

Facts and Questions as a Way of Conclusion

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Deepak Sanan in his magisterial opening speech, vividly depicting his personal experience as a civil servant in Spiti and Kinnaur, recalled the fact that economic and political factors may induce severe and drastic changes in society in a relatively short span of time. In evoking the conflicts that may exist between “tradition” and “change” he thus underlined the necessity of recording local festivals, songs and languages that possibly will no longer exist in a near future.

The region of Himachal Pradesh and the neighbour regions of Western Tibet, the present regions of northern Pakistan, Jammu-Kashmir and Xinjiang, have been, since the neolithic period, part of a vast territory traversed by quite a variety of social groups whose linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as mutual exchange, may be followed nowadays through the reading of the survey of material’s traces, and of mediated expressions, be they artistic representations, written records or other intellectual marks.

The interpretation of a corpus of data and its critique by a person or a team from different perspectives and with different theoretical approaches activate, so to speak, the underlying structural affinities among data and, at the same time, the specific cultural and historical features from where new hypotheses, if not directions of research, may be initiated, and this is obviously nothing new.

It is difficult to say if working in a team, in the case of human sciences, will improve the comprehensive view of the subject matter with respect to the result that may be gathered in the case of individual research. Teamwork and particularly multi-disciplinary cooperative research necessitate the coordination of information and its communication that are ordinarily supplied by the individual working as a person. From a descriptive point of view, the collected data may be “externalized” into a cartographic representation (see W. Cartwright’s contribution, CHAPTER 2) and quickly made accessible as numerical data. This however poses some fundamental questions that have been the concern of scholars since remote antiquity, and

that may become more acute in the case of a team: data needs to be as reliable as possible (cf. the case of palimpsests, K. Tropper, CHAPTER 13) a fact that thereby implies the problem of competence, the existence of a scientific protocol, and the constant application of critique.

An imaginary voyage across the Western Himalaya may be experienced in reading the record of Sven Hedin's "Southern Tibet", particularly in following the variations in the representation of space that may be noticed in the maps annexed to the first volume.¹⁶ Each map speaks for itself and calls into mind the history of technique, of intellectual and material culture, of politics and religions that may be initiated taking its stand upon the documents that that particular period has handed down and made accessible to the historians of the time. When confronted, maps and narratives tell us much about the peculiarity of their authors' vision, and upon this diversity the historian will build his own perspective. And in this respect, the survey of a corpus of data with a different scale of definition of space (viz. the GPS operating on "terrestrial ground", see K. Kriz, CHAPTER 1), and the "survey of a survey" that the satellite is tracing, for better or worse, are but another mode of "reading the past in the present".

During the three days in Shimla, a variety of elements for a diachronic, as well as synchronic, esquisse of the phenomenon of "Cultural Flows across the Western Himalaya" was presented, painting various stages of the intellectual, artistic and religious milieu of the regions that were, at some point of their history, in close or long distance contact with Tibet, as for instance the study of the collections of manuscripts demonstrate (H. Tauscher and B. Lainé, and see CHAPTER 12).

There is thus a shared underlining affinity between the writing of history of a single person, a historian, and the multi-disciplinary approach of a team working on a specific region and epoch, though the results may be rather different. In both cases, that of the historian dealing with a variety of documents and that of a team presenting a complex interwoven corpus of data, strong attention has to be paid to the structural components and the theoretical (and even ethical) issues inherent to the collation of data.

¹⁶ S. Hedin (1917). *Southern Tibet: Discoveries in Former Times Compared With My Own Researches in 1906–1908*. Vol. 1: *Lake Manasarovar and the Sources of the Great Indian Rivers: From the Remotest Antiquity to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Reprint Delhi 1991, B. R. Publishing Corporation. Stockholm.

Contrary to what may have been and, at times, still is presupposed, philology, the “art of reading slowly”¹⁷, may supply important elements. Fascinating in this respect is the contribution of Anne MacDonald (see CHAPTER 9) that, starting from an extremely rigorous philological analysis, leads us to important micro-historical facts, and reveals some aspects of the practice of translating attested in Western Tibet, and, at the same time, raises questions about the biblio-economic practice, the specific usage of texts, exercised in the Tibetan monasteries. She also hints at a provisional or ad hoc “delocalisation” of the translating teams of Indian and Tibetan scholars working in Kāśmīr, the blessed land praised by Abhinavagupta in his *Tantrāloka*.¹⁸ Also in Kāśmīr at that time, as Vincent Eltschinger (CHAPTER 11) and Patrick McAllister (CHAPTER 10) show, highly sophisticated philosophical discussions were the hallmark of an intellectual pluralistic milieu, in which Śaiva and Buddhist traditions were competing on the scene. There, too, theoretical inquiries into the art-process, as Parul Mukherjee (CHAPTER 8) has shown, were continuing the elaboration of aesthetic concepts following a plurisecular attested Indian tradition.

Kāśmīr is not far from the region where the painted shelters reveal various religious practices, question the mode of life of the itinerant religious (Anna Filigenzi, see CHAPTER 5), and, like other markers of long-distance pilgrimage (e.g., the portable objects, Erika Forte, CHAPTER 6) *cum* seminomadic routes, may be compared with analogous shelters studded along the impressive cliffs of the mNa’ ris canyons.¹⁹ A comparable complexity of religious “connivance” equally results from the survey of artistic sites and images done by Verena Widorn on the basis of later reports made by Tibetan pilgrims en route via Lahaul (see CHAPTER 7).

¹⁷This is the definition of Roman Jakobson quoted frequently, see p. 933 and n. 11 in S. Pollock (2009). “Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World”. In: *Critical Inquiry* 35.4, 931–961.

¹⁸Cf. p. 719, n. 103-104 in C. A. Scherrer-Schaub (2001). “Contre le libertinage: Un opuscule de Tabo adressé aux tantristes hérétiques?” In: *Le parole e i marmi: Studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70° compleanno*. Ed. by R. Torella et al. Vol. 2. Serie Orientale Roma 92. Rome: Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 693–733.

¹⁹Cf. W. Huo (2008). “Archaeological Survey of the Khyung lung Site in the Glang chen gtsang po Valley in Western Tibet”. In: *The Cultural History of Western Tibet*. Ed. by D. Klimburg-Salter et al. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 71. Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House; Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 211–231.

And this religious diversity bursts forth also from new documents on the famous “ordinance” of king Ye śes ’od, alluding to the “*Žaṅ-žuṅ gtsug lag*”, a “cultural expression” as noticed by Charles Ramble, since, as he argued during the discussion, the region was at that time called “*mNa’ ris*”. This evidence, according to Samten Karmay (CHAPTER 16), may attest the practice of Bon by the king, a fact that seems to be echoed in the artistic representation of Ye śes ’od capping the famous inscription in the ’Du khan of Tabo. Deborah Klimburg-Salter, building upon her analysis of the two artistic phases of Tabo, identifies and questions the model representing the social hierarchy as attested in a variety of scenes, thus confirming the role of art history as a complementary important source of historical data (see CHAPTER 15).

Each contribution, in breaking seemingly justified frontiers, presented various modes of recomposing the “fractality” of knowledge that has characterized the recent past. In pointing to the indispensable “ferment” of a continuous critical approach, the Shimla days granted that open space where new ideas can find a propitious and fertile ground.

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