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LADAKH
4 & 5**

**Proceedings of the Fourth and Fifth
International Colloquia on Ladakh**

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(Editors)

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PREFACE

The proceedings of the first international colloquium on Ladakh at Konstanz were published under the title of *Recent Research on Ladakh*, but those of the next two colloquia were published under quite different titles (see next page) which did not make it clear that they constituted a continuing series. Indeed this was not assured until the formation of the International Association for Ladakh Studies in 1987.

To clarify this point and for the convenience of readers and libraries we have decided to revert to the original title of "*Recent Research on Ladakh*" for this volume, and to number it "4 & 5" to correspond with the colloquium numbers. Thus there is no volume entitled *Recent Research in Ladakh 2* or *3*.

In view of the wide range of styles and approaches of the authors, and the diversity of secondary sources used, we have not standardised spellings or the transliteration of Tibetan between papers, although in general it follows Wylie.

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Henry Osmaston & Philip Denwood

WILLIAM MOORCROFT AN ASSESSMENT

Philip Denwood*

But for William Moorcroft, Alexander Csoma de Kôrös might well never have taken up the study of Tibetan. The whole cult of Csoma (if I may be forgiven for referring to it as such) might never have arisen in its present form, and the Western study of Tibetan and Mahayana Buddhism would certainly not have got off to such a flying start.

I shall begin by quoting a passage from the writings of another remarkable Hungarian traveller, Arminius Vambery. In the year 1863, heavily disguised as, in his own words, "a genuine Turk and Effendi from Constantinople", he passed through the town of Andkhuy in Afghanistan. Here, he writes,

"An old Özbek remarked to me that 'even the Feringhi [English] (God pardon him his sins!) would be better than the present Musselman Government'. he added that he still remembered a Hekim Bashi (Moorcroft) who died in his uncle's house in the time of Emir Haydar; that he was a clever magician and good physician; that he might have become rich as he pleased; but with all these advantages he remained unassuming and condescending towards every one, even towards women. I made many enquiries respecting the death of this traveller, and all agreed in their accounts, that he had died of fever; which is indeed far more probable than the story of his having been poisoned."

Well, that is what Vambery thought! But the ghost of William Moorcroft has had some fun with his biographers over the last 150 years. For Moorcroft was one of those people who refuse to die. As such he conforms to a mythic and literary stereotype which, incidentally, is known in Tibetan culture as well as our own.

To Moorcroft's intriguing "life after death" I shall return later. While preparing this paper I soon came to see that it was entirely in keeping with his life before death. Let me then go back to the beginning.

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Moorcroft in England

The early part of Moorcroft's life is conveniently summarised in the Dictionary of National Biography, from which I quote with some condensation:

"Moorcroft, William, 1765(?)–1825. A native of Lancashire, was educated in Liverpool for the medical profession. While he was a pupil under Dr. Lyon at the Liverpool Infirmary, it was agreed to depute a student to investigate a serious epidemic among the cattle of the district. The choice fell on Moorcroft. Encouraged by the anatomist John Hunter, Moorcroft spent some years in France studying veterinary science. He afterwards settled in London and for some years had a very lucrative veterinary practice. In Kelly's Directory for 1800 his name appears at 224 Oxford Street. He seems to have realised an ample fortune, but he lost largely over patents which he took out for the manufacture of horseshoes by machinery. He therefore readily accepted the offer in 1808 of an appointment as veterinary surgeon to the Bengal army and superintendent of the East India Company's stud at Pusa, near Cawnpore. He advocated the improvement of the native cavalry horse by the introduction of English or Turcoman bone and muscle."

Up to that time Moorcroft had published the following works: English translation of Valli's *Experiments in Animal Electricity*, London 1793; *Directions for using the Portable Horse-medicine Chest adopted for service in India*, London 1795; and *Cursory account of the various methods of shoeing horses hitherto in use*, London 1800.

On his arrival in India, then, Moorcroft had made his mark as veterinary surgeon, professional man and author, and was a would-be businessman and inventor. In the remainder of his life he was to appear in the guises of Government servant, explorer, merchant and commercial agent, diarist and topographer, freelance diplomat, military strategist, intelligence agent and spymaster, and sponsor of linguistic and literary research: a kind of one-man colonial government on the move. Put like that it sounds absurd, but as I shall try to show, Moorcroft in his peculiar way actually managed to carry it off, at least for a time.

Moorcroft's private life is shadowy, probably because of the fragmentary nature of our sources rather than any attempts at concealment. His daughter, born in India in perhaps 1816, was brought up in France by a Mary Moorcroft. On Mary's death in 1820 the girl was sent to England. Meanwhile Moorcroft had a son by another woman at Pusa. The exact status of these two women is unclear to me.

Early interest in the Himalayas

Soon after his arrival in India, Moorcroft was looking towards Central Asia. In 1810 he attended the fair at Janakpur in the Nepal Terai on the lookout for horses and for intelligence of horse-breeding areas beyond the Himalayas. In 1812 he made his first Himalayan journey, in company with Captain Hearsey. Apparently the main aim on this occasion, apart from general exploration, was to investigate sources of high-quality wool in the western Himalayas. Disguised as Hindu pilgrims the pair travelled through Kumaon, then held by the Gurkhas, and crossed the Niti pass to Daba and Gartok in western Tibet. Their disguise was soon penetrated by the Tibetans, who sent them back via Lake Manasarowar. In Kumaon they were again arrested on orders from Kathmandu and escorted back to British territory.

Soon after returning, Moorcroft wrote to the Government in Bengal setting out his views on Franco-Russian ambitions in Central Asia, based on information gleaned in Western Tibet. Starting from the assumption that France and Russia were planning to attack British India, he offered a well-argued, detailed plan of campaign whereby the Franco-Russian armies might march from Yarkand to Kashmir, and thence to Ladakh and Western Tibet, where they would be well-placed to seize the hill states of the Western Himalayas, then controlled by the Sikhs and the Gurkhas. The whole argument, though entirely speculative, was sparked off by Moorcroft's discovery that Russian traders in the guise of Muslims or in concert with Armenians, were building up markets in Kashmir and Western Tibet, and that Russians and Armenians were in the service of the Sikh leader Ranjit Singh.

From this point onwards the subjects of horses, British trade and the Russian threat were closely intertwined in Moorcroft's thinking, and he could not pursue them separately. Suspicion of Russia was to become an obsession, and Moorcroft was one of the early proponents of the so-called "great game" between Russia and Britain in Central Asia. The kingdom of Ladakh, Tibetan in culture but politically either independent or part of the Indo-Afghan sphere, he saw as a pivotal strategic area in any coming struggle.

Moorcroft's main expedition

In 1819 Moorcroft set out on his main journey towards the horse-breeding areas of Central Asia, an expedition from which he was never to return. Accompanying him were a young German, George Trebeck, two Indians, Mir Izzat Ullah and Ghulan Hyder Khan (all three of whom kept journals of their travels), and an Anglo-Indian hindu physician named Guthrie, together with servants, transport staff,

guards and others who swelled the numbers of the expedition to a total of about sixty. The venture was made entirely on Moorcroft's own initiative and largely financed by him, though he was granted leave of absence on full pay. It was in no sense an official mission.

The chronology and itinerary of this journey is briefly as follows:

October 1819: the expedition leaves Bareilly for the Indian Hill States. February 1820: leaves Srinagar (Garhwal). March-August: Moorcroft makes two trips to Lahore and visits Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler. 1821-22: arrives in Ladakh, based at Leh, and travels around. Unsuccessful in attempts to get permission to visit Yarkand in Chinese Turkestan. September 1822: gives up attempt to travel to Yarkand. Leaves Leh for Kashmir, arriving in November. September 1823: leaves Kashmir, arriving at Peshawar in December. May 1823: leaves Peshawar for Afghanistan, arriving at Kabul in June. August 1823: leaves Kabul for Balkh and Bokhara. September-December: is obliged to make two detours from Tash Kurghan to Qunduz. Mir Izzat Ullah returns to India. January 1825: arrives at Balkh. February: travels from Balkh to Bokhara. July: makes an excursion from Bokhara to Katta Kurghan and back. Leaves Bokhara and moves south. August: having crossed the Oxus, Moorcroft branches off at Aqchah for Maimana: Trebeck and Guthrie continue to Balkh. Moorcroft reported dead of fever at Andkhuy. September: a body purported to be Moorcroft's is brought to Balkh and buried. Guthrie's death reported a few days later. December: Trebeck reported to have died at Mazar. Ghulam Hyder Khan heads back for India,

The sources

The principal sources for Moorcroft's main journey are his own journals - 28 closely written volumes - 150 letters to Moorcroft and over 200 written by him; numerous notes, drawings and memoranda; as well as journals, notes, drawings and letters of George Trebeck; all amounting to some 10,000 pages and assembled as the "Moorcroft Collection" at the India Office Library and Records, London, where they have been listed and bound in as good order as possible considering their heterogeneous nature. The exact provenance of these materials is discussed in detail by Kaye, and it was mainly from them that H.H.Wilson produced the major work on Moorcroft, entitled *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Punjab, in Ladakh and Kashmir, in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz and Bokhara*, published in 1841. Another eight manuscript items, listed by Kaye, are now missing, and since some of them were used by Wilson, the Travels may now be an original source for a few points

concerning Moorcroft's journey.

There is also some information available to us which was not used by Wilson. Extracts from the journals of three members of the expedition - Mir Izzat Ullah, Ghulam Hyder Khan and Trebeck - were printed in the *Asiatic Journal*, and letters and news from the expedition appeared from time to time in that periodical and the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*. In the *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*, by Duka, Csoma's relations with Moorcroft are described, and letters from Csoma and Moorcroft are reproduced. The Bengal Government secret and political records at the India Office Library contain many of Moorcroft's lengthy letters, some of them not duplicated in the main Moorcroft collection.

These sources amount to a vast corpus of material, difficult to use because of its disorganised nature and Moorcroft's bad handwriting, which yet leaves a number of gaps. Moorcroft seems to have kept his journal only when on the move, and unfortunately let it lapse when staying in, for instance, Ladakh, Kashmir, Kabul and Bokhara. These gaps may be partly filled by his letters and notes, but the day-to-day narrative is broken. Nevertheless there is an enormous amount of information occurring in a haphazard manner throughout the manuscripts.

As a straight topographer Moorcroft is not outstanding (though Trebeck is good); nor was he knowledgeable about cultural or religious matters; but he had a very keen eye for political and strategic situations, trade movements and frontiers, for people of all classes and their material conditions, and for natural and manufactured products of all kinds. The agricultural and industrial revolutions were in full swing in Britain, and Moorcroft was always on the lookout for unexploited potential.

Anything approaching a complete edition of Moorcroft's papers would be too long to be manageable. Wilson has been forced to cut out large masses of material in order to concentrate on the narrative of the journey, excising especially passages dealing with politics and strategy, and long disquisitions on everything from local architecture to rhubarb-growing and the feasibility of domesticating the Tibetan wild ass for the use of small farmers in Britain. What remains undoubtedly gives an accurate summary of the journey. Errors do creep in - for instance the remark about Englishmen coming as traders in order to take over kingdoms (p. 274) was actually made by the Rajah of Giah and not by the Kalon of Ladakh as stated - but they are rare. What is missing is the richness of the journals and letters - the anecdotes, observations and verbatim conversations which colour in the personalities of Moorcroft and Mir Izzat Ullah particularly.

Moorcroft and his expedition

Wilson had a high opinion of Moorcroft's sincerity and honesty, but he at least partly subscribed to the often-expressed view of Moorcroft as an opinionated, obstinate man leading a wild goose chase amid hostile populations, loaded down with an embarrassingly large quantity of unsaleable trade goods. Moorcroft certainly had his detractors in Government circles; Sir David Ochterlony, British Resident at Delhi for one had no time for him. Trebeck too, according to Sandberg, was under something of a cloud, though I have been unable to verify this aspersion. The whole enterprise bristled with risks - physical, financial and political - and in one of his own letters Moorcroft admits that to fail would cost him his post at the Pusa stud: "To return, *re infecta*, would even now be fatal to my fortunes, and I must push the adventure to its end".

Against these doubts one may range plenty of evidence of the expedition's success. It is obvious from his journals that Moorcroft was endowed with a subtle and resourceful personality. He was an inspirer of warm friendships and great loyalty, and had a genuine feeling for people of many types and classes. Dr.P.B.Lord, who retrieved many of Moorcroft's papers from Afghanistan, writes:

"it is but justice to add that the impression everywhere left by this enterprising, but ill-fated party has been in a high degree favorable to our national character."

and again

"...on the authority of several Bokhara merchants, who were on terms of intimacy with him during his stay in that city, ... his character was highly appreciated by the king, who frequently sent for him to enjoy the pleasure of his conversation, and conferred on him the privilege, never before granted to a Christian, of riding through the city, and even to the gate of the king's palace on horseback."

and again:

"... it is impossible to hear the warm terms in which poor Trebeck is still mentioned by the rude natives amongst whom he died, without feeling the deepest sympathy in the fate of one who fell 'So young, and yet so full of promise'."

The testimony of Vambery's "Old Özbek" may be mentioned again in this connection.

Moorcroft's effect is remarkable on Asian rulers, most of whom were far more impressed with him than were his own superiors. He travelled equipped with testimonials and introductions from the appropriate quarters, and often with escorts and friendly intermediates provided by the ruler of the state he had just left. According to a report in the Calcutta Gazette, quoted in the *Asiatic Journal*:

"A very extensive feeling of interest in his adventures seems to have been excited among the different chiefs in that part of Asia. Mir Kammer-ad-din sent a mullah to accompany him through Badakshan ... and forwarded letters from the hill chiefs and heads of the Yusefzais, offering every aid in their power, and assurances of the most friendly welcome. The brother princes of Peshawar wrote singly to the same effect; and Mehr Del Khan and Pir Mohammed Khan engaged to send persons of trust in their employ to meet him on his return, with sufficient escorts to ensure him against all danger on the road."

Naturally most of these potentates were highly suspicious of the expedition to begin with, and no doubt their help was partly given with a view to keeping it under surveillance and speeding its onward journey, but Moorcroft undoubtedly did win over most of the rulers he encountered. Approaching a ruler with due deference and forwarding presents - usually guns, swords or textiles - he would quickly try to strike up a personal relationship with him. As this developed he would use impressive resources of friendly conversation, offers of medical assistance, reasoned argument, skilful persuasion and where necessary sarcasm and even heavily veiled threats in order to achieve his aims: the furtherance of British trade and access towards the horse-breeding areas of Central Asia.

The approach usually succeeded, even with such unlikely candidates as the king of Bokhara who was intrigued enough with Moorcroft's personality to give him fairly free rein. Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler, perhaps sensed a fellow spirit in Moorcroft and regarded him with good humour even when they were at cross purposes; while Moorcroft seems almost to have hypnotised the Kalon (Prime Minister) of Ladakh. He managed to extricate himself from some very awkward situations by his shrewd judgement of people, and was in fact more than a match for many of what he called the "needy and unprincipled adventurers" he met in Central Asia. A ready means of ingratiating himself with any local population as well as its ruler was the offer of medical services, particularly immediate operations for cataract, a disease endemic in those parts.

Moorcroft in Ladakh

An examination of Moorcroft's diplomatic activities in Ladakh will serve to show how Wilson's *Travels* may be filled out by material from the India Office collections, and to set the background for his involvement with Alexander Csoma de Kôros.

The Ladakhi authorities were naturally suspicious of the sixty-man expedition when it arrived in their country. The verbatim accounts of the first interview between the two parties show them

sizing one another up. The Kalon (Prime Minister) at first parried Moorcroft's suggestions of increased trade, vaccination schemes and so forth by saying that they would all have to be referred to Lhasa and to China - "We are tributaries of China". He did in fact write to the Tibetan Government telling them of Moorcroft's arrival and asking advice. A copy of the Tibetan reply exists among Moorcroft's papers. The gambit was the same: the Tibetans reminded the Kalon that they had no authority in Ladakh and that they very much doubted whether the Chinese, if asked, would allow Moorcroft to proceed into Tibet or Chinese Turkestan. This invoking of China in order to put off foreign approaches was a convenient evasive tactic used by Himalayan states which were quite outside the Chinese orbit, including both Ladakh and Bhutan.

Meanwhile Moorcroft and his assistant Mir Izzat Ullah worked hard to improve their position, and they were soon in the confidence of the Kalon, despite several plots against them. Moorcroft was determined to put Ladakh's relations with the British Government onto some formal basis and from the first interview had impressed upon the Kalon the advantages of British "protection". He had a good grasp of the political situation.

When visiting Ranjit Singh in 1820 he had naturally mentioned that he hoped to pass through Ladakh. Ranjit Singh immediately asked to whom that country belonged, and was told by a minister that it came under Kashmir, which Ranjit Singh himself had taken from the Afghans the year before. Mir Izzat Ullah had the presence of mind to interject that any tributes being paid by Ladakh to Kashmir were actually in respect of rent for some lands owned by Ladakh in Kashmir. Ranjit Singh's question had been proof enough to Moorcroft that Ladakh could not be regarded as part of the Sikh empire in any real sense.

From the Kalon of Ladakh Moorcroft obtained letters from Aurangzeb which he forwarded to Calcutta, claiming that they showed Ladakh's real allegiance was to Delhi. Eventually, after long negotiation, he managed to get the Ladakh authorities to sign a "trade agreement" and finally an offer of allegiance to the British Government. These seem to have been genuine documents: copies of the Tibetan-language versions are still available. Presumably the Ladakhi Government saw their offer of allegiance as a hedge against the Sikhs or some other aggressor, demanding nothing in return but the payment of the sort of nominal tribute which they were already paying, in theory at least, to both Lhasa and Srinagar.

According to Moorcroft, Ranjit Singh meanwhile made some inconclusive moves to attack Ladakh, inspired by his (Moorcroft's)

calling attention to the country in his interview of 1820. He wrote to Ranjit Singh advising him of Ladakh's independence from the Sikhs. Ranjit Singh promptly forwarded the letter to Sir David Ochterlony, Resident at Delhi, and the wrath of the British Government was naturally aroused. It is interesting that Ranjit Singh remained on the best of personal terms with Moorcroft, who believed that the former was under a powerful obligation to him, perhaps because of medical services rendered. The Sikh leader made a point of commissioning Moorcroft to seek some good horses for him in Central Asia, and made every effort to ease his onward journey.

At the same time as all this freelance diplomacy was going on, Moorcroft was gathering intelligence on Russian activities. The story of his interception of a Russian letter to Ranjit Singh is told in the *Travels*. It was this letter, from Count Nesselrod, that he got Alexander Csoma de Kôrös to translate. He also saw letters from Russia to the Ladakhi Government, proposing that a road be built through Ladakh, and he got wind of Russian diplomatic moves in Central Asia. According to his information, the Tsar had sent a mission in March 1821 to Bokhara, asking permission for his armies to cross Bokharan territory to attack Choresmia and possibly Kabul. The Tsar was also stirring up trouble in Chinese Turkestan and had offered a Russian army to the ruler of Kashgar. This information was enough to prompt Moorcroft to devise a new version of the enemy's master plan. According to this, the Russians would establish themselves in Kabul and ally themselves with the Sikhs and with Ladakh. They would then make a two-pronged attack on Chinese Turkestan, one army attacking Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan direct and the other outflanking the Chinese by striking through Kashmir and Ladakh. This would leave the Russians in possession of Central Asia and put themselves within striking distance of British India. To counter the plan, Moorcroft suggested a British protection of Ladakh and an alliance with Kabul. He supported his arguments with detailed studies of the terrain involved.

Had Moorcroft been active ten or fifteen years later, his Government might have taken some notice of his proposals. As it was, his ideas were too forward-looking and far-ranging to catch their imagination, and his schemes were dismissed as wild theorisings and absurd projects: which, to be fair, is what they often were. At any rate it was Moorcroft's vision of a Central Asia dominated by British influence and trade that gave him the driving force for his expedition. It is doubtful if the simple quest for horses, genuine though it was, would have sustained him in his long and hazardous travels.

Moorcroft and Alexander Csoma de Kôrös

Such is the background to Moorcroft's interest in the Tibetan language. Already in 1816 he was making extensive enquiries in order to try and obtain samples of Tibetan writings from contacts and local rulers in the Himalayas. He acquired a copy of Giorgi's *Alphabetum Tibetanum* but evidently realised that much of the material therein as inadequate and unreliable. In 1823 he wrote a letter to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta from Kashmir, listing the various Tibetan scripts, giving a sketch of the language, and enclosing some specimens of Tibetan drawings and blockprinted pictures. Various pieces of information on the country were included, the report of the letter stating "Mr. Moorcroft has been led to believe, from what he has seen, that the libraries of Lassa abound with matter, which, considering the insulated situation of that country, would surprise the learned in Europe, were they accessible to European research". This letter must have been written after Moorcroft had met Csoma, but before the latter had started work on Tibetan.

At least three factors contributed to Moorcroft's interest in Tibetan. The first was the difficulty of conducting relations with Tibet caused by the policy of rigid exclusion of Europeans, of which Moorcroft had first-hand experience. The second was the immense strategic importance, real or imagined, of both Tibet and Ladakh in the three-cornered game between Britain, Russia and China. The third was the almost unexplored possibility of trade, never far from his mind.

Moorcroft himself had no pretensions to scholarship. He had a good knowledge of French and evidently an adequate working grasp of Persian, though he twice remarks in his journals that his knowledge of Persian leaves something to be desired. At any rate he certainly had a fair estimation of the state of Tibetan studies at the time and an idea of what needed to be done. It is in no way surprising that he saw the possibilities presented by Alexander Csoma de Kôrös when he met him in the Dras valley in July 1822. Here was an accomplished scholar and collector of languages who had just been frustrated in his goal of reaching Chinese Central Asia. Practically penniless, he was in need of support. As a result of past favours received from British institutions and individuals in Hungary and Teheran, he was likely to be favourably disposed to the British interest. Both Moorcroft and Trebeck helped Csoma by showing him the *Alphabetum Tibetanum* and engaging a Tibetan tutor. According to Csoma it was his own idea to devote himself to the serious study of Tibetan: "I communicated my ideas respecting this matter to Mr. Moorcroft who, after a mature consideration, gave me his approbation, favoured me

with money for my necessary subsistence, and permitted me to return to Ladak; nay, he recommended me to the chief officer at Leh, and to the Lama of Yangla, in Zanskar".

Moorcroft further recommended Csoma to the British Government and the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, whom he asked for more materials to aid Csoma's studies into Tibetan. From early in 1823 at the latest until at least January 1825, Csoma lived solely off funds provided by Moorcroft out of his own pocket. Csoma always refers warmly to Moorcroft, and altogether it is not difficult to agree with Duka's description of Moorcroft as "his best and first friend".

The end of the expedition

An estimation of the overall success of Moorcroft's expedition is interesting both for its own sake and for its bearing on his subsequent fate. An expedition of up to sixty men had been maintained in good order throughout, and detailed and accurate records and accounts kept. Large quantities of useful information had been gathered, and friendly relations established with many rulers. Moorcroft had kept himself financially above water, having supported the expedition mainly from his own pocket without selling his property or prejudicing the education of his children. According to Lord, who retrieved Moorcroft's last account books, the amount of goods he was carrying, often supposed to be a great embarrassment to him, had been much exaggerated by his critics and had mostly been sold. Although far less than their real value had been obtained, Moorcroft had never intended to make a profit on them but merely to use them as samples of British merchandise.

As to whether he had succeeded in his aim of getting horses, his letter of 17th August 1825, reported in the *Asiatic Journal*, would suggest not. However, this is contradicted by his own journal in which he records sending Trebeck from Bokhara to Balkh "with the stallions"; by Lord who heard that he had obtained up to 100 excellent horses; by Gurudas Sinh's letter stating that valuable horses were acquired at Bokhara and Andkhuy; and by a report in the *Delhi Ukhbar* stating that he had left Bokhara with twelve very fine horses.

Moorcroft's relations with the Government are also of interest. He always knew he had enemies and detractors there, but he could usually count upon support for the genuine gathering of information on his travels. His trip to Western Tibet in 1812 was undertaken without official permission. He was told afterwards that had he asked for permission, it would not have been granted because of the personal hazards involved and the danger of offending the Nepalese Government, but the tone of the letter is friendly and thanks are

expressed to Moorcroft for the information he collected. He was not officially rebuked, and the Government continued to supply him with goods intended as presents for various rulers and dignitaries.

His correspondence with Ranjit Singh about Ladaġh's independence in 1821 was clearly a mistake and aroused the annoyance of the Government (although Ranjit Singh did not take it too seriously), but they continued to forward him trade goods when asked. Incidentally, if his merchandise had really proved an embarrassment to him, it is hard to see why he several times asked to be sent more. Eventually the Government suspended his salary and asked him to return, but with the proviso that if he had reached Kabul, he was free to continue.

Altogether there seems no reason why Moorcroft should have felt that he faced disaster on his return to India, as some have suggested. Given his determination and powers of persuasion, he would have been able to put up a powerful case that the expedition had been a great success.

There are ten apparently independent pieces of evidence suggesting that Moorcroft died, probably of fever, at Andkhuy, and/or that Trebeck died at Mazar. (Andkhuy is now just inside the northern border of Afghanistan; Mazar or Shah Murdan as it was sometimes known is modern Mazar-i-Sharif.)

1. A report of a letter from Aga Hussain, dated Amritsar, 4.11.1825, referring to another letter from Kabul. This stated that Moorcroft had died near "Ankho", and his companion had gone to Balkh, where he had fallen ill.

2. A report of a letter from Trebeck to Wade, dated 6.9.1825, stating that Moorcroft had died at "Andkho" on August 25th. Additional information in the report said that Trebeck was recovering from his illness.

3. A report of a letter from "a respectable native residing at Cabul", evidently the Gurudas Singh of Wilson's preface, stating that Moorcroft died at "Andkho"; that the body was taken to Balkh where "the second gentleman was", and buried; that Guthrie died a few days later; and that Trebeck went to Mazar and died in December.

4. In 1834, Burnes, visiting Mazar, remarks, "One of our companions, a Hajee, attended him (Trebeck) on his death-bed, and conducted us to the spot where he is laid ..." Burnes evidently spoke to many local people about the fate of the expedition, and supports the "official version" of the story.

5. In 1838, Lord and Wood found at Mazar most of Moorcroft's printed books and some papers. These included a map completed by Moorcroft to within one stage of Andkhuy, and a sketch

of the whole detour via Maimana; also a note of Trebeck's saying "Mr.M.died August 27th". Lord and Wood met a man who was at Trebeck's deathbed and who recalled Trebeck's grief at the loss of Moorcroft.

6. The Reverend Joseph Wolff visited Bokhara in 1832-3. Told in Meshed that Moorcroft had been publicly executed in Bokhara, he made enquiries on his arrival and was told the Moorcroft had died of fever at "Ankhoy", Guthrie and Trebeck at Mazar.

7. Arminius Vambery, the Hungarian traveller, visited Andkhuy in 1863 and met the "old Özbek" whose remarks I have already quoted. His story was confirmed as a result of many local enquiries.

8. It would appear from the introductory remarks to the published extracts of Ghulam Hyder Khan's journal that these were to contain an account of Moorcroft's death, and that this would conform to the generally accepted version. The final extracts were however never actually published.

9. Trebeck's death at Mazar was separately reported in the *Asiatic Journal*.

10. G.T.Vigne met one of Moorcroft's servants at Ghazni in 1836: "I could collect nothing from him but what is already known, respecting that much-regretted traveller, whose name is never mentioned without the greatest respect."

These accounts of Moorcroft's death and other secondary sources are not without inconsistencies and doubts. Different dates, places and modes of death are given. Some of the evidence is provided by Trebeck, "whose *bona fides* we have reason to distrust", according to Sandberg. The doubt is echoed by Holdich, who claims "This story was always regarded with suspicion in India." But these criticisms of Trebeck are unsupported by evidence and are at variance with the picture which emerges from his own and Moorcroft's papers. It is difficult to demolish the accepted version of Moorcroft's death at Andkhuy.

Moorcroft 's "second life"

But, it seems, we ought to try. Our story now moves to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. In 1846 two French Lazarist missionaries, Father Huc and Father Gabet, arrived in Lhasa from Peking. They were soon suspected of being spies, and the job of interrogating them was entrusted by the Tibetan authorities to the governor of the Tibetan muslim community, who were descended from Kashmiri traders and still carrying on an active trade with Kashmir via Ladakh. The governor, evidently chosen for the task because of his knowledge of

the ways of foreigners, was soon satisfied of their bona fides, but cited in justification for Tibetan suspicions the case of an Englishman named Moorcroft. This man, he said, had arrived in Lhasa where he lived in the disguise of a Kashmiri. After having stayed there twelve years he left, but was murdered en route for Ladakh. Among his effects were found a large number of drawings and maps. This made the Chinese authorities very suspicious.

The missionaries further write:

"One day the muslim governor took us to one of his compatriots, called Nisan, who had long served as a servant of Moorcroft's in Lhasa. He spoke at length of his former master, and the particulars he gave confirmed everything which had already been told to us. Moorcroft arrived in Lhasa from Ladakh in 1826, dressed as a muslim and speaking such excellent Farsi that the Kashmiris of Lhasa took him for one of themselves. He rented a house in the town and lived there for twelve years with his servant Nisan, whom he had brought from Ladakh. He bought several flocks of goats and yaks which he farmed out to Tibetan shepherds in the valleys around Lhasa. Under pretext of visiting these, he travelled freely in order to make his drawings and maps. He never learned to speak Tibetan and had little contact with the people of the country. Finally he was killed by bandits in Western Tibet while returning to Ladakh. The bandits were pursued and caught by the Tibetan Government who recovered a part of his effects, including many drawings and maps. Only then did the Tibetan Government realise that Moorcroft was an Englishman. Moorcroft had given his servant Nisan a letter of recommendation to the British Government in Calcutta, but in the alarm occasioned by the recovery of Moorcroft's papers, he destroyed it."

Huc and Gabet continue:

"These facts were confirmed by the Regent of Tibet, the muslim governor, and several other inhabitants of Lhasa. Before arriving in that city, we had never heard of Moorcroft; it was there that we first heard his name."

The two French missionaries were later disposed to retain their belief in this story despite the official version of Moorcroft's death, as after their eventual return from Tibet to Macao, they had read in a journal from Calcutta a detailed and circumstantial account of their own deaths!

We are asked to believe, then, that Moorcroft, at the age of sixty, presumably faced with the failure of his expedition and disgrace on his return to India, and possibly by the danger of arrest or murder, faked his own death. He then made his own way to Lhasa over a period of some sixteen months, crossing the Himalayas presumably in

winter, acquiring on the way a new facility for assuming the guise of a Kashmiri merchant. There he lived till the age of about seventy-two. Is it possible? Substitute most other human names for that of Moorcroft, and the answer must be: just possible, maybe, but highly improbable. Robert Fazy has examined the whole question and concluded that the official version of Moorcroft's death in Afghanistan cannot be demolished, and that the Tibetans, on finding the papers of some undoubted British agent, or of someone who had stolen some of Moorcroft's papers, were mixing the man up with Moorcroft, who had made his incursion into Tibet in 1812. Another possibility is that the man was a Kashmiri, and an agent commissioned by Moorcroft some time between 1820 and 1823, either in Ladakh or Kashmir. Letters or papers bearing Moorcroft's name might have led the Tibetans to assume that the man who had been murdered was Moorcroft himself.

To my mind, the weakest part of the Tibetan version is Moorcroft's assumption of the guise of a Kashmiri. His attempts at disguise in 1812 had been a pathetic failure, and on his own evidence his command of Farsi was not very good before 1825. On the other hand, we know he was willing to try such subterfuges, and in facial appearance many Europeans could pass themselves off as Kashmiris. Another doubt is cast by the evidence suggesting that his expedition had been, not a disastrous failure, but more like a roaring success.

Tibetans are fond of such stories, and have produced some of their own. The sixth Dalai Lama is alleged in a long biography to have survived a bogus death at the hands of the Chinese to live for many years in Mongolia. Having perused Moorcroft's personal papers at length, I am convinced he was perfectly capable of conceiving such an after-life and of attempting to live it out. Whether even he could have actually carried it off, I am not so sure.