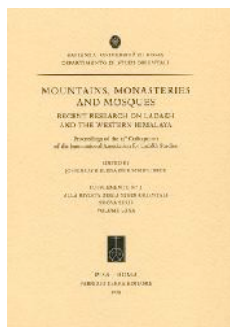


REVIEW: MOUNTAINS, MONASTERIES AND MOSQUES

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John Bray and Elena de Rossi Filibeck (eds). 2009. *Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques. Recent Research on Ladakh and the Western Himalaya. Proceedings of the 13th Colloquium of the International Association for Ladakh Studies.* Supplemento N° 2 alla Rivista Degli Studi Orientali, Nuova Serie, Volume LXXX. Pisa, Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore. Introduction (John Bray and Elena de Rossi Filibeck). 283pp, 2 maps, 45 illustrations. ISBN 978-88-6227-188-2, ISSN 0392-4866 (paperback, 245€).

Ladakh is famous among trekkers for her mountains and among other tourists also for her association with Tibetan Buddhism. Most visitors, however, neglect that half or more of the population follow a different religion, and hardly anybody comes to Ladakh specifically for her mosques. While the title of the volume under review is somewhat misleading – none of the articles deals specifically with monasteries or mosques, and only one, the last, with (sacred) mountains – it aptly highlights that Islam has become an essential part of Ladakhi culture, and cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, the volume is again heavily biased towards Buddhism and the middle class Ladakhi.¹ Only two of the fifteen articles deal with Islam, and a further one with a Muslim trader. In contrast, five articles engage with ritualistic aspects within the Buddhist fold, and a sixth with a Buddhist community. The remaining six articles, actually constituting

¹ One notices also other *lacunae* in ethnographic or anthropological research on Ladakh: the Brokpas or Dards of Lower Ladakh receive little or no attention, despite their 'exotic' customs and appearances, and the same holds for the low caste Mon and Beda communities, victims of social stigma, and the shadow existences of migrant labourers, victims of structural violence. For the latter, see Demenge (2009).

the first part of the volume, deal with trade and other aspects of Buddhist or general history, of which four also involve neighbouring regions: Spiti, Bashar, Kinnaur, and Kangra.

In their introduction, John Bray and Elena de Rossi Filibeck point to the fact that the mountains surrounding Ladakh have never been barriers to people, goods, and ideas. Several of the articles clearly illustrate this: traders, nomads, warriors, and missionaries had long crossed the region's boundaries.

The first European to visit Ladakh was the Portuguese merchant, Diogo d'Almeida (around 1600), followed by the Jesuit missionaries Francisco de Azevedo and João de Oliveira in 1631. Their information, however, on Christians in Ladakh, were quite misleading. It was not until 'Ippolito Desideri's First Remarks on Ladakh' (Enzo Gualtiero Bargiacchi, 27–43), following his stay in Leh in 1715, that more correct and more precise information was available, but ironically, Desideri's works were not published until 200 years later. Desideri travelled on to Tibet where he acquired such proficiency in the classical language that he was not only able to understand Buddhist philosophical treatises but also to compose a refutation, which he presented at the court in Lhasa.

That political boundaries are unstable and could vanish and reappear is illustrated by Christian Jahoda's 'Spiti and Ladakh in the 17th-19th centuries: Views from the Periphery' (45-59). Spiti was incorporated into Ladakh in 1630. After the Tibet-Ladakh war of 1679-1683, Spiti came under Tibetan control, but in 1687, was again under the political control of Ladakh. From 1734 to 1758 she belonged, at least nominally, to the kingdom of Purik. The relation with Ladakh ended with the Dogra incursions. After the treaty of Amritsar in 1846, Spiti was detached from Ladakh (then in possession of Rāja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir) and added to the British dominion. Jahoda emphasises the common religious and cultural traditions, such as the cult of Rdo rje chen mo or court music.

Georgios T Halkias' 'Until the Feathers of the Winged Black Raven Turn White: Sources for the Tibet-Bashar Treaty of 1679' (61-

86) focuses on the treaty that followed the Tibet-Ladakh-Mughal war. He gives a translation, a critical edition, and some facsimiles. Unfortunately, it is unclear which documents are reproduced. The edited document, which is actually a much later reinstatement of the treaty, starts with a historical prelude, followed by four clauses. A subsequent retrospection involves the initial divination by letting a horse run free (its return was the positive omen for the Tibetan conqueror), the bribing of the frontier men, and finally the annexation of the land. This is followed by details of the documentation, post-war arrangements, a pledge, an appeal, and finally the colophon of the copyist.

Kurt Tropper's 'A Thousand *Manis* in Immutable Stone'. A Donor Inscription at Nako Village (Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh)' (87-96), presents an enigma. The donor of the inscription, which dates from the fifteenth century or later, Phun tshog dbang po, describes himself as the offspring of a family of noble origin and great lineage with quite an uncommon name: *bhe()van(a) dpon* (or *dbon*). The name seems to be unknown in Nako, and may be related either to the village of Bhevan in Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) or to a sixteenth century ruler of Baltistan, named Sultan Bewān or Biwān Co. As Tropper states, both possibilities seem equally unlikely, because the village is too unimportant, and the Balti rulers of that epoch never bore Tibetan names.

However, we know of practices that allow different siblings of a family to follow different faiths, as documented in Purik. They might have been current also in Baltistan in the early period of Islamisation. Furthermore, it was not uncommon to have matrimonial relations across the religious 'borders', particularly among noble families. It is, therefore, not so unlikely that the donor could be, at the same time, a Buddhist, as indicated both by his name and his donation, and a descendant of a royal family in Baltistan. The reading *dpon* 'master' is not fully certain, and Tropper thinks that it could stand for *co* 'ruler'. He further suggests that the alternative reading would lead to a "similar meaning" (91). In n. 50 (95) he suggests the translation 'paternal relative' for *dbon*. However, the

common translation for *dbon* is 'grandson' or 'nephew', which would better fit the self-description as belonging to a famous lineage. It seems likely to me that the donor lived in Nako, far from his royal relatives (maybe he had been given away in marriage), and it may have been this distance that prompted him to donate the *mani* wall. Whether this is the correct scenario or whether he actually came from Baltistan as a trader, the inscription testifies to the long distance relations across political as well as religious borders.

Another long-distance cross-border relation features prominently in 'Three 19th Century Documents from Tibet and the Lo phyag Mission from Leh to Lhasa' (John Bray and Tsering D Gonkatsang, 97–116). The documents in question are a receipt for the *lo phyag* (*lopchak*) gifts from the Treasurer of the Lhasa Government and two flowery letters to WH Johnson, then *wazir* of Ladakh, one apparently by a senior lama and the other by the treasurer. The authors seem to be puzzled that the second document contains "a number of spelling mistakes. From a senior lama, one would normally expect a high standard of spelling and calligraphy" (104). It is amazing how modern Western scholars are obsessed with orthography. They tend to forget that our own *literati*, not so long ago, did not bother much about the 'correct' spelling and might have used different variants in one and the same document, only a few lines apart. Tibetologists thus seem to follow blindly the fixed idea of Tibetan scholars that there exists a written standard as codified in the dictionaries (although different dictionaries might give different options). However, certain allegedly "non-standard" spellings are so common across the Tibetan cultural sphere, such as *rten* for *brtan* (cf. 112, first line), that one wonders whether these spellings do not constitute the real standard. Of course, there are often also spellings triggered by the pronunciation of the spoken language (such as the insecurity about a post final as noted in n. 37)² as well as simple slips

² A very common, almost regular 'non-standard' spelling is *ch* (ཅ) for *phy* (ཕ), as both graphemes lead to the same pronunciation [ʧ^h] or [ʧ^h]. Such orthographic variants are not different from those that can be observed in English, cf., e.g., British English *plough* and American English *plow* or

of the pen. But could such slips not happen to well-educated people? Just look at educated Westerners' emails.

The authors also discuss Captain Ramsay's investigation into a few other *lo phyag* documents. According to the latter, the address of one of the documents reads "Ngāris Maug yool guee sā skinongwā" (106). This is interpreted by the authors as *mnga' ris mar [!] yul gi sa skyong ba* (n. 44). It should be noted, however, that Ramsay had sought the help of the Moravian missionary, Rev. Friedrich Adolf Redslob. In older German handwriting, *u* and *n* are almost identical, and not being a German, Ramsay apparently was unaware that only a stroke above an ostensible *u* makes a real *u*. The place name is thus clearly *Mang yul*, a common alternative to *Mar yul*.

'A Project of Imperial Importance': Palampur Fair and the Kangra Tea Enterprise, 1867-79' (Arik Moran, 117-130) describes the development of tea plantations and tea trade in the Kangra Valley after the conquest of the Panjab by the East India Company in 1846. A main force behind the development was Douglas Forsyth, the Company servant and later divisional commissioner of Jalandhar. A proponent of the so-called Forward School, he advocated the expansion of British influence in Central Asia to counter Russian hegemony. The Palampur fair was installed to foster tea trade with East Turkestan, bypassing the Kashmirian trade links. While the tea plantations became a success, the fair soon failed to attract enough traders, due to both economic and political reasons.

In 'The Tradition of Sufism in Ladakh' (131-139), Abdul Ghani Sheikh highlights the impact of Buddhism and Shivaism on the Sufi movement in Kashmir and emphasises the Sufis' appeal to the unity of mankind in all religions. Shaikh Nūr-ud-dīn Wālī, the founder of the Rishi movement, in particular, reminds us of ascetics or yogis like Mi la ras pa, as he meditated for twelve years in a cave. Being a strict vegetarian and a pacifist, he took up the Biblical utopia of *swords to ploughshares* (Isaiah 2:3-4) in a verse, saying "I broke the sword and converted it into a sickle." Sheikh depicts the Nūrbakhshiyya, which spread to Baltistan and Ladakh, as a

plough.

continuation of the Sufi movement. However, most erstwhile Nūrbakhshīs in Purik have converted to Twelver Shi'ism. Sheikh concludes that despite the presence of a minor Nūrbakhshī community in Ladakh, Sufism is mere history in Ladakh and that it is time to revive its legacy.

The Nūrbakhshī movement has been judged quite differently during its history, and the respective historical sources cannot, therefore, be taken at face value. What should be self-evident for every historian is that history or historical narratives hardly ever tell the facts objectively. At best, the presentation of the facts is embedded in the actual socio-political preconceptions. However, more often than not, histories also serve a particular political objective as aptly illustrated by Shahzad Bashir's 'Nūrbakhshīs in the History of Kashmir, Ladakh, and Baltistan: a Critical View on Persian and Urdu Sources' (141–152). The author discusses four different sources from four different contexts: a Nūrbakhshī hagiography from the mid sixteenth century, Mīrzā Ḥaidar's chronicle from the same epoch, an anonymous history of Kashmir royalty from the early seventeenth century, and finally Ḥashmatullāh Khān's *Tārīkh-e Jammūñ* from 1938. Mīrzā Ḥaidar, in particular, had condemned the sect as heretical, but it turns out from the anonymous text, that his persecution was only politically motivated and served to mask his persecution of a local Kashmiri faction.

Bashir's lesson can be applied also to other aspects of Ladakhi history. A common preconception of Ladakhi history, based on the unquestioned authority of Francke, is that it was first inhabited by Tibetan nomads, while farmers settled later. That nomadism and animal husbandry is far from being necessarily a more archaic stage than settled agriculturism is aptly demonstrated by Pascale Dollfus: 'Who are 'Those of the Black Castle'? Discussing the Past of a Nomadic Group Inhabiting the Southeastern Edge of Ladakh' (153–172). The author argues that settled agriculture and nomadic animal husbandry are opposite ends of a continuum, and that people may shift along this continuum as the physical, social, economic, or political circumstances necessitate. The people of Kharnak most

probably came over the mountains from the Zanskar Valley, first practising transhumance, later settling in the area, and growing a small amount of barley wherever possible. However, since the closing of the frontier, they have given up the fields and shifted to the more lucrative production of pashmina.

The thirty-nine 'Wedding Songs From Wam le' presented by Elena de Rossi Filibeck (173–207) had been discovered and copied by Joseph Gergan in 1916. The copy was first handed over to August Hermann Francke. After his death, they were forwarded to Guiseppe Tucci, but ended up forgotten on a shelf, to be rediscovered only in 2000. They differ from the songs collected by Francke in that they do not consist of question and answer pairs, but this is not necessarily a specialty of the Wamle - or Hanle - songs. Most of the wedding songs I have recorded in Khalatse are likewise monologic in their structure. The transcription of the songs follows a brief introduction and the translation follows the whole set of songs. The reader is not immediately aware that the translations are not very faithful. Instead, they merely summarise the lines, omitting all repetitions, and thus do not echo the poetic structure of the original. A few example lines of the first song may illustrate this. In the original transcription, all syllables are followed by a space, but I shall indicate word units for a better understanding:

ཨོྲོ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་པར་གྱུར་ཅིག།	ད་སྙན་གསན་པར་མཛོད་ཅིག།
གུང་སྙོན་པོ་གུང་མཛོད་པའི་ངང་ནས་སྙན་གསན།།	
ཉི་ལྷན་གཉིས་པོ་བྲ་གསལ་ལེ།།	བྲ་གསལ་ལེ་ངང་ནས་སྙན་གསན།
རྒྱ་སྐར་འཛོམ་པོ་ཕྱ་རུ་གོ།།	ཕྱ་རུ་གོ་ངང་ནས་སྙན་གསན།
གངས་དཀར་ཉི་ལེ་དཔང་མཛོད།།	དཔང་མཛོད་པའི་ངང་ནས་སྙན་གསན།།
མཚོ་མོ་མ་ཕམ་གཉིང་ཟབ།།	གཉིང་ཟབ་པའི་ངང་ནས་སྙན་གསན།།

om bkra.shis.par-gyur.cig // da snyan.gsan.par-mdzod.cig //
gung sngon.po gung mtho.ba'i ngang.nas snyan.gsan
nyi.zla gnyis.po khra.gsal.le / khra.gsal.le ngang.nas
snyan.gsan /
rgya.skar 'dzom.po phra.ru.ge / phra.ru.ge ngang.nas

snyan.gsan /
gangs.dkar ti.se dpang.mtho / dpang.mtho.ba'i ngang.nas
snyan.gsan /
mtsho.mo ma.pham gting.zab / gting.zab.pa'i ngang.nas
snyan.gsan /

This is rendered plainly as:

Om, happiness! Now everybody listen!
Up in the high blue sky
Glow the sun and the moon, and the stars (*khra/ dbo* [sic!])³
glimmer,
the stars altogether look like jewels
the white and snowy Tise rises high like a witness [!],
the impenetrable deep lake Ma pham,
...

A full translation would run as follows:

Om, may [you all] be blessed! Now deign to listen attentively (lit.
with [your] ear!)
The blue sky ..., [the sky [rises] high];⁴ on account of (lit. out of
the nature of) the high sky, listen attentively!
Sun and moon, the two are shining bright; on account of [their]
brightness, listen attentively!
The assembled constellations⁵ appear like ornaments, on
account of [their] glittering appearance, listen attentively!

³ The text has *gnyis.po* 'both', hence it only deals with the sun and the moon. The word *dbo* does not appear, and *khra(bo)* means 'piebald', 'colourful', 'glittering', particularly in combination with such descriptive adverbs as *c(h)em.me*, *nar.re*, *me(r).re*, *tsam.me*, or *lam.me*.

⁴ Given the structure of the following lines, four or five words are missing, due to haplography. Since the last two or three words of the first half of the line are always repeated, the passage most probably ends with *gung mtho /*.

⁵ I expect *rgyu.skar* 'lunar mansion'. The vowel sign might have been lost while copying.

The white glacier Tise [rises] high up;⁶ on account of [its]
elevated height, listen attentively!

Lake Mapham [reaches] deep down; on account of [its]
deepness, listen attentively!

...

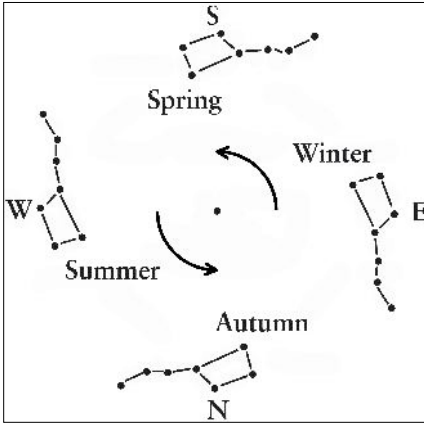
While the second part of each line appears repetitive, it reminds the listeners of their obligation to turn an ear to the song, due to the sacred nature of the items enumerated. It is thus at least as important as the first part, and should not have been omitted.

One also wonders why, in the case of songs v and XVIII, the thirteen lines have been condensed into ten, while the six lines of song XXII have been broken into nine. Similarly the eight lines of songs XV and XVI have been rendered with six and seven lines, respectively. And so on. The songs still await a more faithful translation.

In 'Sa bdag and Tortoise. A Survey of the Tradition of Geomancy in Ladakh' (209–219), Petra Maurer shows that while there might be quite detailed prescriptions for house construction (how the landscape should look, in which directions the doors should face, on which date a construction should be started, etc.), these are treated rather pragmatically. If only a few conditions are not met, this can easily be ignored. It is the astrologer who prescribes the particular conditions as well as the rituals, according to the person's horoscope and according to the seasons in correspondence with the turning of the *sa bdag* 'owner of the earth'. However, the non-consultation of the astrologer or the non-performance of the prescribed rituals can easily be 'healed' by just hanging up a *thangka* depicting the primordial tortoise. It remains unclear whether this tortoise is identical to the *sa bdag*.

⁶ *dpangs.mtho* 'high'. Alternatively, one could think of the 'high meadows', with *dpang* for *spang*, the meadows also constituting a common picture. There is certainly no place for a '(high) witness' *dpang.po*. Compare also the next line, where we deal with the deepness of lake Mapham (Manasarovar). The compound *dpang(s).mtho* 'high' finds its equivalent in the compound *gting.zab* 'deep'.

Fig. 1 The Great Dipper / Plough



Nevertheless, it is fascinating to read that the *sa bdag* turns around its axis throughout the year: in spring, the head faces west with the mouth pointing to the north; in summer, the head faces north with the mouth pointing to the east; in autumn, the head faces east with the mouth pointing to the south; and in winter, the head faces south with the mouth pointing west. This

movement corresponds exactly to the movement of the asterism Big Dipper or Plough (as part of the Great Bear constellation) around the polar star: in spring, the trapezoid, which apparently forms the 'head' faces west, and the 'tail'-like line (the 'shaft' of the Great Cart of the German tradition) points to the east. The western-most star along this line (α Dubhe) points to the polar star, and across to the northern position, which the Great Bear takes in autumn. This star is apparently the 'mouth'. In summer, the Great Bear stands in the west, with the 'head' pointing north and the 'mouth' towards the polar star and across to the eastern position, which the Great Bear takes in winter, and so on.⁷

Erberto Lo Bue travelled through the Himalayan regions in search of the so-called sky-burial, where corpses are cut into pieces and fed to vultures or even crows. The usual explanation for sky-burial is that there is too little wood to burn the corpses, but in his 'Notes on Sky-burial in Indian, Chinese and Nepalese Tibet' (221–237), Lo Bue argues that the main reason behind this and water burial is to commit a compassionate act by letting oneself be fed to birds or fishes. From a Buddhist point of view, the sky-burial is thus most auspicious, but Lo Bue also observes that in peripheral regions, such as Ladakh, this practice has stopped in the past few decades,

⁷ (See, e.g., http://en.es-static.us/upl/2012/09/Big_Dipper_Seasons.jpeg; a wonderful animation is found at <http://www.astrokramkiste.de/polarstern>).

allegedly due to the lack of suitable carrion birds, on the one hand, and specialised practitioners, on the other.

The main driving force, however, for this change seems to have been modernisation and the growing pressure of Hindu values. The situation is completely different in Tibet proper, where the sky-burial may also "carry an implicit message of identity" (234). Sky-burial is also the most popular form of burial in Mustang. The burial, however, differs considerably from the common type in that it is not performed by specialists, but by the relatives of the deceased: those on the father's side (the *rus* 'bone' relatives) are responsible for the flesh, those on the mother's side (the *khrag* 'blood' relatives) for the bones.

The competing forces of tradition and modernity are also the topic of Poul Pedersen's 'Traditionalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Life of a Modern Ladakhi: Abdul Wahid Radhu and Marco Pallis' (239–250). Born in 1922, Abdul Wahid Radhu grew up in a wealthy Muslim trading family, which also managed the *lopchak* (*lo phyag*) mission. He obtained a modern education, resulting in a BA in English from the Muslim University of Aligarh. Abdul Wahid was a restless and cosmopolitan traveller. While in Lhasa on the *lopchak* mission in 1943, he became fluent in Lhasa Tibetan. In 1944, he settled in Kalimpong, but soon set out to Nanjing, the then capital of the Kuomintang, where he got stuck and involved in politics when the communists' power increased. As he spoke both Tibetan and English, he often worked as an official interpreter. In 1947, he eventually was able to return to Kalimpong. In 1951, he went to Lhasa, where he made friends with the Dalai Lama's brothers, but he found the situation too tense, and returned to India, settling in Srinagar. However, at the invitation of the Dalai Lama's elder brother, he returned to Kalimpong to work in an exile-Tibetan information-gathering organisation. After the Dalai Lama settled in Dharamsala, Abdul Wahid was employed by the Aid Committee for Tibetan Refugees before working for the American Library of Congress in Delhi. Upon retirement, he finally settled in Srinagar.

In Kalimpong, Abdul Wahid met with the anti-modernist

Marco Pallis, who provided him with the English translation of the book *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* by the French Muslim convert, René Guénon, a strong proponent of eastern spiritualism. Abdul Wahid thus came to understand that Western education and modernisation were misleading and luring him towards mere materialism. He felt that he had been "caught between two cultures, and had lost the homogeneity of [his] personality" (246). 'Eastern' religions, whether Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, would create "'metaphysical cosmopolitanism', a universe of shared meanings deriving from the primordial, divine revelation of spiritual truth" (247). Probably without realizing it, Abdul Wahid had become a follower of the Rishi movement as depicted by Abdul Ghani Sheikh (see above).

'Charting the Shugden Interdiction in the Western Himalaya' (Martin A Mills, 251–269) describes the background of the conflict and how the Ladakhi Gelug monks got caught between their loyalty towards a powerful protector of their monasteries and their loyalty to the Dalai Lama, who prohibited the worship of Shugden (Rdo rje Shugs ldan) in 1996. The latter, as a protector of the pure Gelug tradition, was adverse to the Dalai Lama's *ris med* or 'non-sectarian' movement, which includes Nyingma elements, and to other important Gelug protector deities. This issue led to an outcry in the international media, where the Dalai Lama was accused of religious intolerance, an opportunity also exploited by the Chinese government.

The Ladakhi Gelug community first hoped that the conflict concerned only the Tibetan diaspora and that they could silently continue their worship. However, the Dalai Lama made it clear that there was no room for compromise and that the monks had to decide between their protector deity and himself. While the monks feared breaking their vows towards the protector, it was also clear that a lama, and particularly a root lama, is considered higher than a (worldly) protector. Hence they reluctantly gave up Shugden worship, and the figures and shrines of the protector were eventually destroyed. Ironically, Shugden worship is now confined to

clandestine practices, much like Buddhist practice in China during the Cultural Revolution.

Mills further points to the dynamics of the conflict that drew the Ladakhi Buddhists from a position largely independent of the Tibetan Government-in-exile into its constitutional fold, as defined by the protector deities. The latter

mark the volatile boundary between religious and state authority for Tibetans: they are used as guardians to secure legal oaths, and their powers are evoked as part of the combined ritual-military defence of Buddhist states (268f).

Like so many other modern constitutional boundaries, this one is no longer permeable.

'Sacred Landscapes in the Nubra Valley' (Sonam Wangchok, 271-283) lists various sacred mountains, lakes, caves, trees, and 'footprints' of saints in the Nubra Valley as part of a larger project to document Ladakh's heritage, in order to generate awareness of the need to preserve it. However, all these sites are associated only with Buddhism. Do the Muslims have no such sites?

The volume is well edited, except for a few typos and a remaining editors' comment (n 3, p 273), which escaped the attention of the editors. This does not impede the otherwise pleasant reading, only the misspelled place names (p 134: Turktuk for Turtuk or p 136: Boghan for Boghdan) are somewhat irritating. Regrettably, the volume lacks an index.

Due to *karmic* complications, the volume did not reach the reviewer until five years after its publication, yet it may not be too late to introduce its interesting and, in several cases, also surprising contents to a wider audience. The price, however, is forbiddingly high, even for Westerners, not to mention the interested readership in Ladakh and the larger Himalayan or Transhimalayan regions, for which the information assembled is of even greater relevance. They should not be restricted by the base economics of 'Western' materialism to being mere objects of research, without being able to

at least passively control what is written about them, their history, and their spiritualism. Hopefully, a more reasonably priced edition will be available in the near future, at least for the Indian readership, as has been the case for earlier volumes of *Recent Research on Ladakh*.

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