on the study of records of teachings received (*thob yig*) by the two disciples. This is in agreement with the date of the Tholing decree which attests that the Gelukpa authorities of West Tibet were fully cognizant of a Nyingmapa community in 1685; see HENRY 2017.

[60] Dating to some time after 1647, the document mentions that Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was the then prefect of the fort of Dangkhar. The arbitration took place at the bridge crossing the Lingti River. It was decided that three fifths of the possessions should go back to the Sakyapa community, while two fifth were allocated to the Nyingmapa adepts of the Pin Valley; see document sTeng-rgyud 68 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

relieved of his office for failure to fulfil his obligations and Rong dga' bde ba succeeded him, presumably with the mission of restoring order in the region.[61] The previous year, the princely state of Kulu had indeed launched a small attacked against Spiti, taking advantage of the fragility of the new geopolitical order in the Indo-Tibetan border region, thereby forcing some of its inhabitants to find refuge in Lahaul.[62]

In order to strengthen its grip on the region, the Tibetan government divided Ngari into four administrative districts (*rdzong*). Henceforth, the Tibetan western borderland comprised the districts of Taklakot in Purang, Tsaparang and Dawa in Guge, and Ruthok. Monitoring the political, economic, and religious activities at the frontiers with several Indian hill states to the south, Ladakh to the west, and the Tarim Basin further up north, the prefects of these districts (*rdzong dpon*) were answerable to the governors of Gartok (*sgar dpon*) who oversaw the general administration of West Tibet. The rest of this period is marked by the consolidation of Gelukpa paramountcy in the wider Western Tibet region. To this end, sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho secured the fortunes of Gelukpa monasteries in Ladakh and Zanskar, as well as some monasteries of other sects that were theoretically placed under the supervision of Drepung in Lhasa; a measure which ultimately does not seem to have affected the administration of monasteries of a different denomination.[63] Interestingly enough, documents issued by the chancery of Ladakh show that King Nyi ma rnam rgyal retained some authority over the affairs of the Sakyapa monastery of Spiti at the end of the 17th century.[64] With the reestablishment of close

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[61] *tshes nyi shur mnga' ris pi ti gzhis sdod thang grong pa sa mtshams su byed sgo 'tshub tsam yod 'dug pas [r]je[s] mar rong dga' bde ba rdzong bda['] byas/*; "On date of the 20th, I dispatched Rong dga' bde ba [to replace] the district officer of Spiti [in] Ngari, Thang grong pa, who had been reckless in [the exercise of his] duties in the borderlands"; see SANGS RGYAS RGYA MTSHO n.d.: 2: 218v.

[62] Reported in the biography of the Zanskar master Ngag dbang tshe ring (1657–1734), the incursion of Mön troops into Spiti is dated to the year 1686 by Schuh who identifies the belligerent neighbour as Kulu. At the time of the event, Ngag dbang tshe ring was in Lahaul when he befriended a group of people who had presumably fled Spiti: *de nas rtag lor spi ti la mon dmag khyer nas bcom pas/ de dus spi ti pa jo mo sri thar/ dbon po rig 'dzin rgya mtsho/ skyid mangs ko mig gi bla ma kun dga' dpal ldan/ dge tshul stan kha spun gnyis/ dpon lhun grub rgya mtsho sogs la chos 'brel rgya cher byas/*; "Thereafter, in the Tiger year [1686], Mön troops waged war in Spiti and were defeated. At that time, I established deep spiritual connections with some people of Spiti; the lady Sri thar, the astrologer Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho, the lama Kun dga' dpal ldan from sKyid mangs ko mig, his novice and relative sTan kha, the master lHun grub rgya mtsho and so on"; see NGAG DBANG TSHE RING 1978: 101v.

[63] PETECH 1977: 84–85.

[64] Regarding the treatment of Sakyapa communities in Ladakh during and after the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal War, see HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

diplomatic relations between Ladakh and Tibet under the reign of that monarch, Spiti was eventually returned to Ladakh perhaps in the wake of sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's assassination in 1705. The rise to power of lHa bzang khan (r.1703–1717), whose wife had the regent disposed of head first, led to an intense period of political and religious imbroglio at Lhasa, which reached its apex with the military intervention of the Dzungar in 1717 and the ensuing Manchu interventions.[65] Given the tumultuous political situation in Central Tibet, the western borderlands were likely a low priority for the new King of Tibet lHa bzang khan who accepted to retrocede Spiti to Ladakh, possibly at the request of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal who saw an opportunity in the political upheavals at Lhasa.[66] This hitherto little-known yet significant episode for the history of Spiti, which was first discussed by Schuh in 2016, is evidenced by a written agreement drawn up by the people of Spiti in the 1708.[67] The agreement followed the arrival in Gartok of a letter from lHa bzang khan in which it was stated that Spiti had been ceded to King Nyi ma rnam rgyal's kingdom. This measure did not apply, however, to the monasteries and the communal ecclesiastical estate of Spiti, which were henceforth placed under the jurisdiction of the Gelukpa governor of Tashigang in West Tibet, at least in principle. All villages

[65] PETECH 1972; DHONDUP 1984.

[66] The rationale behind the retrocession of Spiti is unclear beyond a general decline of Tibetan influence in the region. Schwieger suggests that it was perhaps given back for the "maintenance of its guests from Kashmir" (zum Unterhalt seiner Gäste aus Kaschmir) and because the border valley had little economic value, or, in Schwieger's own word, "because the wealth of the country's subjects was so low" (weil der Wholstand der Untertanen des Landes so gering sei). It is not impossible that Spiti represented indeed a liability for Ladakh vis-à-vis the trade agreement with Kashmir, as we shall see further on; see SCHWIEGER 1999: 48.

[67] *khrim[s] bdag rin po che zhabs drung du/ bdag min rtags khungs du gsal ba'i gan [r]gya kha dan g[yis] bzhags pa/ la [dw]ags (v) rgyal po (rin po cher) spi ti khul cha l(am)/ rgyal po lha b[z]an[g] [g]i[s] gnang ba'i phyag bris sgar nas phebs 'dug par brten/ spi ti lha [s]de mi [s]de rn(am)s ['] dun ma byas [pa]'i (zhu yig) dang skye[s] rgyun 'bul ba bcas la/ ga ga 'brug [b]stan 'dzin dmag gi gtang ba/ [s]lar drag [z]han sus kyang khra ma dang/ kha ze/ zog tshol byas par byung na/ 'ba' gser srang do khrims bdag la 'bul rgyu dang/ de la [b]rten pa'i gong nas bka' skyon dgongs khrel byung na/ de thog du stod gsh(am) [g]yi dmag gi[s] gong du [c]i 'dra zhu dgos byung na zhu ba dang/ [g]zhan ma rn(am)s kyi khra ma skyo ma zhus na 'brug bstan 'dzin gi[s] rgyab du langs rgyu yin/ stod gsh(am)s dmag spyis lag bskor ba'i rta(gs)/*; "In the presence of the Precious-Upholder-of-the-Law. We, whose names and seals are authentic and clear, have pledged a written agreement. In accordance with the letter sent by King lHa bzang [khan], which arrived in Gartok, most parts of the country (*khul*) of Spiti [belong] to the precious King of Ladakh. An arrangement was made to present a request with a series of gifts by the clergy and laity of Spiti who convened a council meeting (*'dun ma*). But then, the senior (*ga ga*) official 'Brug bstan 'dzin dispatched troops. Consequently, should anyone, of lower or higher rank, resort to the use of lie, slander, or deceit, a penalty of two ounces of gold shall be paid to the Upholder-of-the-Law. In case that caused His Highness to harbour disapproval and admonishing thoughts, the inhabitants of upper and lower [Spiti] should offer a report as for why it was necessary. (*seal*) In case further dissention and quarrels are put forward, 'Brug bstan 'dzin will turn against us. Seals of the communal inhabitants (*dmag*) of upper and lower [Spiti], passed from hand to hand. (*seal*) (*seal*)". For a critical edition and a different translation of this document in German, see document No-no 43 in SCHUH 2016b: 263–265.

and households that were not compelled to the payment of ecclesiastical dues became the subjects of the King of Ladakh, who had been granted *de jure* economic, legal, and military control over the secular affairs of the valley. The news of this transfer caused much concern among the people of Spiti who decided to approach the King of Zanskar in a desperate attempt to achieve greater autonomy. Their plea was immediately curtailed by the arrival of military troops, thus putting an end to the people's velleity.[68]

4.7 Spiti and the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh II

4.7.1 King Nyi ma rnam rgyal (1708–1734)

The reign of Nyi ma rnam rgyal (*c.*1694–1729) occupies a special place in the *Royal Succession of Ladakh*. This period has also left many testimonies of his political and religious activities in Greater Ladakh in the form of diplomatic documents and commemorative epigraphs.[69] Primary sources thus show that Nyi ma rnam rgyal's policies were enforced by an executive and judicial apparatus composed of seasoned officials and magistrates. As a Buddhist monarch, the legitimacy of his rule was also guaranteed by his support for all Buddhist communities irrespective of their sectarian affiliation. These included the religious centres of his own kingdom as well as Gelukpa monasteries in Tibet. In 1694, he married bSod nams mtsho mo, a lady from a reputable but impoverished Tibetan household in Dwags po who died shortly afterwards in childbirth.[70] Having restored harmonious

[68] Relying on Gergan's work, Schuh remarks that 'Brug bstan 'dzin rnam rgyal, who dispatched an armed contingent to Spiti, was a distant member of the rNam rgyal dynasty, being the grandson of the King of Zanskar bDe mchog rnam rgyal. The arrival of Zanskari troops forced the people of lower and upper Spiti to recognise the new political order. It is not apparent, however, why the people from the Pin Valley and those from the middle administrative unit (*bar*, *bar cig*) of Spiti did not ratify the agreement. It is reasonable to infer that the communal inhabitants (*dmag*) of these two administrative units did not object the political transfer and new tax regime imposed on them (*nas khral*); see *supra* note 67.

[69] Documents issued by this monarch can be found in Ladakh, Zanskar, Purig, and Spiti. The same applies to commemorative and votive inscriptions produced during his reign. It is not possible here to list all documents and related publications. In addition to specific references given in the present study, further information can be found in Schuh's monumental work on diplomatic correspondence and legal documents. For a general presentation of Nyi ma rnam rgyal's reign informed by the Ladakhi chronicle and early research, see PETECH 1977: 81–96.

[70] The two Ladakhi envoys in charge of finding the King of Ladakh a Tibetan bride (*bod mo*) arrived in Lhasa in 1692. Lady (*bu mo*) bSod nams mtsho mo, who was a member of the Bhrum nas family, was from a reputable

relations with the Gelukpa authorities of Tibet, Nyi ma rnam rgyal also renewed ties with the Drukpa sect, and the Bhutanese master Byams mgon Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1647–1732) assumed the position of spiritual advisor at the royal court of Ladakh in 1706.

As noted above, the Ladakhi ruler regained control of Spiti in the first decade of the 18th century, a handover that weighed heavily on the people of valley. Like other appendages of Ladakh, Spiti was governed by a bevy of local officials under the command of a prefect of the fort (*mkhar dpon*). In this context, the Dangkhar settlement remained–and now perhaps more clearly than ever before–the political centre for the inhabitants of the border valley. In an attempt to assert his authority Nyi ma rnam rgyal's first statement was to embellish the regional capital with a religious edifice. The iconographic programme of the upper temple at Dangkhar, as shown earlier, was designed to celebrate a shared history of religious, cultural, and political interaction between the peoples of Ladakh and Spiti.[71] In practice however, the valley was little more than a vassal polity compelled to pay annual taxes. In 1720, the king felt it necessary to bring his representatives into line by obliging the prefects of the Dangkhar fort to hold office during both summer and winter, hence restricting their absence from Spiti to the shoulder seasons. It was also during this period that the nobility of Kyiling headed the general council of Spiti. It is perhaps not accidental that the members of this aristocratic household were Sakyapa followers. As such, they would have been disinclined to favour the influential Gelukpa establishment of Spiti with its Tibetan political ramifications. Assuming the position of headman (*rgya pa*) of Spiti, Kun dga' chos 'phel and bSod nams btsan 'dzin from Kyiling assisted the prefects in their functions, though this was soon to be challenged by a rival family from the side valley of Pin. In 1729 a dispute between the Gelukpa monastery at Dangkhar and the Sakyapa monastery at Tengyu was settled by the Tibetan authorities of Tashigang. That same year, Nyi ma rnam rgyal abdicated leaving the throne to his first son bDe skyong rnam rgyal (r.1729–1739).[72]

(*tshang bag ldan*) but impoverished (*zhan*) household. The Government of Tibet under the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho therefore endowed her accordingly and sent her to Ladakh in 1694. As noted by Schuh, her name was incorrectly reported as bSod nams rgya mtsho in Petech's seminal work on Ladakh; see SCHUH 2016a: 13.

[71] See section 3.5.5 in Chapter 3.

[72] We do not have, to the best of my knowledge, any literary, epigraphic, or diplomatic sources pertaining to bDe skyong rnam rgyal's activity in Spiti during his short reign.

4.7.2 Spiti and the Kingdom of Purig (1734–1765)

In 1734, Purig was separated from the rest of the Ladakhi kingdom after a family dispute over succession. bDe skyong rnam rgyal kept Ladakh while his half-brother bKra shis rnam rgyal received Purig or Lower Ladakh.[73] This partition fomented much discontent in Ladakh and culminated in a bitter rivalry between the King of Purig bKra shis rnam rgyal and his nephew Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (r.1739–1753) who had succeeded his father bDe skyong rnam rgyal as King of Ladakh in 1739. With the potential to endanger commercial and political stability in the region, this dynastic feud between the two royal houses soon attracted the attention of Kashmir and Tibet. Once alerted to the developing situation, the 7th Dalai Lama (1708–1757) appointed a mediator in the person of Ka' thog rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755), a Nyingmapa master and skilled negotiator from Khams, who was despatched to Western Tibet to hold negotiations between the kings of Purig and Ladakh. After considerable delays, the parties involved met at Hanle (*wam le*) in 1753 in the presence of the representatives of feudatory lands, and the dispute between the uncle and nephew was resolved, albeit laboriously.[74] Among the signatories of this treaty (*'ching yig chen mo*) was bSod nams bstan 'dzin from the nobility of Kyiling, who represented the council of elders of Spiti.[75] The valley headman (*rgya pa*), as pointed out by Schuh, had already acquired a solid reputation vis-à-vis Ladakhi

[73] bDe skyong rnam rgyal was born to Nyi ma rnam rgyal's first Tibetan wife, bSod nams rgya mtsho, who had died in childbirth. The King of Ladakh then married the daughter of a Muslim ruler from Baltistan, Zi zi kha tun, who bore him bKra shis rnam rgyal. In a recent publication, however, the Ladakhi author rTogs ldan dKon mchog thub bstan Rinpoche states that bDe skyong rnam rgyal was born from a queen native of Spiti: *nyi ma rnam rgyal la spyi ti mkhar nas lcam zhig bsus/ rgyal mo de'i mtshan la sa skyong dbang mo zhu'o/ / de la sras bde skyong rnam rgyal 'khrungs/ de nas gces mo nor 'dzin dbang mo 'khrungs nas yum zhi bar gshegs/*; "Nyi ma rnam rgyal married a lady from the fort of Spiti. The name of that queen was Sa skyong dbang mo. She bore a son bDe skyong rnam rgyal. The mother passed away after the beloved [daughter] Nor 'dzin dbang mo was born". This passage is thus at odds with common scholarship. Moreover, the designation *sa skyong dbang mo* is most likely a title rather than the queen's name. My attempts to obtain further information regarding the sources used by this author were unsuccessful; see DKON MCHOG THUB BSTAN 2015: 144. On the royal spouses of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal; see SCHUH 2016a: 13–14.

[74] At the border between Ladakh and West Tibet, the fortified monastery of Hanle is located 40 km north-west of bDe mchog in Ngari as the crow flies (fig. 2.3). On the diplomatic mission sent by the 7th Dalai Lama and the events leading to the Treaty of Hanle (aka Wamle or Vamle); see PETECH 1977: 96–110; SCHWIEGER 1997; SCHWIEGER 1999.

[75] Gergan, who compiled a list of all signatories of the treaty, wrote: *spyi ti rgan mangs 'go pa bsod nams bstan 'dzin/* ; "bSod nams bstan 'dzin was the leader of the elders of Spiti"; see GERGAN 1976: 469. Based on his study of Tshe dbang nor bu's writing, Schwieger, on the other hand, gives the prefect of the fort (*mkhar dpon*), bSod nams bstan 'dzin, as well as the leader of the elders (*rgan mangs 'go pa*) of Spiti amongst the ninety-six signatories of the treaty; see SCHWIEGER 1999: 84–85.

authorities in his capacity as army commander and emissary in the 1720s.[76] That bSod nams bstan 'dzin was requested to attend the negotiations is understandable since the status of the district of Spiti was one of many issues being debated in Hanle. Although Spiti was closer, in geographical terms, to Ladakh, it had formerly been subsumed within the Kingdom of Purig, with which it had no direct border. Spiti was therefore among the territories claimed by Ladakh at these negotiations. As a result of the treaty, however, it was agreed that Spiti would remain with bKra shis rnam rgyal. Following Ka' thog rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu's account, modern researchers merely reiterate the absence of a strong legal basis to support Ladakh's claims.[77] No reason is given to explain why Spiti became an object of negotiation of such importance. As a feudatory land, Spiti offered few resources. Its position on the map, however, ensured that the valley could be used as a roundabout way to the main trade routes of the Western Himalayas. With a number of important passes connecting Spiti to West Tibet, Ladakh, Lahaul, Kulu, and Bashahr-Kinnaur, this border valley offered significant economic opportunities beyond the traditional trade routes prescribed by the agreement regulating the international pashm wool trade. Its strategic position came at a cost to the inhabitants of Spiti however, who had to bear the brunt of vested economic interests in the region. Another point of disagreement concerned the King of Purig's large cattle and herds of horses that were regularly left to graze on Ladakhi pastures. As discussed in the previous chapter, bKra shis rnam rgyal's passion for horses also involved the economy of the Spiti Valley, which had been established as a gelding station under the authority of the prefect of the fort, who directly supervised the trade in Chumurti stallions.[78] As a

[76] In a document issued by King Nyi ma rnam rgyal in 1727, bSod nams bstan 'dzin and his forefathers (*pha mes rgyud*) received confirmation of estates (*sa zhing sa khang*) and preferential taxation (*lhag pa'i khral theb*). These privileges were granted to their household in virtue of their position as headman of Spiti and for service rendered by bSod nams bstan 'dzin as army commander (*dmag mgo*) and emissary (*pho nya*). These dispositions were approved again by royal decree in 1730. See documents No-no 8 and No-no 9 in SCHUH 2016b: 170–173.

[77] Spiti was only one of two areas being negotiated at Hanle. The first area was the territory of mKhar bu, near Mulbekh, on the Srinagar-Leh road. At first, Phun tshogs rnam rgyal's ministers advised the Ladakhi king to postpone his claim over Spiti in favour of mKhar bu, in view of the fragile nature of the legal ground to support their territorial claims. Despite the lack of documents recording the transfer of these territories to Purig, the Tibetan mediator recognised that the absence of a public debate on these matters prior to the enthronement of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal provided sufficient evidence to refute the latter's claim and, *in fine*, Spiti and mKhar bu were to remain with Purig; see SCHWIEGER 1999: 47–49.

[78] See section 3.3.2 in Chapter 3.

result of the Hanle negotiations, however, the King of Purig was forced to return more than two thirds of his herds of horses to Ladakh.[79]

During this period Spiti had also been coveted by the state of Bashahr-Kinnaur which conducted two offensives against the valley–another indication, perhaps, of its strategic value. The first signs of this threat had been noted in 1748 when the local government of Spiti was advised by the King of Purig to stand on guard.[80] As anticipated, the troops of Bashahr had entered Spiti soon after and laid siege to Dangkhar in 1749/50. The attackers had however eventually been repelled and pursued down the hills of Kinnaur as part of a punitive retaliatory expedition. In particular a man named Tshe ring don grub from Kyiber in Spiti distinguished himself for bravery during these hostilities.[81] As a reward, the King of Purig had granted him land in different settlements among which was a house in Dangkhar. This defeat did not however discourage the Raja of Bashahr who launched a new offensive in the 1760s or 70s, after Spiti had been reintegrated into the Kingdom of Ladakh (see below). This time, the damage was more severe and supposedly resulted in a two-year occupation of the Dangkhar settlement. The invaders were eventually defeated by the arrival of troops from Ladakh as evidenced by a document studied by Schuh.[82] A document from the Dangkhar archives also shows

[79] SCHWIEGER 1997: 223–224.

[80] See document No-no 14 in SCHUH 2016b: 174–175.

[81] A document from the archives of Tengyu monastery sheds light on the event of 1749/50. It relates to a first siege of Dangkhar by the troops of Bashahr which was followed by a punitive expedition carried out against them. Issued by the King of Purig bKra shis rnam rgyal in 1751, this royal charter granted privileges in the form of land properties to Tshe ring don grub from Kyiber as a reward for his bravery and loyal services. During these events, the recipient of the document was instrumental in preventing the looting of the district fort of Dangkhar and the scattering of the subjects. He then assumed leadership in a retaliation operation and managed to recover what had been stolen from Spiti; see document sTeng-rgyud 18 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[82] Alexander Gerard wrote that "About fifty-five years" prior to his cartographic survey of Spiti in 1821 "the fort of Dankur was possessed by the Busehurees, who kept it for two years", placing the second invasion of the troops from Bashahr-Kinnaur around the year 1766. This is however incorrectly cited in Lyall's settlement report which states that "Gerard mentions that in A.D. 1776, or thereabouts, the Basáharís held the fort Dankar for two years"; see A. GERARD 1841: 147; LYALL 1874: 167. Whether 1766 or 1776, Gerard's account is corroborated by two local archives from Spiti. The first document is a royal decree issued by the King of Ladakh some time between 1765 and 1782 based on Schuh's analysis. This document was addressed to the people of Gomik in Spiti who were informed that a contingent of three hundred men led by Ga ga bSod nams had left Leh on the first day of the fifth month. They were requested to hold their ground against the troops of Bashahr until the arrival of the Ladakhi reinforcements, suggesting that Dangkhar had already fallen into the former's hands; see document No-no 18 in SCHUH 2016b: 205–207. In support of a later date is a document dated 1778 urging the people of Dangkhar to renew their support following the damage endured by Lagope Monastery at the time the Bashahri invasion of their settlement; see the section 3.5.4 of Chapter 3 and document BmK14 in Appendix

that this conflict resulted in some significant damage to the buildings of Lagope, spurring the community of the faithful to lend their support to the repair of the monastery in 1778.[83]

About four decades earlier, the Gelukpa authorities of Gartok had issued a confirmation letter of privileges to the monastery of the Dangkhar settlement.[84] Dated 1740, this document detailed the historical legacy and monastic endowments of Lagope with great precision, betraying perhaps a certain anxiety about its status. It shows that in this period the Gelukpa monastery was once again at loggerheads with the Sakyapa monastery of Tengyu over land situated in the village of Rapang. In spite of a longstanding contract (*gcod rgya*) between the two communities, the religious authorities of Tengyu appealed to the King of Purig who disallowed the plaintiffs' claim in 1741.[85] These events occurred immediately after the death of King bDe skyong rnam rgyal in 1739. It is thus tempting to see a possible causal relationship between the coming to power of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, who was to claim Spiti for himself, and the haste with which Lagope Monastery approached the Tibetan authorities of West Tibet. This notwithstanding, the dispute between Lagope and Tengyu has the merit of recalling the specific situation in which the monasteries of the valley were caught up. While they had been placed under the legal authority of the Gelukpa governer of Tashigang in 1708, they could still try their luck by resorting to the politico-judicial authorities most likely to meet their demands in the case of disagreements.[86]

4.7.3 Reintegration of Spiti into the Kingdom of Ladakh (1765–1834)

After the death of King bKra shis rnam rgyal, the regions of Purig and Spiti were once again reintegrated into the Kingdom of Ladakh in 1765. The following period was marked by the reigns of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal's son and grandsons and a progressive decline in the sovereign power of the

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6. The accupation of Dangkhar by the troops from Bashahr-Kinnaur also accounted for the loss of a royal charter issued to the astrologer of the capital. His privileges were reconfirmed in 1813 under the reign of Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal; see Jo ba1 in Appendix 6.

[83] See section 3.5.4 in Chapter 3 and document BmK14 in Appendix 6.

[84] See document BmK01 in Appendix 6.

[85] See document sTeng-rgyud 12 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[86] Two documents issued by the King of Ladakh Nyi ma rnam rgyal to the Sakyapa monastery of Gomik in Spiti in 1711 and 1720, for instance, appear to have overridden the legal power granted to the Gelukpa governor (*spon slob*) of Tashigang over the religious affairs of Spiti; see documents sTeng-rgyud 1e and sTeng-rgyud 1f in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

rNam rgyal dynasty. Tshe dbang rnam rgyal (r.*c.*1753–1782), who had inherited a reunified kingdom, was forced to abdicate after what Petech called "a disastrous reign which ended with another revolution".[87] His first son, Tshe brtan rnam rgyal (r.1782–1802), did not assume the royal title immediately due to his young age and died of small pox in his mid-twenties. The throne of Ladakh thus passed to his younger brother, Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal (r.*c.*1802–1840), whose reign was dominated by the challenges posed by expanding Sikh power to the south from the late 1810s.

There is no shortage of primary sources for the latter part of this period and several events were also reported by foreign observers. As before, Spiti remained during this period under the authority of two prefects appointed from Leh who held office in the fort of Dangkhar at certain times of the year. Donor prefaces and diplomatic correspondence exchanged between the royal court of Ladakh and the local government of Spiti provide the names of some of these Ladakhi officials (Table 4). The same applies to local functionaries who assisted the prefects in governing the valley, starting with the members of the ruling household of Spiti. The position of valley headman (*rgya pa*), who represented the council of elders as well as the prefects of the fort *in absentia*, had by this time already been in the hands of the family of Kyiling for many generations. In 1776, however, they lost their political prerogatives and were replaced by the aristocratic family of Guling as the leader and representative of the people of Spiti. This loss of power and influence did not go down well and a junior (*no no*) member of the Kyiling family named bsKal bzang managed to regain the leadership of the valley in 1834 by means of forged documents allegedly issued by the King of Ladakh Nyi ma rnam rgyal, as uncovered by Schuh.[88] The members of these two households were often known as Nono and Gaga, terms of address used for a junior and senior member of an aristocratic family. As local rulers, the headmen of Spiti were to hold office at the fort of Dangkhar and met with many foreign visitors in the 19th century.

[87] PETECH 1977: 118.

[88] See documents No-no 4, 5, 6, 12, and 13 in SCHUH 2016b.

Table 4

List of prefects of the fort dispatched to Spiti in the 18th-19th centuries

*c.*1753–1782	bsTan skyong rgya mtsho[89]
1785	dPal 'bar cag and Na sib 'beg [90]
1793	Byams pa rgya mtsho[91]
*c.*1816	Ga ga Rab rgyas[92]
*c.*1819–1822	Sultan Bheg[93]
*c.*1834	Ga ga Ra yim mkhan and bsTan 'dzin tshe dbang[94]
1840	dPal le[95]

As discussed in Chapter One, the Gerard brothers were the first Europeans to travel to Spiti in 1821. They were soon followed by Trebeck in 1822, Jaquemont in 1830, and Hutton in 1838. Their accounts shed light on the life and customs of the people of this southern district of the Ladakhi territory in the years preceding and following the Dogra conquest of Ladakh–an event that would break down the geopolitical balance of the Western Himalayas. For many of these men, Dangkhar was first and foremost the fort of a district; it was thus the military and defensive aspect of the settlement that initially retained their attention. Jacquemont, on the other hand, foresightedly described Dangkhar

[89] See the donor preface DP3 in Appendix 5.

[90] See document No-no 16 issued by King Tshe brtan rnam rgyal in 1785 in SCHUH 2016b: 176–180.

[91] See the transcript sTeng-rgyud 1 of a document issued in 1792 and sTeng-rgyud 83 in HEIMBEL & SCHUH forthcoming.

[92] The name of this prefect is given by Trebeck in connection to the beginning of a conflict between Kulu and Spiti; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 63.

[93] See document No-no 33 addressed to the prefect of the fort Sultan Bheg (*mkhar dpon sul tan bheg*) in 1819 in SCHUH 2016b: 212–213. Absent from Spiti in 1822, Sultan Bheg is mentioned as 'the chief of Piti' by Trebeck who had met him in Leh prior to his stay in Dangkhar that same year; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 60.

[94] The prefects Ga ga mkhan and bsTan 'dzin tshe dbang are attested in document from Spiti dating to the reign of Tshe dbang don grub rnam rgyal; see the donor preface DP3 in Appendix 5. The former is undoubtedly the same Ladakhi official as the Ga ga Ra yim mkhan mentioned in a document issued in 1834; see No-no 26 in SCHUH 2016b: 226–228. According to Francke's study of *Basti Ram's Account of the Dogra War*, and informed by Cunningham's notes, Rahim Khan (*ra yim mkhan*) was a half-blood Muslim from Chu shod in Ladakh. His son-in-law was Ghulam Khan who plundered monasteries in West Tibet in 1841; see FRANCKE 1926: 267. Similarly, Datta specified that Rahim Khan was indeed the "Kiladar [i.e. prefect of the fort] in-charge of Spiti district" based on an unpublished archive from the *Proceedings of the Foreign and Political Department of the Hon'ble East India Company*; see DATTA 1973: 132.

[95] dPal le is believed to be the last prefect of to fort sent to Spiti by the Ladakhi authorities; see document No-no 42 in SCHUH 2016b: 253–259.

as "the headquarters (*chef-lieu*) of a small country called Spiti".[96] This idea gained momentum in the second half of the 19th century when Dangkhar was more systematically introduced as the capital of Spiti in British accounts and settlement literature.[97] That the Dangkhar settlement with its fort was understood as the political centre of the valley was certainly not an alien concept to the people of Spiti themselves. Indeed, as we have seen, it had long been the seat of a local government with its own officials, clerks, staff, and customary law. And if there remains any doubt, this socio-cultural reality was encapsulated in the use of the Tibetan word *rgyal sa* in donative records to describe the main settlement of Spiti. The earliest occurrence of this term, as we have seen, is found in a document written at Tabo in the 16th century. Another donor preface, which was composed at Kyi during the reign of Tshe dbang rnam rgyal (r.*c.*1753–1782), reiterates this status. Following a well-established literary trope, the text sets forth the political landscape of the time:

> On the hilltop of the Glorious Palace of the great capital of Leh, may the helmet of the great Dharma King Tshe dbang rnam rgyal be high and his kingdom (*chab srid*) prosper. In his excellent dominion (*mnga' 'og*) of Spiti, a district fort (*sku mkhar*) is firmly established. High up, at the hilltop of the capital (*rgyal sa*) Dangkhar, may the great prefect of the fort (*mkhar dpon chen po*), bsTan skyong rgya mtsho, enjoy a long life and may his kingdom (*chab srid*) prosper.[98]

Notwithstanding Spiti's status as a subordinate district (*mnga' 'og*) of the Kingdom of Ladakh in this period, Dangkhar clearly retained its long-held position as the chief settlement of the valley. Worthy of note is its characterisation as a 'capital' or 'royal seat' (*rgyal sa*) and 'political dominion' or 'kingdom' (*chab srid*) which emulated the status of the royal palace at Leh. Just as the site (*sa*) of Leh stood victorious (*rgyal*) over the Indus River of the Kingdom of Ladakh, so did Dangkhar over the river valley of Spiti.[99] This powerful image, where the capital of Spiti mirrors that of Ladakh, is found

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[96] The passage is given *in extenso* in the section 3.2.3 of Chapter 3.

[97] Published in 1852, Thomas' account describes Dangkhar as "the principle village of the Piti valley". The following year, a watercolour of the settlement by Shipley was captioned "The village and fort of Dunkur, capital of the Piti or Spiti district".This painting was not however reproduced for commercial use or published; see Figure 4 in Appendix 3. Instead it was Edgerton's 1864 *Journal of a Tour* which, for the first time introduced the fort, the monastery, and the village of Dhunkur, the capital of Spiti, to a broader readership. The designation of 'capital of Spiti' formally enters the settlement literature with Lyall's *Report* published in 1874; see THOMSON 1852: 125; EGERTON 1864: 24; LYALL 1874: 164.

[98] See the donor preface DP3 in Appendix 5.

[99] According to what seems to amount to a folk etymology, the Tibetan term *chab srid*, which can be rendered as 'dominion', 'kingdom', or 'politics' in English, is believed to stem from the idea that the territory of a polity is

again in the copy of a donor preface dating, this time, to the reign of King Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal in the first half of the 19th century:

> On the right side of the flowing Indus River is a great palace, the Glorious Palace on the hilltop of the great Leh. Looking at its dimensions from afar fear arises. In the distance, enemies are terrified by it more than by lightning. To the subjects, it is smoother than the silk of Chinese women. May the helmet of the great Dharma king Tshe dpal rnam rgyal be high and his kingdom (*chab srid*) prosper. In Spiti, the vassal dominion (*mnga' zhabs*) of his excellent kingdom (*chab srid*), the district fort (*rdzong*) is firmly established in the uplands. At the hilltop of the capital (*rgyal sa*) Dangkhar, may the helmet of the great prefect of the fort (*rdzong dpon chen po*) Ga ga mkhan, along with his son, be high.[100]

After this preamble, the donative record goes on to enumerate at great length the names of donors from several settlements located in upper Spiti, starting with the Byo clan from 'the capital Rangrik' (*rang rig rgyal sa*). How are we to account for this repeated use of the term *rgyal sa* and the semantic field it covered in this document? To my knowledge, there is no evidence that would suggest that the Rangrik settlement exerted any political influence within, say, the administrative unit of upper Spiti in the 1830s, nor that it was the recipient site of royal attention. One element of the answer lies perhaps later in the text when it mentions 'the capital Rangrik' once again, only this time to specify the place of origin of bsTan 'dzin tshe dbang, a man who bore the title of prefect of the fort (*mkhar dpon*).[101] As

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the political entity encompassing the length (*srid*) of a river (*chab*) or the ability of a river valley to operate as a border between two territories. While the Old Tibetan compound *chu srid* shows that the association with 'water' or 'river' is very old indeed, Joanna Bialek recognises that there is no acknowledged etymology of the word *chu*/*chab srid*. Based on her research, Bialek observes that *chab srid* was coined to denote a 'greater *srid*', during the imperial period, whereas *srid* could denote any domain ruled by some local lords; personal communication, April 2019. In the early 1970s, Rolf Stein had already put his finger on this knotty problem: "Le cas du terme *čhab-srid* ou *čhu-srid* (déjà fréquemment attesté dans les manuscrits de Touen-houang) s'y rattache aussi, mais implique un champ sémantique plus large ou des connotations plus obscures. Dans cette expression, l'image impliquée par le premier terme du binôme, 'eau' ou 'fleuve', reste inexpliquée". I wish to thank Charles Ramble for drawing my attention to Stein's article; see STEIN 1973: 413. Still, it is remarkable how the cosmological and politico-religious sections of donative records from the Western Tibet, often locate a political and territorial entity (*chab srid*) in relation to its geographical position, taking as point of reference this or that river, in what Francke assimilated to a "national anthem"; see FRANCKE 1914: 45; LAURENT 2017b.

[100] See the donor preface DP2 in Appendix 5.

[101] I do not have an explanation as to why this second prefect is said to be from Rangrik. Was he, unlike the Ladakhi counterparts who preceded him, a native of Spiti? Or did he take residence there in the course of his functions? In any event, the history of this settlement seems worth investigating. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rangrik was believed to have been the location of mNgon dga', a monastic community that moved to Kyi around the beginning of the 17th century. Moreover, three religious figures are reported to have come from this settlement: the Gelukpa master Rang rig pa Sangs rgya 'od zer (b. late 16th century) who renovated the monastery of Lagope at Dangkhar around 1617; the Drukpa yogi Rang rig ras pa Kun dga' blo gros (1619–1683); and Rang rig pa Blo bzang bsam 'grub who requested a history of four-armed Mahākāla from the 15th

disconcerting as it may sound, the so-called *Register of the Rangrik Region* underscores that the use of the English word 'capital' might prove to be insufficient in some contexts to translate the polysemic notion of *rgyal sa*.

This being so, the donor prefaces of Tabo, Kyi, and Rangrik underscore the well-established fact that, for the people of Spiti, Dangkhar stood well above all other settlements as the seat of local government and the administrative centre of the Spiti Valley throughout the 16th-19th centuries. And it was the fort of the Dangkhar settlement which, of course, embodied this centre of regional political power. Likewise, this edifice was also the seat of Seb lha/bla ma, the ferocious mountain god and territorial deity who safeguarded Spiti in return for blood sacrifices. As noted in a previous chapter, it was at the urge of the monasteries of Spiti, that King Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal officially put an end to the ritual killing of yaks to worship the deity in 1818,[102] a move that must have seriously undermined the influence of the elders and leading families of Dangkhar who had been in charge of Seb lha/bla ma's propitiatory ritual. It is notable that rather than basing their arguments against this ritual on religious and ethical considerations, the request from the clergy of Spiti to ban this practice was formulated in socio-economic terms, as a measure to alleviate the 'the low economic conditions of the common people' (*mi ser khyer zhan*).

Around the same time, the people of Spiti were to pay the price for allowing a smuggling trade to export wool from West Tibet to the Indian hill state of Kulu by way of the Parang Pass in Spiti, thereby circumventing the Kashmiri merchants and their state monopoly. In the early 1820s, Moorcroft and Trebeck, from their vantage point in Ladakh, reported that this illicit trade had been instigated by the people of Kulu around 1816.[103] Relying on carriers from Lahaul, the contraband went

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Lochen incarnate Zhang zhung pa Blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan in the 18th century; see BLO BZANG BSTAN 'DZIN RGYAL MTSHAN 1978.

[102] See section 3.4.5 in Chapter 3 and document BmK02 in Appendix 6.

[103] In 1821, Moorcroft wrote from Leh: "Some traders of Kulu had been detected in an illicit trade in shawl-wool on the frontier, and their goods had been seized: they had complained to the Vazir, and he had retaliated by sending an armed party into Ladakh, which had carried off a large number of horses and other cattle, and violated the sanctity of the temple by mutilating the images. The immediate consequence of this was the interruption of the trade, for the Lahoul carries were afraid of reprisals if they ventured into Ladakh"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 1: 456–457. Trebeck, who had reached Spiti in the summer of 1822, followed up on those events: "About six years ago, when Khaga Rabghi [i.e. Ga ga Rab rgyas] was the governor of the district, attempts were made by the Gadhes, or shepherds of Chamba, Kulu, and its neighbourhood, to

unnoticed for more than four years. Its sudden interruption by the Ladakhi authorities caused an immediate backlash in Kulu which retaliated against Ladakh by ransacking Spiti in around 1820/21; an incident for which the people of the transit valley themselves were to be blamed. As stated by the *Royal Succession of Ladakh*:

> They [i.e. Moorcroft and Trebeck] stayed throughout the whole summer and winter [i.e. 1821-1822] and returned from where they had come. They were the first two foreign sahibs to set foot here. In the meantime, the troops of Kulu waged war in Spiti, bringing devastation to the land. They took everything away without exception and left. In response to a demand of military intervention, they were told 'You are deadbeats!' and were punished.[104]

Things did not end there and Ladakh allegedly reversed its position. On the 15th August, 1822, orders from Leh arrived in Dangkhar commanding the authorities to call to arms the local militia with a view to launch an offensive against Kulu; a plan of action that inspired little hope to Trebeck.[105]

The regulation of the wool market had been a major issue in the economic development of the Western Himalayas since the 17th century. Dependent on the regions within reach, the Kashmir shawl industry imported large quantities of wool (*bal*) and pashm *(le na*) from the northern plains of West

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export shawl-wool to the southern hills, by way of the Parang pass. As this was a contraband trade, an order was received from Lé to have it seized, and in obedience six or eight flocks, amounting, perhaps, in the whole to fifteen hundred sheep, partly laden with coarse wool, were stopped and possession was taken of the whole of the forbidden article, but nothing more. (…) This deterred the traders from speculating again in the same way, and the authorities of Ladakh had no application made to them by the Raja of ulu for the restitution of the property confiscated. Indeed, the occurrence seems to have remained unnoticed for more than four years, as both the Rajas were on friendly terms, and an agent from Kulu was residing at Lé when we arrived at that city. But somewhat more than a year since, a large armed body of the Kulu peasantry, headed by a near connexion of Sobha Ram, entered Piti by the Losar pass [i.e. Kunzom Pass], and meeting with no resistance, took possession of everything which was worth carrying away, and had not been concealed. They advanced no further that Rerik [i.e. Rangrik], and destroyed several houses by lightning large fires in the rooms. The Gonpa of Kih [i.e. Nor bu dge 'phel monastery at Kyi] was much injured. The property taken off consisted chiefly of yaks, horses and other livestock"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 63 MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 63–64.

[104] *dbyar dgun thog gnyis bsdad de log phyin/ phyi gling sa hib 'thon pa'i thog ma 'di gnyis yin/ de nas nyung ti dmag spyi tir brgyab nas/ yul sogs bshig ste/ nor yod dgu khyer te log phyin/ dmag lan mjal dgos zhus lan du/ khyod rang rnams go ma chod pa yin no/ chad pa dang/*; see *La dwags rgyal rabs* 1987: 74.

[105] "On the 15th orders were received from Lé, stating, that it was the purpose of the Khalun [i.e. the minister (*bka' blon*)] to levy an armed force for the purpose of retaliating upon Kulu, for the foray lately committed by that state on Ladakh, and ordering the people of Piti to prepare to meet him near Koksar [i.e. Khoksar in Lahaul], on the north side of the Ratanka pass [i.e. Rothang Pass]. He threatens death to any who shall run away, should any fresh attack be attempted before his arrival; but this is only intended to give confidence to the people, for he knows very well, should they ever be persuaded to take the field, the first shot from a Kulu matchlock would put the whole Ladakhi force to flight"; see MOORCROFT & TREBECK 1841: 2: 62.

Tibet and Ladakh and, on a smaller scale, from the mountains of Central Asia. To this end, the Tibetan 'northern goat' (*byang ra*), a trans-Himalayan breed of domesticated goat (*Caprus hircus*), was reared for its undercoat; a thick down of luxurious fibres called pashm which, once spun into yarn and woven, gave Kashmir its most lucrative commodity: the pashmina shawl.[106] In 1684, the supply of pashm to Kashmir had been a key clause to the resolution of the Tibet-Ladakh-Mughal conflict. Thenceforth, the industry and the trade on which it depended had grown exponentially, often threatening the political stability of these regions, and attracting the mercantile ambition of powerful outsiders.[107]

In 1815, the East India Company thus established a factory at Kotgarh in the lower Sutlej Valley in hope of breaking the Kashmiri monopoly on this trade, but to little avail. With the improvement of roads over the next decade, however, Rampur, the capital of the state of Bashahr-Kinnaur, now under British protection, grew into an important trade centre for Tibetan wool in the 1830s.[108] For that purpose, transit dues were gradually reduced. Meanwhile, the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) had annexed Kashmir in 1819 thereby taking control of the shawl industry. In the early 1820s, skilled Kashmiri weavers were also active in various cities of Punjab, causing the Sikh and British authorities to compete over the Indo-Tibetan border regions and its wool trade.[109] Under these circumstances, the contraband carried out through the Spiti Valley between 1816 and 1821, as one might suspect, was little more than the harbinger of far-reaching geopolitical consequences for the region.

4.8 Age of foreign interest and occupation

4.8.1 The Dogra conquests and the end of the rNam rgyal dynasty (1834–1846)

[106] RIZVI & AHMED 2017.

[107] RIZVI 1999.

[108] Under the Treaty of Sagauli, which marked the end of the Anglo-Nepalese war (1814–1816), the hill territories of Kumaon, Garwhal, and Bashahr-Kinnaur were ceded to the East India Company giving Britain a direct border with Tibet for the first time. This sparked the cartographic surveys of these regions and the Company's interest in tapping the Western Tibetan wool trade; see DATTA 1973: 85.

[109] On the trade relations between Tibet, Ladakh, Kashmir, and British India and the political implications of the pashm trade on the eve of the Dogra conquest of Ladakh in 1834; see LAMB 1960; HUTTENBACK 1968; DATTA 1973.

Immediately after his annexation of Kashmir, Maharaja Ranjit Singh dispatched emissaries to Ladakh enjoining the king to pay tribute. In the face of this powerful new neighbour, Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal complied and seems to have fulfilled his obligations throughout the following two decades. Realising the magnitude of the Trans-Himalayan wool trade, the leader of the Sikh Empire felt threatened when in the 1820s the Ladakhi monarch approached the East India Company for a commercial agreement followed by a treaty that would have effectively placed Ladakh under British protection. Although the deal was rejected, the prospect of a political rapprochement between Ladakh and the Company provided Ranjit Singh with the economic motive for a series of territorial expansions towards the pashm-producing areas of Western Tibet. These conquests were carried out, more or less in his name, by the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh (1792–1857) who had been granted control of the princely state of Jammu in 1822. Under the leadership of General Zorawar Singh (1786–1841), the Dogra forces invaded Ladakh in 1834, Baltistan in 1839, and West Tibet in 1841. These conquests, which had been largely motivated by the potential for economic gain, brought an end to the Ladakh kingdom and provided the context for the annexation of Spiti by British India.[110]

In 1834 the King of Ladakh had thus become a vassal of the Sikh Empire, subjected to a severe war indemnity in addition to a regular annual tribute. Deposed in 1837, Tshe dpal don grub rnam rgyal received a domain at Stok (*stog*) near Leh, although he was briefly reinstated before dying of smallpox in 1840. Meanwhile, the heir apparent Tshe dbang rab brtan rnam rgyal (d.1839) preferred to flee, and accompanied by his mother and sister, reached the border valley of Spiti in 1837. Pursued by a small contingent of Sikh-Dogra soldiers, they received assistance from locals in Spiti whose legendary courage left them about just enough time to escape towards the British protectorate of Bashahr-Kinnaur.[111] Lieutenant T. Hutton, who arrived in the valley the year after, gives an interesting

[110] For more information about this well-documented historical period of the Indian subcontinent, see LAMB 1960: 54–86; HUTTENBACK 1968; DATTA 1973; PETECH 1977: 138–152.

[111] Tshe dbang rab brtan rnam rgyal settled at Kotgarh with his mother in 1838. His wife, the daughter of the minister Chos dbang don grub, remained in Ladakh with her sons Kun dga' rnam rgyal and 'Jigs med seng ge; see A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 350; PETECH 1977: 142. Two documents issued in May 1840 highlight that the headman of Spiti, Nono sKal bzang, was asked to make provisions (i.e. food, drink, and porters) for the return of princess gCes chung rgyal mo to Ladakh from Bashahr. The latter, Schuh argues, must therefore have been the sister of the newly appointed King Kun dga' rnam rgyal, whose father had died in Kotgarh in 1839. Issued by Zorawar Singh himself, the two decrees offered reassurance to the people of Spiti that they would not be

account of the prince's flight and the subsequent desecration of Tabo by the Sikh-Dogra squad.[112] Hoping to seek shelter in Bashahr too, the Ladakhi minister dNgos grub bstan 'dzin, who had been compelled to act as regent, was captured at Tabo not long afterwards and was escorted back to Leh where he was imprisoned. In 1840, it was thus decided to enthrone Tshe dbang don grub rnam rgyal's grandson as a puppet of Sikh power. The appointment of Kun dga' rnam rgyal (1834–1873; r.1840–1842) by Zorawar Singh, remarks Schuh, was accompanied by a horrendous demand of tribute on the people of Spiti whose payment was to drag on for months.[113] As the local government of Spiti failed to realise the urgency of this demand, a young and possibly inexperienced official named dPal le was sent to administer the southern district. This new prefect of the fort was assisted by Nono bsKal bzang from Kyiling who, as previously mentioned, had cunningly usurped the office of valley headman from the Pin nobility.[114] As shown by a royal decree issued in August 1840, the last Ladakhi ruler had clear instructions for the local authorities of Spiti: they were to urgently collect and deliver Gulab Singh's tribute (*dpya*); to levy governmental taxes (*mkhar gyi khral*) as before; and to enforce compliance vis-

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punished for having facilitated the flight of Tshe dbang rab brtan rnam rgyal; see No-no 39 and No-no 39 in SCHUH 2016b: 237–238.

[112] At Tabo, Hutton's appreciation for the "badly executed art" and "grotesques figures" of the monastery seemed somewhat mitigated by the depredations caused to the temple: "Last year when the Ladak rajah [i.e. Tshe dbang rab brtan rnam rgyal] was obliged to seek protection in Bussaher from Runjeet's troops [i.e. Ranjit Singh's], the figures in this temple [i.e. Tabo] were sadly mutilated. The houses of the Lamas were pulled down, and the noses and hands of the idols were cut off and thrown into the river. This outrage is generally attributed by the people to their invaders, but in reality it seems that it was perpetrated by the followers of the Ladak rajah themselves, who when deserted by their master, thought to ingratiate themselves with their conquerors, by assuming the same form of turban, and mutilating the gods of their own countrymen. If asked who defaced the images, the Lamas always accuse the "Singa," as they term the Seikhs [i.e. Sikhs], but when questioned as to the numbers who invaded them, all accounts agree in stating *six* or *seven* men, and the rest were the adherents of the Ladak rajah. These fellows also, finding the opportunity favourable, and knowing that the blame would be laid upon others, plundered every village in Spiti, and levied a fine of fifteen rupees on each, with a threat that they would repeat the visit. Every excess is however attributed to the Seikhs". Regarding the intervention of the people of Spiti, Hutton later writes: "When the Rajah of Ludak was lately expelled by the troops of Runjeet Singh, and forced to seek shelter in Spiti, the tartars assembled to the number of 400 men, and posted themselves at a gorge, in order to check the advance of the Seiks, who were reported to have entered the district. The position they had chosen was one where a handful of resolute men might have held an army at bay, and they valiantly looked forward to the defeat of their enemies. When the foremost of the Seiks appeared, a single matchlock was discharged, doubtless with the intent to strike a panic into the advancing foe, but it had unfortunately quite a contrary and unforeseen effect, for no sooner was the report heard, than, without stopping to witness the result of the shot, off scampered the Tartars, as hard as they could scramble over the hills, and the enemy, who amounted after all to no more than six men, marched through the district and compelled the Rajah, (who fled on hearing of the result of the battle), to seek protection in Bussaher"; see HUTTON 1840: 494, 561.

[113] See document No-no 34 issued on the 3rd of June, 1840, in SCHUH 2016b: 243.

[114] See section 3.4.3 in Chapter 3.

à-vis pashm trade (*le na bsrung bsdom*).[115] From 1840 to 1846, the revenue of the country was thus collected on behalf of the Sikh-Dogra coalition.[116] In addition to tribute and taxes, the enforcement of the traditional wool trade agreement that gave a monopoly in pashm to the Kashmiri workshops was undoubtedly the second most pressing issue on the agenda of King Kun dga' rnam rgyal and his Dogra overlord. Observations made in the field by Hutton suggest that Spiti had taken profit from the transit of wool through its capital. As "the chief mart for grain", remarked the British lieutenant in 1839, Dangkhar was visited annually by Tibetan shepherds who expected to exchange their wool against bags of grain. To this end, flocks of sheep from Chumurti were driven across the border in the summer. Some of them were sheared along the way and their wool bartered with villagers, while the remaining fleeces were traded at the fort of Dangkhar under the local authorities. The wool from Chumurti was "in much repute" and was purchased for a whole range of woollens according to the British officer.[117] In this context, there is ground to assume that the Spiti Valley also served as a bypass for the export of the more valuable pashm wool, taking advantage of the weakening of the

[115] See document No-no 41 issued on the 28th August, 1840, in SCHUH 2016b: 248–251.

[116] As for the revenue of Spiti, Lyall reported that "From 1839 [sic, for 1840] to 1846 the Sikh thánadár [i.e. commander (*thānadār*)] at Ladákh took the revenue of Spiti. For the first four years Rs. 2,000, plus two ponies and 25 sheep, were exacted annually. For the last three years the cash was reduced to Rs. 1,031, but 100 iron crow-bars were added, and the number of sheep increased to sixty. A Sikh force also plundered the valley in these years"; see LYALL 1874: 183.

[117] "We fell in with a large flock of beautiful sheep from Choomoortee [i.e. Chumurti], which was travelling to Dunkur for grain. The sheep are driven from village to village with the wool on, and as the required quantity is cut from their backs, they are laden with the grain which is received in exchange; and which, when the fleece is all disposed of, is carried up into Chinese Tartary [i.e. West Tibet] and sold at a profitable rate. The wool of the Choomoortee breed is very fine, and much longer than that of the low country sheep; it is therefore in much repute, and purchased for the purpose of making birmore, sooklat, and blankets (…) The only spot I could find to encamp on here, was on a small patch of grass, immediately at the foot of the cliff on whose crest the fort was perched, and which towered up some hundred feet above us. Near us were encamped a party of shepherds from Choomoortee, who had just arrived to sell their wool and purchase grain. It is custom among these people to give an order, while the crops are yet green and on the ground, for any amount of grain they may require, which when the crop is ripe, is stored up by the cultivator until he summer of the ensuing year, when the shepherd arrives with his flocks, gives the wool in exchange, and receives his grain, which he puts into small bags, brought with him for that purpose, and drives his flock thus laden back into Chinese Tartary. In the evening when the flock was brought back from pasture, I had an opportunity of witnessing the mode of shearing (…) In a very short time the whole of the flock, save a few thin sheep, were sheared, and the wool being twisted into bundles, was carried up to the fort, to which also the next morning the sheep were driven, when having each received a load of from ten to twenty seers, they descended and took the road back to Choomoortee"; see HUTTON 1839: 492, 498–499, 569.

rNam rgyal dynasty and the British presence in the southern Himalayan hill states.[118] Indeed, figures collected by J. D. Cunningham, who was posted at the frontier between Bashahr and Tibet in 1841, indicate that the value of the pashm trade at Rampur had more than doubled between 1837 and 1840.[119] Under the growing pressures of Zorawar Singh, the King of Ladakh urgently addressed the porosity of these borders and this illicit trade in his diplomatic correspondence with the local authorities of Spiti as well as with the Tibetan government through the district prefect of Ruthok and the governors of Gartok.[120] However these efforts to tighten up the regulation of the wool trade proved to be ineffective. The lack of good will on the part of the officials from West Tibet and the renewed demand for wool from Bashahr finally pushed Zorawar Singh to invade the pashm-producing areas and to conquer the whole of Western Tibet in 1841.[121]

The story of Zorawar Singh's last military campaign, which ended with the death of this so-called 'Napoleon of India', is somewhat outside the scope of this chapter since his troops did not, it seems, march through Spiti on their way to West Tibet.[122] The valley of Spiti did not however escape

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[118] A privileged witness, Hutton reported again in 1838: "The pushm is a remarkable fine wool, very silky and soft to the feel (…) It is obtained in the summer months by *shearing* the goats (…) This wool is afterwards brought to the lower hills for sale, and forms one of the chief export from Tartary. The pushmeenas, which are manufactured from it, are chiefly from Rampore and Cashemere"; see HUTTON 1839: 492.

[119] Over the same period, the less lucrative sheep wool market remained fairly constant before experiencing a rapid rise in 1840. Both pashm and sheep wool sales, however, collapsed dramatically after Zorawar Singh's conquest of West Tibet in 1841; see J.D. CUNNINGHAM 1844: 210.

[120] Issued on the 1st of August, 1840, a decree from Kun dga' rnam rgyal called on the officials of Spiti and West Tibet to prevent any violations of the old trade agreement (*khrims*). To this end, the document alludes to repeated warning messages issued by Zorawar Singh, thereby paving the ground for the Dogra invasion of West Tibet the following year: *'di lor wa zir sa heb nas byang rong tshong pa'i gtong lam sngar khrims 'chugs med dgons tshul dang/ le na mtha' phyogs la 'phud pa sogs phra mo tsam srid kyang/ phyis lam gtan nas mi legs shes pas wa na yang yang 'byor*; "This year, sealed letters from Wazir Sahib have arrived repeatedly stating that 'the trade route of the traders from the northern valleys must remain above suspicion in accordance with former regulation. In case any pashm wool was exported across the borders, even a tiny yarn, such an occurrence would be unequivocally unfortunate'"; see document No-no 21 in SCHUH 2016b: 243–247.

[121] "The scheme to conquer Tibet", wrote Datta, "appears to have been in Zorawar's mind as far back as 1836". It was facilitated by the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 and prompted by his desire to stop the flow of pashm wool to British India and to lay his hands on the gold mines of West Tibet. At the same time, the British government was alarmed at the danger of a possible rapprochement between the Sikh-Dogra coalition and Nepal; see DATTA 1973: 128–144.

[122] A passage from Cunningham's *Ladák* published in 1854, which was later reproduced in Francke's account of the Dogra war, has led many scholars to believe that Ghulam Khan, an officer of Zorawar Singh, was responsible for "plundering the monasteries and temples" of Spiti in 1841. This passage, however, raises interpretative problems concerning the chronology of events. To begin with, Ghulam Khan's alleged desecration activity in Spiti seems to have been inferred from the use of the conjunction of time 'while' in Cunningham's account: "In

the depredations of foreign forces during this period. To date, there is still confusion in academic literature as to when and how many times Spiti was ransacked by Dogra forces.[123] Based on the Company's correspondence, it is certain that Spiti was annexed by Gulab Singh in 1842 when two thousand soldiers led by Baba Lachhman Singh marched from Kulu into Spiti to restore order, after revolts had broken out all over the former territories of Ladakh.[124] In September of that year, the Dogra and Tibetan authorities concluded a treaty of non-aggression that maintained the *status quo ante bellum*, in particular as regards trade.

In effect, Gulab Singh was still a feudatory of the Sikh Empire in 1842. When the first Anglo-Sikh War (1845–1846) broke out, this Dogra ruler remained neutral and played an active role as a mediator in the negotiations between the two warring parties. In gratitude, the British recognised him as the independent ruler of Jammu in a treaty signed in Lahore on the 11th of March, 1846. A week later, he was offered Kashmir against remuneration. The treaty of sale was concluded in Amritsar on

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the month of May, 1841, with an army of 5,000 men, he advanced up the valley of the Indus (…). The conqueror then passed the sources of the Indus, and established his head-quarters on the Sutluj at Tirthapuri, in Gugé (…). The whole country was now occupied by parties of Dogra and Ladáki soldiers. Basti Rám was stationed at Takla-Khar, on the Karnali (…). The Rahim Khán, a half-blood Musulmán of Chachod, was placed over Spiti, *while* [emphasis mine] Ghulám Khán, his son-in-law, was employed in the congenial occupation of plundering the monasteries and temples. This work he executed with iconoclastic fury. The gold and the silver were reserved for his master; but the plastic images of clay, the books and the pictures, excited the religious bigotry of the Musalmán, and were indiscriminately destroyed". If it is attested that Rahim Khan (*ga ga ra yim mkhan*), as seen earlier, had been the prefect of the fort in the 1830s, there is no evidence to suggest that he was still stationed in Spiti in 1841. On the contrary, dPal le had been appointed to that office by the King of Ladakh in 1840. The latter had expressly requested the local authorities to fully assist the young Ladakhi official, a demand that would have been unnecessary if the old prefect Rahim Khan was still at Dangkhar. As for Ghulam Khan, he had been placed at the head of a military detachment that entered West Tibet from Hanle in Rupshu in April 1841. Given that Hanle is located on the other side of the Parang Pass that connects Rupshu to Spiti, one cannot entirely exclude that Ghulam Khan was in Spiti in the spring of that year. In any event, the Dogra officer proceeded to Tsaparang, where he looted the fort, and then marched into Tholing. In view of his itinerary, it seems reasonable to assume that Ghulam Singh's plundering and iconoclastic fury took place in Guge where, unlike in Spiti, Buddhist temples were richly decorated and contained many precious objects. Upon Zorawar Singh's death in battle in December of that year, Ghulam Khan was gruesomely executed in West Tibet by the Tibetan forces who had repelled the Dogra invaders; see A. CUNNINGHAM 1854: 351–354; FRANCKE 1926: 267–268; DATTA 1973: 132–133.

[123] One piece of evidence for the Sikh-Dogra presence in Dangkhar is a Punjabi graffito written in Shahmukhi script on the walls of the upper temple (fig. 4.75). I wish to thank Prabhsharandeep Sandhu, Wolfson College, Oxford, for his help in identifying the script of this inscription. Regrettably, I am unable to provide a translation of this inscription; my attempts to reach out to Punjabi scholars worldwide–five in total–have been met with a resounding silence.

[124] Insurrections were reported in Baltistan, Nubra, Zanskar, and Spiti; see DATTA 1973: 147. It is unlikely, however, that the people of Spiti had posed any real threat. The deployment of two thousand soldiers can only suggest that Gulab Singh had serious concerns about Tibetan armies entering Spiti.

the 16th March. Gulab Singh thus became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, a territory that also comprised Ladakh, yet under certain conditions. In accordance with this treaty, the new state would remain under British protection; its boundaries with Tibet were to be determined by a joint commission; and, most importantly for our present discussion, the valleys of Lahaul and Spiti were ceded to the British government.

4.8.2 The East India Company and the state of Bashahr-Kinnaur (1846–1849)

This brings us to the last two periods of Spiti's complex political history. The British occupation of the border river valley was well-documented by the very same individuals who, in fact, enforced it.[125] In the summer of 1846, the first Boundary Commission led by Alexander Cunningham and Vans Agnew delineated the territories of Lahaul and Spiti by adopting "a boundary of such mountain ranges as form water-shed lines between the drainages of different rivers".[126] Aiming to demarcate the frontier between Tibet and Ladakh, the second Boundary Commission was looked upon with much suspicion by the Dogra and Tibetan authorities who did not offer much support, if any at all.[127] In 1847, Cunningham, with the assistance of Henry Strachey and Thomas Thomson, thus confirmed the frontier based on old boundary milestones set up in the 17th century.

In light of the above, it is fair to say that the British annexation of Spiti was well calculated. The takeover of the border valley effectively created a buffer zone between Gulab Singh's state of Jammu and Kashmir and West Tibet, while also providing the British with a territorial springboard for commercial expansion into Inner Asia which, it was hoped, would open the door to China's market. In the meantime, transit dues were abolished in Bashahr, allowing for the smooth transit of pashm wool

[125] The reader can therefore refer to the works and reports written by the actors of British colonialism reviewed in the section 1.1.1 of Chapter 1.

[126] A. CUNNINGHAM, 1848b.

[127] No Tibetan Commissioners were sent to meet their British counterparts, while Gulab Singh's representatives were not very cooperative either. In fact, the Dogra ruler "had much to lose if a trade agreement was reached", remarked Lamb, and "the Tibetans remained convinced that the Commission was spying out the land in preparation for future invasion". If a military intervention was not on the agenda, Hay's secret cartographic mission in Tibet in the late 1840s clearly intended to collect intelligence towards a diplomatic and commercial rapprochement with Tibet; see LAMB 1960: 78; LANGE 2017.

to British territories. In this scenario, it was felt that Spiti had a great role to play. As reflection of this role, from 1846 until 1849, it was agreed that the revenue of Spiti would be collected by the raja of Bashahr.

4.8.3 Spiti and British India (1849–1947)

By the end of 1849, the three regions of Spiti, Lahaul, and Kulu had all been established as a sub-division of the Kangra District and were headed by an Assistant Commissioner stationed at Nagar in the milder and greener hills of Kulu. From that time onwards, officials visited the border valley of Spiti periodically to oversee and carry out the colonial enterprise of the British Crown.[128] This last historical period, about which I will only make cursory remarks, is characterised by a progressive erosion of traditional structures and Spiti's gradual dislocation from the Tibetan sphere of influence.

After the fall of the Kingdom of Ladakh, the Dangkhar settlement retained its function as political headquarters of Spiti, albeit under foreign occupation. The fort was now used primarily as the site of durbars (*darbār*), or public receptions, for British officers and civil servants during their inspections of the valley. A formerly disused room was also kept up in order to accommodate Western travellers.[129] The former government of Spiti was gradually dismantled but two traditional offices were maintained to assist the representatives of the British authorities in their duties, namely those of the valley headman (*rgya pa*) and the registrar (*ta go che*, *do ga che*). The former, who was now simply referred to as 'the Nono', became in effect a spokesperson for the British, if not their stooge. His secretary, who was in charge of maintaining the ownership records and undertaking the collection of land taxes, received the name patwari (*paṭwārī*) in accordance with the administrative jargon in use in

[128] The British Raj was formally instituted in June 1858 when the East India Company was officially transferred to the Crown in the person of Queen Victoria (1819–1901).

[129] These public receptions were still held in the first half of the 20th century as reported by Coldstream and Shuttleworth; see COLDSTREAM 1913: 8–9; LAURENT 2017a: 9. Meetings were also convened at Dangkhar in the absence of British officials as reported by Lyall: "At the end of the season, when all the passes have closed, a meeting is held at Dankhar, called the "Talsichenmo," [i.e. tehsil + *chen mo*] or great tax audit, at which the accounts of collections, both revenue and common expenses, are settled. It is attended by the wazír [i.e. Nono] and gatpos [i.e. village headman (*rgad po*)] or lambardárs, and some fifty deputies from the five koṭhīs"; see LYALL 1874: 188.

British India at the time.[130] In addition to the introduction of foreign terms such as 'durbar', 'patwari', 'kothi' and so forth, the people of Spiti were also exposed to new ideas, not least among which was Christianity.[131] Moravian missionaries, in their capacity as interpreters, assisted British administrators in their colonial endeavour while relishing the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to their Buddhist brethren by any possible means, including by engraving on stone Biblical verses written in Tibetan.[132]

During the first three decades of British presence in Spiti, Assistant Commissioners in charge of the valley paid a great deal of attention to population census and land property rights. The assessment of revenues on the part of these foreign administrators demanded a clear understanding of the traditional economic organisation of the valley, the different types of holdings, and the nature of taxes, both governmental and ecclesiastical. As with every change of political power, the new authorities were approached by local individuals who wished to obtain recognition of their property rights and privileges granted in the past. In 1851, for instance, Assistant Commissioner Hay was asked to issue a work permit to a family in Dangkhar who, since the mid-18th century, had been granted the exclusive right of producing geldings for the people of Spiti.[133] In the same way, his counterpart James Lyall, who undertook to revise the revenue settlement in the late 1860s, was shown an old deed of donation written in Tibetan from an inhabitant of Tashigang. The latter was an astrologer and had been able to enjoy the produce of agricultural plots free of rent but was now anxious to see his modest

[130] With the annexation of Spiti by British India, the traditional nomenclature used for agrarian institutions and administrative work was partially modified to conform to a new system of governance prevailing in the rest of the Province of Punjab. In addition to Tibetan terms, the settlement literature about Spiti makes use of words of Hindavi and Persian origin. Alongside 'durbar' and 'patwari', the term 'kothi' (*koṭhī*)—an Urdu word meaning 'warehouse' or 'granary'—was adopted to designate the traditional administrative units of the valley. New hybrid terms were also created. Hence the word 'Talsichenmo', for the annual tax audit at Dangkhar, was the combination of the Hindavi word 'tehsil' (*tehsi*) and the Tibetan adjective 'big' (*chen mo*). The word *tehsil* is believed to derive from an Arabic verb (*taḥṣīl*) meaning 'to collect a fee or levy taxes'. In the Anglo-Indian context, a 'tahsildar' (*tehsīldār*) was a stipendiary revenue officer in command of a *tehsil*.

[131] In 1854, the German pastor Johann Dettloff Prochnow (1814–1888) set down in writing his missionary activities in Kinnaur and Spiti: "I sat down with them and my lama and guide, to confer about our proceeding further into the interior. I told them my purpose was peaceable enough, namely to learn the language well, to converse with the lamas, and to distribute medicine to the sick, and to tell them, above all, of the love and mercy of God towards them; that He had sent His only-begotten Son into this world to take all their sins away, and make them children of God. (…) The Tartars behave extremely well (…) When they have finished their supper, and sit around the fire and smoke, we sit among them and talk, and I tell them, through our lama, about our religion, and that all require a Saviour, they as well as we"; see PROCHNOW 1855: 230–233.

[132] BESZTERDA 2013: 96–97.

[133] See section 3.3.2 in Chapter 3 and document BmK11 in Appendix 6.

source of livelihood being subjected to taxation.[134] The most striking case, however, was reported by Egerton during his stay in Dangkhar in the summer of 1863. A man from the Pin Valley named Tshe ring approached him in an attempt to reclaim his forefather's position as prefect (*mkhar dpon*) of Pin. In spite of having produced a document supposedly issued by the court of Ladakh, his claim was rejected by Egerton on political grounds, arguing that it was not "desirable to have two rulers in Spiti".[135]

By the turn of the 20th century, the Spiti Valley had been methodically examined in settlement literature and repeatedly described by the leisured class of travellers and officers on leave. Some aspects of the traditional life and beliefs of the people, however, were still alien to many British administrators and visitors. In fact, it is easy to see how this foreign presence brought its share of cultural misunderstandings and disruption. One such case concerned the double taxation of monastic tenants. For decades, some households had been mistakenly compelled to pay taxes in cash to the British Indian government while simultaneously being bound to the payment of ecclesiastical dues in kind to the monasteries of Spiti. Because of this, they never disclosed the full extent of their farming land to the new authorities. The matter was eventually brought to the attention of the settlement officer John Coldstream who resolved the issue in 1912.[136]

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[134] "At a place called Táshigong", wrote Lyall, "a family of hereditary astrologers (choba) [i.e. *jo ba*] hold two allotments granted to them by the kings of Ladákh free of demand for revenue or begár [i.e. compulsory service]". Left in a state of perplexity, Lyall draws attention to the Tibetan idiosyncrasies of the said document, "The phraseology of the deed of grant is curious. It is drawn up and attested by officials with high sounding titles, signed and sealed at our palace, &c., and promises that the grant shall endure till the feathers of the raven turn white and the snow on the mountains black"; see LYALL 1874: 186. For an actual confirmation letter of privileges granted to the astrologer of Dangkhar by a Ladakhi king; see document Jo ba1 in Appendix 6.

[135] "The other claimant of independence, named Chiring, called by his friends the Garpoon (…) is descended from ancestors who certainly held the office of Garpoon in the Peen valley. He produced a 'sunnud' (or patent), addressed to one of his ancestors, guaranteeing the office to the then holder *and his descendants*. However, this young man is quite unfit to exercise any authority, even were it desirable to have two rulers in Spiti, which it is not. (…) The document produced by the would-be Garpoon was signed by the Wuzeer of Lê [i.e. king of Leh], (in Ladak, and sealed with the 'lal Châpa' (Châpa signifying seal) or 'red chop.' It was written in the character now in use for letter writing (…). The Nono and several of the best readers in Spiti had considerable difficulty in deciphering it"; see EGERTON 1864: 28–29.

[136] "All possible precautions were taken to verify the payment of *pun*. Every landowner, or one of his family, was of course questioned separately and always knew how much was paid by his holding. (…) After some difficulty the monastery records were procured and examined. (…) In no case were records of 1871, 1891, and the monastery accounts all forthcoming. (…) At Dangkhar a darbar was held at which the abbots of all the monasteries, the *Nono* and his servants, the patwari and the great majority of the landowners were present. Mr.

Another source of concern, at least for the most virtuous disciples of Buddhism, was one of most popular British pastimes in India: shooting parties. Though traditionally frowned upon, small game hunting was not unfamiliar to the Himalayan peoples who, when times were rough and food was scarce, had to find ways to make ends meet. It was however considered a serious offence, when poachers ventured into high mountain pastures placed under the protection of monastic communities such as, for example, the hill sanctuary of Ri res spe belonging to the monastery of Lagope in Dangkhar. Were British hunters unaware of these facts, or did they simply choose to ignore them? One thing is for certain, they actively sought the assistance of local shikari (i.e. hunting guides) and porters to hunt down ibex, bharals, and argalis in the hills of Spiti.[137] Under this irresistible passion for hunting, some of the game laws established by the British government of India at the time were even deemed objectionable by the sportsmen themselves.[138]

As in the past, the Dangkhar settlement continued to be a stopping-off place of primary importance for most British officials and foreign travellers who toured the Spiti Valley between 1846 and 1947. To assist them during their journeys, whatever the nature of their expedition, food supplies and porters were generally made available by the Nono and other village headmen upon the production of a travel warrant or purwana (*paravānā*).[139] Prior to 1846, obligatory labour and porterage (*'u lag*) had traditionally fallen upon the members of the main tax paying households of Spiti. Taking over the

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Peter, Superintendent of the Moravian Mission, kindly helped by explaining my questions and interpreting the replies. (…) It was asserted that so far as gran collections were concerned the only significant change that had occurred since Spiti became British territory was made in the time of Major Hay (1853–57) when certain monasteries agreed to collect a fifth less than before because the people were very poor. The monastery accounts however dated from before this time, and thus the discrepancy between the monastery accounts and the statement of the people was explained. The latter were it was agreed by all correct. Asked why the truth had been concealed so long, the assembly gave the explanation suggested in paragraph 38 of Mr. Diack's Assessment Report that they feared confiscation of religious dues by Government"; see COLDSTREAM 1913: 8–9.

[137] See section 3.5.4 in Chapter 3.

[138] Concerning the game laws of the Kangra District in which Spiti, Lahaul, and Kulu fell, the author of *The Sportsman's Manual* wrote in 1893: "With regard to the shooting of Deer, Wild Sheep and Goats, if that portion of the Deputy Commissioner's order were acted up to, there would be no opening for sportsmen in these countries, and it would amount to a close season for these animals *in perpetuo*. I cannot understand it"; see TYACKE 1893: 7.

[139] In 1881, writer and adventurer Harriet Georgina Murray-Aynsley recalled: "At Kaja [i.e. Kaza] a blacksmith met us, and replaced all the missing shoes on our horses. We had dispatched Danni [i.e. the interpreter] from Dankar to the Nono, or head native official for all Spiti, begging him to give us a letter, or *purwana* as it is called, in order to facilitate our getting supplies and coolies whilst passing through his district, and asking him at the same time to send us this workman"; see MURRAY-AYNSLEY 1882: 68.

existing system of compulsory porterage,[140] an ambivalent attitude towards *begar* on the British side is attested throughout the period.[141] In return for meagre wages, porters were often exploited by village authorities as much as by foreign travellers.[142] The continuity of this system under British rule was especially burdensome for the people of Spiti who were usually called on in the summer months when most of the agricultural work needed to be carried out.[143]

Throughout this period of foreign interference, the Dangkhar settlement remained the political centre of a Himalayan border valley wedged between powerful nations. Against the backdrop of the Great Game, the Spiti Valley was arguably more than just a mere pawn on the chessboard of Asia. When Tibetologist David L. Snellgrove (1920–2016) visited the settlement in 1953/4, the fort of Dangkhar had been visibly renovated, an indication that the edifice had continued to serve as the political seat of the Spiti Valley until and even after the Indian Independence Act of 1947.[144] By the time the district of Lahaul-Spiti was formally established in 1960,[145] however, the small town of Kaza had become the headquarters of the sub-divisional district of Spiti, finally relegating Dangkhar to the status of a historic site of secondary importance. Henceforth it would be known by the people of the valley as the 'former capital of Spiti'.

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[140] BRAY 2008b: 41–66.

[141] The Assistant Commissioner of Punjab A.F.P. Harcourt summarized some of the issues raised by obligatory porterage and corvée labour in the Western Himalayas in the 1860s; see HARCOURT 1871b: 276–285.

[142] In 1855, Prochnow reported the "outrageous proceedings of godless Europeans" who had arrived in Kinnaur from Spiti: "We met here two gentlemen coming from Ladakh and Kashmir, one a medical man, the other a lieutenant of one of the Queen's regiments. The latter had taken a poor girl away with him from Spiti, the daughter of a blacksmith, and at every village behaved in a most outrageous way, paying very inadequately for the work and labour he exacted from the poor villagers in carrying his things, and beating them violently. At every village we came to we heard bitter complaints"; see PROCHNOW 1855: 42. Arguing for decent remuneration of Himalayan porters during his scientific expedition in 1861, British malacologist William Theobald was made aware of the exploitative nature of obligatory porterage within the traditional socio-economic structures of Spiti society: "As I had already, in consideration of the hardship of the road, paid the coolies double the usual hire, I was somewhat at a loss to account for their unwillingness to earn an additional sum, and their preferring to return empty handed. As, however, I am not one of those ingenious theorists who solve such questions by supposing "niggers" act on principles unintelligible to other mortals, I made some enquiry and soon found a reasonable ground for their conduct. The coolies I found were furnished by the headman of Kiba [i.e. Kyiber] who supplied them with food, but appropriated their wages himself"; see THEOBALD 1862: 518.

[143] "Called away, as he [pro]bably was, just when his little patch of ground demanded constant care and attention, the services demanded of him were deemed an intolerable burden, for which the insignificant payment tendered could not, by any reasonable person, be held as a fitting compensation"; see HARCOURT 1871b: 280.

[144] See figure 40 in Appendix 3 and SNELLGROVE 1957 : 188–189.

[145] On the development of the Spiti Valley after 1947, see BAJPAI 1987.

CONCLUSION

The linear frontier as it is conventionally indicated on a map always proves, when studied on the ground, to be a zone rather than a line.

A frontier line separates two jurisdictions; but whenever the two communities that are set apart from each other in this way are similar in a general way like France and Italy, or notably dissimilar like India and Tibet, the maximum of difference is to be sought near the centre of gravity of each country and not at the frontier where they meet.

Owen Lattimore (1962)

In accordance with the Government of India's Foreigners Protected Area Order of 1958, tourists travelling through Spiti are presently requested to produce an Inner Line Permit at checkpoints located wherever the road passes within a few kilometres of Tibet. No matter which side of the border you are on, the Spiti Valley, today as in the past, occupies a unique and sensitive position on the map of Asia. While this political boundary is represented conventionally as a line on a map, this line proves to be a zone on the ground with its local culture and history. As shown by this thesis, the river valley of Spiti has a long and complex history within the Indo-Tibetan border region of the Western Himalayas. In spite of a harsh environment and high elevation, human presence in this region dates back at least 20,000 years. It was only towards the end of the first millennium of the Common Era that a Buddhist elite began to leave concrete evidence of a Tibetan-speaking milieu in Spiti, as evidenced by the archaeological and epigraphical records from this region. Marking the end of a period of cultural assimilation rather than

its beginning, the later spread of Buddhism in West Tibet sealed the destiny of Spiti. Henceforth the valley and its inhabitants would fall within the larger area of Tibetan linguistic and cultural influence. In spite of its significance, historical research on Spiti as a distinct region has been subject to unequal treatment in modern scholarship. The site of Dangkhar in particular has never received more than cursory references in secondary literature, understandably overshadowed by the nearby world-famous Tabo Monastery. By addressing this neglected historic site, this thesis hopes to contribute to reshaping our understanding of Spiti. From the time of its inception, the Dangkhar settlement has occupied a strategic and defensive location straddling the routes crossing the river valley of Spiti. In the course of time, a number of multi-storeyed buildings, including a monastery and a fort, were established there, resembling an eagle's eyrie perched atop lofty cliffs. It is as the 'capital of Spiti' that the Dangkhar settlement was eventually introduced to a 19th-century western readership based on colonial reports and travel literature. More recently, and with the erosion of time, the historic monastery of the Dangkhar settlement was recognised as a site of imperilled cultural heritage by the World Monument Fund in 2006.

The dilapidation of historic monuments in Spiti represented a loss of largely undocumented cultural heritage. In light of the real and present threat to Dangkhar, it was thus imperative to carry out an in-depth study of this settlement in order, on the one hand, to keep records of the most endangered vestiges and, on the other hand, to trace the role of this site within the wider history of the Western Himalayas. To this end, survey fieldwork allowed us to distinguish the underlying organisational principles of the settlement: namely, its territorial features, its residential area, its fort, and its monastic complex. Following non-invasive archaeological investigations, I conducted historical research on the basis of local archives and epigraphic documents. No stone was left unturned in the process: a granary cache proved as valuable a piece of information as a written agreement to discuss the complex system of monastic estates and ecclesiastical dues, while a donor tableau painted on the walls of a Buddhist chapel provided the means to rethink the political control exerted by the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh over Spiti. By combining material, visual, and literary evidence, this thesis has brought into focus the socio-economic, political, and religious conditions under which the Dangkhar settlement developed over time. This in turn has permitted an evaluation of the status and functions assumed by this site under

different geopolitical configurations. Significant connections, including possible blood ties, with the rulers of West Tibet were indicative of the ways in which the Dangkhar settlement developed as a royal residence and recipient of courtly patronage. Admittedly, we still lack detailed information on the origin of this 'Holyroodhouse' of the Guge royalty. This notwithstanding, both extant material evidence and primary textual sources point to the importance of this site as a place of regional political power from the late 11th to the 20th centuries. Certainly by the end of the 15th-early 16th century, Dangkhar had emerged as the leading settlement of Spiti before being distinctively referred to as the *rgyal sa* of the valley in primary sources by the end of this period: a Tibetan term which encapsulates both its royal origin and later development as an administrative and political centre. Sitting astride some of the most important trade and communication routes of the Western Himalayas, the Spiti Valley played a significant role in both the diffusion of ideas and the transfer of goods within the Indo-Tibetan border regions. In tracing both local and trans-regional patterns of continuity and change, this research has helped to refine a meaningful and coherent periodisation scheme which illuminates the various political, religious, and economic interactions which have shaped the history of the Western Himalayas. Perhaps most significantly, the thesis presents a detailed historical overview of Spiti–the first attempt to do so since Petech's 1997 introductory essay–largely based on Tibetan language literary works, archival documents, and epigraphic sources. It thereby hopes to fulfil the long-standing unfinished aspiration of Henry Lee Shuttleworth.

Young Tibetologists may take heart from the fact that much work still remains to be done concerning the history of this valley. In the course of this thesis, a large amount of primary material has been uncovered, on the basis of which I have tried to offer potentially fruitful avenues for future research. These include the archaeological survey work of fortified sites, fire-raising stations, and anchorite caves in Spiti; the study of donor records engraved on *maṇi* stones; the documentation of settlements and monasteries based on private documents and official archives; and the visual and iconographic analysis of village chapels from a socio-historical perspective.

Having thus laid some groundwork and a historical framework for the study of Spiti, I would like to conclude by raising some theoretical considerations informed by the field of borderland studies.[1]

[1] FEUER 2016.

Quoted above, Owen Lattimore (1900–1989) was one of the foremost pioneers of the study of 'Inner Asian Frontiers'. "His most basic contribution to the analysis of the frontier," summarizes William Rowe, "was to reconceptualize this as a shifting and fluid zone of interaction rather than a comfortable delineated borderland".[2] As *loci* of interaction, borderlands, by definition, exist in relation to a core area or centre, while being simultaneously influenced by a world situated beyond the boundaries of that centre, as delimited by jurisdictional power. Based on this observation, it is fair to say that the Spiti Valley was a place of interaction as much as it was an object of repeated and competing political claims. As we have seen, the border valley was regularly pulled by centrifugal forces into the orbit of a variety of powerful core areas in the course of its history. It is the degree of differentiation between these competing centres and their periphery (*mtha' dbus*) that I wish to explore here, albeit briefly.

As is widely known, the territorial expansion of the Tibetan Empire from the plains of Central Tibet towards the periphery (*mtha' bskor*) of the Tibetan plateau was a military affair. With the annexation of the Zhang zhung Kingdom by the troops of Srong btsan sgam po in the 640s, West Tibet became a frontier, in other words a military front, which demanded the presence of soldiers and frontier guards. Within this new territorial configuration, the river valley of Spiti likely represented the outermost limit of effective military and political control, acting as a boundary (*so mtshams*)–a term that could be translated literally as a space between teeth–, at which point the area ceased to be a frontier (*mtha' mtshams*) and became a border region (*mtha' khul*). The population of this valley must have been sufficiently different for the incorporation of Spiti into the Tibetan Empire to set in motion a gradual process of linguistic and cultural assimilation. The completion of what could be termed ethnogenesis–the creation of a new identity–seems to have occurred during the 10th-11th centuries, when the western borderlands suddenly formed a new territorial and political entity: the Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet.

Keeping in mind a model of concentric circles, the centre of this kingdom was now situated in Purang-Guge, thereby shortening considerably the distance between the core area and the periphery of the political entity. If geographically speaking Spiti was still located in the borderlands, it was now deeply integrated into the socio-economic fabric and cultural milieu of this new kingdom. By now, the

[2] ROWE 2007: 778.

people of the border valley spoke the same Tibetan language (i.e. Western Innovative) as those of the heartland. Local elites looked to the centre for models and replicated cultural trends by means of religious sponsorship.[3] Intellectual centres and sumptuous Buddhist temples were established under royal patronage, in Spiti (i.e. Tabo) just as in the other regions of the kingdom (i.e. Tholing, Kojarnath, Nyarma), and thirty bright young men from that valley were chosen by the monk-king Ye shes 'od, out of two hundred, to embrace Buddhism and propagate its doctrine through the realm. Despite the ups and downs of royal succession, which prompted several territorial reconfigurations, Spiti maintained close ties with the core area of Guge over the next five hundred years or so. It is therefore not surprising that the founding inscription of the Golden Temple at Lhalung in Spiti, dating from the late 12th century, underscored that the region of Guge-Cog la, to the east of Spiti, constituted the central axis or nucleus (*srog zhing*) of West Tibet. The resurgence of the Guge royalty in the 15th century eventually translated into a new religious impetus in the region, characterised this time by a rapid adoption of Tsong kha pa's teachings and the Gelukpa school. In this process, thanks to patronage of the royal house of Guge, Spiti once again emulated the trends of the core area. By all accounts, the period from the mid-10th century to the fall of the Guge Kingdom in 1630 had been instrumental in shaping the cultural identity of the Spiti Valley. During this time the degree of differentiation between the centre and the periphery had been politically, economically, and culturally minimal.

Looking at state-led territorialisation of Western Tibet after 1630, the geo-political position of Spiti was to shift more frequently and dramatically. Like water ripples produced by two stones cast into a pond, the Spiti Valley suddenly found itself at the intersection of two growing powers: Central Tibet with its Gelukpa theocracy and the Kingdom of Ladakh under the rNam rgyal dynasty. In both instances, the border valley of Spiti reverted to a strong peripheral position under the threat of neighbouring polities (i.e. Kulu, Bashahr-Kinnaur) and rising empires (i.e. Sikh, British). Between 1630 and 1846, Spiti acted essentially as a buffer zone. It became a contested ground where, for example, monasteries of different schools were indirectly controlled by competing state interests. It was also an intermediate zone in terms of economic activity. While tribute and taxes were levied by Ladakh, ecclesiastical dues (i.e. grains) continued to be sent to West Tibet. Perhaps even more significant was the international trade in wool

[3] KLIMBURG-SALTER 1997: 139–140: fig.140; LUCZANITS 1999; HELLER 2010

and pashm, with its potential for disruption and contraband, which became a cause of regional instability and even invasions. Last but not least, the Spiti Valley constituted a natural barrier between, on the one hand, people who shared the same world view and, on the other, outsiders (*phyi rgyal ba*) who inhabited the confines of the Tibetan Buddhist world, be they Indians or the British.

Returning to structural linkages between centre and periphery, the position of Spiti with regard to Tibet and Ladakh appears to have been quite distinct. Even within the relatively homogeneous environmental and cultural milieu of the Tibetosphere, the people of the Spiti Valley, I would argue, identified more closely with Tibet than they did with Ladakh. The reasons of this are threefold. Firstly, West Tibet (i.e. Guge, Purang, Ruthok) was now under the authority and jurisdiction of the Tibetan dGa' ldan pho brang government. These areas constituted the core area of the former Kingdom of the Three Dominions of Upper Tibet which, as we have seen, was a historical point of reference and symbol of identity for the people of Spiti. The tight administrative organisation of West Tibet, with its districts and bevy of officials (e.g. governors, districts officers), operated as a powerful regional centre, thereby shortening the distance between the actual political and cultural centre of Central Tibet and the western borderlands.[4] Secondly, the religious landscape of Spiti largely replicated that of Tibet, where Gelukpa monasteries and monks outnumbered those of other schools. In contrast, the rNam rgyal dynasty of Ladakh developed much greater affinities with the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, a tradition that did not possess any monastic communities in Spiti, and whose support by the kings of Ladakh had contributed to the frontier war between Tibet and Ladakh in the last quarter of the 17th century. Finally, Spiti maintained greater linguistic ties to West Tibet, and to some extent Central Tibet, than it did to Ladakh where a different Tibetic language (i.e. Western Archaic) was spoken; the pronunciation of the name of the region itself (Tibetan and Western Innovative Piti vs. Western Archaic Spiti) is a good example.

In light of these observations, the retrocession of Spiti to Ladakh ordered by lHa bzang khan in the first decade of the 18th century must have come as a real blow for the people of Spiti, if we are to

[4] From the Tibetan point of view however, the monastic estates of Spiti, which contributed to the religious and economic support of the Dalai Lama's government in the 1680s, were clearly perceived as being situated at the outermost border (*mtha' mtshams kyi dgon gzhir*) of the Tibetan jurisdiction; see document BmK03 in Appendix 6.

judge by their desperate plea expressed in a written agreement from this time. The ambivalent loyalties of the inhabitants of this border valley towards Ladakh is perhaps best illustrated by popular narratives and wedding songs.[5] Veronika Hein notes, for instance, that there are several songs about Ladakhi girls who were betrothed to men in Spiti.[6] Intermarriages and matrimonial alliances between groups, as observed in borderland studies, is often a cause and indicator of assimilation.[7]

Throughout the period of hegemony of the rNam rgyal dynasty (*c.*1590–1840), which comprised the Kingdom of Ladakh as well as its regional offshoots (i.e. Zanskar and Purig), the Spiti Valley was a relatively secure vassal polity. The extent of its political integration is reflected by the fact that two Ladakhi representatives, acting as prefects of the fort, spent about six months a year in Spiti, mostly at the end of the harvest season when governmental taxes would be levied, while for the rest of the year the area was left to the supervision of the local government of Spiti. Yet, despite the relative geographical proximity between the core area of the Kingdom of Ladakh and the southern district of Spiti, Ladakhi control over this border valley could not obscure the fact that the people of Spiti still retained stronger linguistic, religious, economic, and historical ties with the region of Guge in Ngari.[8]

That Spiti retained greater ties to Guge and its early history than it did to Ladakh did not prevent the latter from appealing to its Western Tibetan heritage, too. As amply illustrated by donative records– such as founding inscriptions, votive *maṇi* stones, and donor prefaces–, the region of Mount Kailash was regarded as the symbolic and geographical centre of the Jambudvīpa continent, while the early kings of Ngari formed the dynastic bedrock for the development of many polities in Western Tibet. In effect,

[5] See document A in Appendix 8.

[6] HEIN 2007a: 8. In one of these songs, the Ladakhi girl She ma dbang mo is sent to Spiti against her will. Her family agrees to a 'cheap' wedding: "Only for a golden cup of ale did her father send her to the other people's village. Only for some Indian and Tibetan tea did her mother send her to the other people's village. Only for a white scarf did her brother send her to the other people's village". Once in Spiti, she is said to be unhappy and faces many difficulties, notably with her mother-in-law who accuses her of seeing other men. This song is especially interesting as the people of Spiti today believe that it refers to a Ladakhi girl who married the 'Nono of Spiti' three or four generations ago; personal communication with Veronika Hein, April 2019. The husband and alleged cuckold, named Tshe bdang stobs rgyas in the song, would thus have belonged to aristocratic family of Kyiling. Male members of this household, as we have seen, often served as go-between for the Ladakhi authorities and the people of Spiti during the 18th-19th centuries.

[7] FEUER 2016: 88–89.

[8] Or in Shuttleworth's own words: "In Spiti, apart from one semi-reformed Sakya and one small unreformed Nying-ma-pa monastery, all monastic establishments have accepted the Ge-lug-pa discipline and dress. This involved a close connection with Gu-ge and Central Tibet, with which Spiti is connected in every way except politically"; see SHUTTLEWORTH (1934: 59).

Ladakh itself had branched off from the Kingdom of the Three Dominions at the turn of the first millennium. By the end of the 16th century, however, the rNam rgyal dynasty actively sought to conquer West Tibet and adjacent territories. With the annexation of Spiti, the Kingdom of Ladakh could therefore lay claim to this shared cultural heritage and august past. Whether as the expression of genuine sentiment or instrumental political legitimisation, the rNam rgyal dynasty found the means to remind the people of Spiti of these common roots when, following the enforced transfer of Spiti to Ladakh at the beginning of the 18th century, they designed the iconographic programme of the chapel erected in Dangkhar: the old royal seat and capital of Spiti.

Giving this thesis its focus, the historic site of Dangkhar deserved a study in its own right and has turned out to be a focal point for uncovering the role of this border region within the shifting dynamics of the surrounding territories and powers. By documenting and assessing the singular trajectory of this Himalayan settlement, I hope this research has shown that the periphery can be central after all.

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