Himalayan Nature
Representations and Reality

Edited by Erika Sandman and Riika J. Virtanen

Studia Orientalia 109

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Helsinki 2011

Himalayan Nature: Representations and Reality
Studia Orientalia, vol. 109, 2011

Societas Orientalis Fennica
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FINLAND

Editor
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Typesetting
Lotta Aunio

Cover photo
Nakza Drolma: "mTho ris la, a mountain pass at the top of Brag dkar sprel rdzong, and a Buddhist pilgrimage site in Xinhai County, Qinghai Province, People's Republic of China."

ISSN 0039-3282
ISBN 978-951-9380-75-9

WS Bookwell Oy
Jyväskylä 2011

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MAKING MUSEUM COLLECTIONS: MISSIONARY HILJA HEISKANEN'S HIMALAYAN ARTEFACTS

Pilvi Vainonen

ABSTRACT

One hundred years ago, missionary Hilja Heiskanen brought the first Tibetan and Bhutanese museum collections to Finland.[1] The first collection was acquired by the National Museum in 1908, the second in 1912. At the beginning of the 20th century, Miss Heiskanen worked in the Baxa Duar and Darjeeling districts in India for nine years in all as a member of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, whose original initiative was to convert Tibetans. This interest can be seen in the contents of the two collections. Heiskanen grouped the 65 items included in the first collection as *Religious items from Tibet*, with additions of *Bhutanese*, *Tibetan* and *Hindu items*.[2] The second collection is larger, 121 numbers, and, according to the description given by Heiskanen, it consists mainly of various *Tibetan items*.[3] Some of these objects are presented in this paper. According to the theme of the workshop *Himalayan Nature: Representations and Reality* held in Helsinki in March 2008, items made of organic material, mostly of plant parts, are examined more closely. This means a group of various objects and samples from ritual items, such as incense, to the non-sacral utility goods, like sheep fat and samples of foodstuffs. The main effort has been in identifying the natural materials as far as possible, and, secondly, to give a short description of the customary use of the chosen items. Thus the purpose has been to contextualize particular items into particular cultural environments. Natural materials and the items made of them can and do draw connecting links into wider cultural contexts concerning many layers of life.

1 Heikel 1908.
2 Collection VK 4830: catalogue and verification 1908/8.
3 Collection VK 4883: catalogue and verification 1911/5.

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1. THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Today, many of the Tibetan and other items gathered by Heiskanen are displayed in the permanent exhibition *Fetched from Afar* at the Museum of Cultures, Helsinki. The museum context is actually the third phase of the lives of these objects, the first being their making and use at the Himalayas, the second the withdrawal from the original context by collecting. In examining these artefacts, I have used many literary sources that, like the items themselves, date from the late 19th and the early 20th century. These include, for example, the museum documentation of the collections and travel books. This is why the past tense is mainly used in this paper, even though many practices undoubtedly continue today as they were practised a hundred years ago.

1.1 The sites of the collecting

The primary aspiration of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission was to convert Tibetans. Because evangelical work was prohibited in Tibet, the missionaries had to stay in the Darjeeling area in India and in the kingdom of Sikkim, which was also politically controlled by the British Raj.[4] The main mission station was in the village of Ghoom near Darjeeling, and there were others in Lachen and Lachung in Sikkim, in Baxa Duar near the Bhutanese border, and in Cooch Behar in the Indian plains. All these places are situated by the old travel and trade routes connecting China, Tibet, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, and people from various religions and ethnic backgrounds were living there as well as passing by.[5]

Concerning the old museum collections it is not unexceptional that the collector does not give detailed information as to where and from whom particular items were obtained. Here, many of the items have certainly been in everyday use in the Darjeeling district, Bhutan, or Sikkim, and many have been exchanged by trade or otherwise. The majority of the items represent Tibetan culture, but not all. In uncertain cases it is sometimes not even relevant to try to tell the difference; for example, *rudraksha* rosaries and incense are used by both Hindus and Buddhists, *bangchung* containers are perhaps manufactured in Bhutan but used by many hill peoples. Thus, I have not tried to categorize all the items too strictly, but let them tell of their part in the life and lifestyles of the multicultural area where they were collected.

4 Bell (1998 (1924): 54).
5 Bell (1998 (1924): 19); Bell (1988 (1928): 93–94).

1.2 The archival material and the museum catalogues

During their working years in the Himalayan field, the Finnish branch of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission produced a rich text material. Their interest lay mostly in the relations between the missionaries themselves and the local people, concerning particularly religious matters. Thus, not very much information about the local material culture is given. The main value of these writings is that they describe the reciprocal activity in the field, here the exchange relations that in turn produced the museum collections by Heiskanen and others.

The items of Hilja Heiskanen's two collections were first listed by the collector herself. She described the uses of the items and gave native terms for some of them. When the artefacts came to the National Museum of Finland, the then curator, A.O. Heikel, compiled the actual catalogues from Heiskanen's writings and other sources, and the original lists and descriptions by Heiskanen remained as additional verifications. This is the primary information for the items.

Some of the objects have been exhibited later and thus examined more carefully.[6] However, this concerns almost solely the Tibetan Buddhist cult objects and not the kinds of items discussed in this paper. Of course, when I was preparing the manuscript for the permanent exhibition of the Museum of Cultures all the accumulated knowledge was of immense help. Along with that process the data was also shifted to the museum's database cataloguing system, which will also be opened for the public on the Internet.[7]

2. THE ETHNOGRAPHICAL ITEMS

I will start with items related to drink and food. Next there are items connected with hygiene, medicine, intoxicants, and sealing. Following these some cult objects are dealt with, and finally, a group of various other cultural items made of natural materials is listed.

In most cases the chosen items involve relatively little preparation or handling. For example, woollen and cotton textiles and many pieces of woodwork have been left out. Yet, the objects that consist of materials other than "natural" but belong to the same functional cluster with them are included.

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6 e.g. *Oh, Ye Monks, Strive Onwards Diligently! Exhibition of Buddhist Ritual Objects*, Helsinki City Art Museum 1980, catalogue by Harry Halén; *The Path of the Buddha*, The National Museum of Finland 1991, an unpublished catalogue by Harry Halén.

7 This will be in Finnish.

2.1 Beverages

2.1.1 Tea

The great Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo's grandson introduced tea from China to Tibet. Tea became very popular among the Tibetans, who, according to Bell, could drink from thirty to seventy cups of butter-tea every day.[8] As a rule, everyone carried a wooden tea-bowl inside one's gown. Tea and barley flour were also mixed and eaten as a staple food. On visits, after drinking some of the tea the cup was refilled, closed with a lid, and in a little while the drinking continued.[9] In the monasteries tea was drunk several times a day in a ceremonial manner, and during the services as well.[10]

Chinese tea (*Camellia sinensis*) has been the most popular among the Tibetans. Different qualities of tea are produced from the same plant. The leaves and the inferior parts of the tea bush were pressed into tea bricks. Brick tea has been widely used in Central Asia, even as currency. In Sikkim, poor Tibetans and Lepchas could substitute maple leaves (*Acer cadatum*) for tea.[11]

Tea was prepared by mixing a handful of leaves and twigs with cold or cool water in a cauldron, and a small amount of soda was added to draw out the right colour. The mixture was cooked thoroughly. After this, it was poured through a strainer into a churn made of brass, copper or bamboo, butter and salt were added, and the whole was churned well. After churning, the tea was poured into a teapot, which was of earthenware or metal, usually copper. The finest teapots were used only on ceremonial occasions, e.g. at the New Year festivities or marriage ceremonies.[12]

In the Heiskanen collections, there are several items connected to the Tibetan tea culture. Two rough tea bricks, sheep fat in a sheep's stomach replacing butter as well as a strainer made of bamboo strips tell about the making of tea.[13] There is neither a cauldron nor a churn; perhaps the collector considered them too big to be transported all the way from India to Finland. Instead, two wooden teacups and two imported Chinese faience cups from the late Qing dynasty with locally made metal lids and feet are included.[14] Fine faience cups like these have been used by monks and the nobility.

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8 Bell (1998 (1928): 10, 193).
9 Bell (1998 (1928): 195, 197–199); Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5; Forman (1996: 153).
10 Waddell (1895: 191, 214–215, 220).
11 Bell (1998 (1928): 105, 197–198).
12 Bell (1998 (1928): 196–198); Collection VK 4883: catalogue and verification 1911/5.
13 Collection VK 4883: 98 tea bricks, 99 sheep fat, 88 strainer.
14 Collections VK 4830: 37, 38 wooden cups, 39 faience cup, VK 4883: 46 faience cup; Hyvönen (1986: 267, 276–277).

Finally, there are two metal teapots.[15] One was made of brass and copper in Ladakh in the 19th century.[16] Both pots were acquired in Darjeeling where they had probably been used by monks. They were the most expensive items in Heiskanen's second collection: at the beginning of the 20th century they cost 30 rupees together, while one faience teacup cost 2 rupees 8 annas, and the tea bricks as well as the sheep fat – which Heiskanen called *tsilu* – cost only 1 rupee 12 annas.[17]

For their part, these items tell about the importance of butter-tea in Tibet, and something about the tea trade. Tea itself and the finer teacups were imported from China. The fat came from Tibet; butter and fat gave energy and helped to keep the body warm in a cold climate. The expensive metal vessels were used only on rare occasions or by the monks, but the everyday wooden teacups were simple, cheap utility goods, often lathed from horse chestnut wood or maple.[18] This small collection contains a wide range of materials, and the items themselves are connected to many social layers of the Tibetan society. Tea was important to everyone, and, as Hilja Heiskanen put it: "No occasion is perfect without tea."[19]

2.1.2 Beer

The importance of Tibetan beer, *chang*, is likewise often highlighted. Beer has been an everyday beverage as well as a drink with many social and ritual dimensions, e.g. in marriage proposal ceremonies.[20]

Beer was customarily brewed from barley, and, in the lower valleys, from buckwheat.[21] In Sikkim finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), which occurs up to 2,300 metres, has also been used to make the local *thumba* beer. According to Heiskanen, millet beer is milder than *chang*. She collected seeds of the finger millet and yeast needed in beer making as well as a bamboo beer jug.[22]

In Sikkim, beer was brewed by putting the seeds and some yeast into a vessel, and boiling water was poured on them. The vessel was made of a bamboo stem, and the beer was sucked through a reed pipe.[23] Bell gives a more detailed description of the brewing process in the Chumbi valley. He also describes elaborate

15 Collection VK 4883: 44, 45.
16 Untracht, Parpola & Parpola (1993: 83).
17 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
18 Bell (1998 (1928): 199); Polunin & Stainton (1997: 80); Storrs & Storrs (1990: 18).
19 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
20 Bell (1998 (1928): 149).
21 Bell (1998 (1928): 200).
22 Collection VK 4883: 48 jug, 102 yeast, 111 seeds.
23 Biswas (1967: ii); Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.

Figure 1 Straws, cylinder-shaped beer jugs and other wooden vessels sold in the *hat* market in Kalimpong.

Tibetan iron beer jugs with silver and gold ornaments. They were used for serving beer at entertainments, at temple offerings, etc.[24]

Heiskanen's bamboo beer jug comes from Pedong near the Sikkimese border in India. It is quite simple with just three metal rims and a chain handle.[25] Wooden and bamboo vessels like this are made in Sikkim even today and sold in the bazaars, but the old pieces have become collectibles with high prices.

In her description, Heiskanen also mentions an alcoholic drink *ara* brewed from rice or maize.[26] Arrack was actually distilled from beer, and, as it was very strong, it was usually drank by men only.[27] There is a cup in the collection probably made from curly birch and with a metal casing inside.[28] According to Heiskanen, it was normally used as a teacup, but in fact it might have been a liquor cup.[29]

24 Bell (1998 (1928): 200–201).
25 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
26 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
27 Bell (1998 (1928): 200).
28 Collection VK 4883: 47, catalogue and verification 1911/5.
29 Rautamäki (1996).

Figure 2 Dried cheese for sale. Kalimpong, 2005.

2.2 Food

Tea and beer are part of the Tibetan culture by and large, but the food examples in the collections seem to originate mainly from Sikkim and the Darjeeling district. There is neither barley nor salt included, and the pieces of dried cheese are most easily connected to the Tibetan diet and lifestyle.

2.2.1 Cheese

Yaks and other cattle have been numerous in Tibet, and therefore milk and butter were available at a low price. The surplus of the butter went mainly to the temples to be burned in the lamps, and cheese was made in large quantities.[30]

Fatty cheese contains energy, and it has been used, for instance, as a snack when travelling. "People eat cheese by sucking it in the mouth like candies", wrote Heiskanen.[31] Cheese was also mixed in *tsampa* with barley-flour, tea, and butter.[32]

30 Bell (1998 (1928): 180, 187).
31 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
32 Bell (1998 (1928): 185).

There are examples of dried cheese made of yak milk in both collections.[33] Printed patterns from the textile within which the cheese mass was dried can be seen on the surface of the pieces, which are split from a larger chunk. There is a small hole in each piece from which it has been hung or tied with a thread.

Cheese connects the collections to the traditional livelihood and lifestyle of the nomad and pastoral Tibetans for whom yaks and other cattle have been the basis of life. It has undoubtedly been important to other peoples in the area as well, as Heiskanen pointed out, and it still is: cheese pieces in glass cans and tied in strings are also sold as snacks in the urban environment in the food stalls around Darjeeling and elsewhere even today.

2.2.2 Beans and spices

In Tibet meat is part of the diet, but in vegetarian India leguminous plants are among the most important food crops and protein sources in people's daily nutrition. Some species of beans are also cultivated in the Himalayan foothills.[34]

Hilja Heiskanen collected a good number of different kinds of beans as examples of the local subsistence.[35] Certain kinds of beans were collected in Lachen, Sikkim, from an altitude of approximately 2,700 metres, but they have disappeared in the museum storage. Big brown beans and a mixture of beans of various colours and sizes come from the Darjeeling district from 1,500 metres. Small green and red lentils Heiskanen called by the Hindi name *dal*. There are also bigger white and brown soya beans in the collection as well as some boiled rice, with which the bean dishes are often served. The rice is packed in a *bangchung*, and it was also used in Buddhist offerings.[36]

As a food sample, we also have a pasteboard box containing *Spices from Tibet*.[37] The item per se is rough mixture of small twigs and dried smaller plant parts like flowers. As the mixture is pulped and has lost its smell, its constituents are difficult to identify without any additional information or examination. It may contain cinnamon or malabathrum (*Cinnamomum tamala*), which occurs at an altitude of from 450 to 2,100 metres from Kashmir to Bhutan, and whose bark and leaves are used to replace cinnamon.[38]

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33 Collections VK 4830: 41, VK 4883: 101.
34 Polunin & Stainton (1997: 101–102).
35 Collection VK 4883: 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110.
36 Collection VK 4883: 89, catalogue.
37 Collection VK 4883: 114, catalogue and verification 1911/5.
38 Polunin & Stainton (1997: 351–352); Ståhlberg (2007).

The packing is almost as interesting as the item. On the lid of the box there are printed texts advertising watches and jewellery, as well as information on the enterprise: *J.W. BENSON Ltd, STEAM FACTORY, 62 & 64, LUDGATE HILL*. There is also a text *Buttons* in Hilja Heiskanen's handwriting; apparently she was keeping buttons in the box before it was needed for the "Tibetan spices".

2.2.3 Bread

A large flat bread baked from tree roots was collected in north Sikkim, probably from Lachen or Lachung.[39] In her description, Heiskanen noted that the local people were mainly nomads and were not familiar with farming. At springtime there was usually a shortage of food, and people had to eat even monkeys and snakes. Thus the bread seems to be emergency food, even if this is not specifically mentioned.[40]

Besides roots, the bread seems to contain some flour, probably barley, fat, and water. The roots are possibly of pine, ground into cellulose; deciduous trees are often too bitter to eat. The dough was likely fried in a pan with some grease; today, Tibetan *balep korkun* bread is likewise baked in a frying pan.[41] By now the bread has naturally dried as hard as a stone, and it has broken neatly into three pieces. However, it is a very impressive example of the hard living conditions in northern Sikkim at the time.

There is also another piece of bread in the collection without any information from Heiskanen. Curator Heikel catalogued it as *a bread-like cake*.[42] It is smaller than the first and its colour is lighter. Very likely it also contains barley flour and some fat, and probably milk or water to make the dough mouldable.[43] There is a rough cross on the surface, so it is possible that the missionaries used such breads as wafers.

39 Collection VK 4883: 100.
40 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
41 Ståhlberg (2007).
42 Collection VK 4883: 103, catalogue.
43 Ståhlberg (2007).

2.3 Hygiene, medicine, betel, and sealing wax

2.3.1 Soap nuts

The soap nut (*Sapindus mukorossi*) has been widely used to replace soap. The tree occurs mainly in the western Himalayas between 700 and 2,000 metres.[44] As the name indicates, the seeds resemble hard nuts. They contain saponins and produce foam when chopped into pieces and put into hot water.[45]

Heiskanen gathered ten seeds of *Sapindus mukorossi*, and ten bigger flat seeds also labelled as soap nuts. According to her, the latter were growing in huge pods.[46] They are actually seeds of the St. Thomas bean (*Entada phaseoloides*), a large woody climber which grows from Nepal to Sikkim from 300 up to 1,400 metres, and also contain saponins.[47] A third soap substitute used in the area, although not included in the collection, is the seeds of the horse chestnut (*Aesculus indica*). They have also been used as emergency food despite their bitterness.[48]

Lately *Sapindus mukorossi* has become popular in Europe as an ecological alternative for industrial detergents. In Europe, they are often called by the Bengali name *ritha*.

2.3.2 Medicinal herbs

Many Himalayan plants are used medicinally. Bark, leaves, seeds, roots etc. have been used to treat ailments and diseases as fresh, dried, powdered or prepared otherwise.[49] Himalayan herbs are also old trade articles.[50]

Heiskanen collected three kinds of medicinal herbs, all catalogued as *Herbs from Lhasa, mendrok*.[51] Thus, she probably obtained the herbs from a person coming from Lhasa, possibly a Tibetan pilgrim.

The first example seems to be roots either of the belladonna or deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*), or of the mandragora or mandrake (*Atropa mandragora*). The roots of the two plants are very much alike. In the Himalayas, belladonna grows from 1,500 up to 3,000 metres, mandrake from 3,000 to 4,500 metres. Even though belladonna is very toxic, its leaves and roots have been used medicinally.

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44 Storrs & Storrs (1990: 250).
45 Collection VK 4883: verification 1911/5.
46 Collection VK 4883: 112, 113, verification 1911/5.
47 Polunin & Stainton (1997: 88); Tamsang (2004: 11).
48 *Plants for a Future*: *Aesculus indica*.
49 See, e.g. Polunin & Stainton (1997); Storrs & Storrs (1990).
50 Bell (1998 (1928): 91).
51 Collection VK 4883: 117–119, verification 1911/5.

It has strong hallucinogenic properties, and in different cultures it has been used, for example, as a painkiller and for treating colic and asthma.[52]

The next example, catkin-like fruits, is named *pipal* in the catalogue by Heikel. The plant is the Indian long pepper (*Piper longum*). The Sanskrit name of the plant is actually *pippali*, which is not to be confused with the pipal or bodhi tree.[53] Its fruits have been used, for instance, to cure respiratory ailments.[54]

The third example is four small pieces of bark of a tree or a bush, catalogued as *phustaka* by Heikel. There is a small hole in each piece, so they have probably been hung on a thread. The source Heikel used in naming the last two herbs is not known, and up to now I have not discovered what plant the third one is. The Sanskrit word *pustaka* means 'a book', or 'a protuberant ornament'.[55]

2.3.3 Face paint

Sometimes Tibetan women blackened their faces in order to look "extremely" unattractive thus helping the monks to keep their celibacy vows. This is the explanation Heiskanen gave for the eight small cubes of dark skin paint. The cubes were pulverized, dissolved in hot water, and smeared on the face.[56]

The paint consists very likely of caoutchouc, thus it is made of milky sap containing latex. For example, the sap of a rubber tree (*Ficus elastica*), a small tree growing in the eastern Himalayas, was used to make a kind of inferior rubber in the early 1900s.[57] And although the explanation for the use of the pigment may be pious, it has also been used more practically to protect the skin from the sun and the cold winds. In addition, painting the face was believed to ward off toothache and neuralgia as well, and make the skin look whiter after being washed away.[58]

2.3.4 Betel

Chewing betel is a widespread custom in Asia. "All peoples use it here", wrote Heiskanen, and added 12 split "betel nuts" or *pan* in her second collection.[59] She

52 *Plants for a Future*: *Atropa bella-donna*; Polunin & Stainton (1997: 287).
53 *Monier Williams Sanskrit–English Dictionary*.
54 Tamsang (2004: 10).
55 *Monier Williams Sanskrit–English Dictionary*.
56 Collection VK 4883: 20, verification 1911/5.
57 *Kemper Center for Home Gardening: Ficus elastica*.
58 Bell (1998 (1928): 123).
59 Collection VK 4883: 115, verification 1911/5.

must have referred to the Darjeeling district and the Indian plains, but in Bhutan *pan* was also used extensively.[60]

The "betel nuts" come from the areca nut tree or areca palm (*Areca catechu*), which is grown widely in India. Sliced or pulverized "betel nuts", or actually areca nuts, are wrapped together with spices and lime in a betel pepper leaf (*Piper betel*) and chewed as a quid. Areca seeds contain alkaloids, which cause a slightly intoxicated state. *Pan* was also believed to be the cause for goitre.[61]

2.3.5 Sealing wax

There were two complete pieces of sealing wax in Heiskanen's second collection. The original wax sheets were flat and oval-shaped, but being fragile and dry they have fallen apart into several fragments.[62] In the southern Himalayas, fruits of some of the deciduous sumac shrubs produce wax, which is used in lacquer work and for candles.[63] However, Heiskanen's exemplars are made from tree bark and roots, and again, the species are not specified.

Heiskanen called the sealing wax *lacha*. This probably refers to the Sanskrit word *laksha*, which means red lac obtained from a tree.[64] Accompanying the wax, there are also three small metal seals in the collection.[65]

2.4 Ritual objects

In Indian tradition many objects of nature, including rivers, mountains, plants and animals, convey religious meanings. The flora, numerous trees and plants, such as lotus and the pipal or bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa*), symbolize sacred matters in certain contexts and are hence objects of religious action.[66] In the Himalayas, some trees and plants also have special religious meanings, but they are not revered in the same way as in Hinduism. In this paper I am mainly interested in which plants have been used as raw materials in making items of religious or ritual significance.

60 Macdonald (2002: 109–110).
61 Collection VK 4883: 115, verification 1911/5; Macdonald (2002: 109).
62 Collection VK 4883: 95, verification 1911/5.
63 Polunin & Stainton (1997: 84–85).
64 *Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon*.
65 Collection VK 4883: 96, verification 1911/5.
66 Majupuria (1989: 12–13, 60, 72).

2.4.1 Incense

In many cultures incense is burned in religious ceremonies as an offering or as a symbolically purifying substance. In Tibet it has important medicinal functions as well.

Incense is found in many forms. It can be burned either directly, when the fragrant material itself is lit to burn, or indirectly, when a separate heat source makes the incense smoulder. In the first case, the incense is usually a manufactured product such as incense sticks; in the latter it is non-prepared pulp of aromatic ingredients such as different plant parts. In the Heiskanen collections, both types of incense are represented as well as a metal incense burner.[67]

In the Himalayas, the ingredients of incense vary from the usual, such as branches of coniferous trees, cinnamon, clove, and juniper, to a wide range of other herbs, woods, spices, and minerals. The Himalayan cypress (*Cupressus torelosa*), *Juniperus indica*, and *Rhododendron anthopogon* mixed with juniper are commonly used as incense in Buddhist temples.[68]

The ingredients of the incense sticks in the Heiskanen collection have not been examined, but, according to the collector, the sticks originate in Tibet.[69] The longest are 30 cm long, but many have been broken into shorter pieces.

The non-prepared incense pulp is packed nicely in a small pasteboard box, which originally contained *The New Machine Thread*. Heiskanen has plastered a new label on the box with the text *Sang*, the Tibetan word for incense. The mixture contains small branches of the Himalayan cypress and twigs identified as lucerne.[70] In 2005 I asked a Tibetan shopkeeper in the Darjeeling bazaar to name three different types of incense, and he gave me *pama sang*, meaning probably cypress, *labti sang* and *bhalu sang*, both meaning lucerne.

The much decorated brass incense burner in the collection is Newari work. It was acquired in Darjeeling, apparently from a monk. In her notes, Hilja Heiskanen wrote that in domestic life it was usually the womenfolk who attended the ritual incense burning in the mornings by taking the incense up to the hills in modest clay burners. The monks had the most elaborate burners to be used in the temple rituals.[71]

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67 Collections VK 4830: 18 incense stick, VK 4883: 41 *sang*, 40 incense burner.
68 Forman (1996: 81–82, 280–281); Polunin & Stainton (1997: 230, 389–390); Storrs & Storrs (1990: 90).
69 Collection VK 4830: verification 1908/8.
70 Ståhlberg (2007).
71 Collection VK 4883: 40, catalogue and verification 1911/5.

Figure 3 The trap for harmful spirits in the collection is made of seeds from the Indian trumpet tree. Darjeeling bazaar, 2005.

2.4.2 "Mobile"

The "mobile" is a rather extraordinary item.[72] It consists of nine garlands hanging from a bamboo ring. They are made of seeds of the Indian trumpet tree, and the ring is covered with brown and red paper. Paper ribbons have been attached to the tips of the garlands, too. The item is quite fragile. As additional material samples, there are two pods of the trumpet tree with thick layers of seeds inside. The Indian trumpet tree (*Oroxylum indicum*, Skr. *shyonaka*) is a fairly common small tree in the sub-Himalayan tract. It occurs from the Terai up to 1,000 metres, and is planted around the villages. It is a deciduous tree with few branches and leaves with exceptional formation. The flowers are large and trumpet-shaped. The fruit or pod contains a large number of seeds with thin, papery, transparent wings.[73]

According to Heiskanen, the "mobile" is of Tibetan origin, yet she gives only meagre information about its use. Probably it is hung from the roof in front of the house. The placement indicates a protective function; most likely it is a trap

72 Collection VK 4883: 92.
73 Storrs & Storrs (1990: 200).

for harmful spirits preventing them from entering the house. Among Hindus, leaves of the *nim* tree are used similarly, thus hung at the front and back doors in order to ward off evil spirits.[74]

In the Himalayas, a curative device has also been made from bamboo or other sticks by crossing them and twining colourful threads tightly in between the sticks to form a kind of rhombus-shaped flat net or maze (Tib. *dö/mdos*). When someone is sick, the cross is placed on the altar, and the evil spirit which has caused the illness is believed to be caught in it. Crosses are also put on the roof of a house to prevent the harmful spirits and disease causing demons from entering.[75] In fact, there is one such item in Heiskanen's second collection, acquired in Lachen, Sikkim, but it has been almost destroyed during the 100 years of storage.[76]

The religious significance of the Indian trumpet tree in Nepal is mentioned by Jha, but he does not explicate its ritual use either in Hinduism or in Buddhism.[77] I have witnessed the pods of the tree being sold in the Darjeeling bazaar and seen one placed on an altar in a Bhutanese monastery in Kalimpong, a fact which strengthens the assumption of the ritual relevance of the seeds. Yet, I have not been able to find out about the symbolic significance of the seeds that would connect them with the religious or ritual realm. Perhaps this is because they are too common, recurrent and cheap, and as such are not considered as ritual implements.

As a drug, the powder of dried seeds is used, for example, by women to induce conception.[78] Possibly, on a popular level, their potential in medicinal use might bring them positive connotations on other levels, too. Other parts of the tree are also traditionally used as medicine, and the plant is mentioned in the Ayurvedic texts.[79]

2.4.3 Rosaries

Rosaries are important ritual items in many religions. Typically they are used for counting the recited religious formulas, for "telling the beads". In Tibetan Buddhism, these utterances are often mantras, the most popular of which is *Om*

74 Storrs & Storrs (1990: 44).
75 Halén (2008: 71); Untracht (2008: 259–260).
76 Collection VK 4883: 83, verification 1911/5.
77 Jha (2007: 48, 50).
78 Mother Herbs & Agro Products: *Oroxylum Indicum*; Tamsang (2004: 16).
79 Dharmananda (2006); Storrs & Storrs (1990: 200–202).

Mani Padme Hum. It is associated with the patron-god Padmapani and its mere utterance was believed to put an end to the cycle of rebirths.[80]

Ideally, there should be 108 beads of uniform size in the Tibetan Buddhist rosaries corresponding to the number of the volumes of the *Kanyur*. Often there are three extra beads symbolizing the Buddha, the doctrine, and the order. Lay people have also used rosaries made of many kinds of beads in ordinary calculations and as jewellery.[81] The materials of the monks' rosaries are more restricted. Basically, the material depends on which sect the monk belongs to, and what purpose the rosary is used for, for example, on the deity worshipped. Wood (e.g. pipal, sandalwood), conch shell, crystal, coral, bone, and seeds have been the most common materials for monks' rosaries.[82]

There are four rosaries made of wooden material in the Heiskanen collections, one made of wooden beads and three made of seeds of the *rudraksha* tree (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*).[83] Several species belonging to this genus grow in the Terai area, Darjeeling, and the Sikkim districts, and in other parts of the sub-tropical eastern Himalayas.[84] The *rudraksha* tree produces a special kind of drupe with a pitted surface and five cells, and rosaries made of them are important both in Hinduism and in Tibetan Buddhism.[85] In India, *rudraksha malas* or rosaries are connected especially with Shiva. In Tibetan Buddhism, they have been commonly used by monks among the non-reformed Nyingma and Bön sects in the worship of the fierce deities and demons. In Tibet, the abnormal seeds with six cells have been highly appreciated, because, according to a belief, they originate from the seeds of Padmasambhava's rosary.[86]

The seeds of the *rudraksha malas* in the Heiskanen collections are all five-celled. One *mala* contains the whole 108 seeds, another just 75, and the third has 102 *raksha* seeds and three red celluloid beads in sequences. The wooden *mala* contains 102 wooden and 2 glass beads. As Pott has noted, in practice the rosaries are often incomplete, as is also the case here.[87]

80 Collection VK 4883: catalogue and verification 1911/5; Waddell (1895: 148–149).
81 Waddell (1895: 202–205, 209).
82 Waddell (1895: 206–210).
83 Collections VK 4830: 4, 5, VK 4883: 71 *rudraksha malas*, VK 4883: 70 wooden *mala*.
84 Biswas (1966: 191–194).
85 Storrs & Storrs (1990: 108); Majupuria (1989: 32–34).
86 Waddell (1895: 208–209).
87 Pott (1951: 119).

2.5 Other natural materials in cultural use

Furthermore, many other natural materials, imported and local, have various important cultural uses in the Himalayas. Bamboo species are undoubtedly among the most important raw materials in the whole Asia. Bamboo is used for building, making furniture, baskets, mats, tools, etc.[88] In addition to the tea strainer mentioned above, in the Heiskanen collections there are many items made of bamboo, such as three beautifully twined *bangchung* containers, and a water flagon made of a bamboo stem and covered with twined bamboo strips.[89] There is a hat, a comb, and a basket made of bamboo, and, as material samples, a plain piece of bamboo stem and even a fragment from a hut's wall twined from bamboo shreds.[90] Bamboo also occurs as prayer wheel handles and so forth.

In the Himalayas, paper has been made from many plants as handwork.[91] One of the most important raw materials is the bark of the daphne bush.[92] In the collections, items made of paper are two religious books, two bundles of prayer flags, several folded paper amulets, as well as printed papers for making these curative charms.[93]

Wooden items are more numerous and various. To mention some of them, there is a small portable table, printing blocks for a Tibetan ABC-book, as well as a *damaru* and a stick used by a mendicant.[94]

Leather items are rare in the Heiskanen collections. All the attire is made of woven materials, wool or cotton, and there is only one leather belt. A twofold container for needles and gunpowder as well as a flint pouch are also of leather; both of them are Tibetan.[95] Inside the latter, there are dried flowers used as tinder. According to Heiskanen, the plant is Edelweiss.[96] Two species of edelweiss (*Leontopodium*) are found at altitudes of 3,000–4,500 metres, and the windflower or grape-leaved anemone (*Anemone vitifolia*) has also been used as tinder in the Himalayas.[97]

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88 Polunin & Stainton (1997: 441); Storrs & Storrs (1990: 308).
89 Collections VK 4830: 35, 36, VK 4883: 89 *bangchungs*, VK 4830: 40 water flagon.
90 Collection VK 4883: 6 hat, 23 comb, 87 basket, 49 stem, 50 fragment.
91 Macdonald (2002: 170–171); Polunin & Stainton (1997: 354–356, 386); Storrs & Storrs (1990: 146).
92 Storrs & Storrs (1990: 306).
93 Collection VK 4830: 20 manuscript, part *kha* of some collection of Padmasambhava's *terma* literature concerning incense offerings, 63 xyloprint, a collection of *sutra* and *dharani* texts, 9 prayer flags, 10 printed amulet paper; Collection VK 4883: 78 paper amulet, 79 paper amulets and printed amulet papers.
94 Collection VK 4883: 42 table, 94 printing blocks, 50 *damaru*, 86 stick.
95 Collection VK 4830: 12 belt, 24 container; Collection VK 4883: 93 flint pouch.
96 Collection VK 4883: catalogue and verification 1911/5.
97 Polunin & Stainton (1997: 12–13, 186).

Human bone is found in two *kangling* trumpets and a skull begging bowl.[98] All of them are simple and plain without any decoration or ornamentation. Coconut and animal horn are used as soundboards for two string instruments, and a ritual fan is made of peacock feathers.[99]

In addition to the *rudraksha* and wooden beads mentioned above, there are many other kinds of beads in the collections. Mostly they are attached to charm boxes or other items or have been used in rosaries. The natural beads like coral, turquoise, and malachite as well as glass beads are well preserved,[100] but the beads made from celluloid are gradually dissolving. Celluloid is an early plastic that began to be manufactured in the 1860s from camphor (*Cinnamomum camphora*) and cellulose.[101] It was used extensively in bead making to imitate natural beads. In the long run, the material fractures into pieces, and, in the Heiskanen collections, there is one rosary already gone and some other items with serious cracks in the celluloid beads.[102]

3. SUMMARY

Items like the ones described above are seldom presented in museum exhibitions on Tibetan or Himalayan culture. In most cases, objects displayed are considered to be particularly "valuable" or "prominent", and they are often connected with religion or the ritual sphere. If daily life of (the lay) people is presented at all, the section exhibiting the religious domain might still be more significant.[103] Accordingly, items belonging to everyday life are not considered equally interesting or worth showing. There is a danger here that the image of "Tibet" or what is considered to be "Tibetan" or "Himalayan" is somewhat biased, assuming that "Tibetan matters" are more or less religious.

Secondly, items like this, which are only little prepared or even rough, do not represent "art" in the same sense as, for example, the more elaborate metalwork or woodcarving. As such, they are perhaps not considered equally "cultural", but being more "natural" are respectively somewhat undervalued as exemplars of Himalayan cultural history. Yet, as ethnographical objects they carry and convey meanings on many levels, first of all telling about how people have adapted their

98 Collection VK 4830: 15, 16 trumpets; Collection VK 4883: 82 begging bowl.
99 Collection VK 4883: 84, 85 string instruments, 39 fan.
100 Collection VK 4830: 27 woman's ear ornaments; Collection VK 4883: 16 woman's head ornament, 18 bead band.
101 Storrs & Storrs (1990: 82–83).
102 Collection VK 4830: 6 rosary, 28 bead band, 30 bead band.
103 For example, this was the case concerning the exhibition *Tibet – A Culture in Transition* in Vapriikki, Tampere, 2008–2009.

lifestyle and daily subsistence to the difficult environmental conditions. They can also act as a point of reference to many customs practised even today.

In general, there are not many especially fancy or expensive artefacts included in the Heiskanen collections, even though the local material culture is quite well represented in its totality. The Finnish missionaries led a simple life and a shortage of resources was a day-to-day reality. Under such conditions it was not possible for Heiskanen to collect anything particularly fine or expensive. Actually, she had started the collecting in order to show the "pagan" items in the homeland and thus raise money for the missionary work. Although the second collection was acquired for the National Museum the items are equally modest: the three thangkas, for instance, are small and of very simple paintwork. The contents of the collections also tell about the conditions of the collecting.

Finally, for an anthropologist the Heiskanen collections offer an insight into Himalayan life with its many layers and nuances. Furthermore, studying the contents of a particular collection the gatherer's personal interests and motives are exposed, and they in turn help in placing the collecting activity into a wider cultural context.

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