

ity? Might the social stigma¹⁵ attached to this profession dissipate? These are some of the questions that I will try to deal with in my doctoral dissertation.

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¹⁵ It is the general belief that mediums tend to come from the lower stratum of society. They are mostly people with small land holdings.

OB VIRULENTAS NONNULARUM HERBARUM EXHALATIONES

GEORGE VAN DRIEM

A Bhutanese oral tradition enables the identification of two alpine species of rhododendron as the plants whose noxious effects are first mentioned in a seventeenth-century Western source. The pollen and aromatic particles which the flowers exude in summertime can cause respiratory difficulties at the high altitudes at which they grow.

In June 1661 two Jesuits, an Austrian named Johann Grueber and a Walloon named Albert d'Orville, left from Peking to travel to India. The two men traversed China, Tibet and Nepal and arrived in India in 1662. That year d'Orville died at Agra, but his friend Grueber lived to return to Europe. These two Jesuits were the first Westerners to mention Nepāl or the Kathmandu Valley, the name of which they recorded as 'Necbal'. They were also the first Westerners to specifically record a number of Nepalese toponyms. The places which they mentioned were 'Cadmendu', i.e. काठमाण्डू Kāthmāṇḍū, 'Baddan', i.e. पाटन Pāṭan, 'Hedonda', i.e. हेटौंडा Hetāũḍā, 'Maranga', i.e. मोरङ Morāṅ, 'Cuthi', i.e. कुटी Kuṭī or གཉལ་ལམ་རྫོང་ 'Nyalam Dzong¹ (located just north of the present-day Tibetan-Nepali entrepôt at खासा Khāsā), and 'Nesti', i.e. लिस्टी भन्सार Listī Bhansār (near तातोपानी Tātopāni just south of the Tibetan-Nepalese frontier town of कोदारी Kodārī).

Grueber and d'Orville were also the first Westerners to identify that Mt. Everest, which they referred to by its local Tibetan name of ལང་གུར་ 'Langgur 'Tent of Taurus', was the 'mons omnium altissimus',

¹ Tibetan and Dzongkha forms are rendered in the phonological transcription Roman Dzongkha, which reflects actual Western Bhutanese pronunciation. Dzongkha phonology and Roman Dzongkha are explained in the Dzongkha grammar (van Driem and Karma Tshering 1998).

i.e. the highest mountain of all. They learnt this fact from the local Tibetans, amongst whom it was already received knowledge.² The height of Mt. Everest, known today to be 8848 metres, was only first measured in 1852 by Rādhānāth Sikdhar and Michael Hennessy of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, who dutifully named the peak after their former boss.

Like many Jesuits of the day, Grueber and d'Orville sent their reports about Asia back to Rome to the prominent scholar Athanasius Kircher at the Vatican. In his letter to Kircher of May 10th, 1664, Grueber provided an account of his travels with his confrère d'Orville. Kircher studied and compared such travel journals and consequently became one of the best informed authorities on Asia in the West. Kircher's grand collation appeared in 1667 under the title *China Illustrata*, a hefty work beautifully produced in Amsterdam, then a fine centre of the publishing art. The full title of the work was *China Monumentis, qua Sacris quā Profanis, nec non variis Naturæ & Artis Spectaculis, Aliarumque Rerum Memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata, auspiciis Leopoldi Primi*, although the work remains better known by the shorter title which appears on the frontispiece.

Kircher was so admired for his learning that the famous Dutch playwright Joost van den Vondel, who had by then converted from the anti-Calvinist *Remonstrant* denomination to Roman Catholicism, called Kircher 'een tolck, een glans van zestien tongen, door alle dampen heen gedrongen', i.e. an interpreter, a luminosity of sixteen tongues, piercing through all enshrouding mists (1652, II. Tegenzang, r. 2-3). Kircher was not the only Western scholar with considerable knowledge about the Orient. His *China Illustrata* appeared two years after the widely acclaimed *Beschryving van 't Gesandtschap der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aen den grooten Tartarischen Cham, nu Keyser van China* by Johan Nieuwhof in 1675. Moreover, his grand collation also contained a number of wilful interpretations of facts related in reports submitted by the corresponding Jesuits in the East.

² The story about the often incorrectly reproduced indigenous Tibetan name for Mt. Everest has been told elsewhere (van Driem 2001: 749-752, 756).

After the publication of *China Illustrata*, Grueber in his correspondence with Kircher insisted on emendations that should be included in later editions.³ All of Kircher's data on Nepal are evidently drawn from Grueber's 1664 letter. The relevant passage in Kircher reads as follows:

E Lassa sive Barantola sub 29. grad. 6. min. elevat. Poli constituta, usque ad radicem montis Langur quadriduo venerunt; Est autem Langur mons omnium altissimus, itā ut in summitate ejus viatores vix respirare ob aëris subtilitatem queant; neque is ob virulentas nonnullarum herbarum exhalationes æstivo tempore, sine manifesto vitæ periculo transiri possit. (1667: 65)

Kircher carefully traced the route of the journey undertaken by Grueber and d'Orville on a fold-out map between pages 46 and 47 of the original Amsterdam edition, including their crossing of the Everest massif.

A notable feature of the passage quoted above is that Grueber and d'Orville mention that the malaise experienced at the high altitudes around Everest was caused not only 'ob aëris subtilitatem', i.e. by the thinness of the air, but also 'ob virulentas nonnullarum herbarum exhalationes', i.e. by the noxious exhalations of certain local plants. Sadly, today much of Nepal has been deforested. With this extensive habitat destruction both local lore of medicinal plants and a large body of related knowledge have been lost forever. I have observed this phenomenon in progress in many language communities in ecologically degraded portions of the Himalayas afflicted by over-population and the over-exploitation of resources. Yet the herbs mentioned by the two Jesuits can still be identified on the basis of living Bhutanese herbal lore and oral tradition. The effects of the herbs mentioned by the Jesuits are therefore not just some poorly understood or misinterpreted version of a local folk belief.

Altitude sickness is known in Dzongkha as ལྷ་སྤྱོད་ *lad'u* 'the dolour of the mountain passes'. The word ལྷ་སྤྱོད་ *d'u* by itself signifies both

³ The correspondence between Grueber and Kircher was studied by Cornelius Wessels (1924).

'poison' and 'malaria', although in the sense of malaria the term has an antique flavour, and the word has usually been replaced by ཚདལ་ *tshép* in modern usage. Etymologically, Dzongkha དྲུག་ *d'u* reflects a root of good Tibeto-Burman lineage signifying 'pain' or 'doulour', but also widely reflected in the meaning 'poison'. In contrast with other terms denoting illnesses, the Dzongkha term ལ་དྲུག་ *lad'u* collocates not with the verb ན་ནི་ *nani* 'hurt, ache',⁴ but with the verb རེད་ནི་ *shêni* 'to catch', e.g. ལ་དྲུག་རེད་བཞི་ *lad'u shêwi* '[you] will get altitude sickness', or, more literally 'the doulour of the mountain passes will catch [you]'.

In the lore of alpine nomads such as the yakherders of Laya, altitude sickness is caused not only 'ob aëris subtilitatem', by the thinness of the air, as Grueber and d'Orville reported in 1664, but also 'ob virulentas nonnularum herbarum exhalationes', i.e. by the noxious exhalations of certain local plants. In fact, the compromised respiratory fitness caused by the inhalation of the airborne aromatic particles released by these plants is most probably something altogether different from altitude sickness. None the less, the resultant respiratory condition is likewise qualified in Dzongkha as ལ་དྲུག་ *lad'u* 'altitude sickness'.

The herbs in question are the fragrant flowering plants known in Dzongkha as བ་ལུ་ *b'alu*, i.e. *Rhododendron anthopogon*, and ལུ་ལུ་ *sulu*, i.e. *Rhododendron setosum*. These two plants are compact dwarf rhododendrons which very frequently grow together in associated bunches. Consequently they are often referred to collectively as བ་ལུ་ལུ་ *b'alu-sulu*. The leaves of both aromatic dwarf shrubs are collected and sold for the fine incense which they produce. Both *b'alu* and *sulu* are available every weekend at the Thimphu market, and their aromatic properties are common knowledge to the Bhutanese. Neither rhododendron species is exclusively endemic to Bhutan, however. Both *b'alu* and *sulu* occur throughout undisturbed portions of the Himalayan range between altitudes of 3600 to 4800 metres,

⁴ The verb ན་ནི་ *nani* 'hurt, ache' has the stems <na ~ nâ>, whereby the alternating vocalism is not reflected in traditional orthography. Morphophonological patterns affecting vocalism are a feature of many Dzongkha verbs, invariably disguised by the native orthography.

and *sulu* may occur at altitudes as low as 2700 metres. In her lovely book on the wild rhododendrons of Bhutan, Pradhan duly notes that the leaves of *Rhododendron setosum* 'yield aromatic oil used in perfumery and cosmetics' (1999: 43).

Knowledge of the noxious effects of the plants in their wild state is less widespread, however. Yet these effects are well-known to alpine peoples such as the yakherders of Laya. Respiratory difficulties can be seen in some individuals who inhale the pollen and aromatic airborne particles released by the plant in the summertime, or as Grueber reported 'æstivo tempore'. In fact, བ་ལུ་ *b'alu* flowers from April through July, and ལུ་ལུ་ *sulu* flowers from June through August. The effects are obviously aggravated in sensitive individuals when, lured by the lovely fragrance of these plants, unsuspecting admirers attempt to inhale whole nosefuls at close range.

According to local lore, if a mischievous person were to hold his breath and lash out with his walking stick at the *b'alu-sulu* growing alongside the trail, outsiders following him would end up inhaling the pleasantly aromatic but 'virulent exhalations'. The perpetrator could use this trick to his advantage on unwary outsiders. In fact, knowledgeable Bhutanese trekking guides are quick to warn outsiders of the adverse effects of inhaling the airborne particles released by *b'alu-sulu* on the trail. For people not accustomed to the elevation, the scent seems to trigger or aggravate respiratory difficulties associated with high altitudes.⁵

⁵ Charles Edward Albert Ramble at Oxford reports that this article reminded him of the bad reputation in Mustang of low, white-flowering *Stellera spp.* related to Daphne and likewise used to make Himalayan paper: 'Two names for it in different parts of Mustang are *gumburajagpa* and *sibri mentog*. The etymology of the first I don't know, except that *ajagpa* means 'bad'. *Gumbu* by itself means spilt grain that is gleaned, but I don't know if that's what its derivation is in the present case. *Mentog* of course you know (*me-tog*), while *sibri* means 'body odour'. The plant doesn't smell too bad at all to me, but all the Mustangis I've met dislike it, less on the basis of the reputedly malodorous bouquet than the reputation the smell of the flowers has for causing headaches and nausea.' (letter of 9 July 2005)

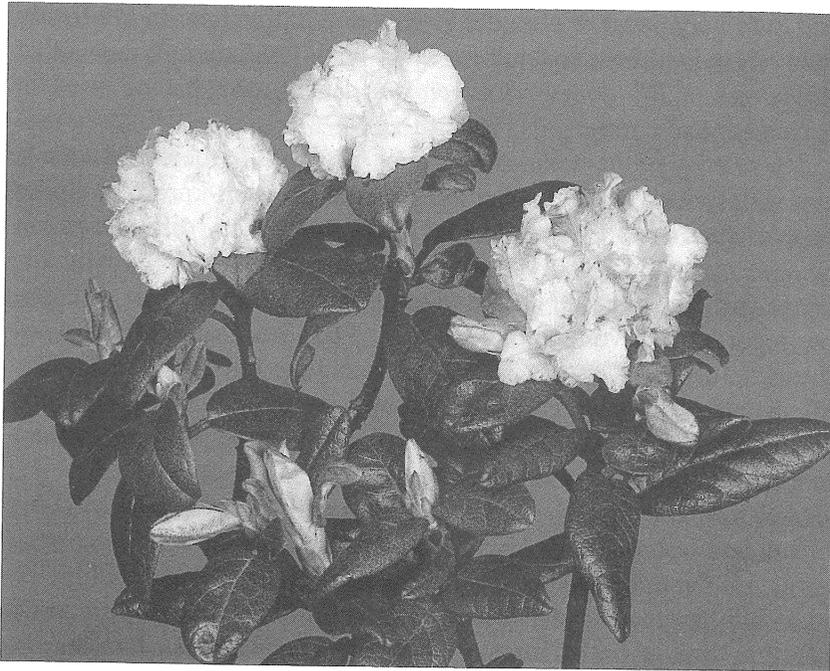


Plate 1: བ་ལུ་ *b'alu*, i.e. *Rhododendron anthopogon* (reproduced from Pradhan 1999: 50, with kind permission)



Plate 2: སུལ་ *sulu*, *Rhodendron setosum* (reproduced from Pradhan 1999: 42, with kind permission)

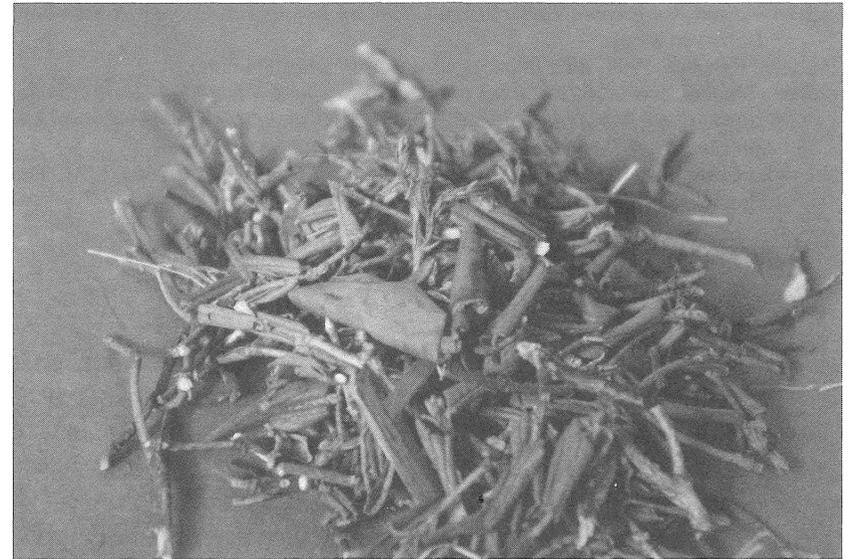


Plate 3: བ་ལུ་སུལ་ *b'alu-sulu* dried for use as incense, mixed with ལུགས་ *shup* 'juniper', *Juniperus recurva*, and spikenard, *Nardostachys jatamansi*, known in Dzongkha as བསང་རྩེ་ལྷོ་མཚུགས་ *sangdzä b'jilijum* 'cat's tail incense' or alternatively as སྤང་སྤོ་ *pangpö*

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KAḤ THOG PA BSOD NAMS RGYAL MTSHAN (1466–1540) AND THE FOUNDATION OF O RGYAN RTSE MO IN SPA GRO

FRANZ-KARL EHRHARD

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the monastery of Kaḥ thog in eastern Tibet in the year 1159 marked an important step in the consolidation of the Rnying ma pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its founder, Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs (1122–1192), occupies a prominent place in the transmission known as the ‘Spoken Teachings’ (*bka’ ma*). This specific teaching tradition was further spread by a number of abbots, known collectively as the ‘Succession of Teachers [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]’ (*bla rabs bcu gsum*). According to one way of counting, the list begins with Spyang snga Bsod nams ’bum [pa] (b. 1222) and ends with Mkhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1395–1458); the two immediate successors of Kaḥ dam pa Bde gshegs, Gtsang ston Rdo rje rgyal mtshan (1126–1216) and Byams pa ’bum [pa] (1179–1252), are not included in this particular list of successive regents of the glorious Kaḥ thog monastery.¹

In the historiographical literature of the Rnying ma pa school, the period of the next series of abbots—called the ‘Succession of Attendants [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]’ (*drung rabs bcu gsum*)—is characterised by an increasing influence of the tradition of the ‘Treasure Teachings’ (*gter ma*), which led to a slight diminishing of the importance of the Spoken Teachings tradition. This event is linked to the journey of Drung Nam mkha’ seng ge, the first in this list of abbots, to the region of Lho brag, where he became the ‘master of the teachings’ (*chos bdag*) of the treasure-cycles of Rig ’dzin Ratna gling-

¹ See Bya bral Rin po che Sangs rgyas rdo rje (b. 1913), *Dpal rgyal rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa’i gdan rabs brgyud ’dzin dang bcas pa’i byung ba brjod pa rin po che’i phreng ba lta bu’i gnam*, n.p., n.d., fols. 31a/5–37a/4. The author states that this way of counting follows the *Mtshan bsdoms gsol ’debs* of the teachers of Kaḥ thog composed by Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880–1925), *Ibid.*: fol. 31b/1–2. The same authority is acknowledged by Mkhan chen ’Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (b.1929), *Gsang chen bstan pa’i chu ’go rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa’i lo rgyus mdor bsdus brjod pa ’chi med lha’i rnga sgra ngo mtshar rna ba’i dga’ ston*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1996, 54.3–5.