

CARAVANS IN SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

PAST AND PRESENT

Edited by

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4 Salt routes and barter caravans in the Himalayan regions of Nepal and Tibet from an ethnographical perspective

Patrice Lecoq

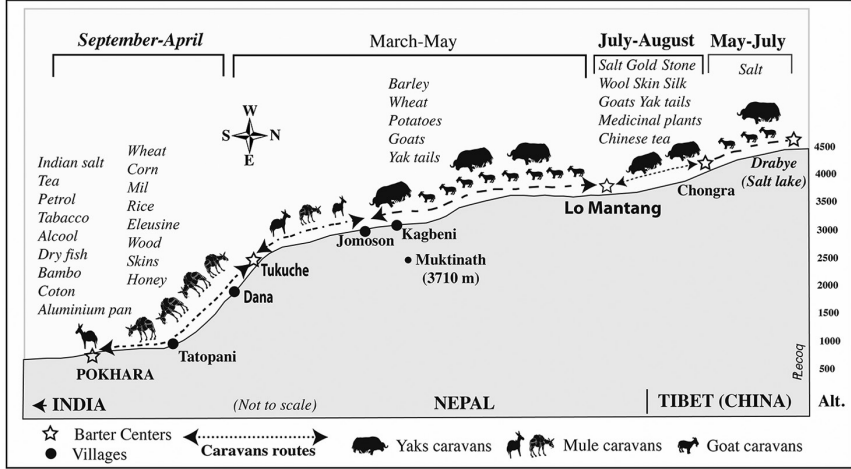
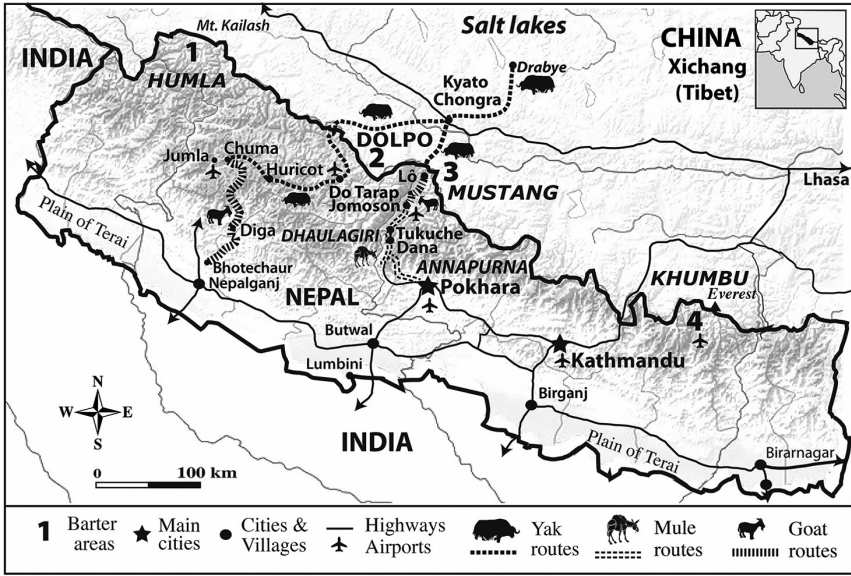
Nomadism and pastoralism in the Himalayan regions

In the Himalayan regions of Tibet and Nepal, as in other parts of the world, nomads have acquired over the centuries a deep knowledge of the environment in which they reside and on which their lives depend. This has allowed them to endure in the most inhospitable places on the planet (Barfield 1993; Clarkson et al. 2017; Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980; Khazanov 1994, 2019). And even if “these societies differ in many factors such as the type of animals involved [yaks, goats, sheep, donkeys or mules], the regional environment, seasonality, mobility and political organization among other factors” (Capriles 2017:39), they have created a common, unique culture that is trending toward disappearance. Understanding the history of pastoralism and the interaction of man with the environment is therefore essential since the domestication of animals and the evolution of pastoral societies constitute a fundamental transition in the economic history of human ecology (Bellwood 2005; Capriles 2017; Childe 1952; Ingold 1980; Zeder and Hesse 2000).

Nomads, pastoralists, and Tibetan farmers

Located in the center of the Asian continent, Tibet is surrounded by mountains that often peak at 8000 m asl. In the south, the Great Himalayan barrier separates Tibet from Nepal and the Indian subcontinent; in the east lies the Karakorum; and to the northwest, the Kuen-Lun, a real barrier between the deserts of Central Asia. The southern part of the area, the Changtang region, is a largely desert expanse of mountain ranges and valleys with innumerable salt lakes, inhabited by wild yaks and large blue sheep (Figure 4.1a).

Further north are steppes occupied by nomadic pastoralists raising herds of yaks, sheep, and goats. It is only along the Tsangpo Valley – the Tibetan name of the Brahmaputra – and the Tsangpo River tributaries that the



The caravan barter system between the highlands of Tibet and the Nepalese low lands in Kali Gandaki river

Figure 4.1 (a) Map of Nepal; (b) the barter system in Nepal

Tibetan population is concentrated (Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1990; Jest 1974:136; Kling 1990; Miller 1997, 2008, 2014 [1987]).

Tibetans are divided into three well-defined groups: Drogpas, nomads of the steppes, descendants of K'iang tribes, yak and sheep breeders; Sonampa, farmers of the valleys; and Samadrog, both farmers and pastoralists.

The Drogpas

“The Drogpas occupy the Changtang plateau at an altitude of 4,000 m asl. Living in tents, their movements are part of an annual sequence of journeys according to an annual nomadic cycle that takes into account the nature of the pasture” (Jest 1974:136). Their journey first includes a winter stay in the valleys that offers shelter for the livestock; in the spring, they move in search of better pastures, and to collect salt from the Changtang salt lakes. The salt is harvested in the form of large blocks that they break with yak horns (Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1990:117–122; Sae-Hyung 2007). The salt is then transported by caravans of yaks or goats to five areas in the southern regions of the Himalayas (Figure 4.1a): (1) Humla, (2) Dolpo and Tarap, (3) Mustang, (4) Khumbu, and (5) Bhutan on the east of Nepal (off-map), where it is exchanged for grain and other essential commodities (Fisher 1986; Fürer-Haimendorf 1975; Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1990; Grenard 1904:9, 55, 68, 71; Jest 1974, 1986; Sarkar and Indrajit 2006).

The Sonampa and Somadrog

The Sonampa live in the valleys up to 4000 m asl. Thanks to irrigation, they are able to grow barley, wheat, and peas; livestock breeding plays only a secondary role and animals remain close to the villages. The Sonampa are farmers, and shepherds of yaks and sheep, as are the Somadrog. A true symbiosis unites the two groups in their complementary way of life: salt farmers and barley producers, farmers, and caravan keepers.

Inside Tibetan space, indeed, operates a real economic circuit based on trade and benefits. They are excellent examples of this age-old barter system and the strategies implemented to overcome climate and environmental problems, which are part of a much larger whole.

(Jest 1974:136)

The annexation of Tibet by China in 1950 brought a sudden, though temporary, stop to this barter system, and in recent years the construction of a major road network in Tibet and Nepal has facilitated the introduction of Indian iodized salt into the traditional market (Valli and Summers 1993, 1994).

Dolpo and Tarap, from high valleys to the southern border of Tibet

Located in northwestern Nepal, the Dolpo region includes a group of four valleys, including the Tarap, which extend at an average altitude of 3800 m asl. By its position behind the high Himalayan range and the Dhaulagiri, which rises to more than 8167 m asl, Dolpo is only accessible by steep paths

and passes more than 5000 m asl high, especially to the north, toward Tibet, while in the south, snowy slopes seven months of the year often prohibit access. In the nineteenth century, this area belonged to the principality of Jumla to the east, and the kingdom of Lo to the west (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975; Jest 1974:139, 1986; Kitamura 2011; Valli and Summers 1986, 1993, 1994). The population, of Tibetan Buddhist culture, has its own language and is divided between farmers and herders. The former use irrigation techniques to mainly grow barley, and the latter raise yaks and other Tibetan cattle, sheep, goats, and horses used as saddle animals or for transactions.

The yak lives at high altitude, serves as a plowing and transport animal, carries loads of 60 to 80 kg, and gives a little milk and meat. Its hair is used to make cloth, and its excrement, which is very dry, constitutes the only fuel available.

(Jest 1986:46)

Tibetan sheep are valued for their milk and their wool production, which is very similar to pashmina, and transportability (one animal weighs 12 kg). Barley is the basis of food. Roasted and then reduced to flour (*tsampa*), it is eaten and kneaded with tea or meat broth; butter, yak meat, or smoked mutton complete this very poor diet. Sowing is done in April to May, and harvests in September, at the same time as pastoral activities, when yaks are driven in October to pastures at altitudes between 4200 and 5000 m asl and left in the custody of women and children who live in tents. Before China annexed Tibet, herds were entrusted to Drogpas who wintered in Tibet in the Tsangpo Valley (Goldstein and Beall 1990; Jest 1986).

In these arid regions, which are hardly affected by monsoons, barley production only feeds the community for seven months, but survival is assured by means of a complex interregional exchange mechanism (Jest 1974:141; Valli and Summers 1986, 1993, 1994).

From mid-July to mid-September, the inhabitants, especially men, leave the Dolpo with their caravans of yaks loaded with barley, reaching Tibet by various centuries-old roads. There, they barter for salt and other pastoral products with their Tibetan partners. In the 1980s, a measure of barley (seven liters) was exchanged for two of salt. The shepherds also received various other goods from China and Tibet: sodium carbonate used for the preparation of tea, bowls, sugar, various utensils, livestock products – wool, hair, yak butter, and dry cheese, and live animals – sheep, goats, and male breeding yaks, the latter of which are used for caravans.

For the last decade, Chinese authorities have allowed the salt trade, but depending on the political situation with Nepal, this trade could be interrupted without warning, as has happened several times in the last few years. Negotiations take place in a large seasonal market in Kyato Chongra, a day's walk north of the Nepalese border, where shepherds are allowed to stay for only three days (Figure 4.1a). The official exchange rate is 17 to 21 measures

of salt against 10 of grain. The Drotpa also bring tea bricks, formerly transported from Sichuan and Yunnan, and traded for Tibetan horses (Forbes and Henley 2011; Fuquan 2004; Jenkins and Yamashita 2010; Wikiwand), borax, porcelain cups that they bartered for corn, potatoes, buckwheat, turnips, and some foreign items from Kathmandu (Kitamura 2011; Valli and Summers 1993, 1994), plus *yartsa gunbu* (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), a caterpillar fungus, particularly popular as a traditional remedy in Chinese markets (Sae-Hyug 2007; Sung et al. 2007). This product is so rare that in 2017, 10 caterpillars could be exchanged for one yak or even more. It is now the fortune of some Tibetans, and in Lhasa, many specialty stores sell this product for several thousand dollars according to their qualities.

A second exchange occurs after the Dolpo return when they barter two measures of salt against three to four measures of grain. But these exchange values depend on the type of grain (barley, wheat, potatoes, buckwheat, corn, or rice) that was brought back from the valleys during a previous trip.

The third exchange takes place in the autumn in the lower and more fertile valleys of Jumla and Botechaur in southwest Nepal (Figure 4.1a) at 1000 m asl, occupied by Hindu populations linked to India. Here, two measures of salt are exchanged for seven measures of grains (barley, corn, rice, wheat, millet, eleusine [finger millet]), as well as for wood, honey, animal skins, and products from India (tobacco, bamboo, cotton, dried fish, aluminum pans, etc.). This system allows the inhabitants of Dolpo to obtain varied food products and live all year round on the arid lands (Jest 1974, 1986:140). During recent decades, the caravan man stays the winter months in the warm regions and does not return to Dolpo until spring.

But these exchanges are not limited to the Tibetan high plateau and Dolpo; they are part of a complex system. Routed in higher Nepalese valleys by yak caravans or deeper into the lower lands of the country (Valli and Summers 1986, 1993, 1994), salt is used locally for meal preparation and, more importantly, in animal feed. In some cases, it even becomes medicine for humans as well as livestock. “The successive bartering is part of a very precise calendar which is a function of the climatic conditions and takes traditional routes with perfectly regulated stages, often using intermediaries known to all” (Jest 1986:49). Thus, in this hot and humid region, salt is often transported by caravans of goats, adapted to the climate (Sae-Hyung 2007; Valli and Summers 1986, 1993). And although no data are available, it is estimated that nearly 1500 yaks and thousands of sheep are involved in these exchanges each year.

Caravans of Mustang and Kali Gandaki valley

In northwestern Nepal, the ancient kingdom of Mustang or Kingdom of Lo is the starting point of an important commercial artery dating back to the time of the Silk Roads (Kitamura 2011; Peissel 1965, 1970; Ramble 1996). Like the road linking Kathmandu to Lhasa (Figure 4.1a), this route

made it possible to travel from India to Tibet (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975). At an average altitude of 2500 m asl, this axis, located at the foot of the Annapurna Massif (8091 m), connects Tibet to the middle and lower valleys of Pokhara, as well as to the Hindu sanctuary of Muktinath, crossing longitudinally the Great Himalayan range along the Kali Gandaki River, and extends south to the Terai Plain and the Ganges basin. Until a few years ago, throughout the year, there were countless caravans of yaks, goats, and mules, but also porters carrying all the essential products to the populations established along its route (Figure 4.1b). Today, we find only caravans of mules, which are gradually being replaced by jeeps, buses, and trucks (Clark et al. 2003; Kitamura 2011).

The region is inhabited by two major cultural groups. In the north are the Buddhist Bothia, of Tibetan origin. Like their neighbors in Dolpo, their livelihood is based on agriculture, sheep, and yak farming. To the south, the Taksatsae region is populated by Buddhist or Hindu Takali whose market center is the village of Tukuiche. More farmers than breeders, they grow barley and potatoes on the uplands and rice in the lower regions. They are also the main grain purveyors for people living in neighboring regions, but they do not have salt.

As Fürer-Haimendorf (1975:Chapter 6) indicates, for centuries, Tukuiche, by its privileged position midway between the high Tibetan valleys in a climatically protected region, has been the traditional meeting place for Tibetan or Nepali merchants and the central point of trade for salt and grain. Its name, *Tuk*: grain, and *che*: flat, is derived from it; it was the privileged place where barley was threshed. In 1862, an order of the Nepalese prime minister, Jung-Bahadur Rana, of the Rana Dynasty (1846–1879) instituted a control of the salt trade, forcing all merchants to pay a tribute on each load carried by the animals. Customs posts were established in Tukuiche and Dana, a village further south. Supervision was entrusted to Takali of noble families, making a fortune for some of them, and the wealth of Tukuiche. From that time, the age-old organization of trade between the north and the south began to change. The inhabitants of L^o Mantang, the capital of Mustang and the neighboring valleys of Dolpo and Tarap, had the right to fetch salt from Tibet, exchanging it with the Droghpa, but they could not then trade it beyond Tukuiche. Salt, obtained in Tibet during the dry season, was then transported by caravans of goats or yaks to the border areas or Tukuiche where it was stored in the collector's shop until the end of the monsoon in September–October (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975). The monsoon over, mule caravans and porters brought commodities from the valleys of Pokhara to Tukuiche. Caravans would therefore meet there, making Tukuiche a key trading center. This monopoly lasted until 1928 when the interregional salt and grain trade was released again.

After China's annexation of Tibet, the salt trade fell sharply due to border closures. The value of the little salt that passed reached very high levels, ranging from a volume of salt or *pathi* (seven liters) for six to eight volumes

of grain. Little by little, the situation stabilized, until the Indian salt, iodized and cheaper because it was transported by trucks, entered the valleys. The construction of roads from Kathmandu toward Pokhara in the central valley of Nepal, or through the Terai on the border with India, enabled an influx of Indian salt toward populations traditionally consuming Tibetan salt. In just a few years, Indian salt conquered the middle valleys, reaching the Tukuche region, then the Jomoson area, located upstream. But in spite of this competition, Tibetan salt continues to be valued and is often more appreciated than the Indian salt because of its whiteness and purity and its particular taste, and because it is believed to give the “life force” to the breeding animals and to the men and women who consume it.

However, the construction in recent years of an asphalt road to the Mustang, the sanctuary of Muktinath, and beyond, to China, now threatens this old mode of life inherited from nomadic pastoralists.

Goat caravans: An example of nomadic secular traditions

Goat caravans are a common sight in the high regions of Nepal. Unlike yak caravans, which have been amply documented in print (Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1990; Valli and Summers 1986, 1993, 1994) and by films (Koch 2002; Kerckhoff 2009; Sae-Hyung 2007; Valli 2000), information on goat caravans is limited to a few referenced articles (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975; Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1990; Grenard 1904:55; Lecoq 1986; Valli and Summers 1986).

Like other caravans around the world, for example, in Africa (Ritter 1981), Asia (Michaud and Michaud 1977), or the Andes (Flores Ochoa et al. 1995; Lecoq 1987, 2019, among others), and as I recently illustrated (Lecoq and Fidel 2019), a typical caravan is organized around four stages: preparation, travel, exchange, and return.

Preparation

Two weeks may be required to prepare a caravan for a trip to the valleys, which takes a fortnight. Salt carried from Tibet by yaks is re-packaged from large woolen bags weighing 50 to 60 kg to small bags (*lukal*) weighing 10 to 12 kg for transport by goats. The shepherds retain some of the salt in large wooden chests for their own use.

Equipment and supplies for the caravan include bags to store food and bring grain back from the valley; rope for loading animals; blankets for the nights; and pans, cans, and various utensils for cooking. A caravan man's clothing may include a pair of heavy trousers, boots of felt or leather, a woolen chausable, and a long coat (*chompa*) that overlaps in the front in the Chinese style and falls to the knees. Pockets serve to keep provisions for the road: a *tsampa* bag, a little dried cheese, a wooden bowl, a rosary, and a few pieces of leather to repair their boots. Men also carry a long dagger

and a small wooden case containing large sewing needles to repair or close the bags, black glasses to protect their eyes from the sun and dust, a sling to guide the animals by throwing a stone at those who are moving away from the path, and a reliquary around the neck, containing a representation of a Buddhist protective deity.

A few days before departure, rituals and offerings are carried out by a monk to ensure a smooth trip. There are often sacred drawings (*mandalas*) drawn on the floor of the temple of the village, and fumigations of juniper, offered to the protective tutelary deities or guardians of the Buddhist faith. On the day before or the day of departure, the shepherds also offer another fumigation of juniper to the Buddhist divinities and tutelary spirits and deposit a stone engraved with sacred formulas “*hom mani padme hum*” on the *chörten* (a shrine, a saint’s tomb, or a monument to the Buddha) or the prayer wall (*mani*), placed at the entrance to the village. A little butter can also be placed on the animals’ heads in order to purify the premises and ensure that nothing unpleasant happens during the trip.

Once preparations are complete, loading can begin. This laborious operation takes between 40 to 60 minutes for a troop of 50 goats. First, the man places on the ground, in the yard of their houses or an improvised pen, a double rope (*chutang*), stretched at both ends by two wooden stakes stuck in the ground with a big rock. Then, one of the assistants herds the animals into the enclosure and attaches them, one by one by the neck, to this rope with a small tie, as he does every day to milk his goats: 15 to 20 goats are thus attached next to each other. Each load is put directly on the back of the animal and fixed under the chest by four small ties to the ends of the bags. To capture the animals’ attention and calm them, it is not uncommon for men to sing or whistle a repetitive and melodious air. Finally, on the day of departure, women, friends, and relatives of the men of the caravan accompany them to the limits of their village to wish them a good trip. The caravan can then move.

Travel journey

On the way, one or two “leader goats”, easily recognizable by their ear ornaments, lead the caravan and are followed by all the other animals, who advance slowly in a confused scrum while grazing the grass encountered on the way. The shepherds accompany them while quietly spinning their wool, playing the lute, or listening to the radio. They are often the members of the same family, father and son as an assistant, with one or two dogs.

A typical caravan has 60 to 70 animals, but some caravans can accommodate 150 to 160 goats belonging to different owners, traveling together for convenience and safety (Valli and Summers 1993, 1994). These caravans involve goats belonging to two species: from the highlands: “*chang-lu*” goats with long wool, which tolerates frost, but less heat; and in the lowlands, “*rong lu*”, goats with short wool, very well adapted to a humid,

hot climate. Each animal carries loads ranging from 10 to 12 kg, divided into two equal packs. In order not to exhaust the youngest animals, and to accustom them to the difficulties of the journey, they are only loaded for two to four days.

The caravan usually follows ancient caravan trails difficult to identify from the available testimonials. It successively follows the beds of partially dried streams, mule tracks, or crossroads, all sparsely marked. It is not uncommon for a caravan to stretch for hundreds of meters, and great confusion reigns when two troops cross each other in the narrow and dangerous passages, sometimes overlooking deep ravines of the Kali Gandaki River.

Each day consists of an average of six to eight hours of walking, virtually uninterrupted, but relatively slowly. The day starts shortly before dawn, between 5 am and 6 am, and ends around noon to 1 pm. The distance traveled in a day does not exceed 6 to 8 km. The shepherds go from village to village at the goats' pace.

Bivouacs are located in open terrain a little away from the track, often on the hillside in rockshelters or natural caves, or in inhabited areas or safe enclosures, loaned or rented by local partners. In the valleys, shepherds camp in harvested fields in exchange for a little salt or wool.

Once arrived, men unload the animals and quickly lay the packs of salt on the ground in a confused scrum. To save time, the herders sometimes leave their goats loaded, day and night, for the duration of the trip, as do the Tibetan Drogpa, back from the big salt lakes of Chantang (Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1990). One of the men drives the animals to graze and gets dry wood for the fire and water to prepare tea and the evening dinner. Those who stay at the camp pick up and stack the bags of salt into a wind-screen, together with the ropes and the rest of the equipment. At nightfall, between 7 pm and 8 pm, they gather near the hearth to share the perennial *tsampa* with buttered tea, which is very invigorating after a long day of walking, and a broth enriched with a bit of smoked meat while commenting on the problems they faced during the day. They also offer some food to the protective deities, and in some cases, may also foreshadow the future by throwing a pinch of salt into the hearth. A dry and crackling salt in contact with the fire is the sign of a good trip. A wet salt, on the contrary, can be a harbinger of rain and bad weather. The men will spend the night under the stars at the foot of the bags, wrapped in blankets, a bag, or a folded chasuble as a pillow.

The barter transactions

After a march of three weeks to a month, the shepherds finally reach the place where grain and salt are exchanged: the high and medium valleys south of Jomoson, the Tuckche or Marpha regions in central Nepal, or the warmer southern Pokhara valleys on the edge of rice paddies (Figure 4.1). Once there, the men usually get in touch with former barter partners, who

are considered “ceremonial friends”. They often belong to other ethnic groups or other religions, usually Hindu. Men simply continue the contacts that their fathers or ancestors once made. They are offered by their hosts a safe place to spend the night, a pen to leave their animals, and to find gifts of food: a bowl of rice or corn, potatoes, fruit, honey, cigarettes. These presents are an expression of the gratitude shown by the hosts to the shepherds for the efforts they made during their trip. In exchange, the shepherds offer their “ceremonial” friends a few prized gifts from the Tibetan highlands: wool, cheese, butter (*erka*), fresh cheese (*ghu*), or dried cheese (*churpe*). They then decide, by mutual agreement, the values of barter and its terms. It remains roughly fixed from one year to the next, as it is not linked to market prices. Meanwhile, the goats graze nearby, guarded by one of the team members (Sae-Hyung 2007; Valli and Summers 1993).

At the agreed time and place, Tibetan salt and pastoral products – wool, meat, some medicinal plants – are exchanged for barley and various other products: millet, wheat, rice, garments, cotton, kerosene, batteries, and other manufactured products from Kathmandu or nearby India. The quantities of salt and grain are measured by volume, using a seven-liter copper container, the *pathi*. Wool and butter are weighed, but no figures are available on the total sum of transactions. Bartering continues for two days or more according to the salt needs of the villagers. Once the exchanges are completed in a village, the caravan continues on to lower regions where the barter values are often more advantageous, until the salt is exhausted (Kerckhoff 2009; Valli and Summers 1993, 1994).

Return trip from bartering places

The trip home is as laborious as the way out. The return of the caravan men to their village in Dolpo or Mustang is celebrated with a big party; the women who remained behind rush to meet the men with a bowl of tea or beer (*chang*) and an “auspicious” container filled with “holy” water (*chuphi*). The deities who facilitated exchanges and protected the men from bad spirits are not forgotten. Members of the family accompany the men to the community *chörten* that dominates or overlooks the village and place there a stone or yak horn engraved with prayers, or flags of victory, and burn juniper or sacrificial butter cakes (*tormas*) as an offering. They also throw in the air small papers printed with Buddhist prayers and the representation of a sacred horse, for the attention of the deities, shouting in Tibetan: “*Tsi Tsi, Tso tso*”, which can be translated as follows: “The gods are victorious”. And they add: “let us hope that the prayer of the ‘Horses of the wind’, which is there printed, will be dispersed in the universe, in the four corners of the world, so the gods will be rewarded until next year”. The party will continue for several days. Thanks to the salt of Tibet, a symbol of vital force, the Drogpa of Mustang and Dolpo have acquired the barley of the valleys, essential to their subsistence.

Between nomadic life and tourism: Enhancement of ancient barter routes

As in other parts of the world, caravans of the Himalayas embody an expression of ancestral knowledge that is inherited through seasonal transhumance of a nomadic way of life that today is endangered. For the shepherds, the caravan is first and foremost the most expedient means to obtain the foodstuffs that are essential to their livelihood, through overcoming the difficulties of the climate and the environment. As I have demonstrated elsewhere for the Andean context of pastoralism, which exhibits astonishing similarities with the Himalayas (Lecoq 1987, 2019; Lecoq and Fidel 2019; Orlove 1985), participating in a caravan allows each member of the team to strengthen not only family and community bonds but also those that he and his ancestors slowly fostered with barter partners from other regions and other religions. In the world of the Himalayas, which is deeply rooted in Buddhist or Hindu religions, following a caravan is often perceived by shepherds as a complex journey of initiation. Thus, each trip is marked by a series of ceremonial actions: fumigation of fragrant plants at the departure and return of the caravan, the deposit of offerings and “flags of victory” on the prayer wall and prayer mills along the routes and the mounds of stones marking the passes, food offerings during the trip, and so on. All these ritual actions are intended to solicit the benevolence of the protecting deities while keeping the demons away.

In a larger context, according to Ingold (2000) and Anschuetz et al. (2001), roads are also considered to be concrete expressions of the process of construction, appropriation, and production of the space of persons or social groups, organized in the form of networks. In Nepal, in addition to the steep paths, often composed of hundreds of steps, there are also rivers, lookouts, and bridges to cross watercourses, as well as rockshelters and paddocks, sometimes used by shepherds to spend the night. As in the Andes (Berenguer 2004; Lecoq 2019; Nielsen 1997–1998, 2013, 2016; Núñez and Nielsen 2011), the objects associated with the daily life of the caravan (ropes, hitch hooks, woolen bags, bells, and other utensils specific to the shepherds) are difficult to find because they are often buried in the ground as the result of the unceasing passage of people and animals.

The archaeological evidence shows many ruins along the roads. Some, such as piles of stones at the top of passes, prayer walls, *chörtens*, monasteries, and shrines (Muktinath) have a distinctly ritual connotation. Other kinds of evidence, such as fortresses (*tzong*) built near Jarkot in the Mustang area, and the caves decorated with Buddhist frescoes of northern Mustang, or troglodyte houses (Finkel 2012), attest to the ancient and turbulent history of this whole region.

Unlike the Andes or other parts of the world, these remains have been little studied. However, in the last few years, they have been listed and restored as part of a vast program of development of ancient silk roads,

aimed in particular at connecting the major axes of pilgrimage between Tibet and India, such as the region of Jumla at Mount Kailash, northwestern Nepal (Figure 4.1a), and Mustang at Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha (UNESCO 2016; Williams 2014). The regions of Dolpo and Mustang, long closed to foreigners, are now accessible to a limited number of tourists for a high tax. The implications for the development of tourism are a key factor in the survival of the local population (Kitamura 2011).

Faced with a decompartmentalization of space and facilitated by the construction of new roads and small regional airports (Jomoson; Dolpa-Juphal, Jumla; Figure 4.1a), there is every reason to believe that the young inhabitants of Dolpo and Mustang will gradually turn away from the old practices of nomadism that are still well anchored in the regional way of life. And for some time now, the sale of caterpillar fungus has been paying more than grain barter.

In Tibet, the number of Drogpa leading a traditional nomadic life continues to decline, while the Chinese central government promotes, sometimes forcibly, settlement in new villages, claiming that it will promote industrialization and economic development (Tibet-info.net. 2011).

Today, more families now have a permanent winter camp, and pastureland is scarce. In the long term, the relationship between nomadic pastoralists and nature will tend to disrupt the environmental ecosystem in Tibet (Human Rights Watch 2007). The interest aroused by the Drogpa among hordes of Chinese tourists crisscrossing the country on organized trips from Beijing in search of exoticism is also worrying because the nomadic life appears from then on like a relic of the past (Migration Policy Institute 2008).

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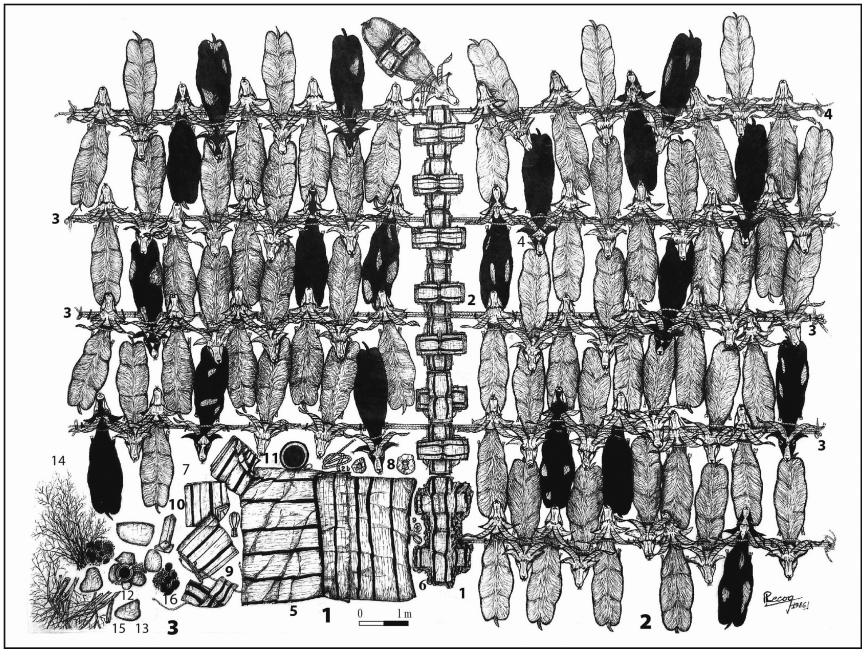
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0.0 Frontpiece, Lecoq, 1. Camp section: (1) Bags filled with salt or (2) grain piled together to form a windscreen. (3) ropes to tie the animals (4) small ropes to maintain the goats. (5) layer of shepherds with a (6) pillow made of ropes or folded clothes, and blanket; (7) personal affairs of the shepherd with flute and objects of worship; (8) bags for *tsampa*, (9) provisions, (10) potato or rice, (11) *Pathi*: copper container of 7 liters used to measure salt or grain.

2. *Goats section:* Goats tied in groups for morning milking

3. *Fireplace section:* (12) Fireplace with an aluminum pan with buttered and salted tea for the meal or breakfast and (13) stones to sit down; (14) Small pieces of wood, (15) beech, and (16) yak dung to light and maintain fire.