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## Compte rendu de : Ladakhi Histories: Local and regional perspectives

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**Ladakhi Histories: Local and regional perspectives, edited by John Bray. Leiden: Brill (Tibetan Studies Library, 9). 2005. x + 406 pages, 36 maps, figures and plates, index. ISBN 90 04 14551 6.**

Reviewed by Pascale Dollfus, Paris.

This volume illustrates the plurality of approaches to studying history and current research in the making. It compiles contributions – very different in length and in style – from researchers from a variety of disciplines: linguistics, tibetology, anthropology, history, art and archaeology. Their sources include linguistics, archaeological and artistic evidence; Tibetan chronicles, Persian biographies and European travel accounts; government records and private correspondence, land titles and trade receipts; oral tradition and reminiscence of survivors' recollections. The majority of the papers were first presented at the *International Association of Ladakh Studies* (IALS) conferences held in 1999, 2001 and 2003, and these have been supplemented by a few additional contributions. I neither have sufficient knowledge nor the space to discuss each of these papers at length or adequately, I will rather summarize the content of the book as a whole.

The aim pursued is not to write a history of Ladakh, but rather to propose – as its title shows – several "histories of Ladakh" (p. 2). As John Bray, the editor, states: "Ladakh's history has to be understood at several different levels". The interaction between local, regional and international viewpoints is therefore one of the main themes of this book. Three contributions however do not inform us of Ladakh's history, but rather highlight the character, aspirations, and motivations of those who planned to visit the region and eventually chose it as their field for research. In his first paper, Peter Marczell (pp. 183-202) examines unpublished correspondence (rendered here verbatim) from Dr. J. Gerard, a Scottish military surgeon, that gives insight into early British fascination for the Western Himalayas. In the second one (pp. 203-216), he discusses the Hungarian scholar Alexander Csoma de Koros' use of a pseudonym during his Himalayan travels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For his part, Poul Pedersen (pp. 293-308) focuses on the commitment of Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark to psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex, that motivated his scientific interest in polyandry, and made him go to Ladakh.

The other 19 remaining essays, put into a historical sequence, lead the reader from the late 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> century, when Ladakh was part of the

Tibetan empire, up to the present day, and recalls – sometimes indirectly – the wars, migrations, conversions, influences and changes which took place in this region over this vast time span. In passing, one welcomes the introductory essay written by the editor himself (pp. 1-30) that gives a useful overview of Ladakh's local and regional interconnections, then examines its political and religious history in greater detail.

The first two papers point out the linguistic similarities between the dialects spoken in the two extremities of the Tibetan speaking world – Ladakh and Baltistan at the north-western end and Amdo and Kham at the north-eastern end. On one hand, Philip Denwood (pp. 31-40) suggests that a millennium ago regular communication must have taken place across the Changthang plateau, which due to a more favourable climate once housed a much larger population at that time than it does today. On the other hand, Bettina Zeisler (pp. 41-65) discusses the position of Ladakhi and Balti within the family of Tibetan languages from linguistic and historical perspectives, and argues that Ladakhi and Balti have their origin in an earlier state of the Tibetan Language, that preceded Classical Tibetan. In other words, "Choskat or the classical book language turns out to be a younger cousin rather than a parent of Old West Tibetan. Thus its orthography cannot be compulsory for the Balti and Ladakhi phalskat".

With Christian Luczanits' essay (pp.65-96), one shifts from linguistic to architectural and art historical evidence such as rock- and stone-carvings, stone-engravings and wood-carvings, murals, statues and all kinds of archaeological relics. The author stresses the importance of studying this largely ignored material to improve our understanding of the early history of Ladakh, and shows in particular how this can help in evaluating the extent of early Buddhism in the area. Next, Roberto Vitali (pp. 97-124) sheds some light on "the one hundred years of darkness" in the history of Ladakh (1280s-1380s). In a paper densely packed with historical detail and footnotes, he analyzes the "fractured secular panorama" at that time. By confronting Tibetan and Persian sources, he introduces the military campaigns of the Chaghatai Mongols (sTod Hor) into Ladakh and Upper West Tibet and the Qarâchîl expedition undertaken by the Delhi Sultanate to stop the former's advance into North-West India. He also makes a thorough review of the sources concerning rGyal bu Rin chen/Rinchana Bottha, a mysterious prince included in the royal genealogy of Ladakh. According to him, this nobleman, who gained power in Kashmir, was a stranger to Ladakh.

Neil Howard (pp. 125-146) continues on the theme of invasion with the raid into Ladakh by Sultan Zain-ul Abidin of Kashmir in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the light of new studies, he questions its route, its date, and its place in the history of Ladakh. Jigar Mohammed (pp. 147-160) reviews the raid of yet another invader, the Mughal general Mirza Haidar Dughlat, whose

armies occupied Ladakh in the 1530s. By way of his paper, the reader enters a new period of Ladakhi history: the so-called Namgyal dynasty, a branch of the existing royal family which ruled over Ladakh from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the annexation of the kingdom in 1842.

Drawing on Persian texts from medieval times and on the account of the French traveller François Bernier who visited Kashmir in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, he provides the Mughal view of the region's economic and social affairs. Focusing on local level, Peter Schwieger's contribution offers a complementary perspective, and adds to our understanding of the relationships between the kingdom of Ladakh and local sub-kingdoms and chiefdoms in this period. He introduces two pairs of documents concerning land titles that give a list of the officials and functionaries who were active in He-na-ku [Heniskot], a petty kingdom ruled by an offshoot of the Namgyal dynasty. At that time, in the nearby Suru valley, most of the inhabitants converted to Shia Islam. According to Nicola Grist, author of a Ph.D. Thesis on "Local politics in the Suru valley" from which the essay presented here (pp. 175-180) is drawn, the spread of Islam in Purig was a gradual process. It results "both of Muslim preachers converting the ordinary populace and of chiefs adopting Islam as part of the process of alliance building with the Mughals and the Chiefs of Baltistan". Nevertheless, by 1758 Purig was incorporated into the Ladakhi kingdom. Consequently the Suru valley was ruled by regional administrators (*mkhar dpon*, "Lords of the fort") who were all Buddhists from the Leh capital area. It was still the case in the 1830s, when Ladakh was invaded by the Dogra armies and finally lost its independence.

Following the first Anglo-Sikh War, the state of Jammu & Kashmir was established by the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. It included Ladakh and Spiti, while Lahul became part of British India. The British authorities therefore felt necessary to demarcate the border between British and Kashmir – and between Kashmiri and Tibetan – territory, and they sent commissioners to survey the frontier at two different times (1846, 1871-72). This technical and political challenge is narrated by Neil Howard (pp. 217-234), who discusses the confusion about where the boundary lay and shows that this persists on contemporary maps.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Leh consolidated its status as entrepôt on the Central Asian route. The British established an Agency to supervise trade and, through the security provided, helped the establishment of Christian missions. Based on British government records kept in the National Archives of India, K. Warikoo (pp. 235-248) discusses the trans-Himalayan political and trade linkages between Kashmir, Ladakh and eastern Turkestan. He highlights the increasing involvement of the British in Central Asian affairs, after the Russian conquest of Western Turkestan. Jacqueline Fewkes and Abdul Nasir Khan (pp. 321-334) give an

accurate picture of the traders' networks inside and outside Ladakh based on personal and business papers of two caravan route traders in Leh : a corpus of 1,000 pages written in different languages (English, Uighur, Persian, Tibetan, etc.). The authors were able to precisely trace the movements of goods, and the people involved in the system and the places where they lived. Consequently they identify three kinship-based social networks embedded in trade history: the traders, transporters (*kiraiyakash*, from *kiraiya* "hire"), and to a lesser extent colonial officials. In each case, kinship was a component of strategy. The *kiraiyakash* transporters were not the only group of Ladakhis who travelled outside their own region in order to make money and, at the same time, increase Ladakh's resources as a whole. They were also migrant labourers as Janet Rizvi (pp. 309-320) shows in an innovative essay focusing on the Suru valley and Zanskar, and drawn, as with her earlier work, from survivors' recollections. It is also on oral tradition that Tashi Stobdan's paper (pp. 181-182) is based. The story concerns a dispute over grazing rights between the villages of Stok and Matho that was ultimately resolved by an archery competition.

As we have already noted the expansion of British rule in India paved the way for Christian missionaries. Three papers address this topic. In the first one, John Bray (pp. 249-270) introduces the context in which these missions took place and presents the various Protestant missions that worked in Tibet and the Himalayan border regions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (the Baptist Missionary Society, the Anglican Church Missionary Society and independent German missionaries). He highlights their special interest – also shared by the British officials – in linguistic research. In the following essay, Christian Heyde (pp. 271-280) discusses the beginning of the West Himalayan Moravian Mission paying particular attention to the station founded in Keylang by his ancestors, Wilhem and Maria Heyde, who lived there for 39 and 42 years respectively. Their efforts to convert villagers to Christianity met with little success. However the missionaries improved living conditions by introducing new irrigation channels, new crops, new trees, new stoves, and made important contributions to education and schooling. This is the topic of A.H. Francke's paper first published in Germany in 1898 and translated here from German by Gabriela Reifenberg (pp. 281-292). It gives a vivid picture of the problems facing the Leh schools: no fixed timetable, no proper classrooms, and most of all no pupils! As Francke clearly states, the main question was the following: how can the mission teachers persuade the children of the Buddhist Ladakhis to attend school? And secondly, which language should be used in translation and more generally in writings: Classical Tibetan that nobody speaks or colloquial dialects? H.A. Jäschke, the linguist, who was in favour of using Literary Tibetan, opposed W.Heyde and A.H. Francke who

wished to develop local dialects (Bunan or Ladakhi) as a written language. Today like yesterday the desire to write in colloquial Ladakhi ("Ladakhi Palskat") rather than in classical Tibetan ("Choskat") according to the ancient grammar of the 7<sup>th</sup> century provokes fierce debate (see B. Zeisler in this book). Recently, there has been a lot of criticism, discussion and noisy debate over what some Ladakhi scholars call "the destruction of the old grammar" by *Ladags Melong* (Mirror of Ladakh). Its editorial advisor Sonam Wangchuk presents his viewpoint on this burning issue in the copy of the journal (dated Summer 2005).

After the demise of the Ladakhi kingdom and its annexion to Jammu and Kashmir State, although the Maharajas were Hindus, connections with Tibet and its religious centres were maintained. The main monasteries continued to send monks for religious training. It was the case for instance of Geshe Ye-shes don-grup (1897-1980), whose life and contributions to Ladakh are described in Nawang Tsering Shakspo's paper (pp. 335-352), based on two unpublished autobiographies. In the same way, all the traditional Buddhist artists in 20<sup>th</sup> century Ladakh have direct or indirect links with Tibet, and in turn transmitted their skills to a generation of painters and sculptors. By reviewing lives and works of some outstanding figures, Erberto Lo Bue (pp. 353-378) highlights the crucial role that these Ladakhi artists have played in preserving Buddhist culture not only in Ladakh, but even beyond, during one of the most troublesome times in the history of Tibetan civilisation.

To conclude, Fernanda Pirie (pp. 379), through the case study of the remote village of Photoksar, analyzes the way anti-hierarchical principles counter social stratification in Ladakh in an ethnological and historical perspective. She argues that these principles of equality derived from social patterns that were established during the kings' era and continue to influence modern contemporary village politics. Thus, while villagers had realised the benefit of selecting a headman who has the knack of dealing with government officials and NGO representatives for an extended term of office, they remain reluctant to have power embodied in one person.

This volume clearly shows that there is not only one way of writing history and it has attempted to uncover several of them. Taken together, it provides the reader with considerable new data and opens the way to reap the fruits of subsequent research. As this book demonstrates, there is still a great wealth of things to be uncovered. To date, while the history of the Kargil and Purig regions has been almost totally disregarded, the history of Ladakhi Changthang has yet to be written. By the way, one may deplore the lack of an essay devoted to nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists inhabiting the eastern plateaus. The Changpas only appear as hold-off shadows when discussing trade networks.

The editing and general appearance of the book are of a high standard, although there are some minor misprints, especially in the spelling of proper nouns. (Concerning Tibetan/Ladakhi translation, no uniform system of transliteration has been imposed.) Alas its price (95 euros, -USD 136) is prohibitively expensive for South-Asian readers.

Last but not least, it includes a useful index and two welcome maps: one situating Ladakh in India's contemporary international boundaries and areas disputed with China and Pakistan, the other showing the different regions composing it. The latter unfortunately is not as informative as it might be. In fact, the toponyms mentioned do not necessarily match the names cited in the book (and vice-versa). Henasku, Suru river or Basgo to quote only a few examples are missing. On the other hand, useless names – at least for the reader – are inscribed. Finally, the volume offers some fine black and white photographs, some of them drawn from the National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen or the Charles Bell collection in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. The lovely picture of the cover showing "the leader of the Ladakhi *lo-phyag* mission in 1921" is one of them.

This being said, the book can be highly recommended. It constitutes an important and original contribution to previous publications, but also represents a significant departure from it. Therefore, it remains an essential reading for all researchers who are concerned with the study of Ladakh and Himalayan regions.