RECENT RESEARCH ON TIBET

A Festschrift for Guntram Hazod
on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday



Edited by Per K. Sørensen and Christian Jahoda

2026

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Editorial office:
Institute for Social Anthropology, ÖAW, Dominikanerbastei 16, 1010 Vienna
Email: christian.jahoda@oeaw.ac.at, +43 1 51581 6459

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Preface

The present volume is a testimony to the rich panorama of recent research on Tibet and the Himalayas that currently characterises academia. It covers a wide range of international scholarly papers with topics on kinship, travelogues by former Austrian adventurers, Bon studies, linguistic and ritual inquiries, papers on the interaction between Tibet and the neighbouring countries, on monastic and religious history, and on scapulimancy, to mention just a few of the themes offered. The papers are all dedicated to a leading Austrian scholar who over many years has left his indelible mark on current scholarship, and has ensured that Vienna remained one of the most prominent addresses for research on Tibet.

At the end of this month, Guntram Hazod is celebrating his 70th birthday. It is both an honour and privilege for us to pay homage to an extraordinary scholar who has contributed to our understanding of Tibetan culture in so many ways. Guntram's path into Himalayan and Tibetan studies was perhaps different from most of his colleagues, since his broad interest and curiosity in the first place was less aroused by the rigid study of textual philology of Buddhist texts that often characterises the standard curricula within most Tibetological institutions. His interest and motivation were grounded in the contact and encounters he had with the people during early trips to India and Nepal. It was the local people's archaic myths and legends and not least the landscape shaping their lives and culture that was to have a strong and lasting impact on him. When Guntram entered the University of Vienna, anthropological and ethnographic studies related to Tibet were still in its infancy, an area attracting relatively few scholars, the reason for which was obvious: scholarly access to Tibet was restricted, in fact over years plainly impossible.

As we read in the interview conducted with Guntram, a change in the situation happened, initially in 1993, when he, along with a team of young enthusiastic scholars in Vienna, succeeded in establishing contact with Tibetan scholars from the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), not least the initial contact with Pasang Wangdu and later Tsering Gyalpo. It was in fact a birth hour for the international collaboration between Tibet and the West in modern times. It resulted in the first trips to Tibet. The time should prove ripe for further exchange and joint publications. This paved the way for the first official collaboration

agreement between the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) in Vienna with the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (TASS) in Lhasa, in fact, the first of its kind in the academic world with Tibet. It proved to be a tremendous success, within the next couple of years, and with Guntram often playing an active, occasionally a pioneering role. Countless fieldwork trips were conducted in Tibet, resulting in numerous joint publications of Western scholars and their Tibetan colleagues, including lengthy research visits to Vienna and Europe, thus deepening contacts. Vienna soon became one of the premier addresses in the world with regard to Tibet research, generating a "Tibet Group" with unmatched competence within social anthropology, a position held until today. Throughout the entire active period in Tibet between 1993 until 2019, Guntram alone conducted a number of prolonged stays in Tibet, where he often remained solo in the field, setting up his camp in remote places or in the vicinity of monasteries, often for months, followed by endless inquiries, productive stays that allowed him to make discoveries that resulted in path-breaking new documentations of places and traditions, until then only known from older written sources. Over the years, his research life thus was to be one characterised by solitary fieldwork and documentation, followed by his recluse life in Hummelberg, Upper Austria, where the enormous amount of data collected in Tibet found a way into his numerous monograph-size publications. The innovative approach that gradually grew out of the numerous stays was to characterise much of Guntram's innovative research: the "search for the place" – until then a blank spot in Tibetan historiographical research – that became part of a methodology that sought to combine texts and ethnography, often enriched through precise satellite images, all in an attempt to establish what we may term historical anthropology, which here means: documenting political and historical developments in place and time and making these developments visible in the landscape and in a topography with shifting boundaries. As a guiding principle, it may also simply be understood as framing and locating history in the landscape. Combined with extensive textual sources, for the first time tracing the migratory and settlement history of a targeted research area proved possible, in particular the unravelling of the innumerable cultic, religious and political bonds that linked people, institutions and territories throughout the area in question, and not least the key role played by major clans and lineages – the true "kingmakers of Tibetan history" – in forming and shaping the fate of the country.

It is impossible to list all his achievements. Worth highlighting is his annotated cartographical documentation of the geographical or territorial division of imperial Tibet, where he succeeded in identifying an appreciable amount of otherwise little-known imperial-time

toponyms. Also the detection of the first royal tomb in Tibet, so far only known to us in mythical framing, which now could be located in a remote side valley in Yarlung, the valley that in the country's emic or local history is considered to be the celebrated birth site and home of the Tibetan kings. Included should also be his fortunate and ingenious discovery of the original site of the famous Zhol inscription stele in front of the Potala in Lhasa, an enormous stele that had been moved from the grave site of one of Tibet's most celebrated 8th-century ministers, Nganlam Tagra Lukhong, in Sri valley. Its discovery aroused international interest, not least in Tibet. This finding and identity was part of what must be considered his lasting and most important contribution to Tibetan studies: his ongoing documentation of the burial mounds and tumuli of Tibet's imperial past. The results of his many years of and still ongoing documentation have turned and will continue to turn a new page in Tibetan historiography. Guntram has transformed our understanding of early pre-imperial and imperial Tibet. The final results of his endeavours will soon be published in full.

His academic involvement is demonstrated by his collaboration with a large number of institutions, at home and abroad, his numerous research grants, and his editorship and supervision of doctoral theses. It is no surprise that in 2015, his academic achievements secured him a prestigious stay as a Fellow at the *Wissenschaftskolleg* (Institute for Advanced Study) in Berlin, where he headed a Tibet research group.

During a splendid career, Guntram embodied all the virtues of an extraordinary scholar: an incredible working discipline and stamina, a persistence rarely seen, parred with a curiosity and openness to new impulses. Not least, he is a true friend and loving person. The appreciation of the pioneering role held by Guntram is attested to by this volume in which a host of colleagues celebrate him with their academic papers.

Last but not least we want to thank Claudia C. Aufschnaiter, Eva Kössner, Martin Pospichal, Charles Ramble, and Sarah Teetor for their support in the preparation of this volume.

Per Sørensen & Christian Jahoda
Leipzig – Vienna, March 2026

From Hummelberg in Upper Austria to Central Tibet: An Interview with Guntram Hazod[1]

Q. Guntram, you grew up in Upper Austria. When did your interest in Tibet begin? Were there any specific moments that you can remember? Was it a topic of conversation in your family or among your friends?

A. Not at all, as far as Tibet is concerned. However, my home did have an indirect influence on my choice of studies, in that around the time I was finishing school, I came across a book on Buddhism in my father's small but excellent library. I remember it was Hermann Oldenberg's *Buddha: sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde*, (Berlin) 1881,[2] which I read with great interest. I didn't go to university in Vienna with any particular interest in Tibet, but rather with a curiosity to learn more about Buddhism. I thought I would go to the Institute of Indology, where I naively explained that I wanted to learn about Buddhism. I was told that there was a new institute called Tibetology and Buddhist Studies. So that's where I went. The institute was located in an old apartment building on Maria-Theresien-Straße in the 9th district, and the classroom was a kind of small living room, which I immediately liked. Of course, I knew a little bit about Tibet, and I had also seen, more or less by chance, a documentary about what was then called Little Tibet, i.e. Ladakh, and was so fascinated that I bought a travel guide. From then on, I knew that I wanted to go there soon. I had already planned a trip to India anyway. So that's how my interest in Tibet began. Above all, my contact with Géza Uray,[3] who was a visiting professor at the Tibetology Institute in Vienna during my first semester, was important.

Q. Right, let's move on to your studies. You studied in Vienna in the 1970s and 1980s and completed your dissertation in 1990 on the topic of "The King Who Came from Heaven: An Ethnological Study of the Ideology of the Early State and the Example of Sacred Kingship in

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1 The interview was conducted by Christian Jahoda in Hummelberg, Upper Austria, on 17 December 2025.

2 Hermann Oldenberg (1882) *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order, Translated from the German by William Hoey*. London: Williams and Norgate.

3 Uray Géza (1921–1991), Hungarian tibetologist.

Tibet (especially concerning the early phase, 6th–7th centuries CE)".[4] What are your memories of your time as a student back then?

A. Initially, I was totally enthusiastic after school. I was interested in everything. University means everything, so I attended lectures on all kinds of (humanities) topics. However, Tibetology and Buddhist Studies soon became a problem in that the Steinkellner Institute – we will certainly talk about later (Ernst) Steinkellner[5] – focused primarily on Buddhist philosophy and was, of course, very language-oriented – Tibetan and Sanskrit. I didn't see my talent in that area and didn't have the necessary interest in Buddhist philosophy. However, I had been interested in anthropology since I was about 14, introduced to it by a friend who was training as a bookseller and provided me with literature on North American Indians. There was an encyclopaedia that Christian Feest, among others, had worked on who – I only found out about this later – eventually became director of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* (now *Weltmuseum*) in Vienna. At that time, as a young enthusiast, I learned that people who study early cultures are called anthropologists. So that was always in the back of my mind, and I began to study anthropology, or *Völkerkunde* as it was called at the time, as my major subject in Vienna, with Tibetology and Buddhist Studies as my minor subjects. That went wonderfully for several years.

Then difficulties arose. In 1984, our first child was born and I fell into a bit of a crisis. I don't want to go into detail, but suffice it to say that I began to question things, including my identification with my studies, partly due to my inclination towards artistic forms of expression. This led to a long delay in my studies. At some point, I visited Géza Uray in Hungary and asked him what he thought might suit me in the field of Tibetan studies. I then studied the feudal systems in Tibet, based on the work of Melvyn Goldstein, and began a doctoral thesis, but failed. I simply wasn't interested in continuing my work there. Some time passed, and at some point I read more closely about the Tibetan myth of the king who came from heaven and the story of Tibet's first mortal king, and that was a good fit. I threw myself into the work and completed my studies with a dissertation on this topic.

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[4] Guntram Hazod (1990) "Der König, der vom Himmel kam: eine ethnologische Studie zur Ideologie des frühen Staates und das Beispiel des sakralen Königtums in Tibet (insbesondere betreffend die Anfangsphase, 6., 7. Jhdt. n.u.Z.)." Dissertation, University of Vienna.

[5] Ernst Steinkellner, Austrian indologist and tibetologist, founding director of the Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Vienna, directed by him from 1973–2000. From 1998–2006, he also directed the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (full member since 1988).

Q. So you had a different dissertation topic at first?

A. Yes, a different topic, which in retrospect wasn't so bad because it allowed me to familiarise myself with the secondary literature in this field. As I said, the topic was the Tibetan feudal system as it related to the Ganden Phodrang (dGa' ldan pho brang) period.

Q. A question from Per Sørensen: what specifically motivated you to combine Tibetology and Buddhist studies with social anthropology?

A. I would say it was actually my stay in Ladakh, which was a formative and fascinating experience for me. And India. I still love this country and its cultures to this day. For me, the whole landscape is teeming with anthropological questions, much less religious than socio-anthropological questions. And at the same time, I learned Tibetan, or rather classical Tibetan, as required for my studies. As I said, anthropology has always been a topic for me in other contexts. So this combination was obvious.

I had always sought out anthropological topics when travelling. For example, I spent a long time in Kurdistan, in eastern Turkey, with Peter Schweizer (a fellow student and dear friend, also from Wels in Upper Austria).[6] A long time means a few weeks, or not even that long. Then I travelled on to northern Pakistan (with a stay with the Kalash) and northern India, etc. I always thought about it and then came to the conclusion that yes, Tibet, it's obvious to stay with this regional area. It was also the case that Professor (Walter) Dostal,[7] who was the head of the *Institut für Völkerkunde*, required his doctoral students to do field research, to learn a language related to this field research and to choose a regional area in that field. In certain cases, it was also possible to write a purely theoretical thesis. And if you can present and submit something like that, then it's clear. So that was the trip to Ladakh, which was decisive.

Q. The next question deals with topics that you have already touched on, but perhaps in a little more detail. Compared to the generations that studied after you, you had to complete relatively fewer courses, right? The scope has increased over time with the study reforms. My question would be: what were your main areas of focus, your most important teachers, and how did you come to choose this

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[6] Peter Schweizer, social anthropologist, who worked for many years at the University of Fairbanks, Alaska, before joining the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna as a full professor in 2012 (information by Guntram Hazod).

[7] Walter Dostal (1928–2011), social anthropologist, from 1975–1996 full professor at the *Institut für Völkerkunde*, University of Vienna, since 1993 also full member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

dissertation topic, which has essentially determined your field of work for many years, in fact until today, if that is correct, at least as I see it?

A. That's right. But I didn't know that we were required to take fewer courses back then. There were compulsory subjects in all areas, regional areas such as North America, etc., and you could choose something there. The assistant professor (Josef) Salat, who taught us about structuralism, had a very formative influence. He played a significant role, in general, this examination of the theoretical orientation in social anthropology, Marxism, Marxist or left-wing approaches combined with structuralism. A great hero of mine was Marshall Sahlins, who died a few years ago and wrote extremely influential works until well into his old age. I studied such things with enthusiasm in social anthropology. Dostal was of course influential with his lecture on the history of anthropology, as was Andre Gingrich,[8] who held the first classes at the time, and, as I said, assistant professor Salat. Professor Steinkellner was always important in Tibetology. He had a very broad range of interests and ensured that this socio-anthropological side of Tibetology was anchored in his institute and also in the Austrian Academy of Sciences. So those were the influential figures.

Q. And Steinkellner probably had a particular influence on your doctoral thesis?

A. No, not really. I came up with this topic myself. There was a commemorative publication for Prof. Dostal's 65th birthday. I wrote an article and summarised the topic of the king's heavenly descent for the first time in a few pages. I then told my son, who is currently writing his doctoral thesis, and my other children that the best thing to do before finishing your thesis is to summarise the whole thing in a few pages. In my case, at least, that was the basis for being able to deliver my doctoral thesis relatively quickly. I submitted my doctoral thesis in 1989, I think at the beginning or middle of that year, and it was set aside by Dostal, my doctoral supervisor, for a year or a year and a half because something else was more important to him at the time, an unpleasant matter that would be impossible today. But there was also something positive about it, in that I used the time to write an appendix in my thesis on the Tibetan royal tombs, based on the state of knowledge at the time. Dostal was very impressed, I was reconciled and had a first basis for orientation in a topic that would much later become the focus of my work.

[8] Andre Gingrich, social anthropologist, full professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology (1998–2017), University of Vienna, and founding director of the Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna (2007–2019) (full member since 2002).

Q. What were the years after completing your doctoral thesis like? What prospects were there for research funding or employment?

A. That is, of course, a crucial point you raise here, and I have very fond memories of that time. Back then, I had two slightly younger colleagues, Hildegard Diemberger and Christian Schicklgruber. I had known Christian Schicklgruber, who like me is from Wels, for quite some time, since we had met more or less by chance during one of my trips to India in Zanskar and spent a few weeks together. Later, Hilde, Christian and I completed seminar papers on the subject of Tibet together and also wrote an article together during our doctoral studies. When I finished my doctoral thesis, Hilde was not quite finished yet. Christian was also in the process of finishing his and then came to me and said that he and Hilde now wanted to submit an application to the FWF[9] for funding for a research project on a specific topic. And he said I should join them. As far as the topic was concerned, the idea was to take up the work of Nebesky-Wojkowitz,[10] the important Tibet ethnographer working in Vienna, or to follow up on it in some way. Hilde was always very well informed about the latest trends in anthropological research in Tibetan-speaking areas, much more so than I was. That's when the concept of Tibetan mountain (deity) worship came into play.

In 1991, shortly after I completed my doctorate, we submitted an application with this title; that was my perspective.

Q. So that was the initiative of the three of you?

A. By the three of us, yes.

Q. What role did Dostal, Steinkellner and Gingrich play in this? Only a secondary one?

A. As far as the choice of topic and the basic initiative are concerned, yes. At that time, however, you still needed a professor or someone with *venia legendi* (habilitation) as the official applicant. We went to Professor Dostal and, typical Dostal, he said, "Go to Gingrich," he wouldn't do it, it would just be more work for him. After some persuasion, Gingrich agreed to be the official applicant (and formal project manager) for this project. His idea was to include Gabriele Tautscher, who had just completed her doctorate on the Tibeto-Burmese Tamang, in the project, which is what happened. We were surprised that the project was approved straight away.

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9 Austrian Science Fund (*Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung*).

10 René Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1923–1959), Austrian ethnologist and tibetologist. See *Exploring Himalayan Cultural and Textual Heritage: The Legacy and Impact of René Nebesky-Wojkowitz*, edited by Uwe Niebuhr, Martin Gaenszle, Markus Viehbeck, and Verena Widorn (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2026).

Q. The key point for me here is that the initiative came from you. It was your research interest, and it was also you who took care of the funding and approached the people who would make it possible. It wasn't the other way around, a director or someone who announced or offered it.

A. Yes, that's how it was.

Q. Good, that's clear then. What contacts did you have with people involved in Tibetan studies elsewhere in Europe? The *International Association of Tibetan Studies* (IATS) already existed,[11] and a few meetings had already taken place.

A. Yes, Hilde (Diemberger) and Christian (Schicklgruber) were in Japan, in Narita, at the 5th IATS Seminar, and Hilde also attended the subsequent 6th IATS Seminar in Fagernes (Oslo).

Q. That was in 1989 and 1992, respectively?

A. Yes, they came back full of enthusiasm and ideas. They had given presentations on the results of their field research there and received good feedback. I attended for the first time in 1995.[12] And we had a conference in Paris in 1993, which was also very important. Steinkellner had agreed to organise this meeting as part of a French-Austrian cooperation. On the French side, Anne-Marie Blondeau was largely responsible for the organisation at the time. Samten Karmay also took part. My contribution at the time was the result of field research conducted in 1992 in western Nepal, in the Tibetan-speaking region of Phoksumdo. The other two presented their work on the Khumbu. Gabi Tautscher presented her research findings on the Tamang. So we were actually already a relatively strong core team.

Charles Ramble and others also spoke at this conference. From then on, we were in close contact with him. Charles later collaborated on the Vienna projects. It can be said that in 1993, or at the latest at the 1995 conference, we became fully involved in this new trend in social

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[11] The IATS was formally created in 1979 on the occasion of a conference on Tibetan Studies organised at the University of Oxford by the late Michael Aris (see https://www.iats.info/iats-page-1/history/, last accessed 22 December 2025). Further seminars were hosted in the USA (1982), Germany (1985), Japan (1989), and Norway (1992). Prior to this, in the summer of 1977, a four-day meeting, "an interdisciplinary gathering of young scholars sharing a common interest in Tibet – its history, its art, its religion, and – above all – its people" had taken place in Zurich. See Martin Brauen and Per Kvaerne (1977) Introduction. In: Martin Brauen and Per Kvaerne (eds) *Tibetan Studies: Presented at the Seminar of Young Tibetologists, Zurich, 26 June – 1 July 1977*. Zurich: Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, p. 3.

[12] 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, at Seggau Castle near Graz, Austria.

anthropological research on Tibet, which we ourselves had helped to shape to a certain extent with our "mountain cult stories". It should be added that after the first projects – at that time they were only two years each – we immediately followed up with subsequent projects. The fact that these all worked out the same way, i.e. were approved, is certainly due to the fact that we were able to demonstrate that our topic was now internationally established and recognised.

Q. But it wasn't possible to get a proper job with it? It was, so to speak, financing through work contracts and field research?

A. I don't really want to talk about this topic. We should talk about more pleasant things.

Q. It's also important to understand what the circumstances and possibilities were.

A. We have been kept very tight. My family kept growing. I had work contracts, so I had to take the pension money to get by. Those were extremely precarious circumstances; at least for me, there was no question of employment for a long time. Christian switched to museum work in the mid-1990s,[13] Hilde went to Cambridge later, and Gabi Tautscher organised trips to Tibet, India and Nepal in addition to her work as a university lecturer.

Q. Right, let's get back to research matters. An important point was the conclusion of the cooperation agreement with the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (TASS). That was a momentous occasion in 1992, wasn't it?

A. No, the official agreement was signed in 1995. But we had already begun to cooperate before that, in the run-up to the field research in the winter (January to March) of 1993. Hilde initiated everything, and one can only emphasise her commitment as the initiator and driving force behind the cooperation in the most positive terms. She had already got most things off the ground during this still unofficial cooperation in the 1993 field research.

This then developed into the official paper of a contract, an agreement between the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) in Vienna and TASS in Lhasa. In the meantime, Steinkellner had ensured that our research was anchored at the ÖAW, in the Commission for Social Anthropology (originally headed by Prof. Dostal, later by Prof. Gingrich). This secured our project as an ÖAW project. Steinkellner

[13] He initially worked at the Heinrich Harrer Museum in Hüttenberg before moving to the Vienna Museum of Ethnology (now the *Weltmuseum Wien*) as curator for South, Southeast Asia and the Himalayan countries, where he also served as director from 2018 to 2021 (information Guntram Hazod).

then played a key role in ensuring that an official agreement between the ÖAW and TASS was concluded and signed in 1995. The most important people from TASS were in Seggau (near Graz) at the IATS conference in 1995 when this was finalised. I travelled to Tibet in autumn 1995 as part of this agreement, which was a very important field research at the time.

Q. How was your first encounter with the people from TASS?

A. Extremely positive. They themselves were convinced that something could come of it, that they had the freedom to enter into such agreements and engage in exchanges. The agreement stipulated that we would have co-researchers at our side during field research in Tibet and that Tibetans could come to Austria to work on specific joint projects and publications.

Q. Do you know if people from TASS had been abroad before, or was this one of the first opportunities for them?

A. Well, I don't know what trips abroad they had made before. Before we forget, it should be noted that Austria was the only country to have this type of agreement, which was officially in place from 1995 to 2013, in this form and duration. There were other TASS agreements with Norway, Japan and so on, but in this form it was actually only with Austria, which was leading in this field.

Q. Was Tsering Gyalpo involved from the beginning, i.e. since 1995? Was he already involved in this first conference? How did the initial field research go, together with Hilde Diemberger or Gabi Tautscher?

A. No. Hilde Diemberger did something completely different. We had different regional focuses. 1995 was a very decisive year for me in terms of field research. I travelled with Gabi Tautscher and my brother-in-law, who is a doctor. Gabi was mainly interested in the border area with Nepal. I had mapped out the route for the field research.

In the run-up to the field research, there was a meeting at TASS in Lhasa. We were told that they had found a co-researcher for us who had just started working at TASS. That was Tsering Gyalpo, who then came in through the door. That was it.

We then conducted this field research, which is a story in itself, in Yazang (g.Ya' bzang) in the Yarlung (Yar lung) Valley, what happened there and what major consequences it had for both of us.

Q. Perhaps you would like to say a little more about that?

A. I had some money from an NGO in Switzerland. We were supposed to take it to Yazang Monastery, a small contribution towards rebuilding the monastery. Then we drove to Yazang. I didn't really see

Yazang on a map, but I knew the monastery was in Yarlung and was thrilled to visit it. This is the landscape at the foot of Mount Yarlha Shampo (Yar lha Sham po), where the Tibetan kings originated. We arrived there and met with the abbot, Champa Gelek (Byams pa dGe legs), as he was called. He was blind and already quite old, and it was a very moving encounter. I gave him the money and asked, with Tsering Gyalpo acting as interpreter, and couldn't stop asking what the ruins were that we had passed, what this and that place was called, and so on. Among other things, I asked him if he knew Yarlung Soka (Yar lung So mkhar), which appears in texts as something like the old centre of Yarlung and which, according to the abbot's answer, referred to one of the ruined sites not far from Yazang. The abbot was quite excited and said that I must be an incarnation of the monastery's founder, i.e. Yazangpa Chökyi Mönlam (g.Ya' bzang pa Chos kyi sMon lam, 1169–1233), who in turn saw himself as the reincarnation of the King Songtsengampo (Srong btsan sGam po), the founder of the Tibetan Empire. The abbot could not explain otherwise why I knew all the names. I was indeed well prepared thanks to my doctoral thesis and had many names, especially place names, in my head. At the same meeting, my brother-in-law, who is a doctor, checked the abbot's health, and so several circumstances favourable to us came together, leading the abbot to open his private archive, something he said he had never done before during previous visits by government officials and local scholars. He was also initially very reserved towards Tsering Gyalpo when he heard that he was from TASS. But because we were both, I would say, shy people, and because he saw that I had so much prior knowledge – although it was really just knowledge of names – he agreed to cooperate. The writings from the archive were sensational texts on the history of this monastery, which the abbot had been able to save from the destructive attacks during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and which we were now able to photograph and study. After he promised us further assistance, we returned in 1997 and pitched our tent at the foot of the monastery, camping there for several weeks, something that is unimaginable today. During this time, we visited almost every place mentioned in the texts, which led us, among other things, to a tour around the famous Yarlha Shampo.

In 1996, Tsering Gyalpo came to Vienna for six months and we translated the text. This naturally raised many questions that could only be answered on site, which we pursued in 1997, as I mentioned. I believe that this had not really been done before (in Western historical research on Tibet), namely to concretise a historical text by identifying local contexts – in other words, to ask: where are these or those places that are mentioned, what local stories might there be about them, etc.

That was, so to speak, the beginning of my historical ethnography, i.e. combining text with ethnographic information.

Q. I have another question along these lines, namely, what you said earlier about the importance of Nebesky-Wojkowitz for your orientation, the mountain cult theme. Two volumes on this subject were published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences Press in 1996 and 1998.[14] In 1996, *Shel dkar chos 'byung*,[15] first in a version in Italy, right?

A. No, I think the order is different. It was first published in Vienna.

Q. Were you also involved in that?

A. The authors were Hilde Diemberger and Pasang Wangdu, and I wrote an article in the appendix. In this article, I attempted to focus on toponyms, local stories and text for the first time. The inspiration came from Pawang (Pasang Wangdu), who was really something of a teacher. We were in Shekar (Shel dkar) in 1993, in winter, with temperatures of minus 12 degrees in the room, which made for a rather strenuous stay. We went out every day with Pawang and searched for the places in question, mentioned in *Shel dkar chos 'byung*. Apart from that, during this 1993 trip, he told me a lot about the traces of ancient Tibetan history visible in the landscape and what the special features are here.

Q. I didn't know that either, for example. What I was getting at was that in later years, say in comparison to earlier ones, you may have worked more text-based. Or, as you say, also toponymic research, something like that. And that you then began working more closely with Per Sørensen in Leipzig. The question would have been: what were the prerequisites for this, how did it come about? You mentioned that this research in Yazang was very important for you. I thought that these book projects or perhaps Nebesky-Wojkowitz might have been more important for this.

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[14] Anne-Marie Blondeau and Ernst Steinkellner (eds) (1996) *Reflections of the Mountain. Essays on the History and Social Meaning of the Mountain Cult in Tibet and the Himalaya*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press; Anne-Marie Blondeau (ed.) (1998) *Tibetan Mountain Deities, Their Cults and Representations. Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

[15] Pasang Wangdu, Hildegard Diemberger, and Guntram Hazod (1996) *Ngag dbang skal ldan rgya mtsho: Shel dkar chos 'byung. History of the "White Cristal"*. Translation and facsimile edition of the Tibetan text by Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger in cooperation with Guntram Hazod. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

A. No, no, not at all. In fact, Pawang-la had an important influence. I would also like to mention old (now late) Chapel here,[16] whom I visited regularly with Tsering or other colleagues from TASS to discuss our plans and research findings with him. One must imagine that in the years and decades before, renowned Tibet historians had repeatedly published texts, but to a certain extent, these were "up in the air". And even later, when field research became possible, those who came often paid little attention to the precise locations mentioned in the texts. Inspired by Pawang, however, I considered it important to locate the text in the landscape, so that the text analysis was not only about identifying the names of people, but also about the place. In any case, that was central for me.

Q. Were the people you refer to Tibetan authors or also from the West?

A. No, Westerners.

Q. So the older generation of historians?

A. Yes. You open a book, for example by Helga Uebach, a wonderful tibetologist, with lots of footnotes on places, annotated with "not located" or "unknown". I then discovered that when you got to the place annotated as "unknown", it was usually clear to every local what place it was. That was my experience. Coming back to Yazang: this is a famous Kagyu (bKa' brgyud) story. In 1990, Luciano Petech wrote in his book (*Central Tibet and the Mongols*) that the monastery must be somewhere in the Lhoka (lHo kha) area. But of course, people like Petech never really had the opportunity to investigate such questions on site. But I was surprised that during the period when field research was possible, from the 1990s to 2010, many people never bothered to take the textual materials they had compiled and go there to see where it was.

Q. You then worked with Per Sørensen in Leipzig from 1999 onwards, on two consecutive research projects, if I'm not mistaken?

A. Yes, he "took me away" from Vienna. I was extremely happy because it came with an employment contract and a better income, and it wasn't just a job. In 1998, we were in Bloomington at the IATS conference. I had actually known him since 1995, but in 1998 I went up to him and said, "I have a problem. In our Yazang text, there is a Kachem (*bka' chems*), namely the testamentary writing Kachem Tontingma (*bKa' chems mTho mthing ma*, "Azur-Blue Testament").

[16] Chab spel Tshe brtan Phun tshogs (1922–2013), one of the leading Tibetan experts on ancient Tibetan history, who worked as *rdzong dpon* in Dzongka (rDzong kha) in his younger years, before 1959 (information Guntram Hazod).

There are some important quotations from this work, including one where the founder of Yazang says, "I am Songtsen Gampo". That was an incredibly great story. Then Per said to me, 'I have the *mTho mthing ma*'. He had it at home since he found the text, I think, in an archive in Kathmandu. That was the starting point for establishing contact, which led to him collaborating on the Yazang book.[17] He analysed the *Thon thing ma* in detail in an article and compared it with other Songtsen Gampo vita traditions. That was very important work, and that is how I came to Leipzig. That was from 1999 to 2007.

Q. Per Sørensen was also a co-author of the Yazang book, wasn't he?

A. Yes, his contributions were very important.

Q. But you and Tsering Gyalpo didn't do field research with him there?

A. No.

Q. Now another question on this topic: what was new and formative for you that resulted from this collaboration with Per Sørensen? You already mentioned that he knew these sources well and was able to contribute something here, but apart from that, were there perhaps other aspects?

A. Yes, the bottom line is that Per Sørensen, at least in my opinion, is one of the world's leading experts on the text. He has an enormous amount of knowledge about the sources.

Q. Where were these sources that he wanted to go through at the time?

A. He always received and brought back a great deal from Gene Smith and other centres, including Bhutan. The extensive annotations we compiled in our joint publications were mainly his work. Tsering Gyalpo and I started translating, and then, for example, we had 100 footnotes in the Tshal Gung thang book[18] and sent them to Per, and the whole thing came back with 400 footnotes. At some point, there were 1,000, and so on. Apart from that, his linguistic competence was crucial in this collaboration.

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[17] Tsering Gyalbo, Guntram Hazod, and Per K. Sørensen (2000) *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po. The Royal House of lHa-Bug-pa-can and the History of g.Ya'-bzang. Historical Texts from the Monastery of g.Ya'-bzang in Yar-stod (Central Tibet). Annotated Translation, Transliteration and Facsimile Edition*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

[18] Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod (2007) *Rulers on the Celestial Plain. Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet. A Study of Tshal Gung-thang*, 2 vols. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

Q. How was the collaboration with Per Sørensen organised in practical terms? Did you live in Leipzig for any length of time?

A. No, I had the greatest freedom imaginable. I travelled there every few months and gave a lecture at his institute. He, in turn, drove from Leipzig to Hummelberg in six hours and we spent a few days there. We discussed the texts and the results of my fieldwork at length. That was very important. But I never had to be there. Even the DFG,[19] which funded my position, did not require it.

Q. What was it like working with Tsering Gyalpo back then, from around 2000 to 2005?

A. Yes, well, at some point Tsering Gyalpo began to go to his homeland for scientific reasons, i.e. to research the history of Guge. He called himself Guge Tsering Gyalpo because he came from Guge on his grandfather's side, which was very important to him, apart from the fact that Guge was the core area of Western Tibet for him. He wanted to do field research there, conduct surveys and intensify his work. As a result, he moved further and further away from my work on central Tibet. Which was perfectly fine, of course, and I also found other colleagues, Ngodrup Tsering for example, with whom I did a lot of work.

However, Tsering Gyalpo has returned to Europe on several occasions, for example in connection with the first translation of the text for the Tandruk (Khra 'brug) / *Thundering Falcon* book in 2005[20] and so on. But he did not engage with the questions as intensively as he had with the Yazang book.

Q. For me, several components of your research were particularly instructive.

As far as I can see, the first element was the ethnological (social anthropological) examination of ethnographic or historical circumstances in the dissertation, 2. field research in Tibet, more or less annually (until 2019), 3. the associated search for and evaluation of local written sources, 4. the associated consideration of oral traditions, 5. an increasing interest in genealogy and topographical circumstances, as well as 6. the representation in maps and the highly successful search for historically significant sites and contexts with Google Earth, up to the comprehensive representation and reconstruction of the historically

[19] *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*.

[20] Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod (2005) *Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

early burial sites in Central Tibet, on which you have been working for several years.

Some of these components were already there early on, the early royal tombs and texts on them, but they were repeatedly expanded and enriched by the inclusion of new sources (such as local oral traditions) and methods (satellite maps, Google Earth). Per Sørensen called this a "holistic" approach:

"The philological, topographical and anthropological inquiries conducted in this process have been exciting challenges, impossible without good and inspirational teamwork.

Although cumbersome and painstaking, I feel that a holistic approach, whenever feasible, allows you to draw a far more accurate and precise picture, whether of an epoch, an institution or an area, or, as in the approach we have chosen, a combination of these. The relational nature between historical sites, the individuals involved and the cults and rituals, religious or political, that were practised, becomes more evident."[21]

In my view, this was highly innovative and something that distinguished the social anthropological "Tibet Group" in Vienna. What is your view?

A. I think Per has summarised it quite well. You have to be a bit careful with the term "holistic". What he means is that the text is not sufficient in terms of methodology. That oral traditions are needed, the stories surrounding the places, the concretisation, the localisation of the text, etc. In this respect, it is a bit more holistic than is usually the case. But I would summarise all the questions you raised with a story that began in 2005, in the course of field research. There was a topic that increasingly came to the fore, one that had actually always fascinated me, ever since I met Géza Uray, in fact. That is the political geography of the Tibetan Empire. All of the questions you raised above can be subsumed under this. And as you already indicated, the grave story is a consequence of this.

I tried to begin systematically locating, for example, the central Tibetan places mentioned in the *Tibetan Annals*, a core text for the empire.[22] Much of this turned out to be a kind of by-product of the surveys conducted in connection with the Tandruk and Gungthang books. My knowledge of toponyms has become increasingly dense,

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[21] Hazod, Guntram (2015) An Interview with Per K. Sørensen, in: Czaja, Olaf and Hazod, Guntram (eds) *The Illuminating Mirror: Tibetan Studies in Honour of Per K. Sørensen on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2015, p. xxi.

[22] See Brandon Dotson (2009) *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History. With an Annotated Cartographical Documentation by Guntram Hazod*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

but many questions regarding the localisation of key places have remained unanswered. Then there was a question that always preoccupied me: the history of the so-called first tomb in Tibet. I must mention my Tibetan colleague Ngodrup Tsering, to whom I repeatedly expressed my problems with finding it. From 2000 to around 2007, he was mostly my co-researcher in the field. He is a very lovable person and a dear friend of mine. Fortunately, the story of the first tomb is described in relative detail, even if it only exists in post-imperial sources. Nevertheless, I had not been able to find it until then. It had to be in Yarlung, we suspected in upper Chongye ('Phyong rgyas), but we did not find it. In 2005, we came to a monastery in Chongye and there was a drunk shepherd standing on the veranda. You often meet them. He overheard the conversation we had with the monks there. Namely, that I was looking for a place described in such and such a way, a place that was supposed to be somewhere in the mountains, where, according to the description, a hill like a sacred mountain was circumambulated, and a few other details. And then the shepherd came over and said he knew the place. It is Bangso Sa Kyilkhor (*bang so sa dkyil 'khor*).

Q. Did he refer to the place as Bangso Sa Kyilkhor?

A. Yes, or just Sa Kyilkhor. He mentioned a few other things and then explained where we could find the place. We made a note of it and on the same day we organised a horse and a guide so that we could set off the next day. It was a great experience. We climbed almost to the watershed in the valley. And then at the end we saw a large mound resembling a burial mound. This discovery was the starting point for systematically pursuing this story. So it came about that during my subsequent field research, at that time still as part of my "clan project",[23] I came across more and more burial sites in the regional districts (i.e. outside the royal tombs). I don't think anyone knew about this, not even the country's archaeologists, namely this dimension of the central Tibetan burial landscape. The data then became so dense that it seemed sensible to classify them systematically in order to find certain patterns. The data provided clues to the history of pre-imperial and imperial Tibet and to the relationship between the king and his allies, the military and civil elite, whose representatives were buried in large burial mounds in the central Tibetan districts. I don't have all the questions you just listed in detail in my head right now, but it all adds up.

[23] "The Great Lineages of Central Tibet", 2006–2011, FWF Grant-DOI 10.55776/P18711.

Q. Yes, I understand, it's clear to me now. I thought perhaps the other way around, that you had become increasingly interested in these methods or sources such as oral traditions, but it was, so to speak, out of this big question that you then gradually adopted and developed these methods.

A. Yes, exactly. They developed in the field. For example, there is one aspect I would like to mention here, namely that the local population does not like to talk about graves. Instead, they speak euphemistically of collapsed cities or "place of collapsed houses" (*khang ral sgang*), which is something you hear often. Or they say it's a "Little Lhasa," which is also a widespread myth.

And the story was that we stood at the entrance to the valley and asked if there were any "collapsed places" further up, etc. Not infrequently, we heard that yes, they were up there, near this or that village. In this way, we were able to expand our data collection. This was all before (free) access to satellite images. In addition to the "first grave," the second highlight in this early phase of the grave search was the discovery of the grave of Nganlam Tagra Lukhong (Ngan lam sTag ra Klu khong), near Lhasa. We came across certain textual references and local clues to grave locations. Incidentally, this discovery caused great astonishment among our Tibetan colleagues. It is the grave of a great general and minister, a 65-metre grave located in the Si (Sri) valley near Lhasa. The inscription on the famous Shöl (Zhol) stele in front of the Potala is dedicated to him. There is no doubt today that this stele was originally a grave stele at the tomb of this general. Its relocation from Si to Lhasa is documented on a mural in the Potala, something that had been overlooked until then. My publication on this discovery in a 2010 paper was translated into Tibetan and published in Lhasa, which had a considerable impact among colleagues and the interested public. My colleagues were astonished, not least because the grave is within sight of a picnic area that is frequently used (especially also by TASS). This points to a characteristic of surface archaeology: you only see what you are looking for, and the now unadorned remains of the grave monuments often blend in with the surrounding topography, making them even more difficult to find.

Q. Here, linguistic mediation was essential in order to find the right formulations, to ask what was actually possible and what was pointless.

A. Yes, as I said, my colleague at the time was mostly Ngodrup, who was extremely helpful and, of course, contributed his own ideas. I only travelled with Tsering (Gyalpo) in Lhasa, in Tshal Gung thang, because it is very close by. He was involved in completely different things at the time.

Q. Perhaps one final question about this cooperation with TASS. As you said, initial contacts were made in 1993, and then in 1995 an agreement was signed that ran until 2013. There were also agreements between TASS and other international institutions, such as Virginia in the USA, Cambridge in Great Britain, and Oslo in Norway. That means the agreement ran for a total of about 18 to 20 years. Of course, there were many personal contacts, official bilateral visits, and repeated meetings that were very productive for both sides, especially for research, of course. Many of your most important articles and book publications to date have been based on this cooperation, at least during the period up to 2013. How do you assess this cooperation today, looking back, now that it has officially ended since 2013? There were and still are informal contacts, but it has been a different phase since then.

A. The most important thing was that it enabled field research. I had a colleague from TASS as a co-researcher for my fieldwork, which was important purely from a linguistic point of view. At the same time, for official reasons, TASS was obliged to provide a Tibetan escort when travelling through the area. This escort carried the permit, the travel permit, which listed the areas that could and could not be visited. So that was crucial for me in the cooperation. And of course, with Tsering Gyalpo, which is an exception, the cooperation was also extremely important in the area of textual analysis, etc. In principle, the end of the cooperation (initiated by the authorities) did not particularly bother me later on. I travelled to Tibet again in 2014 and 2015 with Hubert Feiglstorfer. We travelled on a tourist visa and were lucky enough to find an interested guide. We went where I wanted to go. It was all no problem. In 2019, it was a bit more problematic because the controls were tighter. Nevertheless, I found opportunities to do field research,



Fig. 1 – In Lo Valley (Tagtse County) (photo: H. Feiglstorfer, 2014).

mainly visiting burial mound sites. So the most important part of the TASS connection for me was that it enabled me to do fieldwork. I am eternally grateful for this support and these contacts. But they were not a driving force for the development of my work in terms of methodology or content.

Q. From my point of view, it was important because I have also made other trips to Tibet with other institutions. For me, it made a difference to be in the field with TASS and Tibetan researchers in particular. The cooperation with TASS therefore went beyond simply enabling field research.

A. That's right. I had a very warm, friendly and productive relationship with them. The Tibetans have great trust in me, but also in all my colleagues in Vienna, which was very significant.



Fig. 2 – In Shingtshang (Tagtse County), walking up to the grave field (photo: H. Feiglstorfer, 2015).

Q. Well, the next stop was your stay at the WiKo, *Wissenschaftskolleg* in Berlin, in 2014–2015, together with Tsering Gyalpo and Shen Weirong. That was probably the greatest recognition for your and Tsering Gyalpo's Tibetan studies research, in a circle of scientists, writers, musicians and other outstanding personalities. Apart from the sad ending, with the far too early death of Tsering (at the end of June 2015), what was important for you about this stay and the exchange with non-Tibetologists? From an outside perspective, when I visited in

June 2015, the WiKo seemed to me like a paradise for academics and people with literary, artistic or musical talents. Was that the case, or what was your impression at the time?

A. Yes, well, of course I always have a tendency to quickly feel overwhelmed at such public appearances and to develop stress as a result. But I don't want to talk about that at all, but rather about the positive things, that this exchange with colleagues outside my field of research was very fruitful. That is quite clear. The *Wissenschaftskolleg* is truly unique. I can only say the best things about it.

The fact that Tsering and I were able to get in was largely thanks to Toni Huber. He had teamed up with Michael Oppitz. I had once told Toni Huber at length about my problems with the Institute (for Social Anthropology, ÖAW) in Lhasa in 2010. He and Oppitz agreed that we should find something for Guntram so that he could leave Vienna again and so on. Oppitz knew me, probably as a reviewer of my work. We also had direct contact once in Seggau, at the IATS in 1995, so we knew each other. Oppitz himself was a fellow at the WiKo in the 1980s and knew the leading figures there. He initiated it, and then those responsible at the WiKo decided something like, "Why not? Let's focus on Tibet for once; we haven't had anything like that before." That's how it came about. Someone had to recommend you, otherwise you couldn't get in. That's how it came about. It was a wonderful time with Tsering, we did a lot together. He helped me a lot, again with many questions. Then Per (Sørensen) kept coming up from Leipzig to Berlin. We set our sights on new projects. Due to the death of Tsering Gyalpo, some of these projects were never realised.

Q. From my point of view, this stay (with the Tibet programme) meant great recognition for Tibet research and, beyond that, also in terms of external perception.

A. Yes, indeed, the *Wissenschaftskolleg* is not just anything, that's true. I had already been a visiting professor at Humboldt University in Berlin in 2012 through my contacts there and had heard about the WiKo. It was an important time, but also quite challenging.

Q. I would say that after your time at the WiKo in Vienna, Hubert Feiglstorfer, with whom you worked closely on the "Tumulus project," benefited most from the collaboration in his architecture-related research. Another aspect, the collaboration and also the field research in the team, especially with people from completely different disciplines and worlds (when I think of Tsering Gyalpo), was also very important in my view. Or do you see it as a constellation of three people (you, Sørensen and Tsering Gyalpo) that happened by chance? How do you assess it in retrospect? From my point of view, such

collaborations and constellations are not so common, especially with different professional and linguistic backgrounds.

A. Well, I would say that wasn't planned from the outset; you can't plan something like that, it just happened on the spot. You get a co-researcher, you get on well, you travel to a place and there are lots of discussions every day about what to do with the sources and how to proceed. And then suddenly something develops between the two of them and then an incredible text expert joins them, so there are three people. And the goal was, and here you can use the word holistic, to do something bigger, to understand the text more comprehensively. The other thing, as far as the graves are concerned, is that I was able to systematise this in two consecutive projects from 2013 until my retirement in 2022.[24] And, as you say, Hubert joined us, not only with his expertise in architecture, but also in earth sciences, then the archaeologists, then archaeoastronomy was added, and finally my own son, the geologist Theobald. He was involved in field research in 2019, and much earlier his older brother Thassilo, now himself an ethnologist, was involved as an assistant in field research, where he provided important help, particularly with recording graves. So we had a period of very intensive exchange at that time, during which we were able to expand the questions we were asking more and more. We took a systematic approach, and it helped me a lot to classify and document the burial grounds – currently numbering 749 – something I will complete next year (2026), barring any serious complications. Methodologically, this is a mix in which two other Tibetan colleagues in particular deserve mention: Shawo Khacham, a Tibetan archaeologist at Tibet University in Lhasa, plays a major role, and the exchange with him was and is very important. The archaeologist Shakya Ongdü (from a cultural institute in Lhasa) was also always involved. So the Tibetans were always involved as well.

Q. I just mean that when you look at it today, at our institute or elsewhere, this kind of interdisciplinary collaboration is actually quite rare. It's not easy to achieve between two people, perhaps, or two disciplines, but with three or more disciplines, to my knowledge, God knows, you hardly ever find it anywhere. And even in Tibetan studies, specialisation and working independently tend to prevail, so to speak. I find that remarkable.

A. That may be the case. I am no longer at the institute, but my impression is also that this type of research is not particularly encour-

[24] The "Tumulus project", that is, "The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet", 2013–2017, FWF Grant-DOI 10.55776/P25066 and "The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet, Part II", 2017–2022, FWF Grant-DOI 10.55776/P30393.

aged. It starts with the fact that, in my experience, basic research, the starting point of my work, has never been a priority at this institute. Yet we know that the FWF has always promoted basic research, and I assume that this is still the case today. That was always my idea, to do real fundamental research and develop theoretical things from it, and not the other way around. When we started our project proposal in 1991, it was clear: we would combine text and ethnography, that's it. It's actually a mystery to me why this didn't gain a much larger following, especially during this long period when extensive field research was possible in Tibet.

Q. Recently, there was a conference in Lhasa in memory of Guge Tsering Gyalpo. In the Tibetan text on the website, Vienna is mentioned before Harvard and Virginia as the first place with globally renowned scientific institutions that he visited and where he cultivated important exchanges. Per Sørensen believes that the personal side of this collaboration, the mutual trust and openness that played an essential role, is not sufficiently appreciated. They mention the titles of books he published in Tibet, but not those that appeared in collaboration with you or me. How do you see it?

A. That doesn't surprise me at all. That's how it is, it reflects what Chinese science policy is doing. These contacts are being obscured, at least not given due credit.

Q. As I know from our conversations, your socio-anthropological interests extend far beyond Tibet and the Himalayas. You have also repeatedly engaged with works that have pursued new theoretical approaches or worked with other cultures and contexts, and pointed these out to people like me. I am thinking, for example, of David Graeber. Perhaps I am wrong, but he does not appear in your published works. You have quoted another, Marshall Sahlins, here and there, as you mentioned earlier. My question is, how do you see the development of social anthropological research on Tibet? One criticism from some quarters has been and continues to be that it contributes too little to current social anthropological discourse and is too specialised, including in its terminology. Andre Gingrich has also said this about Nebesky-Wojkowitz, that his works are very interesting but unreadable for non-Tibetologists.

A. I believe there is certainly some truth in this criticism. However, I have always said to myself that it is more important to me to find a significant historical site that has not yet been identified than to make any theoretical or methodological contributions. But it is true that we have not contributed enough to theoretical anthropology and discussions based on our own material. I am also familiar with these state-

ments on Nebesky-Wojkowitz. Just a quick note on David Graeber: I first came across him in 2012. Even as a student, I had a soft spot for anarchist anthropology. I thought I would put it off for a while and pursue something else. Incidentally, Graeber has been quoted several times in a paper of mine that was published in 2018. But one could actually do much more in this area.

Q. Yes, perhaps also if one now thinks that the larger context has changed, that Tibetan studies are perhaps no longer as prominent as they once were, or that they apparently play little or less of a role in these socio-anthropological discourses.

A. I continue to read the more recent works of Maurice Bloch and Marshall Sahlins with great enthusiasm, e.g. Sahlins' *What Kinship is ... and is not* (2013) or Bloch's collection of essays *In and Out of each Other's Bodies* – these are extremely stimulating studies, which I refer to in at least one of my more recent papers.

Q. A few more quick questions on behalf of Per Sørensen. How do you see the importance of fieldwork, i.e. in situ stays, especially in light of the fact that they used to be easier to do but are now considerably more difficult or even impossible? How important is it today?

A. Yes, that's a sad development. I don't know if it's still possible to do what we did when I travelled with Hubert Feiglstorfer and others in 2014, 2015 and 2019, with a tourist visa and an interested guide who takes you where you want to go. We turned off the main roads somewhere and then went up to the graves and so on. In any case, I think it has become impossible or extremely difficult for someone to sit down in a village, as was the case in the past, and record marriage customs, for example, somewhere in central Tibet, or do what you did in Purang.[25] These developments are sad, apart from the extreme external upheavals that this country is experiencing, with all the new infrastructure and colonialist machinations that are going on there, the history of settlement, resource exploitation, and so on, the demographic developments. It's a dramatic story, and that makes basic research materials that are simply presented all the more valuable in themselves. I just want to remind you that now, when documenting the history of the graves, with the help of high-resolution satellite images, I can see how many fields have been filled in by construction projects because the fields are always close to settlements and some-

[25] Tsering Gyalpo, Christian Jahoda, Christiane Kalantari and Patrick Sutherland; with contributions by Eva Allinger, Hubert Feiglstorfer and Kurt Tropper (2012) '*Khor chags / Khorchag / Kuojia si wenshi daguan* [Kuojia Monastery: An Overview of Its History and Culture]. lHa sa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, (second, revised edition Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015).

thing is being built there, a new cement factory, etc. You think to yourself, I saw those fields recently and now they're gone. So what Per is referring to is actually a development that does not look very positive.

Q. One topic that is currently relevant, and which I also see in the reviews we receive for our books,[26] is that there are often complaints that Western researchers are doing something here and that local researchers are not sufficiently involved. This trend is becoming increasingly strong, this suspicion of colonialism, neo-imperialism, that we take data, we do something and the people themselves don't get a chance to participate. What is your opinion on this?

A. Yes, I know that this is an emerging issue. That's a discussion in itself. But long before it became such a hot topic, I was already aware of it. My Tibetan colleagues have often indirectly mentioned that they fear something like "scientific colonialism". But our work, or my work in particular, is a counterexample of how to incorporate local scientific orientations and let them have their say. And appreciate them. So I would not accept such an accusation, at least not for myself.

Q. For example, I'm only mentioning this because it's not widely known, but in these reviews of a volume on Nebesky-Wojkowitz that will be published soon, in which eight or nine of the ten authors are from the West, the question is raised as to why half of the contributors are not from Nepal or the regions where he conducted his research. Why is this not possible? Why is this not happening?

A. I think the answer is that no one asks to include them, and perhaps there are only a few who participate. That's somehow due to both sides. But I don't think this criticism or comment from reviewers is incorrect. I would like to say that.

Q. Perhaps a final question. How do you see the publication landscape as far as social anthropological research on Tibet is concerned? Those who are looking for careers and jobs in this field today are advised to publish in journals or with book publishers that are considered particularly outstanding according to certain rankings. What is your opinion on this?

A. Yes, we have often discussed this. The place of publication is, of course, an issue. In my opinion, one should publish where one's work can be best appreciated. For example, at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. And not at some other, possibly more prestigious publishers.

[26] "Publications in Social Anthropology" (*Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie*) published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

That is completely irrelevant. I can still remember debates about peer-reviewed versus non-peer-reviewed publications. Important works have been published by colleagues in some North Indian journal that was certainly not peer-reviewed, but the scientists were happy to submit their work there because it was published a month later, meaning their research results could be presented in the shortest possible time. So criteria like these are important in today's fast-paced scientific landscape. But that's all largely impossible nowadays. And to submit the work to a renowned American publisher, I don't think they would even accept it in my case, for example. First of all, you have to juggle with complex theoretical terms, but that's not the focus of basic research-oriented work. I think you have to be stubborn here and look for the best publisher for your specific work.

Q. Many thanks!

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(With Karel Kriz) *The Burial Mound Sites of Imperial Central Tibet – Map scale 1:800.000. Map and Supplement*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 33 pp., 2020.

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