

Review Article

PEAKS AND VALLEYS IN HIMALAYAN STUDIES

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David M. Waterhouse (ed.), *The Origins of Himalayan Studies: Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820-1858*. Abingdon/N.Y. RoutledgeCurzon/Royal Asiatic Society Books, 2004, pp.xxiv + 280. ISBN 0-415-31215-9 (hbk).

Wendy Palace, *The British Empire and Tibet, 1900-1922*. Abingdon/N.Y. RoutledgeCurzon, 2005, pp. XII + 194. ISBN 0-415-34682-7 (hbk).

The collection, collation, and dissemination of information was a fundamental part of the workings of the British Empire in India. That information gathering project had its origins in the East India Company's quest for commercial intelligence, which of necessity was soon expanded to include the military and political spheres then integral to Indian trade and commerce. The Company's direct involvement in Indian government further stimulated the process, with national and internal boundary settlements, land revenue assessments, and military recruitment policies all contributing to the development of imperial archives of knowledge about India. Information gathering thus became a fundamental part of the duties of British imperial officers, particularly those of the Indian Civil Service (hereafter ICS) who effectively ruled districts within British India, and the Indian Foreign and Political Department officers ("the Politicals") who were stationed in the Indian "Princely States" and frontier states such as Sikkim, Tibet, Nepal, and Kashmir within, and adjacent to, the borders of British India. The Political Officers were primarily concerned about issues relevant to the security of India – the movement of foreign troops or the political leanings of a cross-border tribe – but officers also collected a vast amount of information about

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every aspect of indigenous life in the districts in which they were stationed. A considerable amount of that material was published in learned journals, memoirs and, most notably, in the imperial *Gazetteers*, which remain a fundamental source today.

While the collection of information about his district was part of the duty of an imperial officer, there were other forces encouraging that process. Local expertise enhanced an officer's career prospects; the officer who compiled a report about a district then became the Government's expert on that area, and his expertise was likely to be rewarded by promotion to senior rank in that locality. So too could hobbies of the type thought appropriate to an imperial officer – hunting and collecting specimens of local flora and fauna – enhance his social and professional status if his findings were published or his collections passed to museums and scientific bodies. There were financial rewards too; photographs, writings and material objects could all be sold to museums and private collectors. Even the imperial Government itself sponsored many publications about India and occasionally rewarded particularly spectacular feats of discovery or initiative, such as Major F. M. 'Eric' Bailey's exploration of the eastern extremities of the Brahmaputra in the early 20th century.

There was also a wider context favouring knowledge gathering in the remotest corners of the Empire. The 18th and 19th centuries were the "Golden Age" of European exploration, and officers such as Bailey could distinguish themselves as explorers within their imperial careers. This exploration can, of course, be easily linked to questions of power, and the imperial information gathering project is also a device through which scholars may examine the workings of power in the imperial system. Knowledge and perception, for example, could be transformed as control over information passed from the hands of "native" informants into the imperial archives of knowledge, where it could be reshaped for political purposes. That link is often more-or-less explicit, as in the late 1930s when the Reuters correspondent for Tibet was actually the imperial officer in charge of that frontier.

But however we may view the construction of an imperial archive of knowledge, scholars today are indebted to the work of those pioneers. The information they gathered, the scenes they recorded, and the material objects they collected form a major part of our archival sources on the former British imperial possessions. If those imperial pioneers are remembered today – outside of the districts where their legacy is often still visible – it is as a result of that aspect of their work.

The two studies under review here, *The Origins of Himalayan Studies*: and *The British Empire and Tibet, 1900-1922*, both reflect that imperial project and concern what were to the British the Himalayan frontier regions of Nepal and Tibet. As British power in India expanded in the late 18th

century, it began to be confronted by the very different environments and cultures of the mountainous lands to the north of the Gangetic plains. Efforts were made to map and build up knowledge on these lands and to communicate with their rulers – who proved to be none too keen on dealing with the foreign power. Tibet closed its borders to outsiders after 1792, and although a British representative was stationed in Kathmandu early in the 19th century, he was soon withdrawn when Anglo-Nepalese relations deteriorated. After the 1816 war, a Resident was again stationed in the Nepalese capital, but was not permitted to travel beyond the Kathmandu valley and was restricted in his contacts with Nepalese society.

B. H. Hodgson (1801-1894) was first posted to the Kathmandu Residency in 1820. After heading his class at Haileybury, the East India Company's training college, Hodgson travelled to India in 1818, and like a number of his successors in the Himalayas, was posted to the "hills" when his health proved too delicate for service on the Indian plains. Hodgson was thus posted to Kumaon (where he served under another great Himalayan pioneer, George Traill), before being appointed Assistant Resident in Kathmandu in 1820. He remained in that post for most of the period until January 1833, and was then promoted to Resident, serving in that post for a further decade. In retirement, Hodgson lived as a gentleman-scholar in Darjeeling from 1845-1858 before finally returning to England, where he received an honorary doctorate from Oxford in 1889 in recognition of his work as a scholar and collector.

Hodgson's papers and the materials he collected were widely distributed in Britain, France and India, while notable collections remain at the Oriental and India Office Library, the Royal Asiatic Society and the Bodleian Library in the U.K., as well as Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.² But Hodgson's legacy has been much neglected, and the only biography of him dates to 1896.³ Interest in this 19th century pioneer and his work has been rekindled in the 21st century, however, with a conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies, UK, in 2002, leading to the volume under review, while the Hodgson Archive Cataloguing Project, which will finally record the full extent of his collection, is now underway. That project has, incidentally, had its more usual academic funding supplemented by a generous donation of £32,000 from comedian, actor and author Michael Palin, who recently presented his own television programme on the *Himalaya*.

² Michael Aris has sadly recorded elsewhere that Hodgson's Tibetan texts in the Asiatic Society 'have all been reduced to dust'; Michael Aris, 'Himalayan Encounters' in Samten Karmay and Philippe Sagant (eds.), *Les habitants du Toit du Monde: Études recueillies en hommage à Alexander W. Macdonald*, Nanterre, 1997 p.184.

³ W. W. Hunter, *Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson, British Resident at the Court of Nepal*, London, John Murray, 1896.

Given the enforced isolation of the Kathmandu Residency, and the slow pace of early-19th century communications, Hodgson's circumstances 'imposed on him a life of indolence under conditions of opulence' (p.xiv). With the encouragement of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, he used the opportunity he had been given to study the culture and environment of a land then largely unknown to the West. European scholarship at that time had been focussed on the Indo-European aspects of Indian history, and the Hindu and Muslim cultures of the north Indian plains, with India approached through the study of Greek, Persian and Sanskritic language sources. Hodgson's discoveries played a major part in opening a new field of study, the Buddhist Himalaya, and with it came new source languages, in particular, Tibetan.

That land to the north of Nepal had already been contacted in the late 18th century by East India Company emissaries George Bogle and Samuel Turner, who visited Shigatse in 1774 and 1783 respectively. But their visits had not led to diplomatic ties or significant trading developments and with the closing of Tibet's borders in 1792, the British were cut off from the Tibetan world. Yet, in the absence of any apparent threat to India from the north, there seemed no urgent need for initiatives aimed at Tibet. The Himalayas offered a barrier against significant troop movements across the border and the British understood Tibet to be a part – albeit remote – of the Chinese empire, with whom cross-border issues could ultimately be resolved. Thus, while in the long-term there were political dimensions to Hodgson's work, it had no such immediate imperatives, and Hodgson was free to study whatever he chose. He used that freedom for a wide variety of enquiries that, by today's standards, seem to entirely lack a central organising principle.

But this was an era before rigid disciplinary specialisation, when subject boundaries were few and the "generalist" and the "gentleman-scholar" were recognised contributors to the new knowledge bodies. Surrounded as he was by novelty, Hodgson's interests seemingly knew no boundaries; indeed the breadth of his collections has previously been a factor hindering their consideration. They include more than 10,000 zoological specimens alone, and thousands of manuscripts and drawings. Buddhology, linguistic ethnology, art, architecture, and natural history all attracted him, with the majority of his many publications concerning the mammals, reptiles and birds of Nepal. Assessing his life and range of studies is thus no easy task.

The Origins of Himalayan Studies largely resolves the problems of representing such a broad range of scholarship by presenting twelve contributions by specialists in the various aspects of Hodgson's life and work, following Thomas Trautman's foreword that locates the unitary aspects of Hodgson's work in their focus on the "non-Aryan" Himalayan Buddhist world. In addition, the work is rounded out by a bibliography of Hodgson's

extensive writings, as well as of relevant primary and secondary sources, an index and a wonderful series of relevant illustrations in both black and white and colour. The publishers are to be commended for the quality of these reproductions, which considerably enhance the final result (although the system of sequencing the illustrations – which omits the numbers 2 and 4 while progressing from one to five – seems unnecessarily revisionist!)

As editor David Waterhouse observes in a brief preface, Hodgson was by ‘birth and training . . . more of an Orientalist than a Victorian’. While aspiring to the ranks of scholarship he lacked formal scientific training, and was prone to the errors of the pioneer, wrongly concluding, for example, that Sanskrit was the original language of Buddhism. In retirement, those failings, allied to a failure to publish his major works on Nepali history and Himalayan birds and mammals, rather obscured his achievements and meant that Hodgson’s primary legacy lay in the material he had collected, an archive his first biographer W. W. Hunter described as, ‘a vast quarry, out of which scholars surreptitiously build their own fame’ (p.17.)

While the historian John Whelpton astutely locates Hodgson’s career in the wider political context of his diplomatic posting at Kathmandu, and details the unhappy clash over policy with the Governor-General Lord Ellenborough that ended Hodgson’s career in Nepal, two biographical essays examine his personal life and career. The first, by the editor, is a model account of his life and legacy, while Harihar Raj Joshi’s essay fleshes out the picture of Hodgson the man through the use of Nepalese oral sources and local histories. As was common in East India Company circles, Hodgson had a local mistress, a Muslim woman with whom he had children but seems to have abandoned after returning to England. Though he cared for the children, and they were taken to Europe to be educated, they did not long survive. Hodgson subsequently twice married Englishwomen, lastly as a sixty-eight year old widower when he married a woman more than forty years his junior.

The contemporary world of Himalayan scholarship was then a small one and Hodgson knew or corresponded with most of the renowned scholars of the day. One such relationship, that with the botanist Joseph Hooker, who stayed with Hodgson in Darjeeling for nearly a year during the period 1848-50, is examined in detail here by David Arnold. Hodgson facilitated Hooker’s entrée into the Himalayas, and the two men shared a number of discoveries and endeavours. Their friendship was somewhat strained by the well-known incident in which Hooker, along with the Darjeeling Superintendent Archibald Campbell, was imprisoned by the Sikkimese, but the closeness of at least their early relationship is clearly indicated in Hooker’s *Himalayan Journals*.

Hodgson’s life spanned most of the first century of Buddhist studies, and his pioneering contribution to that field is examined here by Donald

Lopez. Hodgson is renowned for providing the textual basis for the study of Indian Buddhism through his discovery that Sanskrit Buddhist texts were preserved in Nepal. Lopez draws attention to the fact that Hodgson's Buddhist studies were overwhelmingly concentrated into a four-year period during his residence in Kathmandu, and that after his initial published findings he added little that was new. Hodgson seems to have correctly assessed such later vexed questions as the dating of the historical Buddha, but many of his other insights have not stood the test of time and, as Lopez demonstrates, Hodgson's early theories led later scholars into error. Ultimately, Hodgson's lasting contribution was not his own limited writings in the field, but that collection of materials he made that were later to be used by those with greater linguistic talents, most notably Eugène Burnouf, to provide the basis for modern understandings of Buddhism.

Hodgson's ethnographic and linguistic work is discussed by Martin Gaenzle and George van Driem respectively. Hodgson displayed the early 19th century respect for indigenous traditions and deplored the growing gulf between the races, and he anticipated modern trends in his concern for the peripheral and transient groups in Nepal. His wide-ranging studies of the indigenous communities leads Gaenzle to describe him as the 'founder of Himalayan anthropology' (p.209), and his fundamental contribution to the development of the Gurkha discourse is singled out here. In another example of how his work was carried on in fortuitous conjunction with the expansion of British interests into the Himalayas, Hodgson's ethnographic findings were used to distinguish "martial races" by those recruiting Gurkhas into British military employ, a system Hodgson favoured, incidentally, as a means of uniting British and Nepali interests. In the wider context, his work on the various social groups in Nepal was part of Hodgson's investigation of an envisaged wider unity of pre-Indo-European tribal groups in the Indian sub-continent. But in this assumption he erred, and as in many other aspects of his scholarship he is remembered 'not for the sweeping answers to the few big questions, but for the detailed answers to many small questions.' (p. 222)

The bulk of Hodgson's wider linguistic findings are also now discredited, as van Driem indicates in a trenchant contribution that ranges over and historicizes disciplinary debates in which the author is well-versed. Hodgson's studies of Himalayan languages such as Kusunda and Bahing are judged to be academically rigorous and his word-lists and field-notes as still worthy of attention, particularly given that many of the languages he studied are no longer extant.

Three papers by Ann Datta and Carol Inskipp, individually and in combination, give due weight to Hodgson's interests in the ornithology and natural history of the Himalayas. This field was perhaps his personal favourite, with 146 of his published papers in these areas, and in contrast to those later officials whose collections were sold to museums, Hodgson's

collections and even the cost of their transportation were borne by him. He was though, poorly served by curators, with many of his specimens poorly preserved and mislabelled, and his relations with the museum world strained. These tensions may have explained why in later years Hodgson seems to have distanced himself from that world. As these chapters indicate, however, his contributions are fundamental to any study of the field.

In addition to the Buddhist manuscripts he acquired, Hodgson devoted considerable attention to Nepalese Buddhist architecture during his time in the Kathmandu valley, commissioning an extensive series of drawings and etchings from native artists whom he apparently trained in Western perspectives and techniques. J. P. Losty explores this contribution in a well-illustrated discussion of these collections, many of which are published for the first time. Hodgson's own essay on architectural illustrations of Buddhism follows as an appendix.

Hodgson's employment at his own expense of numerous local technical assistants and experts on his subjects of interest continued throughout his years in Nepal and India. As Losty in particular mentions, he was very much within the model of imperial officials who came to rely a great deal on the information provided by a particular local informant. Just as, in later years, Sir Charles Bell's studies of Tibet drew heavily on the authority of Dewan Bahadur Palhese Kusho, so too did Hodgson's studies of Nepal make considerable use of the *pandit*-informer Amrtananda, who had previously worked for Captain William Knox, who was briefly Resident in Kathmandu in 1802-3.

The role of these informants, cosmopolitan individuals who acted as bridges between cultures and races in the colonial process, is greatly under studied. While many were able to greatly advance their social and economic status in colonial service, post-Independence histories have been little concerned with those whom the nationalist narrative condemns as collaborators with the imperial power. Many of them, however, were drawn from peripheral social groups, or employed from among disaffected aristocracy, and not only did their interests not coincide with the nationalist project, but in many cases that project represented a form of modernity with which they were unfamiliar. As the dominant regional power, and one that offered promotion and reward on merit, the British Empire attracted considerable loyalty from its servants, and those who served as intermediaries tended to be both modernists and realists who worked for an alliance of interests between local and imperial powers.

Lopez flags the theoretical issues around the relationship between informant and official, and references to Amrtananda are scattered throughout the volume, most informatively by Joshi. He is identified as the leading Nepali *pandit* of the time, and a descendent of a famed Tantrika, who had begun the construction of the Mahabauhda Temple in Lalitpur, with

which Amrtananda was associated. It would be interesting to know more of this man, not least how in the political context of the time this apparently leading figure in Nepal's religious and thus social establishment came to be on such good terms with officers at the British Residency. Information gathering was a two-way process, and it is not unlikely that Amrtananda was as valuable to the Nepalese as he was to Hodgson.

Hodgson was a pioneer of so many branches of study in the Himalayas that he remains relevant to us in the 21st century, and in his respect for the indigenous peoples and cultures he is a more appealing figure than many of his Evangelical successors. This is a timely study of an extraordinary man whose breadth of interests ensures that this account will appeal across disciplines to all with an interest in the region, and it may be recommended without reservation. It is a work of considerable but never inaccessible scholarship, with high-quality paper, printing and binding; important matters in a work that will inevitably be frequently consulted.

By the late 19th century, Nepal was firmly established as an ally of the imperial Government of India, thanks to the work of men such as Hodgson. While retaining its independence and keeping its borders closed to non-official European travellers, Nepal continued to host a British Resident and acted broadly in line with British-Indian foreign policy interests, while famously contributing Gurkha recruits to the imperial armies. Other states on India's northern frontier were brought more closely under British control through some form of the Princely State system, which in the long term led them all (with the exception of Bhutan) into incorporation into an independent India. But the exploratory milieu of the age, a growing fear of Russian intentions, the "Free Trade" lobby, and the expansionist logic of British-Indian frontier policy all dictated that Tibet could not be allowed to remain in isolation across the Himalayan frontier.

From the early 1870s, when the British established the Bhutia Boarding school in Darjeeling explicitly to train local youths to act as intermediaries with Tibet, there were a growing number of initiatives aimed at opening communications with the Lhasa government. Efforts were also made via China, but by the end of century it had become clear that the Chinese lacked effective control over Tibet, and under the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1899-1905) the Government of India became determined to force the Tibetans to enter diplomatic and trading relations with British India. In 1903, Curzon despatched an armed mission to Tibet under the command of the Political Officer Colonel Francis Younghusband. The mission fought its way to Lhasa, where the Tibetans were forced to sign a treaty opening

their country to British Indian diplomatic representatives, who were henceforth stationed in central Tibet. While the Chinese gained control of Tibet in the immediate aftermath of the Younghusband mission, when the British Government forced its Indian empire to abandon any plans to establish a protectorate over Lhasa, the collapse of the Manchu dynasty brought effective independence to Tibet by 1913. It retained that status until the Chinese invasion of 1950, and in the intervening years the British-Indian officials stationed in Tibet played an important role in shaping both events in and perceptions of the land popularly renowned as ‘The Roof of the World’.

The events of the Younghusband mission are well-known to scholars through the works of Alastair Lamb, Parshotam Mehra and others, while reliable accounts of the mission and a biography of Younghusband himself have also been published by popular writers such as Charles Allen and Patrick French. Lamb and Melvyn Goldstein have contributed substantial monographs on the subsequent half-century of Tibetan history in which British India and China struggled for control over the Himalayan state, while my own work has examined the role of the British Political Officers stationed there.

Wendy Palace’s rather brief monograph – just 149 pages of text – focuses on the period between the beginnings of the Younghusband mission and 1922, by which time the wider international context was critical to any decisions over British engagement with Tibet. Her stated aim is to examine the impact of the Younghusband mission on Tibet and Britain’s wider Asian foreign policy, and in contrast to most other studies of the period the primary approach is through sources reflecting the perspective of the British in China, rather than of the Government of India and its representatives. Indeed, the sources for the latter perspective are virtually ignored; the National Archives of India have not been utilised and the bibliography lists just two files from the Oriental and India Office Library in London, which also preserves a vast archive of material relating to the subject of Palace’s work. Such a staggering omission immediately suggests either an exciting and fundamental revisionism or a fatal flaw.

The British Empire and Tibet is apparently a largely unrevised version of the author’s 1995 Durham University doctoral thesis, with the bibliography revealing, aside from three articles by the author, just five works published since that date, none of which are seriously relied on or engaged with. Works representing Tibetan perspectives, even older monographs such as those by K. Dhondup (1986) are absent, and it soon becomes clear that the author is not concerned with Tibetan perspectives; Tibetan agency seems entirely absent from her analysis. The implication that Tibetans were pawns, in Premen Addy’s phrase, ‘on the imperial chessboard’, was once common, but several decades of scholarship have now drawn attention to Tibetan responses to the impact of modernity, and not

least to the diplomatic talents of the 13th Dalai Lama, who steered a skilful course between competing empires while centralising power in his own hands. We are also aware now of the many undercurrents in the Tibetan power structure, regional, provincial, and sectarian interests that affected the course of Tibetan history “from below”, but which are largely ignored here.

That ignorance of even fundamental aspects of Tibetan history is one of the most problematic aspects of this work. The outstanding lay individual of the period was Chensal Namgang, later commonly known as Tsarong *Shape* (“Cabinet Minister”), a man of humble origins who rose to be Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan Army and later Tibetan Finance Minister. Unquestionably loyal to his patron, the Dalai Lama, he was a very different individual from the aristocrat Tsarong *Shape*, a government minister who represented Tibet at the 1907 Anglo-Chinese negotiations. After the aristocratic minister was assassinated in 1912, Chensal Namgang was given both his estates and title as a reward for his bravery in battle with the Chinese. The story is well-known to any student of Tibetan history, for Tsarong enjoyed the company of foreigners and stories of his colourful life and personality appear in numerous works by European travellers to Tibet. The author of *The British Empire and Tibet*, however, conflates the two personalities.

An equally glaring error is apparent in the author’s claim that after expelling the Chinese, the Tibetans remodelled their army ‘with the help of Russian and Japanese advisors’ (p. 108). But keeping the Russians out of Tibet had been the most commonly articulated motive for the Younghusband mission, and non-Buddhist Russians were by then excluded from entering Tibet under the terms of the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. Any hint of such Russian involvement would have sent alarm bells ringing not only in Delhi, but in Whitehall. While the Russian military system was considered, and one young Japanese ex-soldier did assist the Tibetans’ training, it was British-Indian arms and ammunition and British military advisors that enabled the Tibetan army to modernize on British lines. Even the Tibetan military bands played British marching tunes!

Errors, great and small, recur throughout the text and notes of this work, making it difficult to recommend it to students. The account of Political Department recruitment (p. 37), for example, is seriously misleading. The usual routes into the Politicals were indeed through service in the ICS or the Indian Army, but manpower shortages and the need for specialists meant officers of other Indian services such as the Police or Public Works Department were occasionally appointed to Political positions. The Indian Medical Service (not ‘Corps’) officers attached to the Political Department positions were, however, a separate cadre. They did not become (although they might occasionally act as) Political Officers, as the author suggests. In addition to such misunderstandings, dates are unreliable, while

proper names are frequently misspelt. It would be tedious to list them all, but we might note that the biographical notes concerning Lt-Colonel J. L. R. Weir (p. 167, n. 15) give the wrong dates for both his term as Political Officer Sikkim and for his Lhasa visits, that both attempts to spell the name of China consular official Louis Magrath King are incorrect, and that Sir John Jordan's replacement as British representative in Peking is referred to (on p. 66) as Sir Freidrich Max-Muller but later as William Grenfell Max-Muller (p. 164).

We are left with a narrative account of diplomatic proceedings that have been analysed at much greater length by scholars such as Lamb. The Sinophile perspective does suggest that the British failed to 'appreciate fully the depths of Chinese anxiety about Tibet, and their need to convince the international community that the country was an integral part of the Chinese Empire' (p.61). The historical relationship between Tibet and China is a complex one. Not easily shoe-horned into the Western model of the Nation-State, and confronted by the actuality of Tibetan resistance to Chinese domination, the British in India tended to sympathise with the Tibetans. Western academia has generally followed suit, and Palace does highlight the view from Peking and how the imperial officials there represented Tibet to the Foreign Office. But it is difficult not to conclude that the vast archives of the British Empire needed to be more thoroughly mined and analysed before publication of this work, and that the number of errors suggests nothing here can be taken on trust without checking the original sources.

The flow of information from the Himalayas that began in the days of the East India Company thus continues, and we have here two works representing peaks and valleys in Himalayan scholarship. Hodgson and the study of Nepal has been well-served by *The Origins of Himalayan Studies*, and the analysis of his collections will be stimulated by this publication. Those seeking a reliable account and a critical analysis of the struggle for diplomatic supremacy over Tibet in the early 20th century must still turn to the works of scholars such as Alastair Lamb.

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