

The British Expedition to Sikkim of 1888: The Bhutanese Role

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In 1888, a British expedition in the southern Himalayas represented the first direct confrontation between Tibet and a Western power. The expedition followed the encroachment and occupation, by Tibetan troops, of a portion of Sikkim territory, a country led by a Tibetan Buddhist monarchy that was however linked to Britain with the Treaty of Tumlong. This paper analyses the role of the Bhutanese during the 1888 Expedition. Although the mediation put in place by Ugyen Wangchuck and his allies would not succeed because of the Tibetan refusal, the attempt remains important to understand the political and geopolitical space of Bhutan in the aftermath of the Battle of Changlimithang of 1885 and in the decades preceding the ascent to the throne of Ugyen Wangchuck.

[Bhutan; Tibet; Sikkim; British Raj; United Kingdom; Ugyen Wangchuck; Thirteenth Dalai Lama]

In¹ 1907, Ugyen Wangchuck² was crowned king of Bhutan, first Druk Gyalpo.³ During the Younghusband Expedition of 1903–1904, the future sovereign had played the delicate role of mediator between

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² *O rgyan dbang phyug*. In this paper it was preferred to adopt a phonetic transcription of Tibetan, Bhutanese and Sikkimese names. The names of the Bhutanese and Sikkimese royal families are transcribed respectively as 'Wangchuck' (*dbang phyug*) and 'Namgyal' (*rnam rgyal*), following the traditional transcriptions in the two Himalayan countries. Scientific transliteration is provided in footnotes and is however used for bibliographic references, according to the system defined by Prof. Turrell V. Wylie (see T. V. WYLIE, A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription, in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 22, 1959, pp. 261–267). In the scientific transliteration, long vowels are indicated by a macron. It should be noted that the transcriptions of

English and Tibetans⁴ and in 1905, he received the Order of the Indian Empire.⁵ His destiny had nevertheless been ratified about twenty years earlier, when in 1885 the then young Trongsa⁶ Penlop⁷ had defeated – along with Paro⁸ Penlop and Wangdi Phodrang⁹ Dzungpon¹⁰ – his main rivals, Thimphu¹¹ and Punakha¹² dzongpons, in the Changlimithang battle.¹³ The State of Bhutan, in fact, was founded at the beginning of the seventeenth century by a Tibetan lama of the Drukpa¹⁴ school, the Zhabdrung,¹⁵ Ngawang Namgyel¹⁶ (1594–1651). After his death, however, the country – formally a Buddhist ‘theocracy’ based on the traditional Tibetan dual system of government – became the scenario of a long period of conflicts between the various local lords until precisely the victory of Ugyen Wangchuck in 1885 and his consequent coronation in the 1907.¹⁷ Later, in 1910, Bhutan would sign with the British the Treaty of Punakha with which the Kingdom accepted the English guide in foreign policy, while maintaining its sec-

Tibetan, Bhutanese and Sikkimese names differ considerably in the British documents of the nineteenth century from the phonetic transcriptions commonly used today, making the reference doubtful in some cases. The Wade-Giles phonetic transcription system was adopted for the Chinese language.

³ *’Brug rgyal po.*

⁴ DGE ’DUN RIN CHEN, *Lho ’brug chos ’byung*, Thimphu 1972, p. 375.

⁵ J. C. WHITE, *Sikkim & Bhutan: Twenty-One Years on the North-East Frontier. 1887–1908*, London 1909, pp. 140–144.

⁶ *Krong gsar.*

⁷ *Dpon slob*, translatable as ‘lord-master’.

⁸ *Spa ro*, in Western Bhutan.

⁹ *Dbang ’dus pho brang.*

¹⁰ *Rdzong dpon*, translatable as ‘lord of the fortress (*rdzong*)’.

¹¹ *Thim phu.*

¹² *Spu na kha.*

¹³ *Lcang gling mi thang gi dmag ’dzing*. On this period see K. PHUNTSHO, *The History of Bhutan*, Noida 2013, pp. 485–492; WHITE, pp. 131–134 and 281. On the birth of the Bhutanese monarchy see M. ARIS, *The Raven Crown: The Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan*, Chicago 2005.

¹⁴ *’Brug pa.*

¹⁵ *Zhabs drung.*

¹⁶ *Ngag dbang rnam rgyal.*

¹⁷ On the theocratic period of Bhutan see Y. IMAEDA, *Histoire médiévale du Bhoutan: établissement et évolution de la théocratie des ’Brug pa*, Tokyo 2011. On the Bhutanese Buddhism see, inter alia, S. KUMAGAI (ed.), *Bhutanese Buddhism and Its Culture*, Kathmandu 2014.

ular and uninterrupted independence.¹⁸ The treaty was signed almost half a century after the Sinchula Treaty of 1865, which had marked the end of the Anglo-Bhutanese war (known as the 'Duar War') fought between 1864 and 1865.¹⁹ This paper will analyse the role of Bhutan between the British and the Tibetans during the British Expedition to Sikkim in 1888.

The Tibetan Occupation of Lingtu²⁰ and the Three British Victories

On 7 February 1888, Viceroy of India Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood wrote to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatsho,²¹ a letter concerning the trespassing of Tibetan troops in Sikkimese territory: *"I write this friendly letter to your Holiness regarding the presence of Tibetan troops at Lingtu in the territory of the Raja of Sikkim in the hope that relations of amity which have hitherto existed between the Government of India and the Government of Tibet may remain undisturbed. It is doubtless known to your Holiness that some time ago my Government, with the knowledge and concurrence of the Government of Peking, proposed to send a mission to Lhasa with a view to placing on satisfactory footing the trade relations between India and Tibet. [...] Unfortunately the object of the mission was misunderstood at Lhasa, and, in defence to the representations made to us on this subject through the Government of Peking, the project was abandoned. The consideration thus shown to the wishes of the Tibetan Government ought to have removed any suspicions regarding the perfect friendliness of our intentions, and ought to have resulted at least in the re-establishment of the status quo ante. I regret to say that this result has not yet become apparent. A small body of Tibetan troops which had been sent forward into Sikkim territory for the purpose of stopping the mission on its way to the Tibetan frontier still remains encamped on the road which, in virtue of our treaty of Sikkim, we have the right to maintain and use, and I am informed that this force, instead of preparing to withdraw to Tibetan territory, have lately strengthened the position which they had taken up in defiance of our treaty rights. Being most anxious that our amicable relations should not be unnecessarily disturbed,*

¹⁸ *East India (Tibet). Further papers relating to Tibet*, cd. 5240, London 1910, Treaty with Bhutan, signed 8th January 1910, No. 346, p. 214.

¹⁹ Full text of the Treaty of Sinchula in *East India (Bootan). Further papers relating to Bootan, House of Commons Papers*, 13, Vol. LII, London 1866, pp. 94–95.

²⁰ *Lung thur*.

²¹ *Thub bstan rgya mtsho*.

I have hitherto refrained from taking measures for the expulsion of the intruders, and have confined myself to friendly requests that the troops should retire, but this forbearance cannot be indefinitely prolonged, and I now write to your Holiness to inform you that if the troops in question do not evacuate their position and retire within Tibetan territory before the 15th of March, I shall be constrained to make good by force our treaty rights in Sikkim. At the same time I wish to assure your Holiness that if the employment of force for the purpose above indicated should unfortunately become necessary, I have no intention, unless further provoked, of sending troops into Tibet, or of forcing on the Tibetan Government any trade convention which they do not wish to accept. All I desire is to ensure the withdrawal of the Tibetan troops within their own frontier, and to obtain a satisfactory guarantee that for the future our treaty rights and legitimate influence in Sikkim shall be duly respected. I trust your Holiness will perceive that in the attainment of this object is to be found the only firm, durable basis for those long-established amicable relations between the Government of India and the Government of Tibet which it is my earnest desire maintain and strengthen.”²²

Today, Sikkim is a small state of India bordering the north and east with Tibet, west with Nepal, south-east with the Kingdom of Bhutan and south with the Indian state of West Bengal. Until the annexation of 1975, the country was an independent kingdom, known in Tibetan under the name of *'Bras ljongs*, the 'fruitful valley'. It was founded in 1642 with the coronation of Phuntshok Namgyal,²³ first Chogyal,²⁴ in the same year in which the fifth Dalai Lama, thanks to the help of the Mongols of Güši qan, subjected Tibet to the Geluk school.²⁵ On 28th March 1861, the British and the Sikkimese signed the Treaty of

²² The National Archives, London, Kew (further only TNA), Foreign Office (further only FO) 17/1108, The Viceroy of India to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, 7th February 1888, Enclosure of a letter to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, No. 24, f. 21.

²³ *Phun tshogs rnam rgyal*.

²⁴ *Chos rgyal* ('Dharma king'). Between 1642 and 1975, twelve chogyals ascended the throne of Sikkim. The first monarch was Phuntsok Namgyal (1604–1670), while the last one was Palden Thondup Namgyal (*Dpal ldan don grub rnam rgyal*, 1923–1982) who reigned until 1975, when Sikkim was annexed to India. CHOS DBANG (*Mkhan po*), *Sbas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi chos srid dang 'brel ba'i rgyal rabs lo rgyus bden don kun gsal me long*, Gangtok 2003, pp. 112–392. On the history of early Sikkim see S. MULLARD, *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History*, Leiden, Boston 2011.

²⁵ *Dge lugs*.

Tumlong,²⁶ at the end of the short Anglo-Sikkimese war.²⁷ The document provided, inter alia, that “[i]f any disputes or questions arise between the people of Sikkim and those of neighboring States, such disputes or questions shall be referred to the arbitration of the British Government, and the Sikkim Government agrees to abide by the decision of the British Government” (article 17). Furthermore “[t]he Government of Sikkim will not cede or lease any portion of its territory to any other State, without the permission of the British Government” (article 19) and “[t]he Government of Sikkim engages that no armed force belonging to any other country shall pass through Sikkim without the sanction of the British Government” (article 20). Article 13 guaranteed the British the possibility of building “a road through Sikkim, with the view of encouraging trade”. The penultimate article of the treaty finally established that “[w]ith a view to the establishment of an efficient Government in Sikkim, and to the better maintenance of friendly relations with the British Government, the Rajah of Sikkim agrees to remove the seat of his Government from Thibet to Sikkim, and reside there for nine months in the year. It is further agreed that a vakeel²⁸ shall be accredited by the Sikkim Government, who shall reside permanently at Darjeeling”²⁹ (article 22). In the years that followed, the road was therefore built along a route that from Darjeeling reached the Jelap Pass, on the border with Tibet,³⁰ a few miles east of Gangtok.³¹ In 1886, three hundred Tibetan soldiers crossed the frontier for about thirteen miles and occupied Lingtu.³² In addition, the then Sikkimese Chogyal, Thutob

²⁶ Full text of the treaty in *Copy or extracts of despatches relating to the Sikkim expedition*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XL, 1862, pp. 44–46.

²⁷ On this, see A. MCKAY, “A Difficult Country, a Hostile Chief, and a still more Hostile Minister”: the Anglo-Sikkim War of 1861, in: *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 45, 2, 2009 and 46, 1, 2010, pp. 31–48.

²⁸ An ambassador or an agent. W. HAMILTON, *The East-India Gazetteer*, Vol. II, London 1828, p. 733.

²⁹ Sikkim ceded the Hill of Darjeeling to the British in 1835. See E. C. DOZEY, *Concise History of Darjeeling District since 1835*, Calcutta 1922, p. 3.

³⁰ S. C. BAYLEY, The Sikkim Expedition of 1888, in: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 58, 3005, June 24, 1910, pp. 734–736.

³¹ *Sgang thog*.

³² British Library, London (further only BL), IOR/L/MIL/17/12/60, Report on the Sikkim Expedition: From January 1888 to January 1890, prepared (under the orders of the Quarter Master General in India) by Lieutenant C. J. Markham, in the Intelligence Branch, Calcutta 1890, pp. 1–2; *Frontier and overseas expeditions from India, compiled in the Intelligence Branch Division of the Chief of the Staff Army Head Quarters, India*,

Namgyal,³³ who had ascended the throne in 1874,³⁴ continued to reside for several months in Tibet, in the Chumbi³⁵ Valley, in violation of Article XXII of the Treaty of Tumlong.³⁶ Officially, the Chogyal had gone to Tibet following the arrival in Phari³⁷ of a Sino-Tibetan delegation that was supposed to settle a crisis between Bhutan and Tibet.³⁸ In a conciliatory response to the Tibetan encroachment, the British decided to stop the preparations for the Macaulay Mission to Tibet³⁹ – a possibility provided by a “*separate article*” of the Chefoo Convention of 1876⁴⁰ –, obtaining, however, the construction by the Tibetans of a

Vol. IV, North and North-Eastern Frontier Tribes, Simla 1907, p. 50.

³³ *Mthu stobs rnam rgyal*.

³⁴ CHOS DBANG (*Mkhan po*), p. 223.

³⁵ *Chu 'bi*.

³⁶ *Frontier and overseas expeditions from India*, p. 50.

³⁷ *Phag ri*.

³⁸ TNA, FO 17/1108, J. Ware Edgar to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, 10th February 1888, No. 28, Enclosure No. 1, ff. 27–28, p. 2.

³⁹ BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/12/60, Report on the Sikhim Expedition, p. 2; *Frontier and overseas expeditions from India*, p. 50. “*Inasmuch as inquiry into the circumstances by the Chinese Government has shown the existence of many obstacles to the Mission to Thibet provided for in the Separate Article of the Chefoo Agreement, England consents to countermand the Mission forthwith. With regard to the desire of the British Government to consider arrangements for frontier trade between India and Thibet, it will be the duty of the Chinese Government, after careful inquiry into the circumstances, to adopt measures to exhort and encourage the people with a view to the promotion and development of trade. Should it be practicable, the Chinese Government shall then proceed carefully to consider Trade Regulations; but if insuperable obstacles should be found to exist, the British Government will not press the matter unduly.*” Article IV of the Convention between Great Britain and China, relative to Burmah and Thibet. – Signed at Peking, July 24, 1886. Full text of the Convention in: *British and Foreign State Papers* (further only *BSP*), Vol. 77, pp. 80–81. The expedition had obtained the passports to Tibet from the Chinese authorities in November 1885. TNA, FO 17/987, Mr. O’Conor to the Marquess of Salisbury, 14th November 1885, f. 337.

⁴⁰ “*Her Majesty’s Government having it in contemplation to send a mission of exploration next year by way of Peking through Kan-Su and Koko-Nor, or by way of Ssu-Ch’uen to Thibet, and thence to India, the Tsung-li Yamên having due regard to the circumstances will, when the time arrives, issue the necessary passports, and will address letters to the high provincial authorities and the Resident in Thibet. If the Mission should not be sent by these routes, but should be proceeding across the Indian frontier to Thibet, the Tsung-li Yamên, on receipt of a communication to the above effect from the British Minister, will write to the Chinese Resident in Thibet, and the Resident, with due regard to the circumstances, will send officers to take due care of the Mission; and passports for the Mission will be issued by the Tsung-li Yamên, that its passage be not obstructed.*” English text of the Agreement in: *BSP*, 71, pp. 753–759.

fortification on the road and blocking the trade route.⁴¹ In November 1887, the British sent Alfred Wallis Paul to Sikkim, together with John Claude White, to convince the Chogyal to return to his kingdom and leave the Chumbi Valley in Tibet.⁴² At the time, Paul was the Deputy Commissioner in Darjeeling.⁴³ In Sikkim, the British official met the Phodong Lama⁴⁴ – who ruled the small country, together with his brother, during the absence of the Chogyal –, but not the king who returned a few weeks later, around the end of the year, together with some Tibetans.⁴⁵ The British realized that the Sikkimese political elite was substantially opposed to the closeness between the Chogyal and Tibet, with a couple of exceptions among the laymen and probably among the monks of Pemionchi.⁴⁶ The need to stop the Tibetan occupation was necessary for the British, as well as for the matter itself and the defence of Sikkim, also to avoid “*bad effect both in Bhutan and in Nepal*”,⁴⁷ the other two main Himalayan countries allied with London. The occupation of Lingtu was, however, on the Tibetan side, also a challenge to the Ch’ing authority, to the authority of Peking: in fact, in Lhasa – according to information that the British obtained – the rift in the guide of the question passed between a religious faction hostile to China, and contrary to the withdrawal from Lingtu, and a faction with a lay guide that “*wish to obey China, to withdraw the force at Lingtu, and to abstain from further interference in the affairs of Sikkim*”.⁴⁸ It should be underlined that the occupation of Lingtu was taking place under the reign of a young Dalai Lama, born in 1876,⁴⁹ and in particular in

⁴¹ BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/12/60, Report on the Sikkim Expedition, p. 2; *Frontier and over-seas expeditions from India*, p. 50.

⁴² WHITE, p. 19.

⁴³ *The India List: Civil and Military*, July, 1888, London 1888, p. 67; *The India List and India Office List for 1905*, London 1905, p. 584.

⁴⁴ *Pho gdong bla ma*.

⁴⁵ TNA, FO 17/1108, J. Ware Edgar to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, 10th February 1888, No. 28, Enclosure No. 1, p. 27; TNA, FO 17/1108, J. Ware Edgar to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, 17th January 1888, No. 22, Enclosure No. 1, f. 17, p. 1.

⁴⁶ TNA, FO 17/1108, J. Ware Edgar to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, 10th February 1888, No. 28, Enclosure No. 1, f. 27, p. 1. Pemionchi monastery (Pemayangtse, *pad ma yang rtse*) is in South-Western Sikkim.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 28, p. 4.

⁴⁹ THUB BSTAN BYAMS PA TSHUL KHRIMS BSTAN 'DZIN, *Rgyal dbang sku phreng*

the passage of power between regent Ngawang Pelden Chokyi Gyeltsen,⁵⁰ who had passed away in the spring of 1886,⁵¹ and the new regent, Ngawang Lobzang Thrinle Rabgye,⁵² appointed in the same year.⁵³

Alfred Wallis Paul managed to meet the Chogyal in mid-February 1888. On 20th March 1888,⁵⁴ the British conquered the fort that had been built in Lingtu,⁵⁵ forcing the Tibetans to flee over the Jelap Pass and into the Chumbi Valley, where they expected substantial reinforcements.⁵⁶ Thomas Graham was the head of the British forces in Sikkim.⁵⁷ Alfred Wallis Paul was the Political Officer of the Sikkim Field Force.⁵⁸ Two months later, on 22 May 1888, a Tibetan attack was launched against the British in Gnatong and it also ended with a British victory.⁵⁹ A few weeks earlier, the British had obtained information

bcu gsum pa thub bstan rgya mtsho'i rnam thar, Vol. 1, Pe cin n.d., p. 50.

⁵⁰ *Ngag dbang dpal ldan chos kyi rgyal mtshan*.

⁵¹ BLO BZANG YE SHES BSTAN PAI RGYAL MTSHAN, *Rta tshag rje drung ngag dbang dpal ldan chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar*, s.l. n.d., ff. 54b–55a.

⁵² *Ngag dbang blo bzang 'phrin las rab rgyas*.

⁵³ L. PETECH, *The Dalai-Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study*, in: *T'oung Pao*, 47, 1959, p. 393.

⁵⁴ TNA, FO 17/1108, A. W. Paul to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, 25th February 1888, enclosed to J. Ware Edgar to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, 10th April 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 1, f. 119, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *East India (progress and condition). Statement exhibiting the moral and material progress and condition of India during the year 1888–89. Twenty-fifth number*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 384, Vol. LIII, 1890, p. 204; TNA, FO 17/1108, Sir J. Walsham to Marquis of Salisbury, 24th March 1888, Telegram No. 13, f. 63. Paul indicates 21st March as the day of the conquest of Lingtu, but he writes: “next day, the 21st, Lingtu was taken without opposition”, referring with “next day” to the battle of 19th March: an error is therefore possible. Ibidem, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 2nd May 1888, enclosed to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 8th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 2, f. 121, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *East India (progress and condition). Statement exhibiting the moral and material progress and condition of India during the year 1888–89. Twenty-fifth number*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 384, Vol. LIII, 1890, p. 204.

⁵⁷ TNA, FO 17/1108, Sir J. Walsham to Foreign (copy to India Office), No. 60, f. 67.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, f. 185.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 25th May 1888, attached to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 29th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 3, ff. 122–123, pp. 8–9; *East India (progress and condition). Statement exhibiting the moral and material progress and condition of India during the year 1888–89. Twenty-fifth number*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 384, Vol. LIII, 1890, p. 204.

about the imminence of a Tibetan attack by the Nepalese prime minister.⁶⁰ However, the Viceroy of India prevented Graham from overcoming the Jelap pass.⁶¹ In September, finally, the hostilities ceased with the final expulsion of the Tibetans beyond the Tuko-la pass⁶² and the entry of the British troops into Tibetan territory, in the Chumbi Valley on 26th September 1888.⁶³

The British Expedition and the Bhutanese

The British had received from both the Kingdom of Nepal and the State of Bhutan the proposal to act as mediators in the Anglo-Tibetan crisis.⁶⁴ In April, Alfred Wallis Paul received a letter from the Deb Raja “asking to be allowed to mediate between Tibet and ourselves”.⁶⁵ The then Deb Raja – as the English called the Druk Desi,⁶⁶ i. e. the secular head of Bhutan – was Sangay Dorji,⁶⁷ appointed by Ugyen Wangchuck after the victory of Changlimithang.⁶⁸ The Deb Raja proposed “to send a Grand Lama and high officials” to Paul as mediators between the British and the Tibetans.⁶⁹ Paul proposed to his superiors to “reply thanking him and saying we always wish to be at peace and are ready to listen to Tibet, if she will send deputation to meet me, and that he may send his officials here”.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the letter of the Deb Raja “appeals to our treaty with Bhutan as making us and Bhutan one”.⁷¹ Despite the lack of

⁶⁰ TNA, FO 17/1108, From Viceroy (to India Office), 2nd May 1888, f. 76A.

⁶¹ Ibidem. From Viceroy (to India Office), 28th May 1888, f. 84.

⁶² *East India (progress and condition). Statement exhibiting the moral and material progress and condition of India during the year 1888–89. Twenty-fifth number*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 384, Vol. LIII, 1890, p. 204.

⁶³ TNA, FO 17/1108, Telegram of the 26th September 1888, from Paul, repeated from the Secretary, Bengal Government, Darjiling, to Foreign Secretary, Simla, 27th September 1888, No. 166, Enclosure No. 8, f. 291, p. 4; P. R. RAO, *India and Sikkim: 1814–1970*, New Delhi, Jullundur 1972, pp. 94–95.

⁶⁴ TNA, FO 17/1108, The Government of India, Foreign Department to Viscount Cross, No. 128, f. 116, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 2nd May 1888, enclosed to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 8th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 2, f. 122, p. 7.

⁶⁶ *Brug sde srid*.

⁶⁷ *Sangs rgyas rdo rje*.

⁶⁸ PHUNTSHO, p. 492.

⁶⁹ TNA, FO 17/1108, Chief Secretary, Bengal, Calcutta to Foreign Department, Simla (Telegram), 14th April 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 8, f. 125, p. 14.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

optimism with respect to some result, the Lieutenant-Governor, Steuart Colvin Bayley, nevertheless proposed to endorse Paul's response to the Deb Raja.⁷²

The Viceroy of India, Dufferin, however, while approving, did not feel the need for a real negotiation with the Tibetans, defeated in the first confrontation, and feared instead that the Bhutanese representatives could hinder Paul's action.⁷³ The Bhutanese delegates had to refer only to the will of the British to live in peace with the Tibetans, but without any possibility to "*permit any foreign power to interfere in the affairs of Sikkim, which is a State dependent upon the British Government*".⁷⁴ In case of further encroachments in the Sikkimese territory by the Tibetan troops, then "*it will be necessary for us to go farther than we have done now, and to take from them some material guarantee for the maintenance of quiet on the frontier*".⁷⁵ The representatives of the Deb Raja could propose to the Tibetans also the possibility of a direct meeting between Paul and a Tibetan delegation: "*[t]hey should clearly understand that we regard their mediation as wholly in the interests of Tibet, from whom the first advance should come*".⁷⁶ Lord Dufferin also asked Sir Steuart Colvin Bayley about the possibility of sending a message without the Bhutanese mediation.⁷⁷

After the May defeat, the need of involving Bhutanese reinforces was more urgent for the Tibetans, while the British required a more decisive and clearer stance of the Manchu Empire, just to weaken the Tibetan influence on Sikkim and Bhutan.⁷⁸ Already in the attack of May

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ "*Viceroy will not refuse to give Paul authority which Lieutenant-Governor recommends. But he should reserve entire freedom of action and not permit himself to be hampered by the presence of the Bhutanese delegates. His position should be that we have very little to gain by entering by any negotiations with the Tibetans.*" Ibidem, Foreign Department, Simla to Chief Secretary, Bengal, Calcutta (Telegram), 15th April 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 9, f. 125, p. 14.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, f. 126, p. 15.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ "*Viceroy wishes to know whether under circumstances Lieutenant-Governor thinks we might preferably send message direct, and avoid any inconveniences consequent on Bhutanese mediation.*" Ibidem.

⁷⁸ "*One thing is certain, – the people of Sikkim and the Tibetan lower classes are firmly convinced that China is not friendly disposed to the English, but will help the Tibetans. If China can be induced to make some overt declaration in our favour, it will, in my humble*

some Bhutanese were lined up in the ranks of the Tibetans.⁷⁹ These 200 Bhutanese men, however, came with the old enemy of Ugyen Wangchuck, the Thimphu Dzongpon,⁸⁰ Alu Dorji,⁸¹ who had taken refuge in Tibet after the defeat at the battle of Changlimithang.⁸² Paul himself saw some Bhutanese during the battle: “*I myself noticed some Bhutanese in the fight and one of the prisoners corroborates this.*”⁸³ According to further information that reached Paul, after the second defeat, other Bhutanese were also going to join the Tibetans, in particular two officials subjected to Paro Penlop and the Dzongpon of Haa,⁸⁴ in Western Bhutan.⁸⁵ At the beginning of July the Thimphu Dzongpon was near Rinchengong⁸⁶ – one of the Tibetan villages near the Sikkimese border and where a large part of Lhasa’s troops were stationed⁸⁷ – together with “*140 Bhutanese soldiers, armed in part, so it is alleged, with 50 rifles, supplied by Kuzoo Lhase from the Sikkim Durbar*”.⁸⁸

The position of Ugyen Wangchuck, the real ruler of the country, was very different: “*Chuchipa – the Tongso Penlow – had recently offered the Tibetans to come and mediate, but the latter had rejected his offer, saying*

opinion, considerably clear our present difficult position of inactivity by confirming the loyalty of Sikkim and Bhutan people towards us.” Ibidem, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 9th July 1888, f. 132, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 25th May 1888, attached to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 29th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 3, f. 123, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, f. 123, p. 10. According to Ugyen Kazi, the Bhutanese with the Thimphu Dzongpon were just 50 men (ibidem). Ugyen Kazi (Ugyen Dorji), later important figure in Bhutanese political and diplomatic history, had recently returned to Kalimpong. T. TASHI, *Gongzim Ugyen Dorji: The King’s Aide and Diplomat Par Excellence*, edited by D. Chophel, Thimphu 2013, p. 10.

⁸¹ *A lu rdo rje*.

⁸² WHITE, p. 133.

⁸³ TNA, FO 17/1108, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 25th May 1888, attached to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 29th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 3, f. 123, p. 10.

⁸⁴ *Hā*.

⁸⁵ “*Already, besides the Timpoo Jongpen, who has all along sided openly with the Tibetans, I hear the Zimpen and Nichen of Paro (two officers under the Penlow), as well as the Jongpen of Har-tamphiong, are collecting and arming men to help the enemy.*” TNA, FO 17/1108, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 9th July 1888, f. 132, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Rin chen sgang*; in the document “*at Dudhyakham within half a mile of Rinchagong*”, ibidem, f. 133, p. 3.

⁸⁷ BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/12/60, Report on the Sikkim Expedition, p. 44.

⁸⁸ TNA, FO 17/1108, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 9th July 1888, p. 133. In August, the Bhutanese under the command of the Thimphu Dzongpon were 300. BL, IOR/L/MIL/17/12/60, Report on the Sikkim Expedition, p. 44.

they were strong enough to retake Lingtu: if they failed, they would let him know.”⁸⁹ In addition to the Deb Raja and the Trongsa Penlop, the Paro Penlop also offered Paul his own mediation.⁹⁰ After the battle in May, the three Bhutanese leaders sent the Dzungpon of Wangdi Phodrang and another envoy – a signer of the Sinchula Treaty and personal friend of Paul – to Phari, to meet the Tibetans.⁹¹ Later, they would have met Paul in Gnatong.⁹² Paul recognized the good faith and hopes of Ugyen Wangchuck and of his allies: “I believe, from motives of self-interest, the ruling Chiefs of Bhutan are really anxious for peace, as they are in an awkward position. Without positive assurances of aid from ourselves, they are not strong enough to break with Tibet; while if they offend us, they fear a stoppage of their subsidy, if not further loss of territory. Whether they will be able to do anything is a different matter, which time alone will show.”⁹³ In this regard, it is useful to underline that the British subsidy to Bhutan was the official motivation for Ugyen Wangchuck to reject the Tibetan requests to intervene in the conflict on the side of Lhasa: in fact, the Tibetans had tried to involve Ugyen Wangchuck, sending him different requests after the second defeat.⁹⁴ However, the future monarch made clear that he did not want to risk losing the annual payment of 50,000 rupees from the British Government.⁹⁵ The Sinchula treaty of 1865 guaranteed, in Article IV, an annual payment by the British to the Government of Bhutan in exchange for territorial transfers in the south of the country.⁹⁶ The same treaty, however, provided in the

⁸⁹ TNA, FO 17/1108, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 25th May 1888, attached to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 29th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 3, f. 123, p. 10.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 9th July 1888, ff. 133–134, pp. 3–4.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem, f. 134, p. 3.

⁹⁴ Ibidem. Extract from a demi-official letter from Major H. Boileau, 11th August 1888, No. 152, Enclosure No. 1, f. 189.

⁹⁵ “I have just heard as follows from Sunder at Buxa: He says – ‘The old Vakil’s son has just returned from Bhutan: he tells me that his Deb Zimpen and Angdoforang Jungpen will shortly return from Paro. The Tibetans have informed them that they need not come to negotiate for peace. The Tibetans are collecting all their men and are determined to fight. They will attack our troops from two or three direction. The Vakil’s son is unable to say more than this about their plan of operations. He tells me that messengers are frequently being sent to Tongso Penlow for resistance. He is said to have informed the Tibetans that, if Bhutan gives any help, the subsidy of Rs. 50,000 will be stopped.’” Ibidem.

⁹⁶ “In consideration of the cession by the Bhootan Government of the territories specified in

article V the possibility for the British Government “to suspend the payment of this compensation money either whole or in part in the event of misconduct on the part of the Bhootan Government or its failure to check the aggression of its subjects or to comply with the provisions of the Treaty”. An important sum of money for Bhutan that Ugyen Wangchuck did not intend to lose without a powerful counterpart, identified by the future monarch in a territorial transfer as reported by [Donald?] Sunder⁹⁷ to Major Henry Boileau, Deputy Commissioner of Julpigoree: “I am told that Tongso Penlow has asked for the whole of the strip of Tibetan country as far as a place called Gyase.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, “[t]he agent for the Deb Raja and the Vakil’s son also say that the Tibetans will not attack till November next as they are not yet ready”.⁹⁹ This last news was particularly useful for Alfred Wallis Paul.¹⁰⁰ Boileau suggested in his letter that “the military authorities should post a wing in support at Julpai, the mere fact of doing so would instil fear into the minds of the Bhutanese; they have their spies about seeing what is going on. The Deb Raja’s agents who have come ostensibly about that strip of Jainti land hang on at Buxa, though they have

Article II. of this Treaty, and of the said Government having expressed its regret for past misconduct, and having hereby engaged for the future to restrain all evil-disposed persons from committing crimes within British territory or the territories of the Rajahs of Sikkim and Cooch Behar and to give prompt and full redress for all such crimes which may be committed in defiance of their commands, the British Government agree to make an annual allowance to the Government of Bhootan of a sum not exceeding fifty thousand rupees (Rs. 50,000), to be paid to officers not below the rank of Jungpen, who shall be deputed by the Government of Bhootan to receive the same. And it is further hereby agreed that the payments shall be made as specified below:— On the fulfillment by the Bhootan Government of the conditions of this Treaty, twenty-five thousand rupees (Rs. 25,000). On the 10th January following the first payment, thirty-five thousand rupees (Rs. 35,000). On the 10th January following, forty-five thousand rupees (Rs. 45,000). On every succeeding 10th January, fifty thousand rupees (Rs. 50,000).” Article IV of the Treaty of Sinochula.

⁹⁷ The text of the letter of Boileau indicates only a certain Sunder at Buxa Fort. “I have just heard from Sunder at Buxa”, TNA, FO 17/1108, Extract from a demi-official letter from Major H. Boileau, dated 11th August 1888, No. 152, Enclosure No. 1, f. 176. He is probably Donald Sunder, a magistrate in Julpigoree (Jalpaiguri) according to *The India List: Civil and Military*, London 1888, p. 70.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, Extract from a demi-official letter from Major H. Boileau, 11th August 1888, No. 152, Enclosure No. 1, f. 189. It is difficult to determine which place is referred to. It is unlikely to be Gyantse (*Rgyal rtse*), one of the main cities of Tibet. In this case, such a proposal by Ugyen Wangchuck should be read simply as a request aimed at total disengagement.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

*been told the matter can't be settled till the cold weather. I have thought this suspicious".*¹⁰¹

The Encounter between Paul and a Bhutanese Delegation

Alfred Wallis Paul met a Bhutanese delegation only on 20th August.¹⁰² The Bhutanese had consigned to the Political Officer "three letters from Dharma Raja, Deb Raja, and the Bhutan Council, respectively, dated 27th June and 2nd July, informing that, out of friendship and in accordance with our treaty, they had despatched Angdoforong [Wangdi Phodrang], Jongpen, Som Doozi, Deb Zimpen and Lama Tenzing as envoys to mediate".¹⁰³ In addition, two other letters, written directly by the three Bhutanese delegates at the beginning of August, however informed the Political Officer of their failure in the face of the Tibetan refusal to arrive at a diplomatic solution and thus their departure without meeting Paul.¹⁰⁴ However, the delegation informed Paul about the state of the Tibetan forces as well as pointing out the neutrality of the Bhutanese nobles: "These Bhutanese state 10,000 Khamtaya troops arrived and 2,000 more Khamt troops are shortly expected – total already assembled at least 10,000. Tibetans have everything ready for an attack, but when did not hear. Provisions not plentiful; no assist has been given by Bhutanese Chiefs."¹⁰⁵

Concluding Considerations

On the geopolitical level, the Tibetan defeat represented a shift in the risks to the power of Ugyen Wangchuck, a weakening of the historical hegemonic role of Tibet in the southeastern region of the Himalayas and the consolidation of the British influence on the area. In 1890, the British would sign an agreement with the Chinese authorities in Calcutta that recognized the British role on Sikkim.¹⁰⁶ The attempted

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Ibidem, Telegram from Chief Secretary, Bengal, Dacca to Foreign Secretary, Simla, 21st August 1888, No. 152, Enclosure No. 5, f. 191. For accuracy, 20th August is the date on which the meeting was communicated to Dhaka.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, Telegram from Paul, repeated in a telegram from Chief Secretary, Bengal, Dacca to Foreign Secretary, Simla, 21st August 1888, No. 152, Enclosure No. 5, f. 191.

¹⁰⁴ "[T]wo other letters, dated 2nd August, written by envoy collectively, and also Angdoforong separately, in which they regret refusal of Tibetans to listen to offers of mediation, has compelled them to return without visiting me." Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ *Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet. Signed at*

mediation of the Bhutanese, although failed due to the Tibetan closure, also represented a further rapprochement between Bhutan and the British Raj. In 1909, John Claude White would write in this regard: “soon after the Sikkim Expedition of 1888–9 broke the power and influence of the Tibetans, and the cause of Aloo Dorji, who fought on their Side in the attack on Gnatong in May 1888 was lost. All subsequent attempts at interference by the Chinese and Tibetans were frustrated by the closer relationships with the Penlops which we maintained henceforth, and thus Ugyen Wangchuk’s influence in Bhutan was firmly established”.¹⁰⁷

The factions of the battle of Changlimithang, re-proposing themselves in the Anglo-Tibetan conflict, with the defeated Thimphu Dzongpon on the side of the Tibetans and Ugyen Wangchuck and its main allies, the Paro Penlop and the Wangdi Phodrang Dzongpon, in a cautious and balanced position, began to clarify the role that Bhutan could play in Calcutta and London. Young Ugyen Wangchuck was ferrying his country – a cultural, religious and linguistic landmark of the Tibetan Buddhist world – towards a key-role in the geopolitical landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the final decades of the Great Game, Ugyen Wangchuck would be able to preserve the independence and identity of Bhutan, unify it under his leadership and make it a political hinge between the Himalayan universe and the Raj to the south. In addition to political and military leadership, Ugyen Wangchuck also inaugurated his diplomatic career. The Bhutanese attempt of 1888 can be read as a prelude to the subsequent mediation work put in place by the Bhutanese under the leadership of the future Druk Gyalpo, the most important of which remains obviously carried forward directly by Trongsa Penlop himself during the Younghusband Expedition of the 1904, three years before his coronation in Punakha and the definitive birth of the monarchy.

Calcutta, March 17, 1890. *With Regulations appended thereto, signed at Darjeeling, December 5, 1893, C. 7312*, London 1894, pp. 1–3.

¹⁰⁷ WHITE, pp. 133–134.