

We like to reply in three parts:

1. Part

First of all the facts. It is truth that the workers took stones from the lower hill side.

We apologize for this and we felt very sad when this occurred and that we were not able to prevent this. Especially this hill we like very much, it is a wonderful location. We told the stone collectors many times not to touch the old remaining walls.

By the way, without our presence, all the sites would have been emptied.

That they took the stones has nothing to do with Buddhist-Bön, or Archeology war. It happened out of the motivation from the stone collectors to provide the bricklayers (mainly father or uncle) with good stones. Most of them are pure hearted, very devoted workers which worked under very hard environment conditions. So please don't condemn this people which you don't know.

To the main site: it was not our idea to rebuild the monastery. The Kailash Dordzin asked us for our help. We have nothing to do with the fundraising, there is no Swiss money involved.

Dismantling the collapsing structure from 1986 was done in early spring 2003, afterwards the Kailash Dordzin started with the new construction. When we arrived in July, due to SARS, the ground floor walls were half finished. Special findings, mainly small statues were collected and are registered by the local government. Architecture was done in accordance with the Kailash Dordzin.

2. Part

A personal view on your writing. After the short meeting some years ago we had a great respect for you. We recommended some of your books and rejoice in your great Tibetan language skills.

So reading this newsletter was quite something. In our lives, this is the second letter of this kind. Late Penor Rinpoche gave us at that time (in 2003) a heart advice how to act on such things. Thanks to this letter (and the writer) we got the chance for a precious teaching.

As we often told visitors, Kailash is in many ways a power place and especially the inner part. Whatever comes up, is usually quite powerful, so most of the people go either through Heaven or Hell or both even within a short time.

The activities and changes during the last years at Gyang Drag, brought great joy and happiness to thousands of visitors with all kinds of background; Bönpos, Hindus, Jain, Buddhist, Christian....Nomads, Farmer, Scientists, Army and Government people.

As you maybe know, the late Bön Lama Gelong Lha Tenzing Wangdrak and the Kailash Dordzin were good friends. When they visited together the main site, both of them were full of joy and Gelong Lha highly appreciated the work. He then even asked us to help him reconstruct the Silver castle in Khyunglung. Why did they always ask us neophytes to help them, since they know you also since many years?

That the same activities at Gyang Drag triggered within you such a frustration and anger, is really sad and we apologize for whatever role we play in this. Even more sad is, that you had to send and share this emotional frustrations with 1200 subscribers in 30 countries on your web site.

How you wrote about us is one thing, which for us is again a great lesson in patience, generosity and many more aspects. Sadly to say, that people who know us maybe get a bad impression about the writer. But how you exaggerated the whole thing. Our birthplace for example, has nothing to do with the project. Or condemning the monks and workers without knowing them, is really sad.

We hope the investigations on the many sites will be done soon, and it will not only bring scientific proof and results, but also helps and involves the local population and the many visitors with different backgrounds. In all the years we stayed there, only the two Jain expeditions showed officially interest in these sites.

The main cause of our suffering is ignorance. Let's aspire that the neophytes and the high educated people learn how to tame their mind and become skillful in transcending ignorance and knowledge into wisdom.

3. Part:

We put comments into your letter. We avoided to reply on the hurting tough words.

Flight of the Khyung

More adventures unfold in Tibet as the *Flight of the Khyung* returns you to Asia's holiest peak, Mount Kailas. This month's newsletter looks at vital issues affecting the sacred mountain and their implications for a sound, sustainable future. Climb aboard and be whisked away to Mount Kailas. A few minutes to remember, a few minutes to forget, let your mind soar ever freer.

Sound the Alarm:

The Destruction of Zhang Zhung's Capital Aided and Abetted by Swiss Nationals

Before June 2009, I had not visited Gyangdrak monastery since 2002. It is situated in the middle of the inner circuit of Mount Kailas, the most sheltered and sacred of precincts imaginable. I heard that Gyangdrak (Tibetan = rGyang-grags dgon-pa), a Drigung Kagyu (Tibetan = 'Bri-gung bka'-brgyud) subsect monastery, had been rebuilt, but did not realize at what cost. Builders destroyed one of Zhang Zhung's premier archaeological sites, and this was carried out with the connivance of Swiss nationals!



Gyangdrak monastery. Note the crumbling apron-wall on the right side of the structure.

First a little historical background: Gyangdrak monastery was founded by Ghuya Gangpa in 1215 CE, after dislodging Drukpa subsect practitioners from the inner circuit of Mount Kailas. Ghuya Gangpa was the first of four religious administrators known as *dordzin* (Tibetan = *rdor-'dzin*), who managed Mount Kailas and Lake Manasarovar until the ecclesiastical takeover of the region by the Sakyapa sect about 60 years later. In the early 15th century CE, the Gelukpa (Tibetan = dGe-lugs-pa) sect came to dominate the pilgrimage places in a religious tussle for power.

The large natural amphitheatre at Gyangdrak, however, has a much longer history than the

Buddhist sectarian rivalries of the 11th to 15th century CE. According to Bon sources, this was none other than the site of the first capital of Zhang Zhung. Known as Gyangri Yulojon, a castle is said to have been founded here in which three different kings resided: Triwer Lharje, holder of the golden horn of the bird crown; Lhabchen, holder of the *khyung* horns of the bird crown; and Hrido Gyerpung, holder of the crystal horns of the bird crown.

As described in my book *Antiquities of Upper Tibet*, the all-stone corbelled edifices found in the vicinity of Gyangdrak are the vestiges of an archaic cultural presence, one that was much more extensive and vibrant than what was possible in the subsequent Buddhist era. The prominent hill hosting Gyangdrak monastery, with streams flowing around both sides, has the kind of geomantic endowment fit for the residence of Zhang Zhung kings. This site, therefore, must have been chosen by the Drigungpa for its historical and geographic preeminence.

Among other important ruins at Gyangdrak is what I designate the Main Group of Lower Gyangdrak. This cluster of ruined buildings was situated atop a rocky knob east of Gyangdrak monastery, on the opposite side of the Dar Chu watercourse. The Main Group, consisting primarily of all-stone corbelled structures in the archaic mode of construction, covered an area of 10 m x 45 m. Its location closely matches the description of a dilapidated fortress noted in the *Tise Neshe* of the Drigungpa. The religious supremo Ghuya Gangapa is recorded as having taken up residence in this fortress.

The Main Group of Lower Gyangdrak could be divided into east, central and west complexes. The isolated east complex contained buildings made with wooden rafters in the Buddhist style of construction, the likely residence of Ghuya Gangpa. The central and west complexes were characterized by a semi-subterranean aspect and all-stone construction. Some *in situ* stone roof assemblies were found in the central complex.

The size, location and fortress aspect of the Main Group made it a very important component of the ancient settlement mosaic of Gyangdrak. Given its archaeological and historical status, the Main Group is crucial to understanding the nature and scope of early habitation at Mount Kailas. Sadly, it is no more. The walls of the ruins were dismantled in order to furnish stones for the reconstruction of Gyangdrak monastery. Now, only piles of rubble and a few footings remain, the vestiges of what just seven years ago were relatively integral ruins. The wanton destruction of the Main Group archaeological site is clearly in contravention of the laws of the People's Republic China governing the conservation of ancient relics and monuments.

If we would not have been there, the whole hill and other sites would not bear any useful stone anymore. We did advise the workers again and again to leave the walls as they are. As we respect old ruins as important cultural heritage and important sites for scientific work.

The destruction of precious monuments at one of Zhang Zhung's chief sites was caused by the ignorance and greed of the Tibetan builders and monks concerned, but the root of the problem lies much deeper. It is a reflection of a bias against ancient Tibetan culture and religion that lingers among some Buddhist practitioners to this day. These Tibetans have a fear and revulsion of their non-Buddhist past, and as the traditional literary record demonstrates, they will go to great lengths to rewrite history according to their own sensibilities and vested interests.

Living and working there many years with Buddhist's and Bönpo's together our experience is completely different (except that we all are in certain ways ignorant), we don't know about your contacts. So please don't put labels on regions and people you don't know deeper.



Current state of the Main Group ruins. Photo: Sally Walkerman

In the case of the Main Group, the tragedy spreads even further, catching in its web Swiss nationals, self-appointed guardians of Tibetan culture and religion.

We are just two simple people with no doctor degree and we never said something otherwise. Together with the advice of different Masters from the lineage, we helped the Kailash Dordzin to rebuild his monastery.

Some people even call us as medical doctors, because we worked from 1999 until 2001 in the Tibetan Medical & Astro Institute in Darchen. In another book Flaviu is mentioned as a carpenter. Now you call us "self appointed guardians of Tibetan culture and religion". We wonder what will come next.

Here is the shocking fact: the reconstruction of Gyangdrak monastery was funded **this is wrong** and supervised by Swiss citizens. The individuals who oversaw the work and disbursed the funds are a couple named Ruth and Flaviu. In process of rebuilding Gyangdrak, this couple allowed the Main Group to be savaged. Switzerland, a country that prides itself in upholding international conventions concerning cultural and humanitarian issues, has citizens operating in Tibet that trample upon its basic ideals. **Sorry that we are Swiss. Switzerland is not connected with this project. Otherwise no comment, useless.** I presume that ignorance of the history and culture of Mount Kailas is behind the destruction of the Main Group, not malignant intent, yet the result is tragically the same.

There is a very serious lesson to be learnt here: people armed with money but not knowledge wreak a lot of destruction in the sphere of development. Ruth and Flaviu, who are culpable in the razing of the Main Group, must be held accountable for their actions. Both the Swiss and PRC governments should move swiftly to address the situation either through legal or pecuniary means. The loss of the Main Group, a precious piece of Tibet's history, must not go unpunished.

Ironically, the new Gyangdrak monastery is already falling to pieces due to an ill-conceived design. The old monastery sat upon a tall stone revetment that was tightly knit around the underlying rock formation. This 'fortress style' random-course revetment closely conformed to the natural furrows and protuberances of the parent formation, furnishing a very secure underpinning

for the superstructure of the monastery

When we consulted other people, everybody wanted to make a very large Monastery. It was possible to convince the people and sponsors to keep the old site and location, which was very important for us.

Like the Main Group ruins, this ancient – **the latest construction was around 18 years old - architectural feature was undervalued by the renovators. It was not a renovation; it was a complete new construction. Because the ground walls from the Monastery, which was rebuilt in the 80's were not good.**

It was largely dismantled and a rubble-filled apron-wall built in its place, in order that the floor plan of the monastery could be enlarged. This construction has proven unsound, and parts of it are collapsing, leaving the monastery vulnerable to structural failure.

Perhaps the spirit guardians of the Zhang Zhung ruins are registering their protest? That is at least as some Tibetans might view it . But what a big loss all around! A Zhang Zhung site is obliterated and the monastery replacing it is falling down. **Due to tight policies, which are also caused by the western supported “pre Olympic demonstrations”, the monks have no teacher. The monks are not able to do maintenance work (they have nomadic background) and the Tibetan workers were and are still not allowed to do even small repairing. Due to the uprising permafrost line and maybe small earthquakes, fissures appeared. They could not be repaired, so the rain water flows into the walls, causing the damage.**

The moral of the story is resoundingly clear: if you want to conserve and develop a cultural site, know what you are doing! Engineers, architects, archaeologists and historians are required, not neophytes. Ruth and Flaviu will have to live with what they have wrought and it is not pretty. **We and many good hearted supporters know about our motivation. Sad that you did not show any interest in the region and the sites during the last 7 years, we would have highly appreciated your support. The work was not showed on CNN or BBC, but it was also not hidden in any way. The government was always well informed about the progress.**