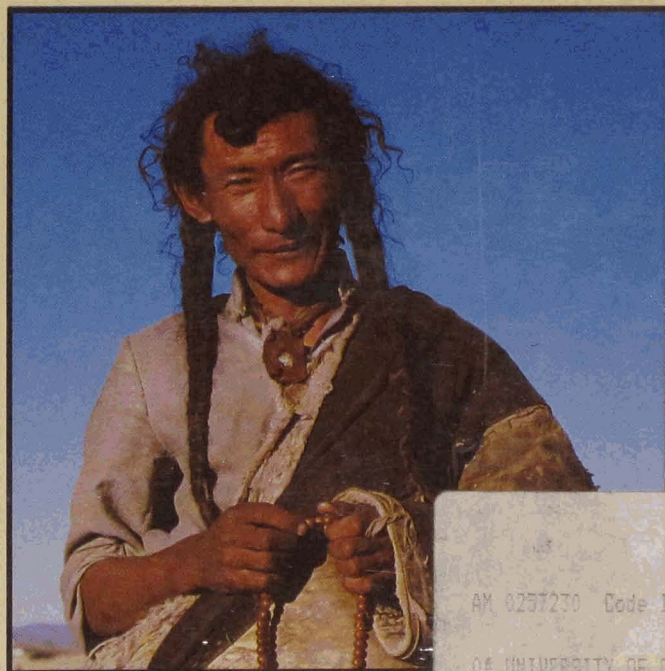


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JOURNEY AMONG THE TIBETAN NOMADS

AN ACCOUNT OF A REMOTE CIVILIZATION



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04 UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

NAMKHAI NORBU

JOURNEY AMONG THE
TIBETAN NOMADS
AN ACCOUNT OF A REMOTE CIVILIZATION

by
NAMKHAI NORBU

Translated by
Maria Simmons



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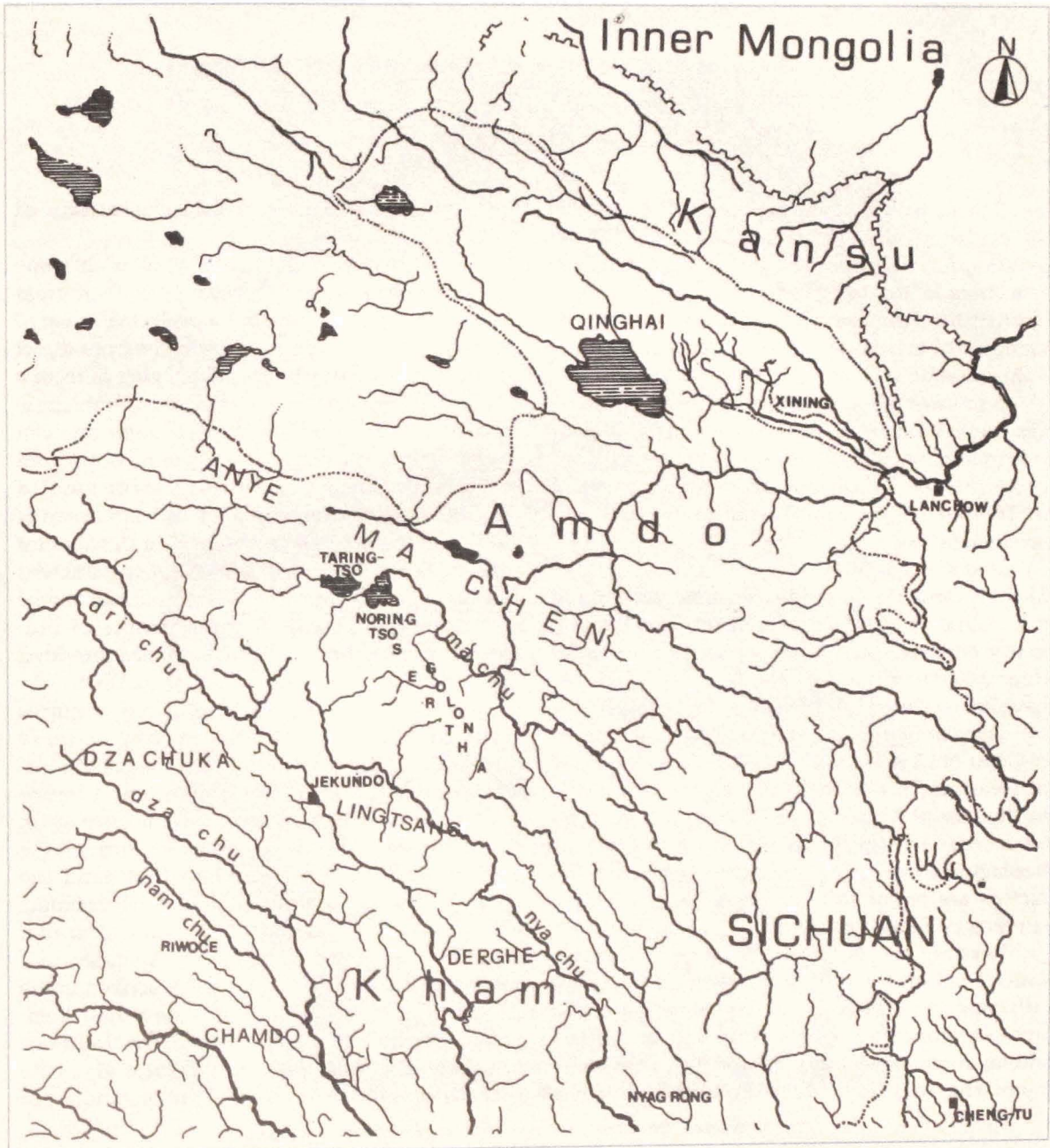
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PREFACE

For all those with an anthropological interest in the particular nature and way of life of the Tibetan peoples, as well as those with a curiosity about Tibet in ancient times, the epic of Gesar of Ling,¹ which mirrors the Tibetan society of antiquity in all its complexity, is an indispensable and exceptionally valuable source.

A number of foreign scholars have focused on this remarkable cycle, presenting the fruit of their research in essays and articles and in translations of episodes of the text itself, evidence that interest in Tibetan civilization, in its intellectual and spiritual heritage, is growing.

Tibetans continue to feel great love for the saga of King Gesar. Despite the dispersal of the exile population in India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, many editions have been published in these communities in recent years. Still other volumes have been printed in China and Tibet proper.²

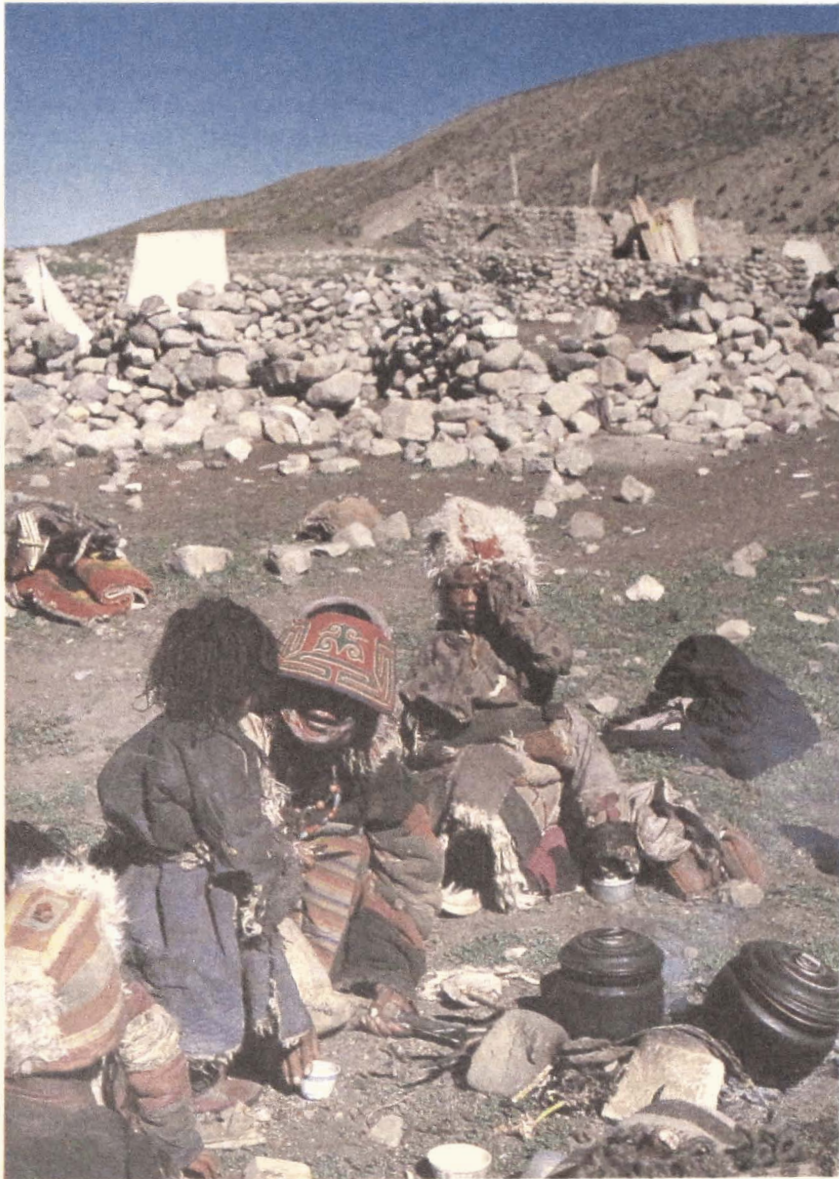
Thus, unlike in former times, copies of the epic of Gesar of Ling are easily available now for study or pleasure. This indicates that a genuine interest in the lore of ancient Tibet and an appreciative awareness of the distinctive qualities of our heritage are increasing among us Tibetans; these factors are certainly of extreme benefit for the survival of Tibetan culture.

Reading the volumes of the epic, directly transcribed long ago from oral renderings, is not sufficient to obtain a clear understanding of the unusual concepts, rare words and enigmatic idioms it contains, and hence cannot adequately open the way to a deep knowledge of the

particular nature of former generations of Tibetans.

The Gesar cycle can acquaint us with some specifics of the peoples of ancient Tibet, their dress and customs for instance, but a profound grasp of their attitudes and outlook must come from direct comparative experience. It is like trying to form a detailed image of a dragon, that is, a prehistoric reptile, from a written account; though one can imagine it in many ways, only a general notion can be formed unless one can ascertain what a "dragon" was, by identifying it with a specimen of reptile which could be shown to be a descendant species. Similarly, information on the ancient Tibetans derived from the Gesar epic can reveal only a general profile of those people of old, especially since the additional evidence provided elsewhere by archaeology is lacking in Tibet.

I discovered, however, that if one acquires thorough familiarity with the real way of life of present-day Tibetan nomads, then the conditions, idiosyncrasies, and folklore of ancient Tibet as described in the saga of Gesar become once again clear and alive. This discovery came through the opportunity I had to observe at first hand the nomads of Kham in eastern Tibet. Direct contact with their nature and way of life made clear that nomadic usages and customs corresponded in a surprisingly high degree to those described in the Gesar epic, and that amongst them had been handed down, and thus preserved, the traditions of ancient Tibet. I began to realize that study of the nomads could be a key to our understanding of



During summer migrations meals are prepared outside the tent.

Tibet's culture and history. For Tibetans, at this critical moment, an understanding of the history and culture of our country is of the greatest importance: but acquaintance based only on books, or study that remains an academic exercise, is not enough. All Tibetans, old and young, should study the various aspects of Tibetan civilization, such as language and writing, dress, Bön and Buddhist texts, medicine, astrology and so forth. The great value of all these subjects, which constitute the essence of the original culture of the historic Tibetan people, must be directly verified and appreciated if they are not to become only dry information. By understanding these categories of knowledge, Tibetans will realize their significance, and foundations will have been laid for a living Tibetan culture.

The study of history and traditions through direct comparison with the present reality must become our method in the quest to safeguard our cultural identity and civilization. This was my idea in studying the nomads of Tibet and it guided me like a compass on my path towards a deeper knowledge of the history of my land.

In the summer of 1951 I travelled among the nomad tribes of eastern Tibet, keeping a detailed journal of what I saw and heard. In 1965, when I was already living in Europe, at the instance of Mr. Hugh E. Richardson,³ British diplomatic representative in Lhasa in the 1930s and a well-known Tibetologist, I set the present work down in writing from the notes I had taken, my recollections and further knowledge I had acquired over the years about the customs of Tibetan nomads. My account deals primarily with the nomads of the northern Dzachuka region and the

Golok tribes of Sertha in Do-Kham who, however, can be considered representative of Tibetan nomads in general. Once written, the text, for which I had no particular regard, remained for many years in a drawer, unread.

Some years ago, several young Tibetans came to visit me, and asked if they could read the manuscript when we came across it by chance. Having read the text with great concentration, they told me that, like many others of the new generation of Tibetans, they were interested in knowing more about their country and its civilization, and that this account was of considerable help to them in understanding Tibetan culture, as shown in the characteristic way of life of the nomads. They repeatedly expressed their wish that it be published to aid younger Tibetans to recover their cultural heritage. In 1983, then, I decided to publish this book in Tibetan, in view of the problems faced by younger Tibetans in learning about and re-connecting with traditions that were, until recently, very much alive.

I hope this translation may be of interest to scholars and that it may be a stimulus to further, deeper studies. It is also my hope that this book will allow the general reader to appreciate the specific characteristics of the Tibetan nomads and, through this description of their natural condition, to gain a sense of the way of life of the inhabitants of ancient Tibet. May its publication contribute towards recognition of the value, originality and vitality of the culture of our great nation.

Namkhai Norbu
Formia, 1983
Arcidosso, 1996

INTRODUCTION

Most Tibetans believe that the northern regions of their country are deserted territories that have been isolated for thousands of years, unwelcoming spaces covered by snow and ice, avoided by most men where survival is impossible for anyone but a few hardy nomads.

As a child I imagined that the nomads lived in a frozen wilderness and that their lifestyle, their beliefs and even their somatic features were very different from those of the settled peoples that I knew. I was extremely curious, and whenever the chance arose I asked my father and his friends about them, since they continually travelled to the nomads' territory and knew their customs well. They were always ready to explain to me, and would describe, in minute detail, the living conditions and customs of the nomads; needless to say, the image that emerged was very different from that of my fantasies.

I remember how my father, who knew the highly popular epic of Gesar of Ling very well, would often repeat that the places mentioned in those stories could very probably be identified through topographical and environmental similarities, as those regions inhabited by the nomads of the north-eastern regions of Tibet.¹

When I was a boy, he often recounted the legends of Gesar to me so that I became passionately interested in reading them and later dedicated myself to identifying the place names,

beginning by carefully comparing those cited in the various legends.

The most famous stories of the epic cycle of Gesar form a whole work known as "The Eighteen Fortresses",² though it is extremely difficult to find the 18 books that comprise them collected in a single volume. For that reason, much as I wanted to, I have never managed to read them all. Those that I have been able to procure are the following:

1. *Ling and the divinities*,³ the story of Gesar's journey to the land of the divinities;
2. *His birth at Ling*,⁴ the story of Gesar's birth in the land of Ma, the area surrounding the river Machu in north-eastern Tibet;
3. *The horse race*,⁵ the story of how Gesar became king;
4. *The fortress of the riches of Tasig*,⁶ the story of the war between Ling and Tasig, a kingdom to the west of Tibet, sometimes identified as Persia;
5. *The turquoise fortress of Kache*,⁷ the story of the war between Ling and Kashmir;
6. *Ling and the land of Mön*,⁸ the story of the war between Ling and Mön, a region in south-eastern Tibet bordering Bhutan;
7. *Ling and the land of Jang*,⁹ the story of the war between Ling and Jang, a region that corresponds to the present-day province of Yunnan;
8. *Ling and China*,¹⁰ the story of the war between Ling and China;

9. *Ling and Mongolia*,¹¹ the story of the wars between Ling and Mongolia;
10. *Ling and the demons*,¹² the story of the war between Ling and the Dūd, a class of demonic beings corresponding to the Māra of the Indian tradition;
11. *Ling and Hor*,¹³ the story of the war between Ling and the Hor, the peoples once settled in present-day Xinjiang Uighur;
12. *The fortress of the armors of the Drugu*,¹⁴ the story of the war between Ling and the Drugu, peoples of Turkish origin who lived in the western part of eastern Turkestan;
13. *Ling and Hell*,¹⁵ the story of Gesar's descent into the hell-realms.

Besides these, my father had read:

1. *The silk fortress of Minub*,¹⁶ the story of the war between Ling and Minub, probably a region of Yunnan inhabited in ancient times by a people of Thai origin;
2. *Ling and Shang-Shung*,¹⁷ the story of the war between Ling and Shang-Shung, an ancient kingdom of western Tibet;
3. *The coral fortress of Cheru*,¹⁸ the story of the war between Ling and Cheru, probably the Islamic region of Ning Xia that borders Mongolia;
4. *Adrak*,¹⁹ the story of the war between Ling and Adrak, a country that I have been unable to identify.

Another book that neither my father nor I ever managed to find is *Riche* which, so far as I have gathered from the other volumes, should contain stories of the wars between Ling and Riche, probably a region belonging to Khotan.

All these books, apart from their mythical or

legendary aspects, contain important historical information on the customs and lifestyles of the ancient peoples of Tibet. Their reliability is unquestionable, and so it is not simply guesswork to think that there may have lived, in a certain historical period, a character, perhaps extraordinary but none the less real, named Gesar.

The veracity of the information contained in these ancient legends is confirmed by the fact that almost all the customs and life patterns of the nomads of today correspond to those described in the epic.

From the stories told by my father and my nomad friends I began to understand how ancient the history of these territories of north-eastern Tibet was and the importance of its protagonists, from the earliest times. I conceived a great desire to visit these regions, to admire their landscapes and to learn the ways of their inhabitants. And so, in the summer of 1951, some friends and I headed north from Derghe (which is situated at the centre of eastern Tibet).

In the region of Dzachuka we visited the Yading, Achuk and Takgön tribes known as the "Changpa khagsum", and journeyed into the territory of the Golok Sertha. For three months I travelled by horse and mule in these parts, everywhere received as an important lama on his rounds of bestowing blessing, honored with many offerings and gifts and always with further invitations to visit new places.

I was thus able to observe and personally verify everything that I had long wanted to see and to be better acquainted with. I discovered much that was extraordinary, very different from what I had expected and sometimes beyond imagination.

What did seem clear to me, however, was that the customs of the nomads corresponded to those of the people described in the stories of Gesar and that these were authentic proof of the reliability of the information contained in the ancient literary cycle. For whoever may have the opportunity to carry out systematic field research in those same places, useful guidance may be found in the books from the Gesar epic entitled *'Khrungs gling* and *rTa rgyugs* (both published by Kan Su'u Mi Rigs Dpe Skrun Khang in 1981).

Most of the territories that I travelled through were sparsely populated, but some were devoid of any human presence; there, wild animals lived free and undisturbed, between high, majestic mountains covered with perennial ice and snow. In some regions many ice-peaked rocky mountains arose and at their feet in the valleys lived herds of deer and flocks of wild sheep known as *nawa* (*ovis nahura*).

The nomads almost always choose for their settling places grassy plains with abundant water where the highland green is studded with innumerable mountain flowers. Herds of *Kyang* (*equus hemionus*), wild asses many thousand strong, along with hundreds of wild yaks called *drong* (*bos grunniens*), graze on those plateaux along with deer, antelopes called *gowa*,²⁰ *dre* which is a type of marten similar to and slightly larger than the weasel, wild sheep called *nyen* (*ovis hodgsoni*) and many other species.

In the green valleys, where the song of thousands of cranes resounds, stand the *rukor*, the encampments of yak-hair tents which shelter from 11 to 30 families settled together to better protect

themselves and to more easily defend their camp in case of attack from enemies, thieves or bandits.

Some areas of the plateaux are covered with marshes, some larger, some smaller, where it is easy to founder. To avoid that risk, we had the indispensable help during the journey of a local guide familiar with the terrain. In those parts, to cover a distance of three kilometers as the crow flies would sometimes take us half a day as we would often have to take detours to avoid swampy grounds.

One day while we were travelling without a guide on the plateau at the foot of a mountain called Dzagyel Phenchuk, a member of our group lost his way and slipped into the bog. Hearing his cries for help we ran to his aid. We threw him a rope and managed to pull him to safety. But for all our efforts we could not recover his saddle nor save his horse which, in its terror, had continued to strain and thrash and for that very reason had sunk rapidly into the mire; it was swallowed up by the swamp before our eyes.

Our friend and his rescuers emerged looking both ridiculous and terrifying: their skin and clothes had turned the blue-black color of a yak-hair tent. In fact, in those swamps the mud is black with a bluish cast, a type found only there and used by the nomads to dye wool and other materials.

The bogs are not a great problem to the men and animals of these areas who know them well and do not fear them; indeed, one never hears of local men or animals having been engulfed. The problems in travelling caused by the swamps only exist in the summer. In other seasons the intense cold means the territory is covered by snow and

ice: these atmospheric conditions permit the nomads and their herds to cross the iced surface of the marshes.

The landscape and geographical features of these regions vary greatly from one zone to another and not all are similar to those described above. Some groups of nomads live on mountains or enchanting grassy plains, others on mountain pastures in areas where the mountains alternate continually with valleys containing numerous varieties of low shrubs with slender branches such as the *langma*, a type of willow (*salix thamsoni*), the *sukar* and the *sunag*, two types of rhododendron (*balu*) that have, respectively, white and black flowers. The *penkar*, a white-flowered shrub and the *pennag*, a red-flowered variety, are also to be found along with the *nyadri*, another mountain shrub.

Here, stretches of marshy grazing land are very rare, swamps do not exist and there are places inhabited by millions of small rodents called *avra* (*ochotona erythrotis*). The *avra* dig thousands of holes underground to make their dens and divide the surface of the land they claim as theirs into different neighborhoods, like a city. The holes, big and small, that open on the surface uncovering the black soil, are linked by narrow tunnels which run a few centimeters under the grass and serve as passage-ways.

The journey across these regions was somewhat trying, since our horses and mules were not accustomed to such terrain and often stumbled in the burrows dug by the *avra*. The mounts of the nomads, being used to the ground, moved, by contrast, swiftly and fearlessly.

A fact we found striking was that thousands of the birds called *atakayu* lived with the *avra*. These

small birds, grey in color with black beak and dark grey claws, and slightly larger than a canary, live in the same dens as the *avra* and lay their eggs there. When the *avra* leave the den, the *atakayu* immediately lie on the rodents' backs and let themselves be carried; what is amusing is that when the *avra* scuttle quickly back into their holes in the ground, the little birds are usually not quick enough to "dismount" and are knocked off unceremoniously.

The nomads say that the *atakayu* take the *avra* across mountains and rivers, and that the *avra*, thanks to the help of the *atakayu*, can reach places protected by natural obstacles that they could never overcome by themselves. Many people say that they have, with their own eyes, seen the *avra* fly, carried over the mountains by these birds. We were not able to confirm anything of the kind, though there are many stories that in a certain sense explain the reasons for this belief.

The nomads recount how they often were forced to abandon sites, where they had lived without ever seeing trace of an *avra*, when they were suddenly invaded by millions of these small rodents who dig hundreds of thousands of holes in the valleys and on the slopes of the mountains and destroy the pastures, reducing the earth to a blackish surface with no grass. These invasions by the hordes of *avra* are a veritable scourge for the land and the nomads at the first sighting of the *avra* invite lamas to carry out specific rites,²¹ called "the diversion of the *avra* hordes".²²

We had the opportunity to observe every stage of such an infestation. The green pastures untouched by the *avra* contrast with those ravaged by the rodents who sometimes settled by the



Nomads and their yaks on the move. These imposing beasts, once tamed, play a fundamental role in the economy as draught animals, pack carriers, producers of milk and its by-products and sources of wool and meat.

millions, claiming a territory and puncturing the earth with the holes of their dens. In some places the black earth was stripped bare and a few *avra* lingered on, while in others long since abandoned, the grass was beginning to grow once more on the dark soil.

During the winter these rodents do not remain in their dens, surviving on their summer stores of grass and two particularly tasty and nourishing tubers, *troma* (*potentilla fulgens*) and *mönkar*. Of the latter, which grows on the high plateaux, a white and a red variety exist. The white is sweet and edible, while the red is very bitter and, named *likadur*, is used in Tibetan medicine.

In autumn the nomads dig into the dens to recover the tubers stored by the *avra* and some nomad boys, my friends, told me that several of these storehouses rendered enough *troma* and *mönkar* to fill a large travelling bag.²³

THE DZACHUKA REGION IN THE UPPER BASIN OF THE YALUNG RIVER

The region of Dzachuka is exclusively inhabited by nomads of 18 great tribes: Sershul, Tromdza Kongma, Arigdza, Washul, Bachung, Juwa, Trokong, Trogab, Tharshul, Ghetse, Bumnying, Bumsar, Bathur, Chewo, Chaktsa, and the three tribes known as "the three groups from the north" (Changpa Khagsum).

In every tribe there is an important family within which the title of chief has long been hereditary, but in reality no chief has the authority to govern all the nomads, nor even some of them. The families who vaunt this title do not even have the right to exact tribute. Here we are dealing with honorary inherited titles, which had been conferred over time, for a variety of reasons, in two kingdoms in eastern Tibet, Derghe and Lingsang. Most of the tribes now in Dzachuka were under the jurisdiction of the former while the "three tribes of the north" (Changpa Khagsum) were under Lingsang.

One of the main tasks of the "chiefs" is to receive the representatives of the two above-mentioned kingdoms when on their periodical official visits to the area as well as the high-ranking lamas who might be travelling in their land. Another of their duties is to organize defences against sudden attacks by enemies and bandits and to lead those under their authority in efforts to pursue and capture them.

Where disputes arise between groups of nomads the chief has the authority to represent his

group in discussions, to arrange reconciliations and to grant advice. In the first month of autumn the kingdoms of Derghe and Lingsang each send a representative¹ to the nomad territories, accompanied by assistants, to extract a form of payment in kind: butter, meat, cakes or pastries called *thü*, the type of sweet tuber known as *troma* and whole sheep carcasses called *pukhog*. This is known as "the king's annual tribute"² and corresponds to the taxes or rent in the lands of settled peoples, where farmers pay in produce from their fields to public or private collectors.

The nomads do not consider this tribute exactly as a tax in that they always offer their best products, knowing that their offerings, along with the farmers', help to finance the various annual religious celebrations in the monasteries.

As an example, in Derghe Gönchen (an important Sakya monastery founded in 1448 by Thangtong Gyelpo), lamas and monks from more than 20 monasteries of the *Sakyapa*, *Kagyüpa* and *Nyingmapa*³ traditions meet every year to perform a number of rites to benefit the whole country. The most important of these is the *Drukchu chenmo*, a wrathful rite to eliminate negativity, centered on the divinity Yamāntaka, a fierce manifestation of Mañjuśrī. Other rituals, the most important of which is the *Duwa chenmo*, dedicated to the tantric divinity Hevajra, are carried out from the first day of the year until midnight on the 15th day of the first month to celebrate the anniversary of the

period of "the Buddha's miracles". In Lingsang, similarly, rites to eliminate negativity are performed as the new year arrives, among them the "torma⁴ of the 29th day"⁵ and the ceremonies celebrated on the first 15 days of the new year.

Most of the Dzachuka territory is dominated by great stretches where marshy areas and hard, thin grass abound, with mountains whose slopes are covered by pastures and meadows full of mountain flowers. The scenery is magnificent and inspires a sensation of peace and happiness.

The local people are very sincere and do not know dishonesty or falsehood; they are good-natured and faithful, deeply devoted to religion and respectful of the mores of their community, yet they are fierce warriors. Many names of places and of mountains are the same as those which recur in the epic cycle of Gesar of Ling.

The remains of the great walls that one sometimes comes across are considered by the nomads to be the ruins of the fortresses of the hero of Ling, while the vestiges of large enclosures built with clods of earth dug from mounds called *potho* are thought to be the remains of the encampments of Ling's army at the time of the war with the land of Hor. Two hills, which the nomads call "the hill of the divinities" and "the hill of the *Lu*" (the spirits of the waters and the underworld), are mentioned by the same names in an episode of the epic of Gesar entitled *The horse race* that the nomads still pass down:

From the summit of "the hill of the divinities" the men/ made smoke offerings in honor of the gods/
From the summit of "the hill of the *Lu*" the women/ admired the spectacle.

THE SERTHA REGION OF THE ANYEMACHEN MOUNTAIN RANGE

East of Dzachuka and south-west of Mount Anyemachen lies Sertha, a region which, like all the lands at the foot of this mountain, is considered an integral part of the region of Golok. By its natural geographical conformation, it is one of the most inaccessible areas and so protected from external attack.

The inhabitants of Sertha say that the true name of the region is not Golok, but rather Nolak, which means rebellion. One of their folk songs says:

I rebel (*Nolak*) against those up there, I rebel
against Tibet, / I rebel! / Against the orders of
the *Dharma* King of Tibet I rebel! / I rebel and the
sky is with me. / The blue sky is with the
rebellion! / I rebel against those down there, I
rebel, / against China I rebel! / Against the
Chinese government's laws I rebel! / I rebel! We
make our own laws! / The laws for the deer of
the rocky highlands of Ma, / We make
ourselves! / I rebel against those down there, I
rebel, against the Hor I rebel! / Against the
invincible horsemen of Hor I rebel! / I rebel, it's
meat I like! / I, boy, am with the rebellion!

For many hundreds of years no one ever managed to subdue the Sertha. One reason is that the rocky mountains and snow-capped peaks which surround this region form a natural bulwark in whose shelter the nomads lived, tranquil and independent.

The peoples of Sertha are divided into 18 groups scattered over the grassy stretches between the mountains and valleys around Sergyi Drongi Mukpo, a small but particularly beautiful mountain that the nomads consider the seat of the life-force¹ of Pal Leden Tsogkyi Dakpo, an aspect of the protector divinity Mahākāla, one of the most important in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon.

Near this sacred mountain lived the Washul, the traditional chief of the Sertha, considered a descendant of an emanation of Mahākāla, "Tsogkyi Dakpo". He was seen by his people as a religious authority, an "elder", one to be turned to for advice, but with no effective powers: he could not give orders, exact tribute or condemn criminals. This was not because he was held in low esteem by his people but because of the very particular way of life of those nomads from the most ancient times. Never subjected to the laws imposed by China or the Hor, and unaware of the custom of paying tribute, they had always lived in total freedom, in radically different conditions from the rest of the population.

I was not able to identify the origins of the family of the Washul with certainty, but it seems that this title can be traced to the time of Pönla, a yogin practitioner of Dzogchen (one of the essential teachings in both the Bön and the Tibetan Buddhist traditions) who was gifted with great magic powers. Many stories relate that he was a

discoverer of “spiritual treasures”,² able to find sacred objects and teachings concealed in earlier ages and that he was an emanation of the same “Tsogkyi Dakpo”.

At the time of my journey, a marvellous black cloak that Pönla had miraculously discovered, known as Mahākāla’s “Tsogkyi Dakpo” cloak, was still kept as a sacred object by the Washul family. The nomads told me, with deep conviction, that no enemy was able to attack the land of the Sertha because, should this happen, Mahākāla would have been called on to help, and the Sertha, waving his black cloak against the aggressors, would have put them to flight.

They told me how twice in the past they had defeated the soldiers of Xining in this way, and on another occasion those of Sichuan.

On my visit there, I met Kelsang Gön, grandson of Pönla, son of one of his sons named Karma Dorje; he was of normal appearance and nothing particular distinguished his daily and religious activities from those of other nomads. All the inhabitants of Sertha respected him and considered him a great lama gifted with spiritual power and went to him for blessings, divinations to learn the possible outcomes of determinate actions, protection for the living and rituals to help the dead.

In that region there have never been beggars nor has extreme poverty existed while, on the other hand, no families have possessed extreme wealth. The wealth of single family units varies widely but it can be calculated approximately that an average family owned between 500 and 1,000 sheep, from 300 to 700 yaks and *dri* (the female of the species) and from 30 to 70 mules and horses.

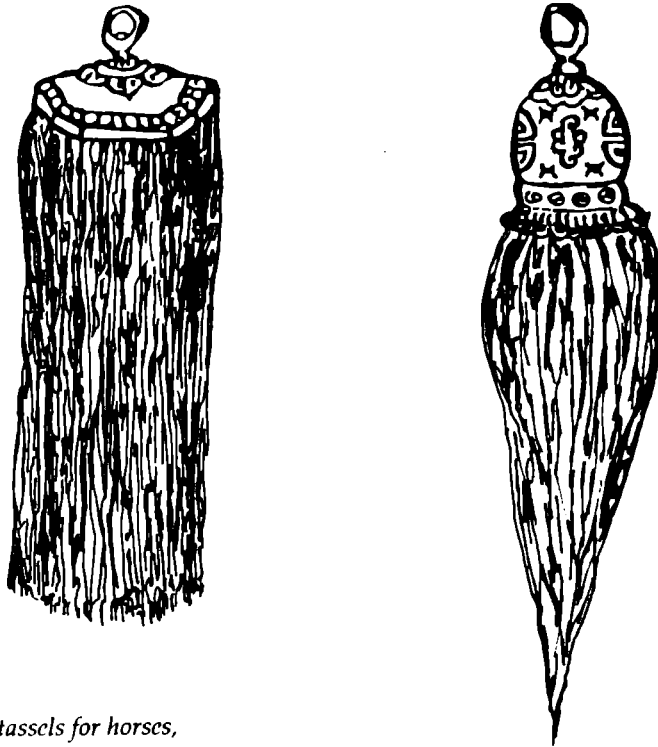
These nomads are not subject to the political authority of a chief, but never disregard the spiritual advice of their lamas: every family, according to its religious tradition, has a lama whom it considers its spiritual protector.

Religious figures are held in high esteem. Whenever the nomads meet a person in the garb of a Buddhist monk, they take off their hats as a sign of respect. If the monk is elderly they also dismount from their horses. If the lama is a reincarnation or an abbot, recognizable by his yellow robes and the red tassel³ that decorates his mount, the nomads, once dismounted, pull their sleeves, which usually hang loose, above the shoulder, take their rifles (slung previously around the shoulders) and set their hats on them; then, drawing sword and scabbard from their belts and holding these and the rifle in the left hand, they ask the lama for a blessing, normally given by his placing a hand on their heads.

Given that nomads do not know state laws, do not obey rules imposed from above, and have no system of public education, their ways, natural and without artifice, seem at first sight rough and ignorant, but nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, they have a good-hearted and honest disposition, are sincere and true in every action and faithful and trustworthy in friendship. Among friends and within their own group, fraud and cheating do not exist, and wicked deeds are never perpetrated openly or covertly.

By nature they are reserved in bestowing their friendship, but once one has become their friend, they can be given complete trust and their affection is constant and long-lasting. The nomads help each other in every way to the point that when

a friend is in difficulty no fear prevents them from offering all their possessions and even their very lives. These customs and this lifestyle are common to almost all the nomadic populations of north-eastern Tibet who from ancient times have always lived happily and in harmony with nature, and in complete independence from other countries.



Both these ornamental tassels for horses, which would be part of an elaborate caparison, indicate the high social rank of the horseman.

SWEARING THE OATH OF FRIENDSHIP

The nomads' dedication and loyalty in friendship is proverbial and whoever becomes their friend can place complete trust in them. Amongst the nomads themselves, to be considered a friend, it is not sufficient to have known or spent time with someone over many years; a relationship must be formalized or "sealed" with an oath of friendship known as *najog*.

Where a pact involves two different communities, the oath is sworn in a rite called "pounding the blood-red hide".¹ All the elders from both groups assemble in one place where a freshly flayed yak-skin, still covered in blood, is spread out. Then together they stamp upon the hide with their bare feet, and all join by crooking each other's right index fingers in the shape of an iron hook, declaring the particular reason for pledging their friendship. Then each elder proclaims:

As long as there is a sky /
As long as the earth is not emptied /
There will be no discord! /

Having said this, the local deities and the earth spirits are called upon as witnesses.

If two individuals take the oath they must perform the so-called "crooking of the fingers",² linking the bent index fingers of their respective right hands in the form of iron hooks and stating the reasons for swearing the mutual oath and its purpose. This is sufficient to seal the pact and obliges those who have sworn fidelity to come to

each other's aid, whatever the motive and importance of the matter, a pledge they will always observe with sincere solicitude, in the spirit of the nomad adage:

Rejoice in happy times together, /
Together bear adversities. /

Making such an alliance might seem simple, but in truth it is a very serious commitment, to which the nomads attribute the greatest importance. A nomad unable to keep his pledge is despised as an individual devoid of any sense of honor, and it is widely believed that the local deities and the earth spirits, offended by this failing, will inflict sufferings upon him both now and in future lives.

Every nomad has several "sworn friends"³ with whom he has made this pact of solidarity. Relatives and friends of both parties are automatically bound and thus committed to reciprocate help. If, for example, a nomad is harmed by someone from a group from another region, his sworn friends must avenge him. If he is in a dispute under arbitration or must pay damages for the killing of a man or, indeed, is in difficulty of any sort, all his sworn friends together will share responsibility in coming to his aid. If a nomad's herds are decimated by an epidemic and his survival is in jeopardy, it is his friends, once more, who help, each as best as he can, with the gift of livestock necessary to restore him to solvency.



*A group of shepherds with sacks of grain bought from the profits made on their products.
This is usually barley, which is best conserved by grinding just before use.*

VENDETTAS

Although loyal and trustworthy in friendship, and possessing many fine qualities, the nomad can prove a very dangerous enemy. When any point of argument arises, great or small, involving either an individual or a group, it is very important that those responsible immediately recognize that they are at fault and make amends in the appropriate way. To neglect the portent of the offence given or the harm caused to another can set off a very serious vendetta, called *titsö* by the nomads.

Incidents, which can vary in their gravity, might arise over pastures, property or unfulfilled matrimonial commitments.

When a nomad is offended by an individual or a whole group, from his own area or another, and no one admits to being at fault, intense hostility is created: the immediate family of the offended person, his other relatives, his sworn friends and those of his relatives unite to defeat the adversary. These vendettas can escalate over time and transform into lethal "blood feuds".¹ When someone is killed in a feud, the group to which he belongs will accept no truce until they have slain his assassin. Thus, blood feuds are drawn out, interminably, from generation to generation. I learned of feuds that continued more than 100 years and grew ever worse.

It is commonly believed that a son's first duty is to kill his father's murderer and this becomes the duty of the sworn friends of the deceased where

there are no sons to avenge him. Failure to carry out the vendetta will bring down on one the contempt and condemnation of one's fellow nomads.

To avoid the perils of such vendettas, some nomads are forced to leave their own region and turn to their sworn friends, often in distant inaccessible territories. These self-exiled nomads are particularly dreaded since, every year in summer, they return to their homelands to carry out vendettas, robberies and raids and often start new "blood feuds".

There are numerous feuds, great and small, among the nomads but one should not think these arise easily for trivial reasons. Indeed, even when the wrongs committed would be a just cause for a vendetta, the nomads, aware of the grave risks and terror such feuds create, strive to bring about a reconciliation. Both parties recognize their share of the blame wherever this is possible and where what has happened is not held to be too grave for this to be acceptable.



Sturdy and richly caparisoned horses such as these are the nomads' inseparable companions.

HONOR AND SHAME

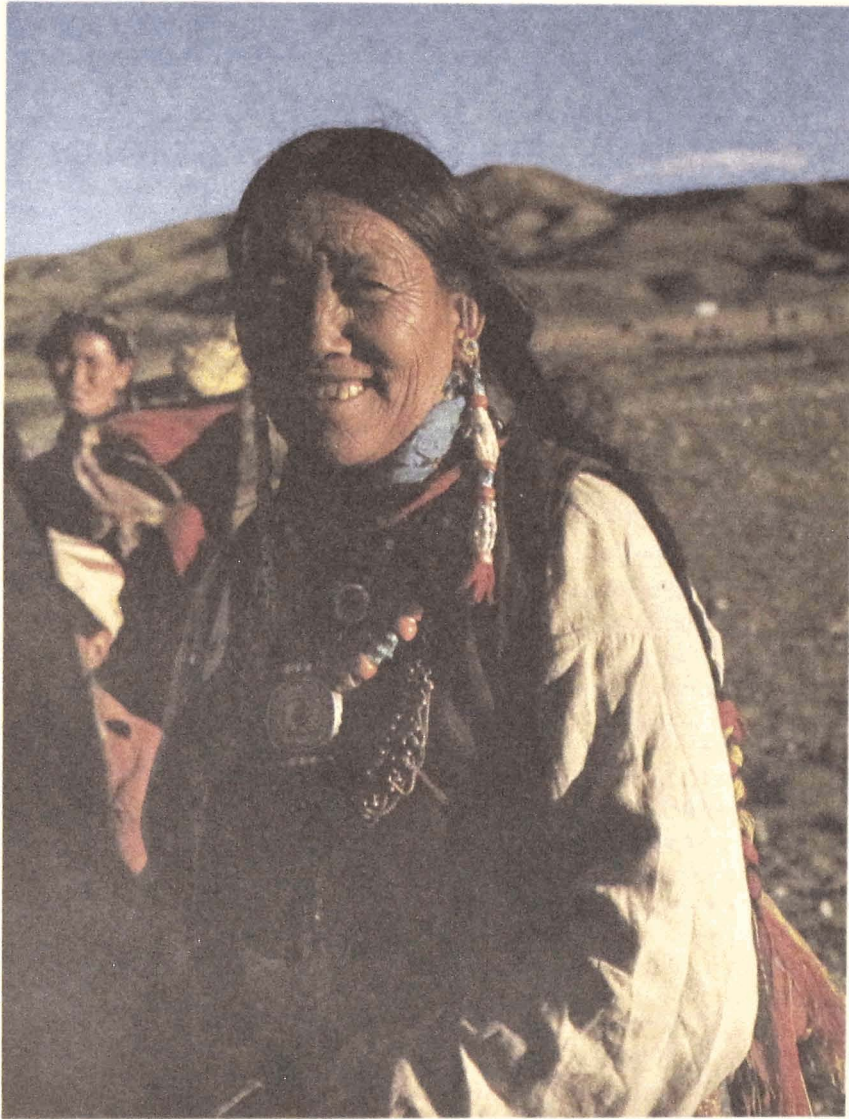
The sense of shame and the principle of not offending common decency are shared by all Tibetan nomads, and indeed by all the world's peoples. What varies considerably, according to place and circumstance, is what is decreed as correct behavior or, conversely, that which is offensive.

The nomads too have their own clear ideas in this regard. Within families, the sons and daughters never joke about sexual matters in front of their parents or other older people. This topic is likewise avoided in front of brothers and sisters together in the same place who would get angry or interrupt the conversation and leave if anyone dared to speak of such things. Such behavior would doubtless be considered indecent and highly reproachable and that offender would be ostracized.

Marriage among the nomads is arranged by parents and should two young people elope without the consent of their respective families, this is considered *chidong*, a shameless action. Marriages between blood relatives, considered to be such down to the sixth degree of kinship, are carefully avoided. Marrying a relative is thought extremely blameworthy and inauspicious, a source of misfortune for the whole community and a probable cause of epidemics and mishaps for man and beast.

The offspring from this shameful union are thought wicked and impure and are called *nal*, one

of incestuous origin. The *nal* are not allowed to offer aromatic herbs and other substances for burning during the *sang* smoke rituals performed to honor the local protective deities lest the power of the *sang* be contaminated and weakened. Furthermore, they are not permitted to approach nor touch a newborn baby, since, should they do so, the baby's speech could be impaired, his mental development damaged or even his very existence threatened. Incest leaves its stigma in such negative ways that nomads take great care to avoid committing it and so it is very rare to find descendents of such origins.



Tibetan nomad woman wearing her jewelry.

NOMADIC KNOWLEDGE: ARTS AND CRAFTS, MEDICINE, ASTROLOGY

Erudition derived from books is extremely rare among the nomads: few are qualified to teach in this way and there is absolutely no social tradition of applying oneself to this type of study. However, their wide knowledge gained from practical experience and their skill as craftsmen enable them to face any situation, to make the objects that they need, and thus to live serenely.

In raising livestock, for example, the nomads are extremely expert and although not possessing veterinary texts they unerringly know what techniques to use, how to protect the animals from illness and how to cure them when necessary, relying on experience passed down in their oral tradition.

Among the products typical of their handicrafts are various articles of clothing made of felt: the *kyaching*, a waterproof coat used for journeys on horseback; the *dziching*, a waterproof cloak with a hood used by shepherds which is cut from a round piece of felt; the *khepching*, square and heavy, used for protection from the snow, rain and cold when sleeping in the open; the *kheppol*, a cover used for cold winter nights; the *tsebü*, a hat also made from felt with its peak decorated with red silk threads, worn during the summer by all nomads, male and female. It is from these, I believe, that the "Gesar meditation hat" derives. The *tsebü* is mentioned in the epic and its similarity to the nomad felt hat can be seen in the statue of Gesar Dorje Tsegyel, a divine aspect of the hero of

Ling. Other objects are the felt boots for winter and, lastly, the huge carpets with black wool swastika or *ganchil* designs used for sitting on.

The felt is prepared on a hot, sunny day. A large piece of yak-hair cloth is opened on a soft meadow and on it well-carded wool is laid out evenly; a little hot water is poured onto it and finally everything, that is, the layer of wool with the cloth below, is slowly rolled together. The last part of the process is completed by a group of people of both sexes, the number depending on the size of the felt. Standing in a long line they spend usually about an hour, rolling the two-layered cloth.



Ornament
on a belt:
a silver stud
embossed with
the ganchil design.

After this, the layer of felt is separated from the cloth below and the rolling is continued for several hours more. When the time comes for this last phase, all the neighbors are called in to help, the host offering them a sheep slaughtered for the occasion and other food and drink.

While rolling the felt the boys and girls sing a charming song:

*Ala mani la padme*¹

Boys: The divine good felt for the young gods!

Girls: Good fortune, the finest wool of the white sheep!

Boys: The first good felt for the boy's *kyaching*!

Girls: The second good felt for the girl's *dziching*!

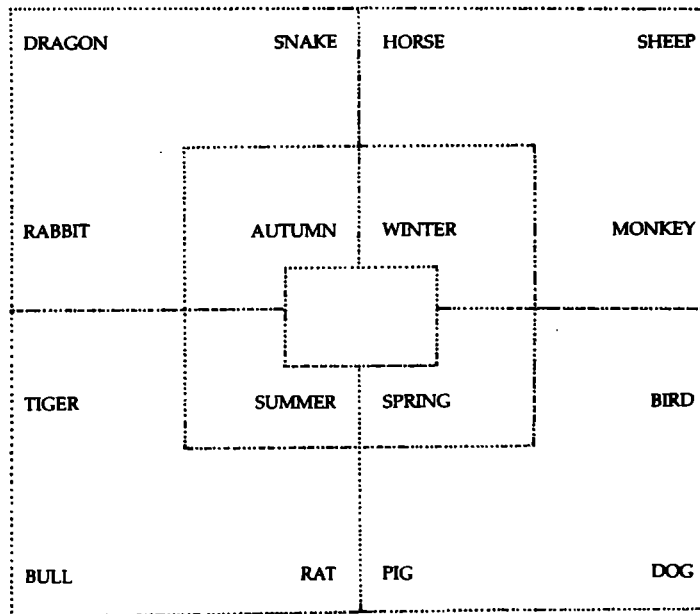
Boys: The third good felt for the sentries' waterproof!

Girls: The fourth good felt for the divine white altar cloth!

Boys: The fifth good felt for the hat of the five divinities!²

Girls: The sixth good felt for the clothes of the shepherdess going to milk!

This enumeration, all of which I do not remember, continues for a long time. The nomads value the

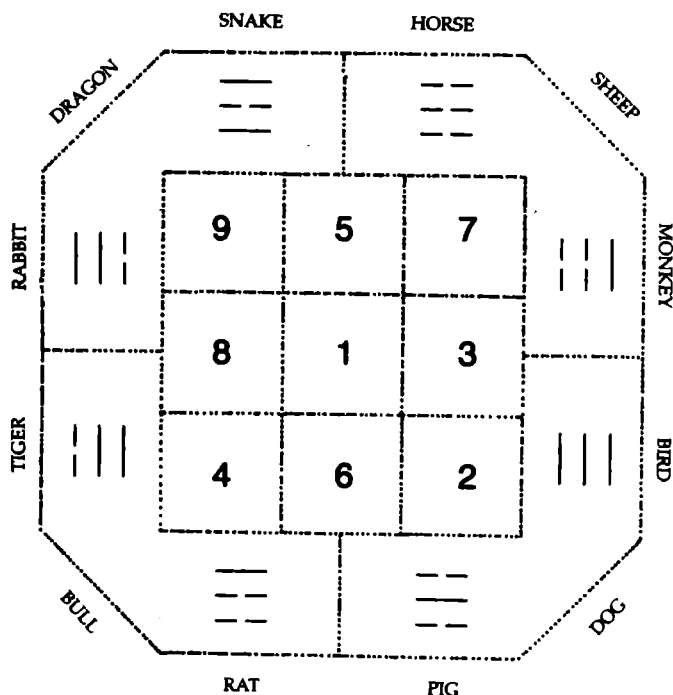


The months and the seasons.

hair of the yak and the *dri*, its female companion, very highly. With the softest hair, weaving the black and white strands, they make a material that is used for saddle-cloths for the yaks and horses, baggage covers and bags of various sizes. With the coarser hairs, from the tail for example, they weave thongs with which they tie down their loads on the pack-saddles and which are also used to fix their tents to the ground. The most important product obtained from yak-hair is a very heavy black cloth³ which is indispensable for making the tents⁴ in which the nomads live.

For weaving and spinning they have nothing but a simple tool made of sticks of varying size. This, however, is sufficient to make the different types of cloth they use, as well as the products to be sold to the settled peoples.

Among the nomads there are painters expert in sacred art. In some tents belonging to rich families, and in monasteries, above all in the Dzachuka area, one can admire works of great value by famous artists that depict sacred subjects such as the Twelve Deeds of Lord Buddha,⁵ the Eight Manifestations of Padmasambhava,⁶ various



Reverse side of the astrological mirror.

legends of Gesar, King of Ling, the Five Deeds of Milarepa,⁷ and the portrayal of many divinities.

In the typical pictorial style of those regions, the sacred figures executed with a stronger brushstroke and thicker paintwork stand out in a landscape background of flowery meadows and snowy mountains represented by a few light strokes.

Among the nomads, blacksmiths making knives, picks and other objects for everyday use are numerous, whereas goldsmiths able to work gold, silver and women's jewelry are very rare; to complete a set of women's ornaments takes about a year and the labor involved is expensive for this reason.

Doctors are extremely difficult to find. Usually they are monks or tantric practitioners resident in local monasteries. During the summer they set off on journeys and visit different communities, where they are received with great honors. They then cure the sick in the various encampments and gather the local medicinal herbs. This summer tour is called *mendom*. At other times of the year when a person falls gravely ill there is no choice but to send for a doctor, which is certainly not easy in some areas because the trails are rough, and countless valleys and mountain passes stand between the doctor and the person who needs his care.

The nomads, in curing illness, give more importance to rituals than to medicine. When someone in the family falls ill, they first turn to their own lama and ask for a divination to see whether the cure requires a rite or medicine. If rituals are indicated in the answer, the lama is invited to perform the appropriate ones. Usually,

when the illness is thought to have been caused by food or drink or by accidental circumstances, medicine is considered the most effective cure. Medicine is not sufficient and ritual cure becomes necessary when, instead, the cause is identified as disturbance by a spirit previously angered by the patient, accumulated negative karma^a or the falling due of a karmic debt to be paid.

In the monasteries of these regions there are many astrologers expert in both the systems of zodiacal astrology, and the astrology of the elements.⁹ They calculate the combination of year, month, day, hour, planets and constellations using the principles expounded in the *Chetsi*¹⁰ and regulate the manner and timing of certain events through specific systems of calculation in the astrology of the elements, such as "the astrology of death" and "nuptial astrology".¹¹ The nomads attentively follow astrological suggestions on what to do and what to avoid. Interestingly, many totally illiterate nomads can, by observing moon and stars, tell the date and the constellation of the day with extreme precision and can list the auspicious and unpropitious actions for that given astrological moment. Their explanations exactly match those in astrological texts which they have never studied.

The nomads use the following names for the 12 months: Bird (first month), Dog (second month), Pig (third month), Rat (fourth month), Bull (fifth month), Tiger (sixth month), Hare (seventh month), Dragon (eighth month), Serpent (ninth month), Horse (10th month), Sheep (11th month), Monkey (12th month).

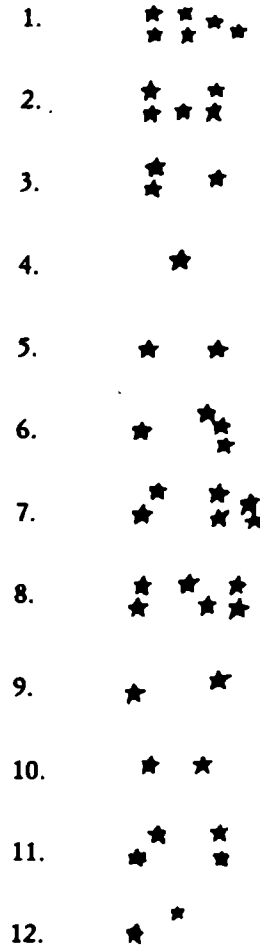
Of the many factors considered in the astrology of the elements when calculating the

positive and negative aspects of a specific moment, the constellation of the day is deemed the most important. The nomads identify the following constellations when they appear with the moon in the night sky: 1 *Mindruk*, 2 *Peudzi*, 3 *Malpo*, 4 *Lak*, 5 *Napso*, 6 *Gyel*, 7 *Pa*, 8 *Tachen*, 9 *Tachung*, 10 *Tra*, 11 *Chama*, 12 *Chau*, 13 *Sari*, 14 *Saga*, 15 *Laksor*, 16 *Deu*, 17 *Sokpa*, 18 *Chu*, 19 *Phul*, 20 *Troshin*, 21 *Chishin*, 22 *Möndre*, 23 *Möndru*, 24 *Trumtö*, 25 *Trumme*, 26 *Thakar*, 27 *Dranye*.

Their ways of identifying planets and constellations correspond almost exactly to the *Chetsi* and *Druptsi*,¹² astrological texts that are probably their source of knowledge in this sphere, passed down for generations.

Most nomads wear as an ornament a round mirror made of brass or of another alloy. On the back, clockwise around the circumference, are etched the 12 animals representing the 12-year cycle in Tibetan astrology. On a concentric circle, in the same clockwise pattern are the symbols of the eight *parkha*, that is, the trigrams identical to those used in the Chinese *I-Ching*. At the centre of these two circles a quadrant is inscribed, divided into nine sections, numbered from one to nine, comprising the astrological numerical cycle named *meva*. Some mirrors have only a swastika within the circle formed by the 12 animals.

It is said that this object drives away the negativity of the year, month, day or hour, and can eliminate conflict between the astrological aspects of the *meva* and the *parkha*. The nomads explain that, thanks to the reflections in the mirror, one is hidden from the eyes of evil spirits.



Constellations 1 to 27.

13.



14.



15.



16.



17.



18.



19.



20.



21.



22.



23.



24.



25.



26.



27.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE NOMADS

All nomads, young and old, are extremely devout and pure in their religious feeling. Most of them, although illiterate, know many famous prayers and invocations by heart: the Refuge,¹ Praises to Tārā,² the mantra *Om mani padme hūm*,³ the *Siddhi* mantra,⁴ the *Sampa lhundrup*,⁵ the *Leudiünma*,⁶ and numerous others not found in books. One such example I noted was an invocation to the master Karma Pakshi (1204-1283), the second “Karmapa” of the *Karma Kagyü* tradition, that I heard recited by many nomads and was able to transcribe:

To many Chinese he taught the Dharma / The one who converted many Chinese to Dharma, making them progress / Is the *yogin* Karma Pakshi / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / If you do not know his father's name / That name is Tampa Rigpa! / If you do not know his mother's name / That name is Drolma Karmo! / At one year old he learned the alphabet! / At two he was a great scholar! / At three he could ride! / He turned his horse up towards central Tibet, / And there the offerings fell like snow flakes! / He turned his horse down towards China / And there the offerings were like thunderstorms! / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When he was thrown from the summit of a white rock, / He transformed instantly into a vulture, / King of birds. / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When he was flung into a blue river, / He transformed instantly into a water bird! / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When he was hurled into a pit full of

thorns, / The pit became lined with soft white wool! / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When he was tossed into fire, / He transformed instantly into the red god of Fire (Melha)! / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When he was imprisoned in a tiny cell / The cell transformed into a *stūpa* with many doors!⁷ / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When shut in a dark room he appeared as a divine and radiant sun! / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / When thrown into a crevice filled with tormenting insects, / The biggest insects circumambulated him respectfully! / The smaller ones prostrated at his feet! / I invoke the Lord Karmapa! / Whoever does not forget to recite this once a day, / Is promised that after death he will not go to hell, / It is certain that he will not fall into the lower realms of existence!⁸ / I invoke the Lord Karmapa!

Most nomads are not sectarian: their religious sentiment is not tied exclusively to any one school; but despite their great devotion and the purity of their outlook, very few really understand the true sense of Buddhism.

In effect, the theory and practice of Dharma are held and passed down in the monasteries found in those regions. Many great masters of the past, such as Khyeu Rindzin Chenmo (19th century), Dza Patrul Rinpoche (1808-1887), Jamgön Mipham (1846-1912) and others, were very successful in maintaining, developing and protecting the Buddhist teachings there. After them, there was

never a lack of erudite masters, deeply learned in religion, philosophy and other disciplines, to instruct the nomads in the rules of moral conduct linked to the sacred Teaching.

Every morning, the nomads rise reciting the Refuge and other prayers which they continue to pronounce while performing their first tasks of the day. Later, when they set off towards the mountains they sing the mantras *Om mani padme hūm* and *Om ā hūm vajra guru padme siddhi hūm* with different melodies. For the *Om mani padme hūm* mantra in particular, there is a very beautiful chant called *Shardza mani*; tradition has it that this was composed by a yogin from the hermitage of Shardza in Dzachuka. It is so widely known that there is no region where it is not heard sung.

Every evening, after supper, the family comes together for prayers,⁹ during which there are at least three repetitions of the Praises to Tārā and the *Sampa lhundrup*. It is usually the father or the eldest son who leads the prayers. After this, cheese and butter are burned, outside the tent, as an offering to the deceased while the family members recite several *malas* (the Tibetan equivalent of rosaries) of the mantra *Om mani padme hūm* and, at the end, recite an invocation, a sacred formula, dedicating accumulated merits and virtues for the benefit of all beings. Each evening, they place a butter lamp, called “that which burns all night”,¹⁰ on top of the stove as an act of devotion towards the Three Jewels: the Buddha, his Teaching and the religious Community. This butter lamp remains lit from dusk to sunrise of the following day.

The nomads have great respect for their parents who when old are no longer expected to work and instead go to monasteries or religious

communities to receive teachings from the lamas. Here they dedicate themselves first of all to those religious practices known as the Five “Hundred-Thousands”¹¹ which are preliminary to tantric Buddhist practices and consist of:

1. 100,000 recitations of the Refuge through which one declares the intention to take refuge, so as to find liberation from the sufferings of this world, through the Buddha, his Teaching and the religious Community;¹²
2. 100,000 recitations of the 100-syllable mantra of the tantric divinity Vajrasattva as purification, to remove obstacles to spiritual realization;
3. 100,000 prostrations to purify the obstacles of the body;
4. 100,000 offerings of the *mandala*,¹³ symbolic offerings of the entire universe through which one accumulates the merits and virtues needed to follow the path of wisdom;
5. 100,000 practices of spiritual union with the master, known as *Guru Yoga*, whose aim is to receive the transmission of the energy of the wisdom which enables one to realize the deep meaning of the teachings.

After these preparatory practices, instructions are received on the transfer of consciousness, known as *phowa*, that allow the practitioner, through specific yoga exercises, to control his consciousness at the moment of death so as to transfer it to the desired dimension of existence. Finally one learns to enter into the non-dual state of essential contemplation known as *trekchö*, which is the true purpose of the teachings.

The elderly can choose either to remain in the teaching centres or to live in small tents near their

families where they dedicate themselves to spiritual practice and the recitation of daily prayers.

In the nomads' regions there are monasteries, large and small, belonging to the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, particularly to the *Nyingmapa*, "the ancient school".¹⁴ Most of these monasteries comprise temples, residences for the lamas, practice colleges and living quarters for the monks. They are usually beautifully constructed, in wood and stone. Certain types of monastery, such as the *nakgön*, made up of black yak-hair tents and thus called the "black monasteries", sometimes change location during the summer months.

In the Dzachuka region the following monasteries are to be found: in the *Nyingmapa* tradition: Dzagyel Gön, Ghemong Gön, Gulung Gön, Pathul Gön, Pönru Gön, Gunyung Gön, Gotsa Gön, Tro kong Gön, Drelkar Gön, Phukung Gön, Norling Gön, Atse Gön, Juwa Gön, Bumnying Gön; in the *Kagyüpa* tradition: Kashi Gön, Chaktsa Gön, Tharshul Gön, Monghe Gön, Barö Gön; in the *Sakyapa* tradition: Bachung Gön, Lanknag Gön; in the *Gelukpa* tradition: Patrö Gön, Seshul Gön, Jowo Gön, Wönpo Gön, Bumsar Gön; and the non-sectarian Changma Ritro monastery. Also many religious communities of varying sizes developed around a master, like that of Khyeu Rindzin Chenmo, as well as many "black monasteries".

In the Sertha region, the monasteries, flanked by teaching centres and "black monasteries", in the *Nyingmapa* tradition are Tungkar Gön, Taktse Gön, Yarlung Gön, Horshul Gön, Rakra Gön, Basug Gön, Raktram Gön, and Kyillong Gön. In the *Kagyüpa* tradition, there is Taklung Gön.

The economic management of the monastery is mainly entrusted to its various administrative

offices called *chi*: the central administration, the offices of the lamas' residences, and other specific ones. The *drachi*, the central office of the monastery, is the most important and handles all its business, distributing hundreds of beasts, usually yak and *dri* (female yaks), to the nomads who work for the monastery, deciding on the agistment of the female yaks, the loan of grain and the handling of trade.

These duties can also be delegated by the central office, for periods lasting from three to five years, to the private residences of the lamas inside the monasteries or to rich private citizens. The administrators in their turn are helped by ordinary monks and try to increase the capital in every way possible. The profits made during the year finance the annual religious ceremonies and those related to recurring commemorations and festivities.



The ritual bell (dril bu), symbol of emptiness and the diamond scepter (rdo rje), symbol of the enlightened state of the individual.

When religious ceremonies take place in the monastery, the central administration provides for the monks' sustenance whereas, at all other times, donations from lay persons for specific rituals and income from work done by monks within the monastery are used for this. Those monks who are newly arrived or who do not have a position of importance and thus have neither of these possibilities are entirely supported by their own families.

In most monasteries there are colleges where different meditation techniques are practised,¹⁵ whereas only in some are there colleges for philosophical studies.¹⁶ In the former, the course of study and practice lasts from five to seven years during which those staying in the college are maintained by the head lama of the monastery, known as the holder of the doctrine,¹⁷ who must, whether he is a reincarnation or an abbot (*khenpo*), take this responsibility, drawing on the capital of his own residence.

To increase this capital, the holder of the doctrine goes out on rounds to collect offerings: in summer among the nomads and in winter to the settled communities. When the holder of the doctrine is an important reincarnation, his residence delegates these duties to an abbot, or to two or three teachers called *chila*, who have completed their five to seven year course in the college. Supplied with their needs by the administrator of the lamas' residence, they are sent out as representatives to collect offerings, following the same seasonal pattern.

Besides the central office of the monastery and that of the lamas' residence, many other offices exist which manage the funds set aside for the

various ceremonies which take place during the great religious celebrations. Usually, most of those directing these offices are rich heads of nomad families. As in the monastery and lama residence offices, these departments also possess and manage herds of animals and extensive summer and winter grazing lands, agree upon the agistment of the herds and hold considerable capital accumulated from trade with the settled communities. With the earnings from these activities, they finance religious ceremonies and distribute what is left over at the monks' assemblies. These administrators can invite, as *chila*, a lama who has completed the five to seven year course of practice in college and entrust him with the leading of religious ceremonies and the collecting of offerings for three years. Everything amassed must be passed on to the office that engaged him which, in exchange, gives him his living.

In all these offices, the capital is divided among the administrators, be it in cash or butter stocks. Their task is to set this capital to work, through trade or loans with interest that are known as "five for four". If someone fails to exploit the capital entrusted to him he must make up the average annual increase from his own pocket.

All rules on the administration of the monastery are controlled by the *gönpön* and the *chötrim*; all the ordinary rules governing its internal and external activities are also in the hands of these functionaries. In certain cases, on important questions of general concern, representatives of the office of the lamas' residence, those from the central administrative office, the head of the choir known as the *undze*, the *gönpön*

and the *chötrim* meet to take a decision. On matters of extreme importance, the holder of the doctrine is invited to preside over the meeting and only then can a decision be taken.

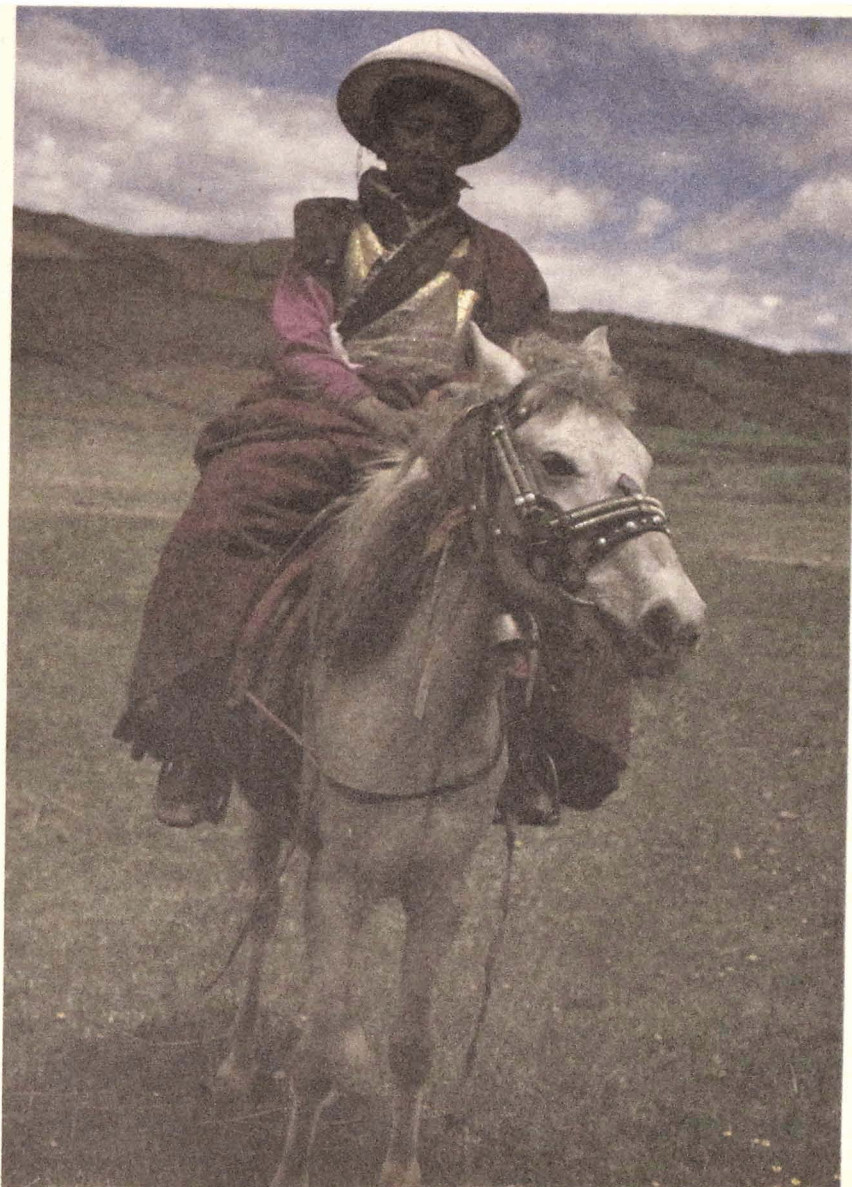
In general, the holder of the doctrine is the true master of the monastery. The *lachi* and the *drachi* administer its wealth, the *gönpön* (in charge of the monks) is responsible for internal and external rules, the *chötrim* (perhaps two or three of them) are functionaries under the *gönpön* who see that rules are observed, especially during religious ceremonies, and oversee the kitchens on these occasions. Then come the *khenpo* (abbots), some of whom give teachings to the monks only during the summer retreat¹⁸ while others do so continually in the philosophy college. The *lobpön* (head teacher) is the tantric master of rituals, known as *dorje lobpön*; while the *drubpön* is the person giving instruction on various tantric practices in yoga and meditation on the divinities within the practice college. The choir master, the *undze*, leads the chants and prayers at large assemblies and acts as *dorje lobpön* in less important ceremonies. There are, furthermore, secondary *undze* who replace the main one and the *dorje lobpön* in daily religious ceremonies.

An ordinary monk can follow three types of career. In the first, once his studies on the monastery's religious ceremonies and rituals are completed, the monk remains seven years in the practice college. When this period is over, the holder of the doctrine, the current *dorje lobpön* and his predecessors present him with a hat, a *vajra*¹⁹ and a bell,²⁰ as a symbol of his obtained rank. The monk then acts as head of the orchestra²¹ during large ceremonies for three years. Afterwards, he becomes

head of the secondary choir²² for another three years, and for three further years he is head of the main choir. He thus obtains the rank of *zurla*, who are lamas regarded as candidates for the position of head teacher (*lobpön*). From their number are chosen the *chila*, the lamas delegated by the administrative offices to raise funds for the monastery. He may then become a *lobpön*, a tantric master of large religious ceremonies and must perform this role for at least five years. Finally he may rise to the rank of *drubpön*, master of tantric teachings, for an unlimited number of years. This is the highest level obtainable in a monastery.

In the second type of career, a monk studies such different disciplines as grammar, poetry, medicine and astrology in the appropriate school of the monastery, or else directly enters the college of philosophical studies where he dedicates himself to studying the famous "Thirteen Principal Texts".²³ Subsequently, he leaves to study in the philosophy colleges of other monasteries before finally returning to his original monastery to act as *kyorpön*, one who teaches lessons. After this, for three years, he becomes a *khenpo*, chief abbot of the monastery and then the abbot of the college of philosophical studies or perhaps a tutor²⁴ of the reincarnate lamas leading the monasteries. Most of those who follow the second type of career, however, go into retreat and then give teachings.

In the third type of career, once basic studies are completed in a chosen school of the monastery, the monk acts as *tunkpön* for three years which means he is responsible for sounding a great ritual conch shell on specific occasions. Then, for the three following years, he becomes an



The lama at the head of the monastery collects offerings, travelling amongst the nomads every summer and to settled communities each winter.

administrator²⁵ in the central administration office. Subsequently he may for three years act as *gönpön* and become responsible for discipline in the monastery. After this, he must perform the duties of *chipön*, the chief administrator of the central office of the monastery or of the lamas' residence.

In addition to the main patterns mentioned above, there are slight variations in career developments within a monastery. The *zurla*, for example, can become a *gönla*, those adepts responsible for rituals conducted in small shrines dedicated to the divinities who are protectors of the teachings. The *chötrim* can become *könnyer*, custodians of the temple.

There are various other administrative duties generally entrusted to monks without their having a pre-established career. Posts which entail a personal risk of loss or an opportunity for earnings are given by turns.

THE GREAT FESTIVAL OF THE MANI PRAYER

For all the nomad tribes the “Mani Festival”,¹ dedicated to the divinity Avalokiteśvara and his mantra *Om mani padme hūm*, is a period of intense Buddhist practice.

During the first month of winter, men and women of all ages go to the “black monasteries”, formed of tents, or to other monasteries in their regions where, before a *lobpön*, they take the *nyunne* vow, one of the more common purification practices, for two days.

To purify the body, no solid food is eaten on the afternoon of the first day and the day after is one of complete fasting and prostrations. To purify the voice, the second day passes without speaking to others, reciting the mantra *Om mani padme hūm*. To purify the mind, the teachings of *Mani Kabum*² are received from the *lobpön* and are practised.

During this festival, most of the lamas and monks from the different monasteries meet to practise and perform ritual offerings to Avalokiteśvara with a *maṇḍala* made of small piles of grain,³ the number of which corresponds to that of the requisite divinities. The “*maṇḍala* of small piles” used in this ritual can be traced to a tradition begun by Gelongma Palmo,⁴ a famous Indian Buddhist nun.

A text contained in the *Rinchen Terdzö*⁵ describes the way to take the eight vows of *nyunne* by oneself, how to impart them to others and how

to carry out the ceremonies connected to them. The eight vows are:

1. Not to kill
2. Not to steal
3. Not to have sexual intercourse
4. Not to lie
5. To abstain from alcohol, the cause of every defect
6. To eat only at the prescribed times
7. Not to sleep on high beds
8. Not to use perfumes, wear ornaments or indulge in dancing and singing.

The one-day vow, “Until tomorrow’s sun rises I shall apply myself perfectly to purification,” is taken before a master or an image of the Three Jewels (the Buddha, his Teaching and the religious Community) and must be kept from the morning on which it is taken until the morning of the following day, when it is renewed.

However, in Tibet, this practice is usually performed over a cycle of two consecutive days and can be repeated. At dawn on the first day, called “of the happy states of existence”,⁶ one rises and takes the vows; during the morning only tea and milk are permitted while the midday meal, strictly vegetarian and with no alcohol, is consumed at one sitting. In the afternoon until the moment of retiring, only beverages such as tea and milk are allowed.

The second day is known as “the day of silence” and from the moment of rising one does not speak; one washes head, hands, and feet and pronounces the vow once more. On this day, nothing is eaten or drunk.

On the morning of the third day, rising at dawn, one washes head, hands and feet and then drinks water contained in a ritual vase placed on a *mandala*. From this moment one can speak and break the fast with “dawn soup”,⁸ made with milk, butter, cheese and green wheat flour boiled together. This is the two-day *nyunne*. The vow can be renewed and one can proceed two days at a time for up to 16 consecutive days: this longer period of retreat is called “the eight pairs of the white *nyunne*”.⁹

For the elderly and the young who cannot sustain the complete *nyunne* there is another practice known as *nyenne* which differs only in that the midday meal may be taken on “the day of silence”.

At the end of the period of the “Mani Festival” the older members at the gathering place themselves under the guidance of an able master for two or three weeks to train in the practice of the transfer of consciousness or *phowa*.¹⁰ Many of them succeed in obtaining the characteristic signs of the realization of this practice: loss of hair on the top of the head, a discharge of serum from the same point, and the ability to insert easily a straw into the scalp at the crown of the head.¹¹



A mandala, representation of the cosmos in its pure dimension.

THE SUMMER FESTIVITIES OF THE MONTH OF THE BULL

The “Four Victories of the Month of the Bull”¹ is the most important of the recurring festivities dedicated to the cult of the divinities.

For this occasion, the nomads prepare many small cloth flags of different colors called *lungta*, printed with mantras, or else small cotton flags called *targö*, to which five cloth ribbons colored blue, white, red, yellow and green are attached. These represent, respectively, space, clouds, fire, earth and water.

On the fourth day of the month of the Bull the men decorate their gunrests, the two horns of a *tsö* antelope (*pantholops hodgsoni*), with colored prayer flags and hang from them a small pouch filled with substances for the smoke offerings to the deities, called *sang*. The bag contains a mixture of toasted barley flour called *tsampa*, butter, tea, black and white barley seeds,² various other cereals, cheese, the sweet tuber called *troma* and the powder of precious offerings. These are the “substances for the *sang*”.³

When the nomads gather at the place chosen for the tribute to the deities, they begin to set out from their bags copious offerings of the substances to be burned, while those officiating carry out the appropriate *sang* rites. They might meet on the top of a mountain that acts as an abode for particular energies⁴ or on the slopes of a mountain belonging to the “earth spirits”.⁵ At the part of the rite dedicated to the local gods⁶ everyone as he makes his offering calls out “Ki! So! Cha!”, and expresses his personal wish.

The following are verses I heard pronounced by the people of Sertha. I jotted them down because I had never been able to find any written versions of the numerous quite similar invocations common among the nomads.

Ki! Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho! / The offering begins: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine! / Drongri Mukpo, guardian god of / The upper part of Ser! / With your 1,900 followers! / Chief of armies, Halang Gongra! / Holder of promises, Dorje Legpa! / Seven brothers Dzachen Radza! / Silwo Silma of Acho / Nale Taktse, / Guardian spirit of the lower part of Ser! / Nultruk Chukmo of Nale / Ritra Dzatra of Thorpo / Ludüd Gora Nakpo / Selag Taktse / Lhatse Chukmo Dzichung! / Guardian gods, to you I give offerings and praise! / Guardian gods who surround me without my having made offerings to you / Powerful guardians of deserted places! / Guardian deities of the ancestors' lineage! / Wrathful local gods! / Be satisfied, you praiseworthy ones! / Do not let us fall under sharp weapons! / Do not let us fall under the dominion of the powerful! / Send us fattened game, / And we will offer you fat! / Give us wild beasts with striped coats, / And we will offer you furs! / If enemies approach, sound the alarm! / Act so that all goes well! / Let good fortune increase! / Among the multitude, favor me with luck! / Among the few, let my wishes come true! / Do not send sickness to men! /

Do not send calamities to animals! / Be satisfied,
you praiseworthy ones! / Favor my wishes! / So
that what I desire falls into my hands! / Act so
that all goes well! / Let good fortune increase! /
Ki, ho, ho! / May the Gods be victorious!

The *sang* offering over, the men mount their horses
and ride to one of those heaps of stones called *latse*
that the Tibetans pile up on mountain passes in
honor of the local gods. On their arrival, they hang
prayer flags on the stakes set in the pile of stones
and together they recite the following
invocation:

I invoke the mountain pass, I invoke the
mountain pass! / To the right, the gaily colored
Tiger God⁷ (deity of men) / To the left, the gaily
colored Leopard Goddess⁸ (deity of women) / In
the centre, multicolored *latse*! / Generations of
deities from the beginning of existence! / Of
warriors⁹ protectors of men, / Heroic falcon,
eagle and wolf!¹⁰ / Great divinities of the five
elements! / Five great brothers, gods of good

fortune!¹¹ / Mountain to the right that represents
/ He who guides the arrow (the male)! /
Mountain to the left that represents / She who
raises children (the female)! / Great sentinels of
slopes to the north and south! / Namchi Kungyel
from above!¹² / Namar Dungchung from below!¹³
/ Fine stag who dwells on rocky mountains! /
Old *Tsen* of the hard boulders!¹⁴ / Pure waters of
the stony mountains! / Swift currents of air! /
Spirals of flaming fire! / Protectors of the lineage
of ancestors! / Playfellows of children! / Loving
as parents! / Executioner of enemies! / Clear
light that illuminates the day! / You who dissolve
the darkness of night! / King of the gods of
Fortune! / To you and your retinue of 100,000
armies of gods! / To you go the first offerings of
the best quality! / To the sacred mound of stones
I fervently offer praises! / These pure prayer
flags¹⁵ I offer! / May all hear! / I praise you and
present my offerings! / Act so that all goes well!
/ Increase good fortune! / Grant all wishes! /
When I sally forth bravely to confront my



Rifle with antelope horns which serve as the gunrest.

enemies, / Hasten to the sharp point of my weapons! / When I travel far to trade, / May I be skillful in bargaining and gain! / In legal disputes and altercations, / Hasten to the tip of my red tongue! / Do not quit your duty with the light of day! / Do not lose sight of me in the dark of night! / Stay with me like the shadow of my body! / Grant me refuge and protection! / Be my guardians and sentries! / Ki, ho, ho! / I offer praise to the mountain pass!

Having recited these verses, they swiftly return to the brazier¹⁶ used for the ceremonies of the *sang* and ride clockwise around it from three to seven times, brandishing swords and guns and shouting "Ki! So! Cha!"

That same evening, they pitch their tents in a field near a sacred mountain¹⁷ or near one where earth spirits dwell. At this point the women, in their finest clothes, bring butter, meat and different kinds of cakes to eat, with milk and yoghurt to drink. The young men compete in a horse race called *bulima*, riding bareback, and also in other trials of strength and skill.

Amongst the contests in dexterity are three races that follow each other in order of importance: in the first, the *metok khathu*, or "gathering the flower in one's mouth", the winner is the first rider to pick a flower with his mouth as he leans out of the saddle. In the second, the *metok tsetrek*, "picking the tip of the flower", the winner is the first to pick a flower with his hand; the third test is won by passing under the horse's neck at full gallop.

There is a series of eliminating races in which the competitors must participate. The horsemen

first race two at a time, galloping to an agreed point marked by a rope held tightly by two men, go beyond it and return to the starting point where the winner is the first to grasp a white scarf hung from a lance flying a flag, known as a *rudar*,¹⁸ which is stuck in the ground there.

The winners of this competition qualify for the next race the following day, in which they run eight at a time. The winners of these heats then run four at a time. Finally, the winners of these four-horse heats enter the final to contest the prize¹⁹ offered by all the nomads assembled. Its value depends on the number of people involved and on their passion for horse-racing. The horse winning the race becomes very famous and is widely admired. If enemies should suddenly arrive, the horses running in the final are the ones mainly relied upon to pursue them.

After the race, the winners of these competitions show their skills in a difficult exercise, called *boktse*, in which they shoot at a target from a galloping horse, whirling their rifles from right to left with a dance-like movement.

The third day, the elders meet to establish the laws for the coming year, security measures for their land, and the plans for summer and winter encampments and the winter pastures. This assembly can last from three to five days, and has no pre-arranged time limit. The decisions taken are not recorded in writing.

EDUCATION

The basis of education for the nomads is the Buddhist doctrine. Students gather around a great scholar or a spiritually realized practitioner in monastic encampments of yak-hair tents known as “black monasteries” or at teaching centres, both of which can vary widely in size.

When children reach the age of six months or a year they are taken to their family lama who carries out a ritual called “the first offering of hair”. The lama introduces the child to the refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and *Sangha*): the recognition that the Buddha is the place of refuge, that his teaching, the Dharma, is the way and that the *Sangha* is the religious community of fellow practitioners who help us along the path. The lama also gives teachings on the benefits of taking refuge and says, in conclusion, “Divinities who rejoice in virtue be happy!”, at the same moment cutting a lock of the child’s hair and placing it before the altar.

Then the lama gives the child a name deriving from his own: if, for example, he is called Rindzin Dorje, he might use Rindzin Gön, Rindzin Wanden, or Rindzin Sangpo for a boy or a name such as Rindzin Lhamo, Rindzin Tso, Rindzin Wangmo, or Rindzin Sangmo for a girl.

Usually, however, the nomads place the letter “a” before the first syllable of the name, transforming it, for example, into “A rig”. Otherwise, after the first syllable, they might place the syllable “lu”, “ga”, or “yang”, obtaining names they

usually use, such as “Rig-lu”, “Rig-ga” and “Rig-yang”. These diminutives are used for years and it is difficult to distinguish male names from female.

Women are usually not taught to read or write, apart from those who choose the religious life early on, eventually becoming nuns. These have other duties passed on by the mothers, aunts and other women of the family who teach them on the basis of their own experience. Young women thus learn to keep house, tend the flocks and herds and care for animals, duties which they will fulfil for a long time, gradually becoming expert.

The nomads, by nature, have profound faith in the Buddhist religion. Deep in their hearts, parents wish that their children might become monks or nuns and do everything they can towards this end. From a very young age, the children are entrusted to the family lama or to a monk or lama connected to the family in some way, so that they can learn to read and write.

When a child is seen to have a particular inclination towards the religious life he is encouraged to take up a monastic career and to stay in the monastery to study religious teachings as well as astrology, medicine, logic, grammar, poetry, drawing or music. If the child shows no predisposition towards study he returns home, where he learns to play a part in the nomads’ usual activities.

Studies in religion and other fields are not officially debarred to laymen but it is common



Horses grazing in a valley.

opinion among the nomads that reading and writing are skills only possessed by monks. This is why a high percentage of nomads remains illiterate and no schools exist outside monasteries and religious communities.

When nomads need to send important communications from one place to another they request the resident lama to write a letter which, in the absence of a postal service, goes by messenger. Matters of extreme importance, however, are not trusted to letters but are discussed in person. In most cases, though, to communicate with a distant place, the nomads are satisfied to entrust messages to passing travellers to be delivered by word of mouth.¹

Crafts, breeding techniques and all the other aspects of the cultural heritage of the nomads are passed down solely within the family until the young nomad, through observation and experience, can follow in the footsteps of his parents, eventually taking over from them.



The entrance to a nomad family's tent. The framework is of willow poles, the cloth of yak hair woven in strips on the loom, as are the ties. The surface that the tent covers varies from 10 to 15 square meters depending on the size of the family.

THE YAK-HAIR TENT

The typical nomad dwelling place is the tent. These *dra* vary in size and are made from black yak-hair felt. In the nomad territories there is nowhere else to live, apart from the monasteries.

This is because wood is so rare that to find even the main support poles for their tents, the nomads have to undergo long and difficult journeys to the areas with settled communities. A permanent house would not, in any case, be of use, since raising livestock is the nomads' main occupation and this requires constant moving in search of new pastures.

Most nomad tents are very large and of excellent quality. Some have 12 or 16 poles and are held down on the outside by many ropes of different lengths. I transcribed the following riddles from among the many that young nomads ask each other: "What is a rope that goes through the noses of 100 hornless yaks?" The answer is "a necklace". Then one asks: "What is a yak without horns with 100 ropes tied to its nose?" The answer is "a big yak-hair tent". This last riddle conveys the impression received upon seeing one of these tents.

The tent is divided into two separate areas. The right side (looking at the entrance from within) is called the "female tent". This is where the women pass their time and carry out their work, which has mainly to do with the production of dairy items such as butter and yoghurt. In some large tents, within the female space there is an area set apart for storage.

The "male tent" is on the opposite side and here the men live and guests are accommodated. In most

tents, within the male space there is a small shrine room where lamas can stay when visiting the family. Meat is handled and prepared only on the male side.

Raw meat is never taken into the female side of the tent since it is believed that this would disturb the sky god Kunglha and have disastrous consequences for men and animals. No representations or sacred objects portraying this divinity are to be found on the female side though, which differentiates it from the male side.

The term *kung*, literally sky, here indicates the opening at the centre of the roof of the tent. I was unable to establish whether this opening is so called because it really represents a divinity in whom the nomads believe, or whether they are simply handing down an old tradition. The fact remains, though, that day or night, this aperture is never closed completely except during heavy cloudbursts or snowfalls.

When the children pull too vigorously on the tent ropes and the opening closes completely, their parents hasten to warn, "Don't obscure the *kung*! Disturbances might secretly arise!" and they re-open it a little.

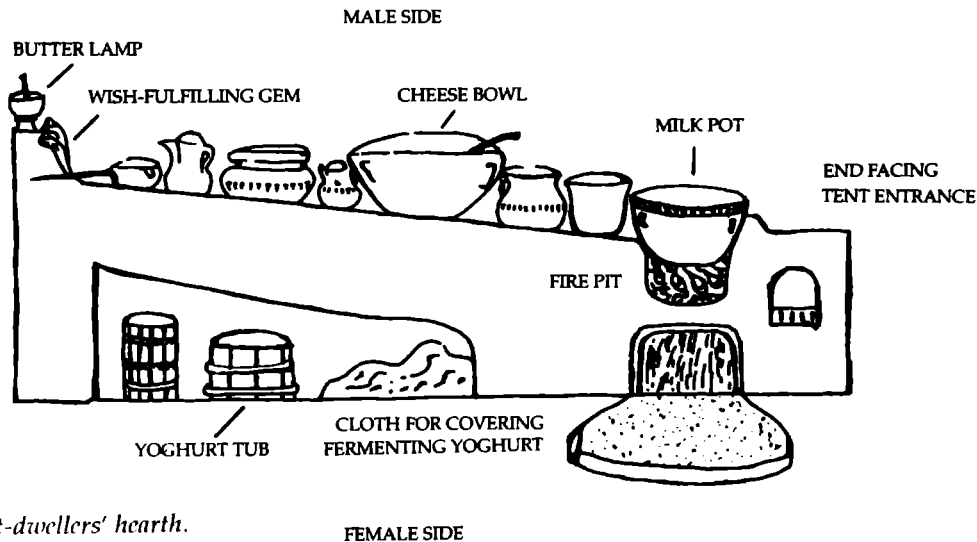
The hearth, which separates the two sides of the tent, stands between the poles of the tent in line with the opening above and is of the same length. It is designed to burn animal dung, the nomads' main fuel, and is built so that it rises gradually from the end facing the entrance inwards. At its base on the lower end of both sides are two large apertures

for gathering ashes. The top is decorated with the form of "the wish-fulfilling jewel",¹ above which are placed the butter lamps "that can last all night long",² lit in honor of the divinities.

Since the door of the tent usually faces south, because this direction is considered the propitious gateway that brings wealth, the fireside openings are to the east and west. The east is held to be the way of obtainment and gain, through which riches from the outside enter the home; the west corresponds to the female side of the tent where the thriving of people and the well-being of animals are fostered, and within which is placed "the coffer of abundance"³ that every family prepares to attract good fortune. The idea is that the luck and riches entering from the east side increase the good fortune and prosperity of the family that are conserved on the west side.

For that same reason, water and fuel are placed on the west side and one has to go around the hearth to use them; this movement, the opposite to the sun's path, is considered auspicious because that way the "sun never sets" on good fortune and prosperity.

On both sides of the large tents of the richer families stand smaller tents of a different shape, known as *naktsang*, which serve to accommodate aged parents, lamas, guests and craftsmen. Those who watch over the animals sleep in a separate tent, called the *gurra*, beside the pen. Another type of tent, known as the *yab*, is used on trading journeys. Besides these, there are tents of cotton, tents of different colors, small tents for a single person, and many other types in varying forms and sizes.



The tent-dwellers' hearth.

FEMALE SIDE

LIVELIHOOD

The nomads depend mainly on breeding the yak, the *dri* (its female counterpart) and sheep for their livelihood.

The yak is an animal well-suited to the nomad lifestyle. Yaks and *dri* breed without difficulty, reproduce easily, can survive the intense cold of the winter season, and are the only beasts of burden able to move freely in snow and ice. The nomads' very tents are made of their skins. The *dri's* milk, though less abundant than the cow's, has a far superior taste and more nutritional value than milk of other types, and a large amount of excellent butter can be made from a relatively small quantity of it.

Meat from the yak and the *dri* is one of the nomads' main foods and many everyday uses are found for their skins such as the soles of shoes, trunks for storing leather clothes known as *kam*, travel bags of various sizes, and saddle bags.

Sheep, too, adapt well to the nomad lifestyle and are raised in large numbers, made easy by their great breeding capacity. Their meat and the yoghurt from their milk are basic foods while their skins are used for clothing. The *dzo* and *dzomo*—the male and female cross between yak and cow—and the goat are raised quite widely, but cannot be considered of primary importance to the nomads. Cows do not exist in these regions, being unable to survive at such altitudes and most nomads do not even know what they are.

The main local foods which are consumed on a daily basis are: meat, butter, cheese, various types

of cakes or pastries called *thii* and the small sweet tuber called *troma*. Products from other regions are also used, such as dried fruit, peas, turnips and different grains such as barley, wheat and rice. These are not common, though, since they come from cultivated lands situated at a great distance and must be brought by yak across mountains and valleys. The main drinks are sheep's yoghurt and milk. Elderly people also drink tea, but since it comes from China it is rather expensive and therefore quite rare.

In short, for the nomads, the staple solid foods are butter and cheese and the usual drink is sheep's yoghurt, while the settled peoples of Tibet eat mainly *tsampa*, toasted barley flour, and drink *chang*, a wine made from fermented cereals.

The nomads normally prepare a stock of meat¹ to consume in the summer. In autumn, when the animals are slaughtered, good cuts of yak meat are selected. Also, whole sheep² are readied: the offal is cleaned and put back inside the carcass. All the meat, once wrapped in twigs from a reddish bush, is put inside round heaps of dung,³ gathered from the winter pastures. This provision is used towards the end of spring or beginning of summer. The cold, stinging winds that constantly batter the land at these high altitudes ensure that the preserved meat does not go bad. Although the outer part may become slightly tainted, the inner remains good and retains its flavor.

Some nomads also prepare *shogen*, which they call "old yoghurt". Enriched with cream, it is



At a town market with hides for sale.

poured into a large wooden receptacle which is wrapped in felt and placed inside a dung heap on the autumn pastures. This "old yoghurt" is eaten at the end of winter or the beginning of spring when milk and yoghurt are scarce.

The main fuel used by the nomads is dung left by their livestock. In autumn the children gather the dried dung left on the autumn and winter pastures into large mounds. This store of dung is burned in winter when snow covers the mountains and valleys and there is no way of finding other fuel. Over the winter the women recover the dung, frozen hard as rock, from the animals' sleeping places and pile it in enclosures, spreading it along the sides. When dry, it is taken to create the stockpiles that are used in summer when the heavy rains make finding fuel difficult.

To make their clothing, the nomads use mainly sheep and lamb-skins and the felt obtained from sheep's wool. Other garments made from cloth or woollen fabrics are worn only on special occasions; since they come from afar they are rare and not of great use in the nomads' daily life.

THE RAISING OF LIVESTOCK

During the summer, autumn and spring, the nomads feed salt to their livestock. To carry out this procedure, in summer the herders draw auspicious figures such as the “wish-fulfilling jewel”, the swastika or the knot of infinite love¹ in salt on the soft surface of a field. When the animals lick the salt, they scrape away the turf uncovering the black earth underneath, thus leaving those designs, which can be seen from far away, etched in the ground for years.

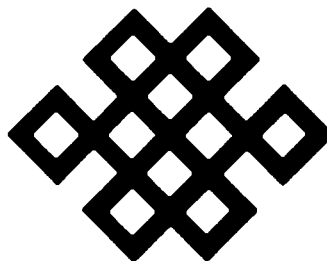
On this occasion the nomads, inviting their friends, organize a small celebration near the place where the salt had been distributed. This celebration is called *dzilum*, the shepherds' festival. The food traditionally eaten is the *trosho*, a mixture of sheep's yoghurt and the sweet root *troma*. Fights between large yaks from the herds of different camps are the main entertainment. During the winter and spring seasons a mixture of salt and yoghurt, called *ratsa*, is poured directly into the mouths of the yaks and the *dri*, using a horn as a funnel.

Nomads train their sheep to obey their voices by offering them a small quantity of salt mixed with yoghurt each time they come at the shepherd's call. When the milking is to be done, the women call out: “Ze, Ze, Ze!”, and the sheep, however far away they might be, immediately come to them. The women, holding a long rope in their hands, then exclaim: “Tha ka, tha ka, tha ka!” (tie up, tie up, tie up!) and the sheep to be milked line up in a row,

and stick their necks out to be tied, obeying like soldiers receiving an order from their commander. The milkmaids tie 100 to 500 sheep together with a long rope, facing each other in two rows forehead to forehead, and begin milking, starting off at the same time from the far ends of the two rows. This scene was quite astonishing for us, seeing it for the first time.

Milking is considered woman's work and no man does it. The feminine associations of this work are so emphasized that women are called *shönma*, milkmaid, amongst some nomad peoples.

The nomads are skilled in telling the age of beasts. By examining the lines in the yaks' and *dri*'s horns, which they call *triü*, and those on the sheep's horns, called *khyuk*, they can tell precisely the age of an animal even though they have not seen it



The knot of infinite love.

before. Here follows a list of names that are given to yaks and *dri* according to their age:

YEARS	MALE	FEMALE
1	<i>bi = bc'u</i>	<i>bi = bc'u</i>
2	<i>yaru</i>	<i>moyar</i>
3	<i>shed = sonyi</i>	<i>shedmo</i>
4	<i>sozhi</i>	<i>sozhima</i>
5	<i>sotruk</i>	<i>sotrukma</i>
6	<i>khatsang</i>	<i>khatsangma</i>
7	<i>trüchik</i>	<i>trüchikma</i>
8	<i>trünyi</i>	<i>trünyima</i>
9	<i>trüsum</i>	<i>trüsumma</i>

The average lifespan of yaks and *dri* is 17 years which corresponds to ten *trü*.

Here is a similar list regarding sheep:

YEARS	MALE	FEMALE
1	<i>lugu</i>	<i>lugu</i>
2	<i>laga</i>	<i>laga</i>
3	<i>tseru</i>	<i>tsemo</i>
4	<i>nyikpa</i>	<i>nyikmo</i>
5	<i>trikpa</i>	<i>trikmo</i>
6	<i>khyuk tangpo</i>	<i>khyuk chikma</i>
7	<i>khyuk nyipa</i>	<i>khyuk nyima</i>
8	<i>khyuk sumpa</i>	<i>khyuk summa</i>
9	<i>khyuk zhipa</i>	<i>khyuk zhima</i>

The average lifespan of sheep is 12 years, which corresponds to seven *khyuk*. I have listed the names that nomads give their animals according to how many years old they are along with the criteria used for calculating age, because these terms are considered important in nomad culture and, in fact,

recur frequently in their ancient tales, proverbs and songs. For instance, I heard this song in Sertha:

The three-year-old ram (*tseru*) was born along with the three-year-old sheep (*tsemo*) / When the time comes for slaughtering, poor *tseru*! / The *tsemo* stays behind to comfort our mother. The little *shed* (a three-year-old yak) was born along with the *shedmo* / When the time comes to travel with a packsaddle on his back, poor *shed*! / The *shedmo* stays behind to comfort our mother. / The boy was born along with the girl / When the time comes to get married, poor girl! / The boy stays behind to comfort our mother.

The nomads that live not too far from the areas inhabited by settled communities possess good objects and tools made of wood, useful in dairy work: milking pails, yoghurt and milk containers, butter churns, with which they produce yoghurt and butter of excellent quality.

The groups that live far from the more temperate areas are not so well supplied with wooden utensils and the few they do own, like their milking pails, are not of good quality. Instead of big milk pails and large wooden churns they use yak skin containers, called *wokyal*, and other bigger ones, called *tarkyal*, that serve as churns. The quality of their products, however, is in no way diminished.

PASTORAL MIGRATIONS

In the summer, since the grazing grounds change with the seasons, nomads move to the best pastures on the plateaux and mountains; there no private land belonging to single families exists and



Milkmaids tie from one hundred to five hundred sheep together with a long rope. Milking is regarded as an exclusively feminine task.

there is no limitation on where animals may graze, except for the borders between different regions and some zones considered the private property of certain camps.

Autumn is held to be a particularly good time for the accumulation of dairy produce. In fact, there is a saying amongst the nomads: "Autumn milk is half butter." In that season the herds are taken to luxuriant pastures near the encampments of the nomads. Each camp has an autumn pasture whose grass was left untouched during the summer, at a lower altitude than the summer grazing grounds, warmer and sheltered from wind and rain.

Of all the pastures, however, the most important are those where the herds spend the winter. Each camp and most families own winter allotments, for private use. During summer and autumn no one, regardless of social position, is allowed to graze his animals on the winter pastures. If anyone violates this rule, the next spring he will have to pay damages to the family legally occupying those grounds for all their animals dead from hunger over the previous winter, sometimes a considerable number.

The winter pastures usually lie in green hollows on mountain slopes, in sunny valleys and other warm places, sheltered from rain, snow and storms. There, the nomads build ample pens as high as a man, using animal dung to erect the walls; these enclosures serve to protect the livestock from the wind, storms and attacks of wolves and other wild animals that are more frequent during the fiercest parts of the winter.

Spring is a difficult and demanding time for the nomads. Their animals, thin and weakened, cannot cover long distances to reach the pastures

and at times sleet falls for many days in a row, causing the death from starvation of hundreds of stock. For this reason, the spring pastures, where the grass covered by snow in winter begins to grow again, must be very near the winter ones.

LEASING LIVESTOCK

Many yaks and *dri* of the nomad herds have particular identifying marks on their horns. These animals are called *shenior*, or leased livestock. The owners are usually the various stewards' offices of either the monasteries or of the lamas' residences.

Every year, those who are entrusted with the herds must remit to the owners an agreed quantity of butter called *she*. For every adult *dri* that has a one-year-old calf the amount due is 44 pounds (20 kilos) of butter, for each *dri* with a two-year-old calf about 22 pounds (10 kilos) of butter.

If a *dri* accidentally dies, the herdsman² who had it on lease must return the flesh and skin to the bailor³ and ask him to affix his brand on the horns of the dead beast's offspring.

For the male yaks, the contract evidently does not contain most of these clauses, but in cases of accidental death their flesh, skin and marked horns must be returned to the bailor.

Each year in the summer, the bailors go to the pastures to collect their due and to register the new births. They also inspect the brands on the animals' horns; these identification marks are made with red-hot branding irons and indicate the name of the steward's office of the monastery or lamas' residence to which the animal belongs.

PACK ANIMALS

All travelling and trading journeys to the lands of the settled peoples, however distant, are made by yak. As a pack animal the yak has several disadvantages: it can carry only light and not too large loads, it covers a relatively short distance daily, and during the summer, incompletely trained yaks can destroy their loads. Nonetheless, given the environment in which the nomads live, the yak remains the best pack animal because it is able to travel even on snow and ice.

The nomads own many yaks that they use as beasts of burden. One person can load and unload 30 yaks in a short time and men and women are so skilled in packing and loading that everything they need can be transported anywhere.

REPRIEVING THE LIVES OF ANIMALS

Many yaks, *dri*, and sheep belonging to the nomads wear a wool ring on their ear; these are the animals called *tsethar*, those that have been ritually released from slaughter.

The custom arises from the nomads' conviction that with this act they are lengthening their own lives. When someone in the family falls seriously ill, numbers of beasts are freed from slaughter to ensure the sick person's recovery. The animals chosen are brought before a lama who is requested to liberate them. The lama then recites the mantra of Amitāyus, the Buddha of long life, in each animal's ear and pronounces the vow that, from then on, the animal is freed from the fear of being killed. It is believed that thanks to the power



Tools for tanning hides: scraper, notched stick in hard wood, knife.

of the truth of this pledge, all the dangerous circumstances threatening its proprietor's life vanish, and that both the master and the animal obtain rebirths in superior realms of existence until the total realization of Buddhahood.

After having recited invocations and auspicious phrases at length, the lama gives the owner colored cloth or red wool to hang on the ears of each animal. From that moment onwards that animal may not be killed for any reason, not even if his owner finds himself in circumstances so dire as to put his own life at stake. When pack yaks that have been reprieved in this way reach old age they do not have to work, and are cared for and fed until death. This is called *tseyok*, succor for a long life.



The method used in tanning hides is rudimentary. Scrapers, which are sometimes of stone as in the picture, are used to remove residues of gristle.

CLOTHING

In their lands, the cold is almost always intense, apart from in the brief summer, and so the nomads wear only sheepskin clothes for everyday use. In full summer, on the few hot days that occur, some youths wear woollen clothes or cotton ones lined with lamb-skin. Such clothes, though, can be worn only on those very few hotter days.

The men's sheepskin garment known as the *paklag* has all its hems, including those at the neck and the wrists, lined with red cloth; on some of them

this red cloth is edged with leopard-skin. Of still better quality is the garment made from deerskin or *gowa* antelope skin lined with lamb-skin, with borders of red cloth or leopard-skin.

Other common garments are tunics and trousers made of *gowa* antelope skin lined with lamb-skin, wolfskin trousers and boots made of felt or leather. Summer hats are made from felt, winter ones from fox fur.

Women's clothes are similarly made from sheepskin or lamb-skin, and have borders appliqued with strips of cloth colored blue, green, red, yellow and white in that order. A narrow band of leopard-skin or otter fur is also added to the hems of some women's garments. Their hats and boots are identical to the men's.

Clothes for festive days are made of brocade or silk and lined with fine furs, such as fox and marten.¹



*Left: Woman's garment.
Facing page: Clothing worn
on festive days.*



HUNTING

Towards the end of the summer many nomad youths meet and, with trains of yaks loaded with their gear, set out to hunt the *drong*, the great wild yak on the distant, deserted plains.

In those territories many lone male specimens, called *nulu*, roam freely. These, despite their remarkable size, are ignored, however, by the hunters because of their extremely tough meat. The prey sought are the animals to be found in a herd: males around three years old and young females.

When the hunters reach the areas where the *drong* live, some prepare hiding places, making small dug-outs in hillocks, within which they lie in wait, armed with rifles. The others mount their horses and surround the herd of *drong* and try to drive them towards those in ambush. Coming close to the hideaways, the beaters disperse and the men with rifles lying hidden choose a single young target and shoot to kill.

Sometimes, the whole herd gathers around a wounded and bleeding animal, letting out loud bellows that the nomads describe as "the call of blood".¹ If at that moment the *drong* should notice the hunters, they will charge them. The beaters, then, have to intervene, shouting and shooting to distract the beasts, leading them ever further from the hideaway. It sometimes happens, as many stories relate, that the *drong* discover the hideouts and kill the unwary hunters. Hunters explain that because of its height, the *drong* has difficulty in goring a man on the ground, and so it slays its

adversary by trampling on him or by abrading his skin with its extremely rough tongue.

If not disturbed, the *drong* is a peaceful animal and not at all aggressive towards man. When, passing through the deserted expanses that are their natural habitat, we happened to come across them, they would slowly move away on seeing us while those close by were content to gaze at us in wonder and to sniff us calmly.

The *drong* also abound in uninhabited areas near the nomad territories, but these animals are under the jurisdiction of the hunting laws of single groups of nomads to whom those lands belong and so cannot be killed, neither by the inhabitants of that place nor by others.

The nomads believe that wild animals form the flocks and herds of the various local gods.² The *gowa* antelopes are their goats, the *nawa* their sheep, the *kyang* their horses or mules, the *drong* their yaks. For this reason, no one is allowed to slay these animals lest he incur the wrath of the gods and its dangerous consequences: a vendetta as inevitable and real as that involving a human being who is intent on vindicating a wrong done to him.

Many surprising tales can be gathered from nomads confirming such beliefs. A hunter once recounted that amongst the hairs on the back of a large *drong* that he had killed in remote lands very distant from any cultivated area, he found a few spikes of grain. Another added that the skin of a *drong's* back was so hard and thick it could have

served as a tent pole. This was said to be because, in both cases, the local gods placed heavy burdens on the backs of their *drong*.

I asked the oldest nomads detailed questions on this subject, and it was their shared belief that the fierce divinities would go to farmed areas, hurl down violent hailstorms on the crops, load the deer with grain and the *drong* with sheaves of barley and then make their return to the territories inhabited by the nomads.

Another belief holds that children who die in their first year of life become the makers of the hailstones with which the wrathful local gods pelt the tilled lands which they raid to store up on grain. I think this belief stems from the fact that for children dying so young the specific 49-day ritual for the deceased is not performed, and only a week of rites offering the scent of burned foods is carried out.

When we arrived in the territory of the nomad tribe called Arig Dza, a rather strange event had just occurred involving a fairly prosperous family named Dalo. Gulu, a 12-year-old boy, had gone to graze his flock of sheep on the mountains, but he had not returned when evening fell. The following day, his entire family searched the mountains and valleys in vain, finding no trace of him until six days later when shepherds noticed him walking on the flank of the mountain sacred to the local god Awo Lhachen. They tried to follow him but were only in time to see him disappear between the rocks and could not manage to reach him.

The next day, the family and almost all the nomads living nearby searched the rocky slopes of the mountain, and after inspecting every

crevice they eventually found him hidden under two large boulders. They told us he seemed terrified, like a wild animal, on seeing men, but by the time we visited the Dalo family, he had returned to normal and was able to answer all our questions.

He told us the following tale: "I was sitting on a flat clean stone and had just poured my yoghurt into a cup and was sipping it slowly when I felt someone pulling me from behind. I turned around and saw a terrifying person with long curly black hair, wearing felt clothes. He said to me: 'I am Awo Lhachen's shepherd. Your father killed two of my *gowa* antelopes. For this you must come with me as a forfeit!' He tied a rope around my neck and I can no longer remember what happened from that moment on until my return home. I only have glimpses of myself, at times, in a great felt tent with brocade hangings, filled with delicious food and drink." He said no more to make his adventure clearer.

I asked his father if he had really killed the antelopes and he confirmed: "A month ago, while I was on a trip to procure salt, I shot two *gowa* antelopes. None of my sons knew about the shooting, and so what happened is really a punishment by the local god Awo Lhachen. I vow that from now on I shall never slay wild animals and will make copious ritual offerings to Awo Lhachen." We later performed, all together, a great ritual purification for the divinities through the smoke offerings of the *sang*.³

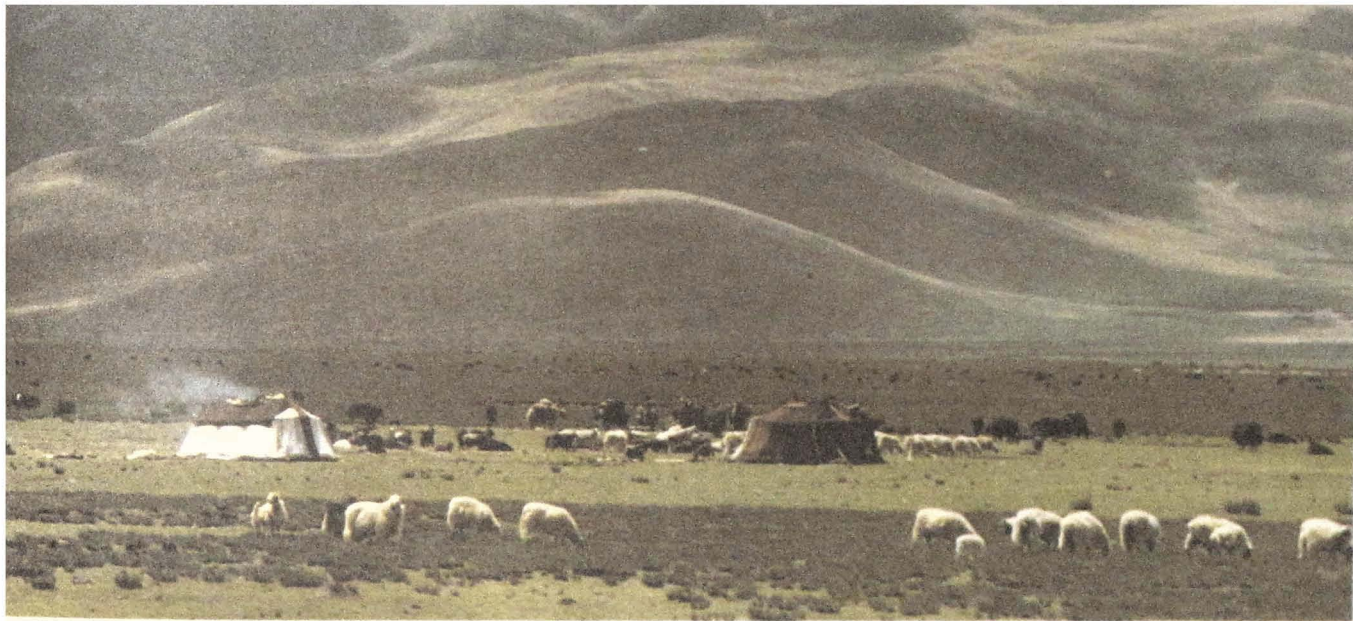
This type of story is fairly common in those regions. This is why the nomads do not like hunting wild animals and the youths who want to do so must go to distant, unknown lands.

The wolf is the nomads' greatest enemy and

whenever one appears they try to kill it. When a nomad manages to slay a wolf the tradition is that he makes an alms-collecting round of the camp carrying its skin. The members of the various families of the group present him with quantities of butter and cheese. This payment is called "the wolf's tribute".⁴

It is said that the hunter can cast a special curse known as "the touch of the wolf's nose"⁵ on anyone refusing even to make a minimal offer. In this case the hunter, as he leaves, touches one of the boundary stones of the animal pen with the wolf's nose. This gesture, whose effects last a year, calls on the wolves to attack the livestock of the family so cursed.

This, however, seems to me hearsay with no basis in truth. No evidence that such things really happen was ever offered me. Yet the nomads do usually give conspicuously large tips to wolf-hunters on their rounds.



The winter camp is situated on mountain slopes in places sheltered from snow, rain and storms.

THE FESTIVITY OF THE RENEWAL OF THE TENT

Every year, in summer, the nomads refurbish their tents: replacing ropes, sometimes reversing the yak-hair felt and performing the maintenance tasks which will keep a tent in good repair. A small feast known as *retön* is organized on this occasion, and the nomads invite relatives, pledged friends and neighbors, offering them generous amounts of boiled mutton and large cakes made from *troma*, the sweet tuber.

When I was staying at Tromdza Kongma with my escort, we were invited to such a feast by some rich nomads, friends of my father. We went bringing sweets as a present. There were more than 30 people gathered, between ourselves, the family's relatives and their friends. We entered the male side of the tent and sat in two lines facing each other.

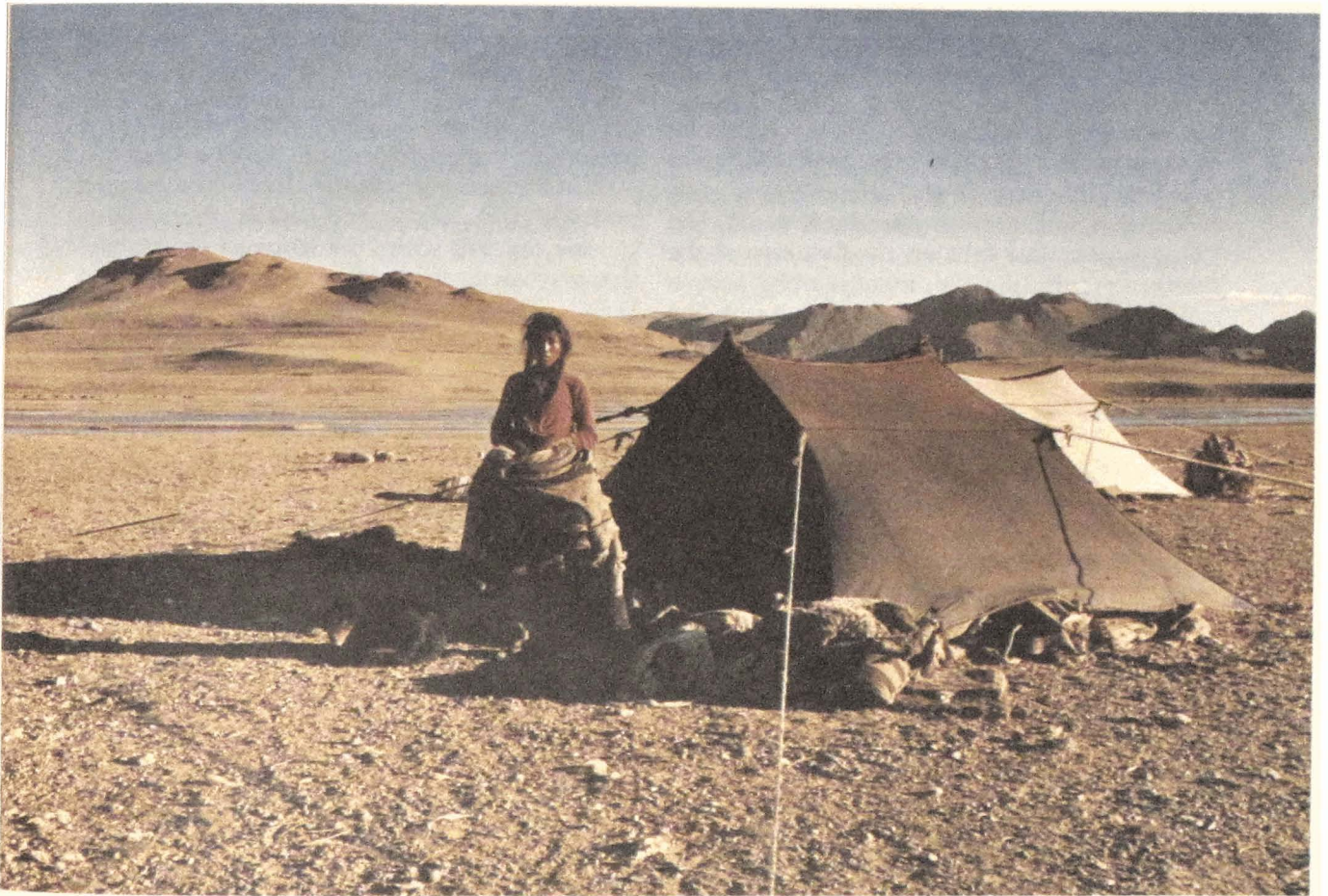
The eldest son of the family and his wife then passed along the rows with two large metal trays piled high with pieces of mutton. I took the smallest piece and was about to put it into my mouth when the son of our hostess, a child of around six years old, began to cry, staring at the piece of meat I held with my fingers, sobbing and exclaiming: "Mama, he is eating my meat!"

In my surprise and embarrassment I tried to understand what was going on, by observing every detail of what was happening around me. I realized then that various members of the family were looking in the tray, apparently without success, for pieces of meat to their liking and I noticed that many of those pieces were scored with

cuts, tied with hairs from a yak's tail or marked in some other way.

The next day I asked a nomad friend about this. I finally learned that, as was customary, before the cooking of the mutton, each member of the family had chosen for himself the piece of meat he liked best, identifying it by making two incisions with a knife, inserting small sticks or tying it with white or black hairs.

My friends and I, never having heard of this custom, had during the feast chosen and eaten pieces of meat meant for others, thus creating such turmoil.



Early morning at the encampment. This smaller type of tent is used during trading journeys.

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Like the settled population of Tibet who celebrate two new years, called "little new year" and "great new year", the nomads also celebrate two: *gyalo* (Chinese new year) and *losar* (new year). The Chinese new year falls on the first day of the Monkey month (the 12th month) while *losar* is celebrated on the first day of the Bird month (the first month). *Gyalo* coincides with the beginning of the Chinese calendar year and does not differ from *losar* in the way it is celebrated, but only in the length of the festivities.

For the festivities of the "great new year", from the 23rd to the 25th day of the Monkey month, the nomads who live in the vicinity of monasteries go there bearing yoghurt and *troma* in separate receptacles to offer to the monastic community. The monasteries initiate the ritual practices of *Deshe Kagye*¹ on those days and on the evening of the 29th day, at the end of the rituals, they throw away the *gutor*, "the *torma* of 29",² the ritual object through which all negativities of the past year are cast off and those of the coming one are averted.

Those nomads who live far away from monasteries request the lamas with them or nearby to perform a ritual on the evening of the 29th called "the ransom to prevent misfortune".³ A human figure riding a yak is made from animal dung, an intestine is placed in its hand and a cow's stomach on its head. This effigy, adorned with many lengths of old rope used to tie animals, is then taken to a place where it can not be seen from the tents. This rite puts an end to all the bad luck that

previously afflicted the herds and keeps away the misfortune that might arrive in the new year.

On the morning of the first day of the year, the nomads rise early and wash themselves outside the tent with "the water of the stars",⁴ drawn when the light of the night stars has not yet faded. Then the men chant an auspicious invocation and make a smoke offering, burning the woods of the *sukar*, the *nyadri* and the *penkar*, a type of rhododendron, on braziers constructed with the earth of those hillocks called *potho*.

The women, meanwhile, make a ritual offering known as *yado*. In the inner part of the tent, on a piece of white felt covering the family treasure, they draw a swastika in crumbled cheese and on this they place the *chemar*, the *shaldro*, the offerings of the first portions of yoghurt and milk and as many butter lamps as possible. Having done this, they recite an invocation of auspicious portent.

The above-mentioned *chemar* is a little heap of toasted barley flour mixed with butter on top of which is placed an ornate wooden strip with decorations in butter that depict the moon, the sun and the "wish-fulfilling jewel". To make the *shaldro*, small *troma* are piled on a silver plate or on any white one, along with dry crumbled cheese, and various cakes and pastries called *thü*. Many knot-shaped fried biscuits, called *khase*, are then placed on this mound.

When the whole family is re-united within the tent, together they make a smoke offering called *kungsang* (the purification of *kung*). The upper

aperture of the tent is opened wide and whatever sweet-smelling plant cuttings that can be found are placed on the hearth. The eldest son and his wife take the *chemar* and the *shaldro* and present them to their parents and then gradually to all the others, in order, from the eldest members down to the youngest.

The nomads explain how, in this rite, if the tent fills with thick smoke, the family will become rich. Should the smoke rise directly through the upper opening into the sky, this is a good omen. When the smoke spreads in all directions herds will increase. Smoke from the front side spiralling downwards to the ground means accidents will befall the men. If the smoke blows to the right, the women's divinity is powerful and breeding and dairy production will flourish. If the smoke moves to the left, the men's divinity is strong and enemies will be subdued. When the smoke blows both right and left, many conflicts with enemies will arise.

Then the family members pick up a little *chemar* and, tossing it as an offering into the *sang*, the fragrant woods that are being burned, they say:

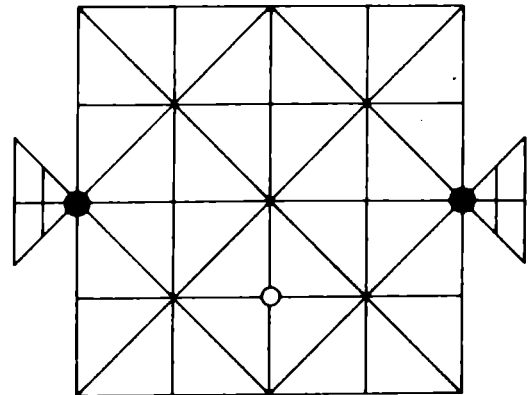
May all be auspicious! / Let good fortune come!
 / Let life be long! / Let there be no sickness!
 / May all go well! / Let there be no mishaps!
 / Let happiness abound!

Then everyone takes some *troma* and *thü* from the *shaldro* and eats it. On this special occasion of the new year the nomads eat a toasted barley flour soup called *tsamkhu*. It is made by frying a little barley flour, mixing it with melted butter, and adding a bit of salt, after which a little tea, with a slightly larger amount of milk and crumbled dry cheese, are poured in. Other dishes traditionally

eaten over this holiday are: the *logo*, "the head of the new year" which is a yak's head, or more rarely that of a sheep, cooked whole; various biscuits (*khase*) and dried fruit.

There are other foods not indispensable to tradition but prepared as a matter of individual preference: *gora*, a kind of fried bread similar to the *paklep* eaten by the settled folk; *pholok*, dough filled with meat and fat and roasted on the fire; *dzonia* or "dzo's nose", which is a flour-based dough rolled into the shape of a dzo's nose, boiled in water and then kneaded with dry crumbled cheese and butter; and *tsökor*, small disks of dough mixed with yoghurt and flattened into a circle with a hole in the middle, then cooked in butter.

Several types of soup may also be made: *gyenlog*, a broth cooked with small meat-filled balls of dough; *dreshathuk*, a rice broth with a lot of meat in it; *gyenthuk*, which is similar to what the settled Tibetans call *pakthuk*, soups with noodles, since



"The nine royal doors".

gyen, in fact, has the same meaning as *paksen*, noodles made with flour.

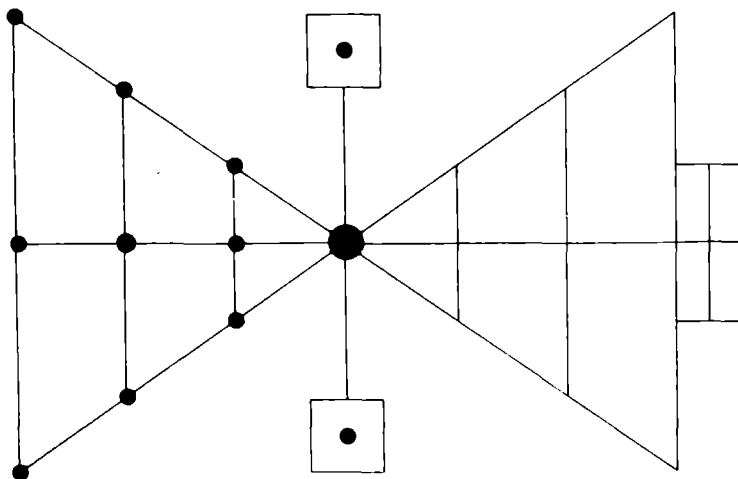
The main sweets are: *shun*, made by grinding the tuber called *troma* until it is like flour and mixing it with melted butter, sugar or molasses; *trothü*, or *troma* cake, which is made by kneading ground *troma* with flour, butter, cheese and molasses; *mönthü*, made by mixing flour from the *mönkar* root with a little cheese and kneading it with honey. Biscuits in many shapes are also made, by mixing flour with milk and honey and frying them in butter.

The second day of the year, known as *logyap*, is dedicated to playing games and merry-making, the third day to visiting relatives and sworn friends, the fourth to visiting neighbors and the fifth to horse races and trials of strength among the different nomad groups assembled for this purpose. On the evening of the fifth day all the nomads gather on a plain and with a huge pile of animal dung light an enormous bonfire, called *wangkha*, around which

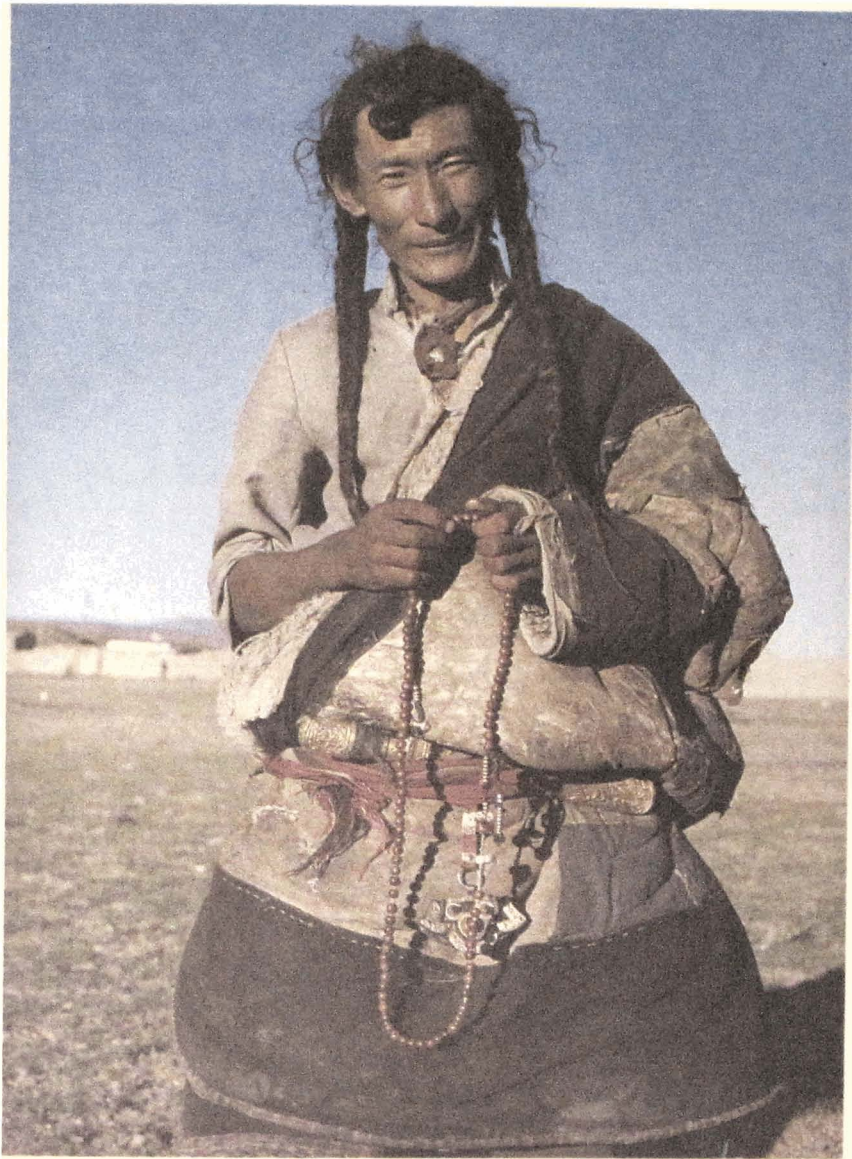
the young men and women dance. The dancing over, all present divide into two groups for song and riddle contests that sometimes continue for days.

The main games that the young nomads play over the new year are *gurthen*, *thikgam*, *thikpak*, and *doben*. *Gurthen* is a trial of strength where the two ends of a long rope are knotted together to form a large ring. Two men, standing back to back, pass the doubled rope through their legs and then put their heads in the ring so that the cord, sliding behind the nape of their necks, shapes into a kind of harness. The contestants, secured to each other by this harness, get on all fours and pull in opposite directions, each trying to drag his opponent with him.

In the game of *thikgam*, one person must jump through a slip-knot held open by two others who, by tightening the knot, try to catch the player as he leaps. *Thikpak* is a jumping game where one must vault over a rope held tight by two men who raise



"The two royal doors" or "The king's damaru".



A nomad shepherd wearing the habitual inverted sheepskin. His hair, allowed to grow long, is gathered in plaits and tied with colored ribbons. He wears a locket containing a photo of the Dalai Lama.

it after each successive jump. *Doben* is a throwing contest where five stones are placed in a line as the targets. The contestants have five stones to throw and, starting at one end, must hit the stones in sequence. Should they strike a single target stone out of order, they must start again.

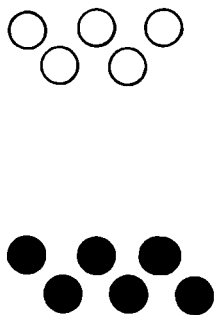
The older men enjoy playing various board games. They might also use the ground as a board, drawing lines and moving pebbles on it. The most common of these games are *gyelpe gogu* (the nine royal doors), *gyelpe gonyi* (the two royal doors) and *drig* (the game called "filé").

In the game of *gyelpe gogu*, one of the two players disposes of 24 pieces, of which eight are already placed on the board at the beginning of the game. The first player positions the remaining 16 one after another, alternating turns to move with the second player who has two larger pieces representing the kings. Only the kings have the power to capture another piece, which they do by jumping over it, while the populace must block the

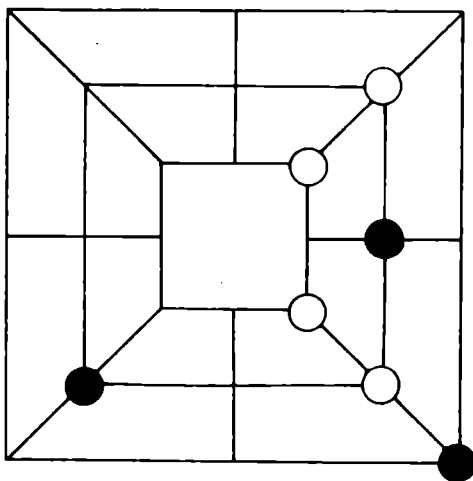
kings within their two castles. When the first player has finished positioning his pieces on the board he can then, and only then, begin to move them, manoeuvring to block the two kings. The other player, meanwhile, with his kings, tries to capture as many of his opponent's pieces as possible. The kings have the first move in this game.

Gyelpe gonyi is based on an identical principle but the board is different and there are 11 pieces for the populace and one for the king. The populace must block the king in his castle. The playing board has the shape of a *damaru*, a small drum with two faces, and so the game is also known as the "king's *damaru*".

In *drig*, the two players have nine pieces each, which they take turns to place, one at a time, on the board. When one of the players manages to place three of his pieces in a line his opponent loses one of his, as in "filé", played in the West.⁵



Drig, "Filé".





Gathering during the new year festivities.

GATHERINGS

From the fifth to the 10th day of the Tiger month (the sixth month of the Tibetan year) there takes place an important annual gathering in which all the members of the same community of nomads meet in a safe and protected place. During those days they request the lamas and monks present to perform the rituals which they need. On the ninth day of the month, in particular, rituals are performed, linked to wrathful tantric deities such as Vajra Kumāra or Hayagrīva or forms like Guru Tragpo, a ferocious manifestation of Master Padmasambhava, that aim to drive away all the negativities provoked by their enemies and to conquer them. The next day, a great ritual known as "the offering of the 10th day" is held, for which the best food and drink are prepared.

During this time, the elders meet every day to discuss issues of common interest. They consult each other on the best way to avenge damage inflicted by an enemy, choosing the most favorable astrological moment to attack and co-ordinating the necessary preparations. Having decided, most of them set about carrying out the vendetta. When an enemy attack is feared, they study their defences, organizing the watch and sending groups of horsemen, capable of confronting the enemy, on reconnaissance missions.

The ways in which these gatherings are held vary, as do their aims, from region to region according to circumstances. In Sertha, for example, important rituals called "General protection for the Tiger month"¹ are performed over these days for

the benefit of the whole land. The nomads in the north of Dzachuka, instead, organize their vendettas and come together to settle disputes between those of the same group. In the south of Dzachuka, the meetings are held principally to examine the annual laws of the country and to ensure that they have been respected.

This period, in general, is dedicated to settling vendettas, and the nomads are on guard day and night, in a state of alert. Many stories recount how entire groups of nomads, assembled for such gatherings, have been completely annihilated by a sudden enemy attack.



Two nomads from western Tibet.

MARRIAGE

Amongst the nomads parents arrange the marriages of the young, and it is rare to find sons and daughters who marry following their own inclinations.

The eldest son, usually, is destined to take a wife and become head of the family properties, the second born enters religious life in a monastery, while other sons create new nuclear families in the usual way, that is to say, by arranged marriage. The girls leave the paternal family when they marry. Many, however, grow old without finding a husband, since there are more women than men, many of whom are killed in vendettas or, as monks, never marry.

Unmarried women are called *koma*, and generally have the same outward appearance as nuns, sometimes even shaving their heads, and dedicate themselves with great devotion to religious practices. While young they live in the females' part of the tent and their principal occupation is dairy work; at an older age they go to live in a tented monastery to practice religion and their needs are met by their families.

When a young man is to marry, astrological calculations are made to find out if the chosen girl's aspects are in harmony with his own. If so, the main figure in his family, usually the father or a paternal uncle, goes to the future bride's home to ask her parents for her hand, and offers them gifts of cloth, wool and silk of different lengths. These presents are called *nathag tak*, "the rope that is attached

to the nose". By accepting them they commit themselves to give their daughter as bride.

After this event known as *nye thagche*, "the resolution to marry", the young woman cannot be given to another family. Should this happen, this violation of the marriage promise called *paktong* has serious legal consequences. Neither is it permitted for the groom's family to change its mind or the repercussions are generally similar, as the bride's family will then sue for breach of promise.

The groom's family, according to its means, prepares as a marriage token one, two or three series of nine silver pieces, nine stallions, nine mares, nine *dzo* and *dzomo*, nine yaks and *dri*, nine lengths of different colored cloth, nine fox furs, nine lynx skins and nine leopard-skins. The bride's family must provide her with a dowry, her dress, jewelry and ornaments. Their importance and value matches the marriage token offered by the groom's family.

Nomad women usually wear their hair in two different ways, either large braids¹ or small ones.² Unmarried girls wear the former style, combing their hair into three thick braids, and do not wear ornaments other than a few pieces of amber or coral. When a young woman marries, however, her hair is dressed in a wedding style called *pakma tralc*, worked on by a few expert women, composed of numerous very fine braids. The nomads consider the small braids of the wedding hairstyle an

adornment of fundamental importance to the wedding.

There is a song that goes:

If you appear at the wedding / without your hair in small braids / we will somehow come to an agreement / But the lady with small braids / and the amber *pöden* in her hair / comes from kind, loving parents.

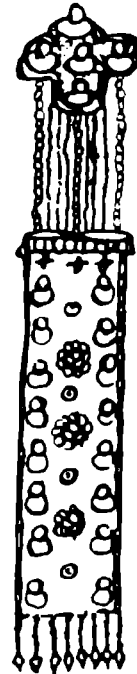
The *pöden*, the amber ornament mentioned in the song, is one of the principal hair adornments. Placed on the crown of the head, it is formed of five large pieces of amber, each surmounted with a coral, set in a cross shape. From it hangs down, onto the nape of the neck, a beautiful strip of silk to which is attached two rows of six or eight pieces of amber, each topped by a coral. Between the two rows there are embossed silver studs, on which gold settings and many turquoises and corals of different sizes are fixed. Strings of various precious stones complete the ornament.

Another important element of the wedding costume is the *charma*, a belt of precious silk, about 20 centimeters high and as long as the circumference of the waist of the wearer, enriched with a gold and silver buckle. The upper border is embroidered in gold and silver, called *baleshen*, while affixed to the middle and to the two ends are gold and silver studs, called *borchen*, with several turquoises and corals set around them.

A second type of belt has, instead of the *borchen*, three large settings; at the centre of each is mounted a large coral surrounded by small silver lotus flowers studded with many little turquoises. A ring is fixed under each stud and each part of the setting. A double hook in silver adorned with a turquoise

mounted in gold is attached to the one on the right; this hook, here an ornament, was originally used by women to hold up their milking pails. A small knife with gold and silver chasing is tied to a ring to the left which is linked by two or three fine silver cords to a ring on the right, passing through a central one from which hang many pendants called *crkha*.

Bridal jewelry includes necklaces of different lengths made of *zi*,³ turquoises and corals; ear-rings of gold, silver and precious stones; ivory bracelets; and rings set with precious stones.



The *pöden*,
an essential
adornment for
the hair of the bride.

The wedding dress is made of prized silk lined with wild animal furs. The bride's family must carefully prepare these ornaments for her trousseau. When the elder daughter gets married, she can use her mother's bridal array, whereas the poorer families can borrow the necessary wedding finery from relatives.

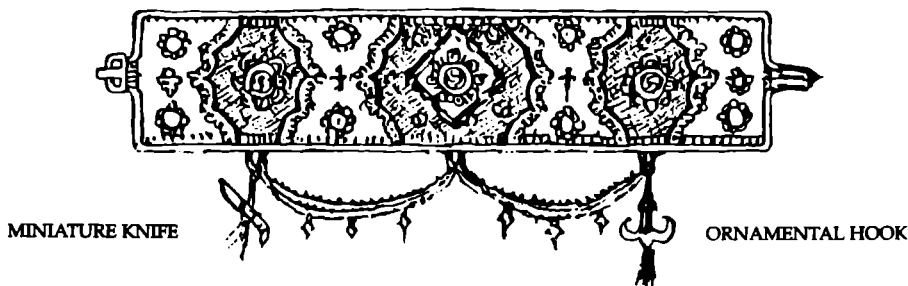
When the time comes for the girl to leave her father's home, a party of the groom's people comes to meet her. The group, guided by the *nyenpo*, one of the more important relatives or a sworn friend of the groom's family, with a few companions, is handsomely entertained for three days by the bride's relatives. Then, on an astrologically favorable day, the girl departs from the paternal residence. As she is about to step out of the tent, her mother calls her by name three times in a whisper and says:

To others do not take the luck of men! /
Leave it to your mama! / With you take the
sun and happiness!

Then a maternal uncle takes the young woman's

mount by the bridle and leads the bridal party away, accompanied by several relatives and sworn friends. When she nears the dwelling place of those who have asked for her hand, two horsemen from her new family meet her in order to take her hat; this hat plays an important role in all that follows. At a sign from her brother who touches its brim with his whip, the horsemen must grasp the hat, taking it without fail by either the right or the left side. If they succeed in touching only the front part, this will be a negative omen for the groom's family; if, on the contrary, they snatch it from behind, this will be an unlucky sign for the bride's family. Great importance is given to this act and many quarrels have been provoked by the way in which the hat was taken.

None of the nomads I interviewed were able to explain the reasons for all this. In my opinion it is a custom which is meant to keep at bay the negativities thought to come with the bride. It is similar to the customs of the settled peoples of Tibet who on the occasion of a wedding, when the bride is about to arrive in her new house, put the



The charma, a belt worn by women at their wedding.

effigy of a pig on the road. The effigy is then destroyed with a thrust of a sword by one of the bridal party and thrown away to cast off the negative influence called *pakna*, which it is believed might arrive with the bride.

When the bride reaches the boundaries of the groom's house, a young girl from his family who has an auspicious name and whose parents are alive, bears a white scarf which she offers to the person leading the bride's horse. She then says:

Uncle whose wishes will all come true, / give
me the bridle and I shall offer you this snow-
white scarf. / Take three steps, take three
steps upwards!

Then the man gives the bridle to the girl and she leads the horse to the door of the tent. Here the bride dismounts onto a white woollen carpet on which a swastika has been drawn with rice.

The bride first enters the male side of the tent where, in a symbolic act of purification, a few monks sprinkle water from a ritual vase over her. They then perform rites to bestow long life and summon good luck, after which the most important lama among them gives the bride a new name.

At this point, another young girl, whose parents are also both alive and whose name is auspicious, offers the bride some yoghurt, called *tashi dzesho*, "the auspicious yoghurt", pouring this with a silver spoon three times in succession into the palm of the bride's left hand. The bride offers the first spoonful to the Three Jewels, casting it towards the inside of the tent, drinks the second one and pours the third into the left sleeve of her

dress. The last gesture is considered propitious for all dairy work.

This series of actions, called "the offering of the yoghurt of the vow",⁴ is considered the most important ritual act of the wedding ceremony. There is no custom, though, requiring that the husband should also drink "the yoghurt of the vow".

Once this phase of the ceremony is over, the mother-in-law gives her new daughter-in-law a milking pail full of water and milk. The groom then gives her a bundle of twigs of *balu* (a type of rhododendron), tied with white wool. Carrying these objects, the bride makes her entrance into the female side of the tent, accompanied by those officiating. One of them dips the bundle of twigs into the bucket and sprinkles that whole part of the tent to purify it.

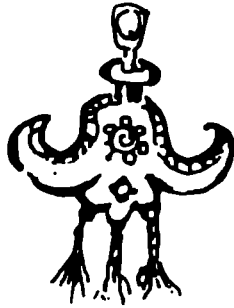
Thereupon, the bride, holding a plate of dried crumbled cheese, and the groom, holding an ornate arrow, stand close together while the lamas recite auspicious invocations and many prayers to bring good fortune. For the next three days the bride remains in that dwelling place and this is called "the three-day wedding".⁵ After songs and dances, she then returns to her father's home.

Three months having passed since "the three-day wedding", the bride must return to the groom's family and it is on this occasion that the horses, the yaks, the *dri*, the sheep, and the rest of her dowry are handed over. Her brother and her relatives also prepare many meat pies, called *shathü*, to offer to the groom's family. The girl's father and one of his sworn friends escort her along with her dowry. All those who form the escort then stay at the groom's

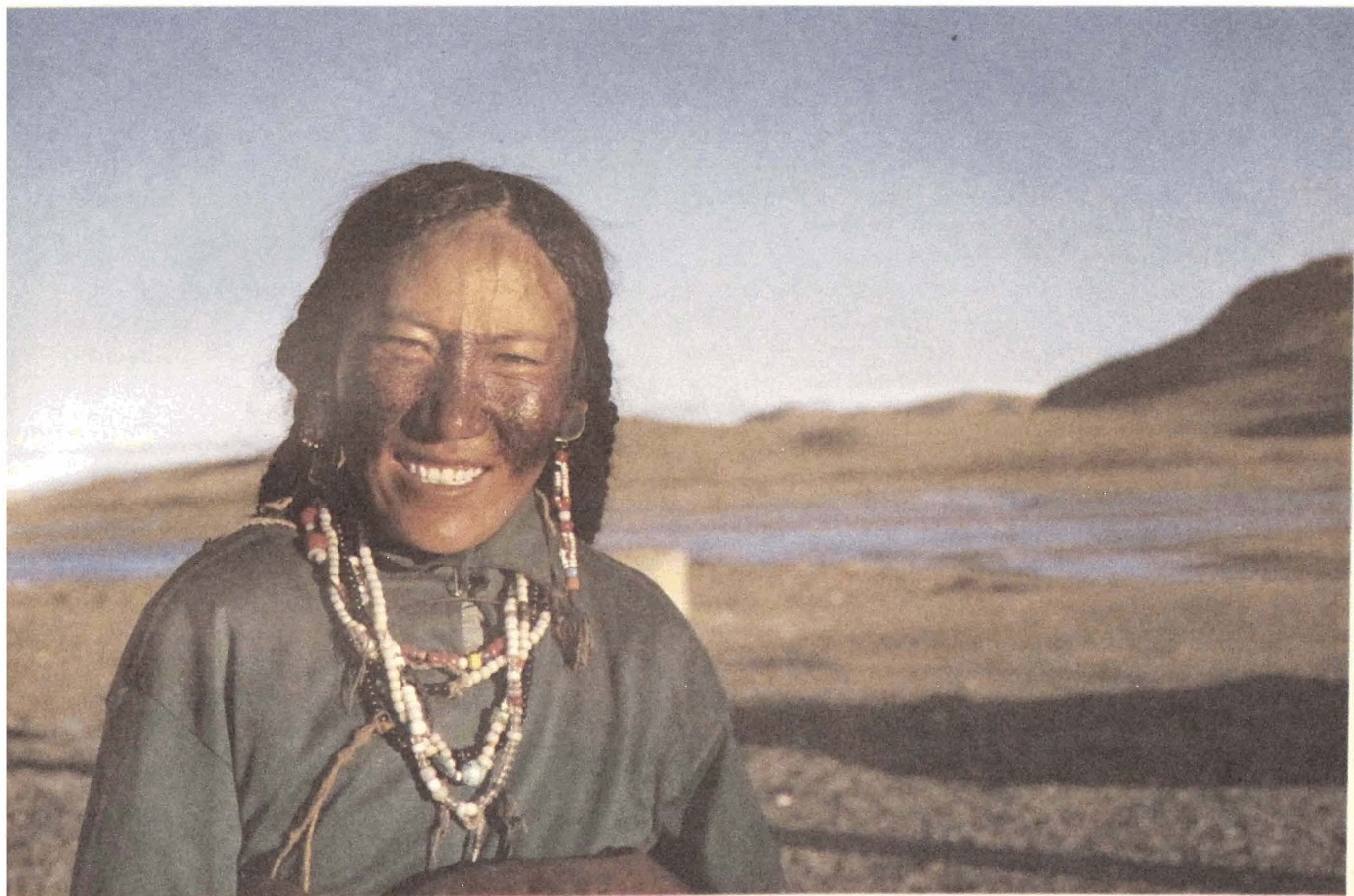
home for a week during which they are entertained with many fine banquets.

When they leave again, leading away the bride's mount, they also take two huge bags full of cheese pies and *troma* called, respectively, white pie and black pie.⁶

Finally, at the first good opportunity, the bride's family must invite the groom, prepare abundant feasts for him, and at the moment of his departure for his home, offer him a fine stallion called "the bridegroom's horse".⁷



*Wedding ornament: silver and gold hook
in the form of those used to hold up the milking pail.*



A face mask affords protection from the elements.

POPULAR JUSTICE

In nomad lands laws are not decreed by powerful nobles or monasteries nor are written statutes established by local peoples. Yet no one, naturally, is given licence to kill or steal without restraint. Conduct is governed by a respect for cohabitation norms handed down from the past that stem from both ancient religious laws and lay ethics.

The elders¹ from different encampments safeguard these norms of behavior, holding assemblies in the course of the celebrations of the Bull month and, if necessary, continuing during meetings in the following Tiger month. These codes forbid the hunting of any type of game dwelling on mountains that are sacred to the gods, in places where the earth spirits rule, or on slopes under the jurisdiction of monasteries.

If someone is found with slain animals in those places, not only is the game seized from the offender, but his horse and firearms are confiscated and sold, and the money allocated to the fund for the month of the bull celebrations. If a whole group of hunters is taken by surprise and caught, they are tried before the authorities of the nearest monastery and each one has to hand over his game as well as a horse and a rifle to make amends.

Should they refuse to accept these sanctions they risk setting off vendettas against themselves by the local community. The accepted belief that hunting in prohibited places causes a decline in prosperity, a shortening of life, misfortune, and troubles that deplete livestock ensures that these bans are very rarely breached and that those who

are caught infringing are ready to repent and make good the damages.

Rigya, the general laws that govern relations with the environment, also forbid the gathering of certain tubers and roots such as the *dzayung*, the *yartsa gunbu*² and the *karmog*. The nomads, in fact, often say that the *yartsa gunbu* and the *karmog* are the treasures of the earth spirits, while the *dzayung* is their very heart. If anyone should pick them, his community and their livestock will be struck by virulent epidemics that will spread all over the region.

The gathering of these tubers and roots is very often a cause of conflict between different groups because young people, both male and female, secretly collect them outside their own territory. If discovered by the locals they are stripped of their booty and savagely beaten. This risk is taken because the young have little belief in the stories about those tubers and are far more interested in the tea, silk, cotton and ornaments they can procure bartering them with Chinese traders.

Every nomad community carries out patrols known as *risher* over its entire territory in summer and autumn and these are very successful in maintaining order and have a reassuring effect. The youths with the best horses volunteer readily for these expeditions as they have a battle-loving spirit. On these patrols they are very likely to encounter hunters from other regions, thieves, bandits, people violating customary laws or even enemy spies or hostile bands out on



Easy to breed, able to endure the rigorous winter, the yak is the only pack animal which can travel when snow and ice are everywhere.

raids seeking victory in their vendettas. Only when one patrol has been completed is the date of the next one fixed, taking account of the situation.

Nomads never steal at the expense of members of their own group or from others with whom there are no precedents for hostility. If someone contravenes this code of behavior, he is obliged to return the ill-gotten gains and efforts are made to straighten out differences. Theft and robbery in this case are considered blameworthy, shameful acts, and those who commit them are despised and disgraced.

On the other hand, horse rustling and taking plunder on raids in hostile territories is greatly approved of and considered heroic by all. If a whole summer passes and an adult male has not managed even one act of pillage at his enemies' expense, he is dubbed "a spinster grown old at the hearth".³ For this reason, if young nomads have no valid enemy nearby against whom they can test their mettle, they demonstrate their courage by travelling to distant territories to make incursions against peoples totally unknown to them.

DISPUTES AND QUARRELS

The nomads use the term *gyö* for a dispute and *gyöpa* for the disputants while the peace-makers are known as *zupa* and their decisions as *zu*. When the two parties expound their arguments, they use allegory, *dzig*, and include such symbolic references as mountains, oceans and lions. Damages, *nyak*, are claimed by the plaintiffs in plain terms: "If you consent to give me these damages (*nyak*) the question can be discussed, otherwise 'there is nothing to talk about'."

The panel of arbitrators is made up of two *zupa* or elders from the litigants' respective communities and two *dzigpa*, individuals renowned for their honesty and sharp wits whose task it is to question both parties and to study the case. The two *zupa* should show impartiality and are expected to be stricter towards the litigant from their own community. If, instead, a *zupa* should favor his own, the other litigant would have grounds not to accept his judgement and to impugn his decision. When this happens, a third *zupa* is called upon to settle the question and reach a definitive judgement agreed to by all three *zupa*.

There is a phase in this process, called *dzigdeb*, during which, for a number of days, the two *dzigpa* question the litigants on the reasons for the dispute, making comparisons and asking the *zupa* for their opinions. Then, it is the latter who must establish the truth and pronounce a sentence.

People known for their probity are given the authority to make decisions in important cases, even if they are not considered powerful. As a nomad saying points out: "The noble dressed in tiger's skin must abide by the decision of a *zupa* clad in goatskin."

If one of the two parties challenges the sentence agreed upon by the two judges, a further, more serious judgement is taken against the party refusing the verdict and the two judges. When a serious controversy involves two nomad communities, the elders of the respective groups and the functionaries of the local lamas' residence and monastery are requested to settle it. Less serious controversies arising within an encampment can be resolved by a single *zupa* and a single *dzigpa*.

BLOOD MONEY

When both parties in conflict have killed a man during a feud, the judges who are summoned to settle the dispute generally end hostilities, forbid further vendettas and do not establish any damages.

The communities seek to console the victims' families, offering them horses and other livestock and inviting lamas to perform the necessary rituals. The main ritual for the dead is the *changchok*,⁴ usually lasting 49 days.

When one man kills another, a solemn act known as "bowing the head of the vendetta"⁵ is necessary to avoid a feud. The murderer hands over to the family of his victim the weapon with which he committed the crime. The sword is called "the bloody-pointed sword",⁶ the rifle, "cruel bloody-horned rifle",⁷ where the "horns" refer to the antelope horns that function as a rest for the nomads' rifles.

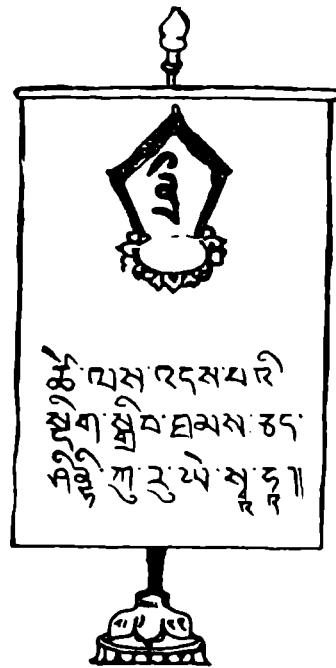
The male relatives of the murderer and his sworn friends pledge that they will add to the damages owed to the family the *nyakki tapo*, a greatly valued horse famed for winning races while the women will offer a fine amber necklace, amber being the main jewel for everyday use.

The compensation agreement having been settled, the murderer must personally give the dead man's family a stallion and a massive yak; this gesture of reparation is called "laying down the carpet".⁸

In the trial, the *zupa* try to establish where the blame lies by investigating precisely the causes of the fight. Compensation is based on the severity of the crime and the damages obtained by the

family in similar situations in the past which constitute inexorable precedents in setting the amount. These legal customs imply that fights and murders are fairly frequent among the nomads.

There are three levels of compensation: the first, for the most serious cases, provides for a payment of 100 *dotse* of silver, the second for 70 and the third for 50. Shaped like a horseshoe, the *dotse* was a silver ingot (full name *dotse tamikma*) traditionally used as a measuring unit corresponding roughly



The *changchok* used in purification rites to benefit the deceased.

to 50 ounces. In murder cases, however, given the size of the compensation awarded and the scarcity of silver, another measure, called the *mar song*, is used. This corresponds to six *dri* or yak for every *dotse* in the most serious cases, the first degree of compensation, to four animals for the second degree and to two for the third degree.

When the indemnity has been paid, the murderer must additionally give to both the mother and the wife of his victim, as further reparation, a *dri*; this offering is called "meat for reconciliation with the killed man's relatives".⁹ The offering to the father, given with the same aim, is called "meat for the brothers".¹⁰

DAMAGES FOR THEFT

Within a nomad community, as I have already explained, theft and robbery are not common and so legal arbitration on such matters is rare.

However, stealing by one group of nomads from another does occur and damages are established on the basis of an old proverb:

What is taken from the gods is paid
ninefold,
What belongs to the community fivefold,
What was stolen from one's brothers
threefold.

This means that for property stolen from monasteries and lamas' residences, compensation is set at nine times the value. Goods stolen from the community are compensated five times over and that taken from the family at three times the value.

COMPENSATION FOR HORSES KILLED

Many horses and mules are gored by yaks and die, thus creating disputes. The yak with the "killer horns"¹¹ must be handed over, as compensation, to the owner of the horse killed. For a dead mule, the owner must also receive another five-year-old yak.

If the yak concerned is not seen in the act, the herd is searched for a yak with horns stained with blood and fat. There is a folk-saying: "If a wild yak brings down a horse, his horns will be anointed with butter," that is, with the fat of the horse killed. However, since the yak was not actually witnessed in the act, a three-year-old yak suffices as compensation.

SETTLEMENTS ON ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN

If a girl becomes pregnant before marriage, her parents investigate so as to discover the father.

When both sets of parents agree to join the couple in marriage, the traditional wedding ceremonies are rapidly organized. Otherwise, the natural father¹² must pay compensation to the girl. This is known as "the father's horse, milk and fur",¹³ whereby in lieu of fulfilling his role as father he must give his best horse, a five-year-old *dri* for the baby's milk, and seven three-year-old rams for his garments. However, when the natural father is poor and has no horse, a five-year-old yak is an appropriate substitute.

In the latter case, the process moves slowly towards resolution, respecting common custom established in ancient times; no disputes arise and the *zupa*, or elders, need not intervene.

COMPENSATION FOR SEPARATION AFTER THREE DAYS OF MARRIAGE

Many nomad women, having spent the traditional "three-day marriage" with their new family to celebrate the wedding, and having returned to the parental home for the customary three-month stay, then refuse to go back to their husbands at all. The very serious controversy that ensues is called *mosha* ("female flesh").

Most nomad girls marry in obedience to their parents' wishes and it is improbable that they meet their husbands before the wedding. It is therefore, I believe, unlikely that their companion will be the one they would have wished for and therefore separations and controversies occur, and not uncommonly.

The customary indemnity for an abandoned husband consists of a fine colt and nine times the value of what had previously been offered for the bride. If, however, the girl subsequently marries another man, the family that had held a right to her based on the earlier marriage promise might easily begin a dispute. If matters should worsen, this may lead to the start of fierce blood feuds.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. According to traditional Tibetan sources the hero Ge sar of Gling lived at the beginning of the 11th century Common Era.
2. In China, Tibet and India the following volumes of the epic of Ge sar are known to have been issued:

In 1976: by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *sTag gling g.yul 'gyed*, full title *sTag gling g.yul 'gyed 'dod dgu phun tshogs rnam sras bang mdzod longs spyod bsam 'phel* (pp.386).

In 1980: by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *Mon gling g.yul 'gyed* (pp.470) with 12 color illustrations of Ge sar; *Hor gling g.yul' gyed*, in two parts (pp.441 and 564); by the Szechuan National Minority's Publishing House, *lHa gling gab tse dgu skor*, full title *dGra bla'i rgyal po ge sar nor bu dgra 'dul gyi rtogs pa brjod pa lha gling gab tse dgu skor* (pp.152) with five drawings; *'Khrungs gling me tog ra ba*, full title *Dzam gling seng chen nor bu'i rtogs par brjod pa las/' khrungs gling me tog ra ba dang/rna sa bzung dar dkar mdud pa* (pp.186) with six drawings; by the Kansu National Minority's Publishing House, *'Dzam gling spyi bsang*, full title *Yul gling dkar rgyal blon dpa' brtul rnam kyī rnam par thar pa zur tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar snyan pa'i glu dbyangs dge legs sprin gyi rol mo* (pp.197).

In 1981: *rTa rgyug rgyal 'jog*, full title *'Dzam gling seng chen skyes bu'i rta rgyug gi rtogs pa brjod pa cha bdun nor bu'i me long* (pp.252) with three color illustrations.

In 1979 to 1982: a complete collection of the Ge sar epic, in 31 volumes, was published by the Druk Sherig Press, Thimpu, Bhutan.

In 1983: by mTsho sngon People's Publishing House, *'dZam gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung/ Bye ri'i byur rdzong* (pp.518); by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *'jar gling gyul 'gyed*, full title

'dZam gling ge sar 'phrul gyi rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las phyi gling 'jar gyi rgyal khams btul ba'i gyul 'gyed dpa' bo snying gi dga' ston ngo mtshar gtam gyi le'u dang 'brel ba'i drel rdzong dang go rdzong gtsor gyur pa'i gyang gter gyi sgo mo phye ba'i gtam ngo mtshar dgos 'byung bsam 'phel nor bu'i mdzod khang (pp.446); by the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives (LTWA), India, *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las dru gu go rdzong*, Vol. II (pp.723); *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las rta rgyugs* (pp.185).

In 1984: by Mi rigs Publishing House, *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung/ Lha gling gab tse dgu skor* (pp.84) and *Gling sgrung gi gtam dpe gces bstus* (pp.473); by LTWA, *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las dru gu go rdzong*, Vol. I No. 2 (pp.413) and *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod 'chi med lha yi rnga sgra* (pp.291).

In 1985: by LTWA, *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las zhang zhung mu tig gi rdzong chen phab skor* (pp.425); *'dZam gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs pa brjod pa las sog smad mang rje rgyal po dbang du bsodus nas rin chen khrab kyī gter rdzong phab pa'i rnam thar dkar phyogs gyul las rgyal ba'i bzhad sgra* (pp.824); *'dZam gling ge sar rgyal po'i rnam thar las byang go ra rgyal po'i bcud gyang gtsos gter kha bcu gsum blangs shing rdzu 'phrul sku yi bkod pa bstan pa'i ngo mtshar rtogs brjod gyul las rnam rgyal* (pp.684); *'dZam gling ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las byang go ra'i tshwa gyang phab pa'i bar gyi le'u dpa' bo dgyes pa'i dga' ston*, Vol. 2 (pp.284); *'dZam gling ge sar rgyal pos byang yul dbang du bsodus te rigs lnga'i gter gyang blangs pa'i smad le'i thar pa'i lam ston* (pp.476); *'dZam gling ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las rmi li'i dgra tshur rgol gyi lo rgyus stod 'khrug le'u phra mo ngo mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba* (pp.514); *'dZam gling ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las rmi li'i gser gyang blangs pa'i smad kyī le'u phra mo ngo mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba* (pp.808); *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las dru gu go rdzong smad cha'i kha skong* (pp.62); *Dru gu go rdzong*, Vol.III (pp.58); by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung/ mTha' gling gyul 'gyed* (pp.241).

In 1986: by the Kansu People's Publishing House, *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung gtam gyi tshig 'grel gsal sgron* (pp.305); by LTWA, *Ge sar gyi rnam thar las mtsho mi nub kyi dar gyang blangs pa'i stod cha rtsi rong lug rdzong 'bebs pa be ha ra ti sma* (pp.401); by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung/ Ti dkar*, Vol. II (pp.761).

In 1987: by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung/ Ti dkar*, Vol.I (pp.411); *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung/ Ti dkar*, Vol.III (pp.533); *Ja rong 'bru rdzong*, full title '*dZam gling ge sar rgyal po'i rnam thar las lho ja rong stops ldan rgyal po cham la phab ste 'bru rigs sna lnga'i gter kha 'byed pa'i rtogs brjod lho gling stag seng ngar 'thab kyi gyul 'gyed dpa' bo snying gi dga' ston*, (pp.522).

In 1988: by the Tibetan People's Publishing House, *Gru gu go rdzong*, full title '*dZam gling skyong ba'i pho lha ge sar dmag gi rgyal po'i rtogs brjod las byang bdud gru gu gyul rgyal stobs chen thog rgod rgyal po mnga' 'bangs dang bcas dbang du 'dus shing go mtshon gyang du blangs pa'i rnam thar yid 'phrog snying gi dga' ston*, Vol.I (pp.883).

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3. H.E. Richardson served in the British civil and foreign services in India and Tibet. He is the author of *Tibet and Its History* and co-author, with David Snellgrove, of *A Cultural History of Tibet*. Among his other works are *Ceremonies of the Lhasa Year*, reprinted London, 1993, and *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*, reprinted Hertford, 1995.

INTRODUCTION

1. mDo Khams.
2. rDzong chen bco brgyad.
3. lHa gling.
4. 'Khrungs gling.
5. rTa rgyugs.
6. Ta zig nor rdzong.
7. Kha che g.yu rdzong.
8. Mon gling.
9. 'Jang gling.
10. rGya gling.

11. *Sog gling.*
12. *bDud gling.*
13. *Hor gling.*
14. *Gru gu'i go rdzong.*
15. *dMyal gling.*
16. *Mi nub dar rdzong.*
17. *Zhang gling.*
18. *Bye ru'i byu rdzong.*
19. *A drag.*
20. *dgo ba.*
21. Like the *gto* and the *sku rim*.
22. *ar dnag kha sgyur.*
23. *dos po.*

THE DZACHUKHA REGION

1. *she sdud pa.*
2. *rgyal po lo khral.*
3. The Sa skya pa school was founded by 'Khon dkon mchog ryal po (1034-1102); the initiator of the bKa' brgyud pa school was Marpa Chos Kyi blo gros (1012-1099); while the rNying ma pa school goes back to the time of the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet due principally to Padmasambhava, who visited the country in the 8th century. The other great school, the dGe lugs pa, was founded by Tsong Kha pa Blo bzang grags pa (1357-1419).
4. See Note 2 in the "New Year Celebrations" chapter.
5. *lo zad dgu gtor.*

THE SERTHA REGION

1. *bla*: a type of energy or vital force that can be "sustained" by mountains, lakes, precious stones amongst other things.
2. The *gter ma*, literally "treasures", can be either objects or manuscripts which, in Bön and in the Tibetan Buddhist rNying ma pa traditions, are held to have been hidden in the 8th century and rediscovered in subsequent eras by particularly qualified practitioners, known as *gter ston*.
3. *gdom*.

SWEARING THE OATH OF FRIENDSHIP

1. *ko dmar khrag bzdzis.*
2. *'dzub mo bkug.*
3. *mna' ya.*

VENDETTAS

1. *mi sha.*

NOMADIC KNOWLEDGE

1. Exclamation similar to the famous mantra: *Om mani padme hum.*
2. See Note 11 of the chapter "The Summer Festivities of the Month of the Bull".
3. *rtsid re.*
4. *sbra.*
5. The Twelve Deeds of the Lord Buddha:
 1. Descent from Tushita heaven
 2. Entry into the maternal womb
 3. Taking birth
 4. Mastery of worldly arts
 5. Enjoyment of erotic pleasures
 6. Renouncing the world
 7. Practising asceticism
 8. Meditation under the *bodhi* tree
 9. Vanquishing Māra's host
 10. Attaining perfect enlightenment
 11. Turning the doctrinal wheel
 12. Passing into nirvana.
6. Gu ru mtshan brgyad, eight aspects of the great Guru of Oddiyana.
7. Five fundamental episodes in the life of the great Tibetan *yogin* Mi la ras pa (1040-1123), famous in the West through his biography and his mystic songs. These are:
 1. Magic deeds
 2. Hardships and trials
 3. Ascetic practices
 4. Teaching
 5. Miracles.

8. The law of cause and effect that governs human life according to Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.
9. Zodiacal astrology (*skar rtsis*, literally sidereal calculations) is of Indian origin and corresponds to the astrological system commonly used in the West. The astrology of the elements (*nag rtsis* or 'byung rtsis) is instead based on notions pertaining to the relations between the "five elements" (wood, fire, earth, metal, water) and aspects such as the position of the constellations and planets and also considers the numerical cycles of the nine *sme ba* and of the eight *spar kha* trigrams.
10. See Note 11.
11. The astrology of death (*gshin rtsis*) is useful in ascertaining whether the period when a person died is astrologically favorable or unfortunate for his surviving relatives and, in the latter case, prescribes remedies. Also, it indicates the precise date on which to hold the funeral.

The astrology of marriage (*bag rtsis*) establishes, through the appropriate calculations, the propitious moment for the bride to leave her paternal home and when she should be welcomed by her husband's family.
12. Two different systems of calculation in *skar rtsis* astrology. The *Byed rtsis* is based also on astrological notions of Chinese origin. The *Grub rtsis* instead uses as a source the principles espoused in the *Kalacakra Tantra*.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE NOMADS

1. Refuge, see Note 12.
2. Tārā (sGrol ma), "She who saves", is the most famous female divinity in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon.
3. *Om mani padme hūm* is the mantra of the *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara, patron of Tibet, who symbolizes universal compassion and of whom the Dalai Lamas are considered emanations.
4. *Om ā hūm vajra guru padma siddhi hūm* is the mantra of Padmasambhava, the tantric master who introduced Buddhism into Tibet in the 8th century.
5. The *bSam pa lhun grub* (*The granting of wishes*) is a famous invocation composed by *Padmasambhava* and rediscovered on several occasions as *gter ma* over the centuries.
6. The *Le'u bdun ma* (*The seven chapters*) is an invocation to Padmasambhava that contains many historical references. It was rediscovered by the *gter ston byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550-?).
7. The *stūpa* (*mchod rten*) is a sacred Buddhist structure originally created to hold the Buddha's relics. A "stūpa with many doors" refers to a type of *stūpa* commonly found in Tibet which contains numerous shrines dedicated to the cult of various divinities.
8. According to Buddhist teachings, all beings can be divided into six principal classes: the gods, the demi-gods and men (the three higher realms), animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings (the three lower realms). Each one of these six dimensions of existence is caused by a specific type of passion that produces the karma which causes its manifestation.
9. *dgong 'don*.
10. *mtshan thub*.
11. 'bum lnga.
12. The Refuge in the Buddha, his Teaching and the Community of practitioners is the "outer" or exoteric meaning of "refuge" (*skyabs 'gro*), according to *sūtra* teachings. In *tantra* the main object of refuge is the guru, "the root of initiations", along with the *yidams*, the divinities upon whom one meditates, and the *dākinis*, female beings that protect the teaching and the practitioner. At a deeper level, the true refuge is the knowledge of one's own primordial state.
13. The real meaning of *maṇḍala* (*dkyil 'khor*) is that of the "pure dimension" of existence. This dimension is represented by the image of a central divinity and its infinite manifestations at the four cardinal points, the "four directions", corresponding, in turn, to four

elements, colors and wisdoms. The central divinity varies according to which specific *tantra* the practitioner is following on his path towards realization. A *maṇḍala* can also be represented as a visual support for the meditator or as a ritual offering object, and can be of three different types: painted on cloth, drawn with colored powders, or constructed with small piles of grain.

14. As a principal example of the structure and running of the main religious establishments in nomad territory, I have taken Dzogchen monastery.
15. *grub grwa*.
16. *bshad grwa*.
17. *bstan bdag*.
18. *dbyar gnas*.
19. The *vajra* (*rdo rje*) and the bell are the most important ritual objects in tantric Buddhism. The former, which is a kind of scepter, symbolizes the individual's primordial state and its limitless manifestation. The bell, meanwhile, represents the void and the energy which are the basis of this manifestation.
20. *dril bu*.
21. *rol dpon*.
22. *dbu mdzad*.
23. The "Thirteen Principal Texts" (*gzhun chen bcu gsum*) are:
 1. *Prātimokśasūtra*
 2. *Vinayasūtra* of Gunaprabha
 3. *Abidharmasamuccaya* of Asaṅga
 4. *Abidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu
 5. *Prajñā nāma mūla madhyamaka* of Nāgārjuna
 6. *Madhyamakāvatāra* of Candrakīrti
 7. *Catuhsatakasatra* of Āryadeva
 8. *Bodhicaryavatāra* of Śāntideva
 9. *Abhisamayālamkāra* of Asaṅga
 10. *Mahāyanasūtralamkāra* of Asaṅga
 11. *Madhyantavibhanga* of Asaṅga
 12. *Dharmadharmatāvibhanga* of Asaṅga
 13. *Mahāyanottaratantra* of Asaṅga
24. *sku rgyab pa*.
25. *spyi pa*.

THE GREAT FESTIVAL OF THE MANI PRAYER

1. *Mani rgya bzhag*.
2. The *Mani bka' 'bum* is a text that contains teachings on the practice of Avalokiteśvara, along with numerous historical references. Attributed to King Srong bstan sgam po (609-649 C.E.), it was rediscovered as *gter ma* by Grub thob dngos grub (12th century).
3. *Tshom bu'i dkyil 'khor*.
4. *dGe sLong ma dPal mo*.
5. *Thug rje chen po bcu gcig zhal gyi snyung par gnas pa'i cho ga snying por bsdu pa* (*Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. Ra, XXV 13).
6. *bde 'gro*.
7. *ngag bcad*.
8. *thor thug*.
9. *snyung gnas dkarpo cha brgyad*.
10. *'pho ba*.
11. The texts containing the instructions on the *'pho ba* as practiced by the nomads are to be found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. Zha, XXI, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

THE SUMMER FESTIVITIES OF THE MONTH OF THE BULL

1. *glang zla bzhi rgyal*.
2. These are seeds of barley roasted, some lightly so as to retain their white color while others are black and almost burned. These symbolize animals such as the yak and sheep which in the past were sacrificed.
3. *bsangs rtsi*.
4. *bla ri*.
5. *gzhi bdag*.
6. *yul lha*.
7. *stag lha khra bo*.
8. *gzig lha khra mo*. Since in general the tiger (*stag*) symbolizes the male human, it is very probable that the term (*gzig*) or leopard in this female divinity's name represents woman.

9. *dgra lha*.
10. The falcon, the eagle "*glag*" and the wolf are the three principal manifestations of the "Thirteen Wer ma warrior gods" (*dgra lha'i wer ma bcu gsum*) of Gesar of Gling. Men who are setting off for war or on a long trading journey consider encountering these animals a good omen and believe all their desires will be fulfilled.
11. These are the five deities of the *klung rta* that bring good luck and prosperity: "the white crystal man" (*shel gyi mi bo*) along with the tiger, the lion, the legendary eagle *Garuda* (*khyung*) and the dragon.
12. gNam phyi gung rgyal, "the ancestor queen of the sky", is one of the original female divinities of the pre-Buddhist Tibetan pantheon.
13. Na dmar dung chung might be a divinity that, in the Gesar saga, is the paternal uncle of the hero. In general, the term *na dmar* refers to a type of meadow common in the nomad lands on which many highly perfumed red flowers grow, their petals as fine as strands of silk, called *a dar ge dar*. The name *dung chung* is sometimes used to describe the deer, whose horns are called *dung rwa*. This is why I cannot identify this divinity with certainty.
14. The *bTsen* are a class of semi-divine beings of a particularly wrathful nature. They dwell mainly on rocky mountains.
15. *klung rta*.
16. *bsangs khrid*.
17. *lha ri*.
18. The *ru dar* according to descriptions in the Gesar epic was, in ancient times, a banner distinguishing various divisions of the army. With time, it lost this function and today is a triangular ensign of any color.
19. *rta rgyal*.

EDUCATION

1. *kha cha*.

THE YAK-HAIR TENT

1. The mythical "wish-fulfilling jewel" (*yiid bzhin nor bu*) is represented in Tibetan tradition as three different colored jewels surrounded by flames.
2. *mtshan thub*.
3. *g.Yang sgam*. Through an elaborate ritual invoking the divinities of fortune and prosperity, various propitious objects and medicinal substances are placed in a container which is then carefully safeguarded by the family.

LIVELIHOOD

1. *sha bam*.
2. *spu khog*.
3. *lci' bam*.

THE RAISING OF LIVESTOCK

1. *bal be'u*.
2. *nor bdag*.
3. *she bdag*.

CLOTHING

1. *sbre*.

HUNTING

1. *khrag 'bod*.
2. *yul lha*.
3. *lha bsangs*.
4. *spyang sdom*.
5. *spyang sna gtug*.

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

1. The *bDe gshegs bka' brgyad*, "the Deities of the Eight Transmitted Precepts", is the most important tantric cycle in the Mahāyoga system of the rNying ma pa tradition. This includes the *maṇḍalas* of the eight divinities on which one meditates:

1. 'Jam dpal gshin rje (Yamāntaka)
 2. rTa mgrin (Hayagriva)
 3. dPal chen heruka
 4. Che mchog heruka
 5. rDo rje gzhon nu (Vajra Kumāra)
 6. mNgnon rdzogs heruka
 7. Dregs pa kun 'dul
 8. sTobs ldan nag po
2. The *gtor ma*, usually cone-shaped, is a ritual object made mainly of toasted barley flour mixed with butter. It can serve both as a "support" for specific forces and energies belonging to different types of beings, as well as an offering. In this case, however, it is a type of *zor*, a magic weapon that can be empowered by reciting the appropriate *mantra* and serves to annihilate negative forces.
3. *god glud*.
 4. *skar chu*.
 5. Further observations by the author on the celebration of Tibetan new year can be found in G. Tucci, *Tibetan Folk Songs from Gyantse and Western Tibet*, pp. 123-153, Ascona 1966.

GATHERINGS

1. *stag zla'i spyi srung*.

MARRIAGE

1. *slas chen*.
2. *slas zhib*.
3. The *gzi* is a hard, variegated stone, with black veins on a white background that sometimes have a zigzag pattern, sometimes a round or square one. It is characterized by its so-called "water eyes" (*chu mig*), round or square veining which can vary in number from two to 12. According to its type and shape, the *gzi* is given names, such as the *chu bang kha sprod* which has round and square water eyes facing each other, the *rta so ma* that has pairs of undulating stripes, and the *stag log ma*, which is

round and has both "water eyes" and wavy lines. The Tibetans have considered them highly precious ornaments since ancient times.

4. *mna 'zho blud*.
5. *zhag gsum bag ma*.
6. *thud dkar nag*.
7. *mag rta*.

POPULAR JUSTICE

1. *rgan po*.
2. The *dbyar rtswa dgun 'bu*, literally "summer grass, winter insect", is a medicinal plant that assumes the form of an insect in winter. It is used for its tonic effects.
3. *go kha'i rgan mo*.
4. In this rite, the name of the dead person is written on a small piece of paper or tablet, known as *ming byang*, to which an initiation is given and teachings transmitted. Then the *ming byang* is burned, and after the lama has performed the practice of the transfer of consciousness of the dead person, the ashes of the tablet mixed with clay are put into moulds that represent *stūpas*, deities or sacred objects, thus obtaining the forms called *tsha tsha*. It is believed that by doing this, the negative karma of the deceased is purified.
5. *mi sha'i mgo bkug*.
6. *ral gri so dmar*.
7. *sdug bog rwa dmar*.
8. *gdan bting*.
9. *nye ba'i mthun sha*.
10. *phu nu'i zur sha*.
11. *rdung gi rwa dmar*.
12. *byi pho*.
13. *pha rta 'o lpags*.

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