

---

## Dismemberment and sharing of game meat by pastoralist hunters on the Tibetan Plateau

*Démembrement et partage de la viande de gibier par les chasseurs des  
communautés pastorales du plateau tibétain*

**Toni Huber**

---



### **Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/3969>

DOI: 10.4000/emscat.3969

ISSN: 2101-0013

### **Publisher**

Centre d'Etudes Mongoles & Sibériennes / École Pratique des Hautes Études

### **Electronic reference**

Toni Huber, « Dismemberment and sharing of game meat by pastoralist hunters on the Tibetan Plateau », *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [Online], 50 | 2019, Online since 04 March 2019, connection on 04 March 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/3969> ; DOI : 10.4000/emscat.3969

---

This text was automatically generated on 4 March 2019.

© Tous droits réservés

---

# Dismemberment and sharing of game meat by pastoralist hunters on the Tibetan Plateau

*Démembrement et partage de la viande de gibier par les chasseurs des communautés pastorales du plateau tibétain*

Toni Huber

---

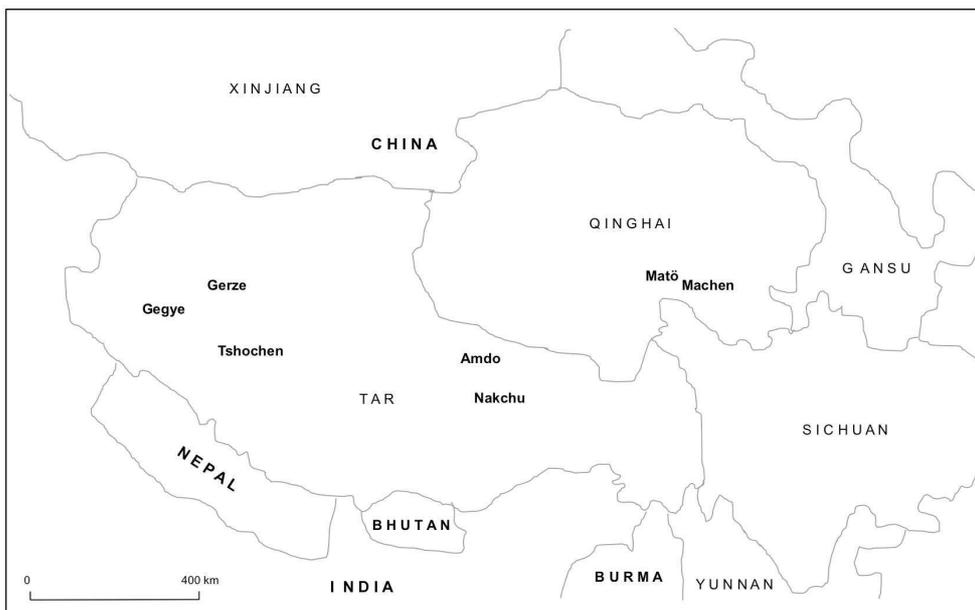
## Introduction

- 1 Among rural societies of the Tibetan Plateau and immediately adjacent Himalayan highlands, most hunting practices can be clearly divided into three phases. This is so regardless of the actual hunting technique involved (e.g. driving, ambush, trapping, etc.). The initial phase occurs prior to a chase, the second during the chase itself and includes the actual kill, while the final one involves processing of the animal's carcass. My study reports on this third phase of practices during hunting. It invariably involves dismemberment, and commonly also division of the game meat into portions, including shares intended for distribution to recipients other than the actual hunter who killed the animal. Both dismemberment and any subsequent sharing of portions from game carcasses mark the point during hunting when wild animals properly enter the social world. This study examines how certain communities upon the Tibetan Plateau divide the meat of large wild animals, and then distribute it using various modes of sharing.
- 2 My study relies primarily upon ethnographic data gathered during long running field research conducted between 1999-2010. I worked with different populations of pastoralists at widely spread locations across the northern Tibetan Plateau, including the western counties of Tshochen, Gerze and Gegye, the central counties of Nagchu and Amdo, and the eastern counties of Machen and Matö (Fig. 1<sup>1</sup>). I also resort to the very scarce notes published on the topic by other writers. Furthermore, brief observations will be made on a few relevant references occurring in indigenous Tibetan language

documents and some scholarly conclusions concerning them. These documents include the Old Tibetan Chronicle, the Dunhuang Old Tibetan manuscripts PT 1071 and PT 1072, several Classical Tibetan texts recording origin myths, and two modern Tibetan accounts of pastoral practices written by persons from the areas being described.

- 3 My scope remains limited in some important respects. I do not comment upon any general population referred to as being “Tibetan”. This is because those Tibetan Plateau communities who hunt and speak different Tibetic languages are so diverse they cannot be accurately encompassed by any single generic - and nowadays politicized - modern “Tibetan” referent. Moreover, in this short presentation I will defer engagement with the substantial literature concerning game meat sharing among those societies around the world who live primarily as foragers or hunter-gatherers. Many discussions of meat sharing in that literature appear far less relevant for the type of societies I am dealing with. All available records from the Tibetan Plateau region reveal hunting has never been a practice of forager or hunter-gatherer groups there. Rather, it has always been a subsidiary economic activity of variable and often low importance among those Tibetan Plateau populations who live as pastoralists, mixed agro-pastoralists or sedentary agriculturalists. What I will do is engage in limited comparisons with peoples inhabiting regions around the peripheries of the Tibetan Plateau since this is seldom done, and its neglect has always encouraged naive claims about “indigenous Tibetan” practices and patterns.

Fig. 1. Locations of field research areas



© Toni Huber

- 4 In summary, my results reveal that informants usually represent dismemberment of hunted wild game with an idealized scheme involving eighteen parts of the carcass. This overlaps with similar schemes represented for butchering of domestic animals on the Tibetan Plateau, as well as those used for sacrificial meat in some neighbouring highland societies to the southeast. However, the observable practice of real dismemberment frequently does not generate the eighteen distinct parts of the ideal.

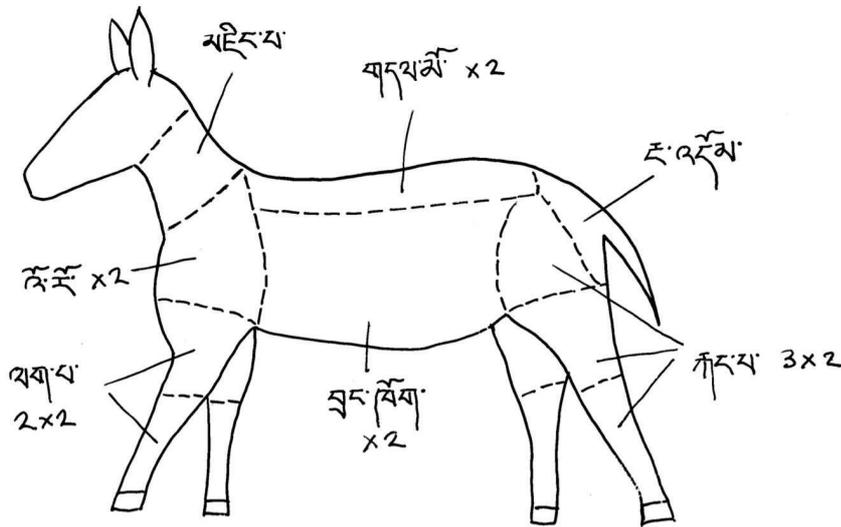
- 5 Concerning findings on game meat sharing, it is invariably bound by a variety of well-defined and fairly inflexible rules. I identify four distinct modes of sharing that I refer to as the killer's share, the stranger's share, randomized sharing and symbolic differentiation. While the first three are ethnographically attested, the fourth only occurs in mythical narratives. The killer's and the stranger's shares are both to be considered as forms of special exception, while randomized sharing only involves equal shares of the remainder of any carcass after the possible removal of one or both of the former two types of shares. This equal sharing of the bulk of the game animal - as opposed to allotment of ranked, unequal shares - was the norm in all the communities of hunters I sampled. The mythical representation of sharing based upon symbolic differentiation is an example of allotment of ranked, unequal shares. If anything, it reflects patterns evident in sacrifice rites involving large animals.

## Dismemberment

- 6 The importance of game "carcass dismemberment" (*sha bgo stangs*) in Tibetan Plateau hunting practices is directly related to the size of any animals killed. A very wide variety of wildlife has been recorded as hunted game upon the Tibetan Plateau. However, by far the most favoured game, both historically and during recent times, are the larger animal species inhabiting alpine steppe and mountain areas. These include wild yak (*Bos grunniens*), Tibetan Argali sheep (*Ovis ammon hodgsonii*), blue sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*), Tibetan antelope (*Pantholops hodgsonii*), Tibetan gazelle (*Procapra picticaudata*), and the Tibetan wild ass (*Equus kiang*). Presumably - no systematic research has been undertaken - such larger animals have been favoured due to three factors: their reported abundance prior to the advent of the modern Chinese Communist state across the Tibetan Plateau (today some species are now endangered or locally extinct); hunters' economies of resource investment in relation to returns of meat and animal products; and the perceived palatability of meat from certain species and desire for specific types of animal products of high value. These three pragmatic points determining game choice were regularly reported by Tibetan Plateau hunters I undertook research on.
- 7 Dismemberment of game carcasses directly at the site of a kill has been the common practice recorded across the Tibetan Plateau<sup>2</sup>. There are both technical-pragmatic and socio-cultural reasons for this. The first reason I will consider here, and the second only in the section below on the stranger's share. Dismemberment at the site of a kill was a premodern practical necessity due to the inability of men and available domestic beasts of burden (yak, horses) to transport entire carcasses of larger game, such as wild yak, wild ass, large deer species or mature specimens of Argali sheep. Large wild yak bulls, for example, can weight up to ca. 1 000 kg. This transportation problem became obviated at some sites after the 1960s. The Chinese Communists introduced trucks into many parts of the Tibetan Plateau region, including to those rural communes that maintained "hunting brigades" (*khyi ra sgrig 'dzugs* or *khyi ra ru khag*) as part of their local economies<sup>3</sup>.
- 8 Hunters usually refer to dismemberment of large game by citing an ideal division into "eighteen portions of a carcass" (*sha lhu bco brgyad*). This notion is very widespread in space and time across the region. It was found at all of my field research sites, as well as occurring in older texts depicting dismemberment (see below). While the game dismemberments I myself observed during field research never resulted in exactly eighteen portions, they nevertheless remained close in ranging somewhere between

roughly fifteen and twenty larger portions per carcass. Exactly the same was observed when domestic bovines were slaughtered. Domestic butchers also referred to eighteen portions but never ended up with the ideal. It is clear that both pastoralist hunters and domestic butchers have a culturally transmitted ideal “carving chart” in mind when they consider dismembering any larger animal, but particularly bovines. I regularly used a generic diagram for informants in Gerze and Tshochen Counties to designate the portions they aimed at producing. Fig. 2 shows an example from my field notes with the most common scheme, while Table 1 summarizes the details with formal Tibetan spellings of the named portions.

Fig. 2. “Carving chart” of ideal eighteen portion scheme for dismemberment of large animals



© Toni Huber

Table 1. Ideal portions of a dismembered carcass

carcass portion	quantity	total
front legs ( <i>lag pa</i> )	each in 2 sections x 2	4
rear legs ( <i>rkang pa</i> )	each in 3 sections x 2	6
neck ( <i>mjing pa</i> )	1	1
chest ( <i>brang khog</i> )	in 2 sections	2
back or loins ( <i>dal mo</i> )	in 2 sections	2
shoulder ( <i>stod ro</i> )*	in 2 sections	2
tail and crotch ( <i>rnga 'dom[s]</i> )	1	1
	total	18

\*The orthography 'o ro on Fig. 2 reflecting informants' spoken terminology was suggested by my late colleague Tsering Gyalbo, a native speaker of the pastoral dialect around Gar Gunsa in Ngari Prefecture. I think such spoken forms are based upon formal *stod ro*, cf. Jäschke 1881, p. 223, "*stod khog* the upper part of a carcass, also *stod po*", and p. 535 *ro* "carcass".

- 9 It is obvious that the ethnographically attested ideal scheme only concerns portions including the majority of the flesh. The hide, bones and sinews, blood, inner organs and head/horns are omitted from it. However, all these parts are separated out during dismemberment of any carcass, whether it is of a game or domestic animal, and usually most if not all of them are utilized in some way or other. The most conspicuous absence from the scheme is the animal's head (and horns). The head is reckoned to be separate from the rest of the carcass due to its central ritual importance for what I call the killer's share (see below). Indeed, the ideal eighteen-portion scheme for dismemberment of large animals is most likely related to mythical logics and sacrifice rites, as I will discuss in subsequent sections.

## Sharing modes

- 10 The dismemberment of any game animal carcass obviously determines what portions will be available to be shared between any hunters when more than one is involved in a hunt, as well as with any other persons associated in various way with the event of a hunt and the hunter(s). We have seen that dismemberment is idealized for fixed meat-bearing portions only, although in reality these portions can vary in kind and number, and that all the non-meat parts of an animal's carcass not reckoned in ideal schemes are also actually available for sharing. My data revealed four distinct modes of sharing that potentially involve all parts of a game animal's carcass, not just the meat itself. The first three modes are ethnographically attested, while the fourth is only evident in myths. All four modes are examples of social practice that invariably relate to a clear set of principles and rules known and agreed upon by all those persons directly involved. I will describe each mode below in order of their frequency of occurrence upon the Tibetan Plateau as currently known to me. A brief analysis of sharing modes will be reserved for the final discussion.

### The killer's share

- 11 Any hunter who performs the technical procedure which actually kills a game animal – whether shooting a fatal (or first) arrow or bullet, setting a trap, chasing it to exhaustion and knifing or clubbing it to death, and so forth – gains a special status in terms of which parts of the carcass become their undisputed share. I call this mode of sharing the killer's share. Its occurrence is universal across the Tibetan Plateau according to my research results (Table 2), as well as being recorded in the few more detailed accounts of hunting practice that several careful observers have left us<sup>4</sup>, some of which will be presented below.
- 12 The most important feature of the killer's share is that it rarely accords priority to any of the major or best meat-bearing portions of the carcass. Rather, the share itself very frequently consists of the animal's head, together with any horns. This is the case locally when the share is set at being only a single portion. However, a killer's share often involves the head together with a range of other body parts. After the head, those most commonly occurring in a killer's share are, in descending order of frequency, the hide and tail, then the heart, lungs and liver, and finally the chest (see Table 2). In some communities, by customary right a part of the killer's share also becomes a public token or trophy of his success. For example, among the Drongpa Changma ('Brong pa Byang ma)

tribe of northern Gerze County with whom I worked, any hunter who manages to kill a wild yak bull will immediately remove the tail and hang it from the belt of his gown to proclaim his kill. This exceptional trophy is to recognize the fact that the wild yak bull is the most dangerous Tibetan Plateau game animal for man. The tail itself is specifically chosen as a symbol of heroism because it marks the animal's most dangerous state: when enraged by human disturbance, or when wounded, a wild yak bull will raise its tail upright into the air while charging any perceived aggressor (Fig. 3). Similarly, wild yak bull heads/skulls with horns claimed by the killer can be placed conspicuously near their dwellings, or upon some simple, local stone shrines.

Figure 3. Charging wild yak bull with raised tail, Ngari Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, China, 2010



© photograph by, and used courtesy of, the late Tsering Gyalbo (Lhasa)

- 13 Some comparative records of the killer's share are given in Table 2<sup>5</sup>. This confirms that awarding or claiming the killer's share is also found widely among highland populations speaking Tibeto-Burman languages around the Himalayan peripheries of the Tibetan Plateau, from western Nepal across to northwest Yunnan.

**Table 2. Comparative data on the killer's share from Tibetan Plateau pastoralist communities and adjacent Himalayan highland societies**

location/population	head, any horns	hide, tail	heart, liver, lungs	chest
Gerze County (northwest Tib. Plateau)	X	X	X	X
Amdo County (northern Tib. Plateau)	X	X	X	X
Nagchu County (north-central Tib. Plateau)	X	X	X	
Golok Prefecture (northeast Tib. Plateau)	X			X
Southwest Gansu (eastern Tib. Plateau)	X	X		
Magar (west Nepal)	X			X
Nishi (western Arunachal Pradesh)	X	X		
Adi/Galo (central Arunachal Pradesh)	X (plus the neck)			
Pailibo (central Arunachal Pradesh)	X		X	
Bori (central Arunachal Pradesh)	X		X	X
Tangam (eastern Arunachal Pradesh)	X			X
Moso* (northwest Yunnan)	X	X		

\*The feet are also part of the killer's share among the Moso; Mathieu 1998, p. 231.

- 14 It should be noted that, while the less frequently allotted chest does reflect one of the meat bearing portions in the ideal “eighteen portions of a carcass” scheme, the chest is in fact one of those with the least amount of actual meat mass - mainly between and around the ribs. If anything, the chest is valued by pastoralists for its fat deposits. Furthermore, while internal organs (*nang cha*), such as the heart, liver and lungs, are all considered by Tibetan Plateau populations to be good, edible parts of most game and domestic animals, they are not the most sought-after parts of culinary interest.
- 15 In general, it is possible to consider those carcass portions comprising the killer's share as representing a higher ritual value than other portions. In certain respects, the killer's share also echoes cases of animal sacrifice recorded from the wider region, and in which the ritual specialist - whether or not they actually kill the sacrificial animal - is singled out for a special portion of the carcass due to their direct relationship with the sacrificial process itself. It is relatively easy to document the idea that the killer's share has a higher ritual value. For instance, for the head, hide and tail in the context of the Tibetan Plateau we have many records of animal heads being placed upon shrines and above gates and doors of dwelling places, and records of hides of large bovines being spread upon the ground for oath-swearing ceremonies or serving as special “thrones” for yogins and rulers, while yak tails are used as insignia in various contexts, including for rites. A higher ritual status specifically accorded the heart and liver is comparatively rare upon the Plateau, yet it is commonly encountered in the adjacent Himalayan highlands from Nepal eastwards to Arunachal Pradesh. For example, livers are widely used for divination

and as the communally shared first ritual portion of animals just killed, while hearts – often still beating – are the first item removed when an animal is sacrificed.

- 16 Textually recorded historical – as opposed to mythical – details of Tibetan Plateau hunting practices are rather few and far between across the ca. 1300 year sweep of written Tibetan language documents that have survived until now. However, there is one Old Tibetan document uniquely providing very early evidence of the existence of the killer’s share among hunters. The closely related manuscripts PT 1071 and PT 1072 detail legal regulation of *lings* hunts that involved large groups of participants during the Tibetan imperial era. Various scholars have interpreted the relevant statute towards the end of the document in different ways<sup>6</sup>. Here I quote from the recent translation by Joanna Bialek that provides the most complete rendering to date by addressing heretofore-unresolved problems. The following passage from the statute concerns the case of killing a wild yak bull with a maximum of six possible hunters involved:

On the extent of the share (lit. advantage, *don*) authorised when the game is killed: The game being killed, as regards the authorised share, [it] is counted to six arrows for one yak. As concerns the authorised arrow of the former (i.e. first) [hunter], having cut off a full span of the opposite left-sided *thur thur*<sup>7</sup> as a trophy, [one] is authorised the skin of the right-sided ribs. The early arrow is authorized the tail, the heart, the chest, the tongue, half the blood, the veins, and sinews. As concerns the authorised arrow of the subsequent (i.e. second) [hunter], [he] is authorised the skin [from] the ribs of the left side, half the blood, *chu spyag* of the innards, and the fibres of the back. As concerns the arrow of the further [hunter], [he] is authorised the right ribs. As concerns the arrow of the fourth [hunter], [he] is authorised the left-sided ribs. As concerns the arrow of the fifth [hunter], [he] is authorised the limbs of the hind legs. As concerns the arrow of the sixth [hunter], [he] is authorised the limbs of the forelegs<sup>8</sup>.

- 17 An understanding of this statute as regulating the issue of the killer’s share within the complex context of a group hunt is supported by both contextual data and all our ethnographic records. According to descriptions of the imperial era *lings* hunts on the Tibetan Plateau by both Hugh Richardson and Brandon Dotson, multiple hunters would have been potentially shooting the same animal(s) they had surrounded in circumstances that likely resembled an *mêlée*<sup>9</sup>. Thus, in such a context the killer’s claim needed to be defined along with his share. Further confirmation occurs in the next statute in the text that deals with deciding claims of being a killer<sup>10</sup>. Most details given in the above statute match our contemporary ethnographic records (see Fig. 3, and the section “The stranger’s share” below). For instance, the types of body parts allotted to a killer accord closely with later hunting traditions of the Tibetan Plateau and its highland periphery regions. Also, the defining feature of a primary killer past and present is the one whose projectile first strikes an animal which then dies. Moreover, the killer receives a body part considered as a “trophy” of one form or other.

### The stranger’s share

- 18 The second Tibetan Plateau game meat sharing mode is what I call the stranger’s share. Entitlement to the stranger’s share is governed by coincidence. If a stranger – meaning somebody unconnected with the hunter and his party – comes upon the site of a kill before the carcass has been dismembered, they are due a particular share of the animal. The stranger’s share is not universal across the Tibetan Plateau. Rather, it appears to be more strongly localized in regions that experienced historical settlement by ethnic

Mongol migrants from the north. Pastoral areas where the stranger's share has been recorded mainly fall within the Nagchu and Golok Prefectures. Scattered records of the stranger's share also exist from widespread sites, including the Himalayan highlands<sup>11</sup>, and have become encoded into origin myths of certain populations<sup>12</sup>.

- 19 In addition to the mechanism by which it occurs, the most important feature of the stranger's share is that the portion of the game carcass involved is often generous and of high consumption value compared to the killer's share. It is even generous compared with shares allotted to members of any actual hunting party involved in the kill. Thus, the stranger's share represents a rather exceptional share. A further point of comparison with the killer's share is that the carcass portions for the stranger's share can be highly variable compared with the fairly consistent dominance of head/horns, tail, vital organs and chest for the former. This variability depends upon two factors: the species of game killed; and the customary rules maintained by individual tribal or clan units.
- 20 Due to the inherently localized variability of the stranger's share, it is best to compare two accounts of the phenomenon from the same part of the Tibetan Plateau. For this purpose, we have two rare indigenous records of the stranger's share that both describe slightly different modes of the practice in the pastoralist communities of northern Amdo County (Byang rigs A mdo). That area is situated in the far north of Nagchu Prefecture, in the central-northern Tibetan Plateau region. Both accounts mention the stranger's share together with other hunting rules and customs. The first account is that by Nor bsam published just prior to the commencement of my field research. In order to highlight each key aspect, my translation of the passage introduces paragraphing and numbering not in the original, while interpretations of several terms and expressions remain tentative or unresolved and are annotated accordingly:

If one goes hunting from home riding or on foot, and someone arrives when a hunter's kill has just been made, there is a custom of giving a share of the game meat to them, which is called *'dres re* or *Ab lag*.

1. Any other pursuers of the same game animal in a hunting party get a half share of the meat and the hide of any wild yak or wild ass killed, while the actual one who kills it gets the other half share.

2. If two hunters come across each other in the field, and if a wild ass or wild yak has been killed, they get a half share each. This is not applied to blue sheep, gazelle, Argali sheep, and antelope.

3. If one goes hunting from home riding or on foot, and a *'dres* [person] arrives, they will get not only the *Ab lag* [portion] from wild ass or wild yak, they will also get a share of the meat of blue sheep, gazelle, Argali sheep, and antelope.

4. As for the portion obtained by the actual killer of the game animals, which is like the "wages of sin" (*sdig gla*) or a "flag of heroism" (*dpa' dar*), and which is called the *Ab lag* or the *mgo rung* ("fit for a chief"):

a. If a wild yak bull is killed: the tail, hide from the centre of the back, hide from the hump (*'bag dbar*<sup>13</sup>) which is called *gla dbar*, and likewise the *dran* meat (heart?<sup>14</sup>), the right and left kidneys, and the liver. A traditional saying about this is: "The three tail, hump, and centre back are the prerogative share of the hide. The three dark red brothers [i.e. heart (?), kidneys and liver] are the prerogative share of the meat. When the above are eaten, the hunter's own share has been dealt with".

b. If a wild yak cow is killed: the head, the tail, the hide, and likewise the *dran* meat, the left and right kidneys, and the liver. That is the prerogative share of the killer.

c. Concerning the four blue sheep, gazelle, Argali sheep, and antelope, [the killer gets] the head, skin, chest meat, the *dran* meat, and the liver.

d. If one does not want to give the *Ab lag* share, then when a wild yak is killed in the hills by a man, immediately cut off its tail and its stomach. When one has been able

to separate those parts from the wild yak's carcass, even though another person may arrive at the scene the *Ab lag* will not be lost to them.

e. As for wild ass, blue sheep, gazelle, Argali sheep, and antelope, if one can manage to remove the entrails and cut off the four lower leg joints, the *Ab lag* will not be lost.

f. As for wild ass, there is nothing else [for another who may arrive] once the head and the meat of the chest, *dran*, and neck have been detached<sup>15</sup>.

- 21 The second, shorter account from northern Amdo is that by bKra ba and bKra shis sTobs rgyal, and forms part of their description of group hunts during summer when wild yak are the main game being hunted. The initial section comes at the end of a passage describing dismemberment of a wild yak being supervised by a very skilled, senior hunter in the party, who is called the *ri pa'i pha rgan*. He is responsible for running the encampment and overseeing the distribution of game meat to the other hunters in the group, for which he receives a special share due to this responsibility. A second section lower down the page then discusses the case of animals smaller than a wild yak. Both sections read as follows,

If, on that occasion [i.e. dismemberment], a person who is not an inner member of the wild yak [hunting] encampment suddenly arrives before the tail of the wild yak has been cut off, it is called a "tail of the wild yak arrival" (*brong gi rnga slebs*<sup>16</sup>), and they need to be given a half share of the wild yak's meat. [...] Furthermore, when wild ass and smaller species of game animals are hunted, the one who makes the kill needs to be assigned the biggest share or "wages of sin" (*sdig gla*), and when a person suddenly arrives before the stepping, falling and recovering wild ass can be brought down to the ground with seven steps<sup>17</sup>, it is called a "wild ass feigning a pulse arrival" (*rkyang rtsa la bco*<sup>18</sup> *slebs*), and there needs to be made a division of half the wild ass's meat [for that person]. If a person arrives [at a kill site] before the dislocation and tearing off of the four lower leg joints on small game animal species is completed, it is called *'dre red* and it is necessary to give them half the meat<sup>19</sup>.

- 22 The two reports offer us locally variable interpretations of the same basic principles and common terminology. The special terms *'dres* or *'dre[s] re[d]*, and *Ab lag* in these accounts which I left untranslated refer to the same or overlapping phenomenon. As for their possible interpretation, the Tibetan verb *'dre[s]* means "to be mixed (or) mingled with", also "to interfere, meddle with", referring here to someone outside the hunting party who unexpectedly arrives at the scene of a kill, viz. "the stranger". The *re[d]* element has two possible meanings which might fit this context: *re* is a common verb meaning "to ask [for something]", "request" or "to beg"; while the verb *red* can have the meaning "being affected by some external cause, to become unfit<sup>20</sup>". The term *Ab lag* represents a loan word from Mongolian into Tibetan, and indicates a significant Mongol cultural-historical background related to the fact that the general Tibetan Plateau region where it mainly occurs experienced waves of Mongol migration and settlement during centuries past. According to Ferdinand Lessing's *Mongolian-English Dictionary*, the noun *ablaga* (Classical *abulg-a*) means "a thing to be taken; something to which one has a claim; claim; a debt to be collected", while the verb *avlakh* (Classical *abala-*) means "to hunt in a group or in a battue<sup>21</sup>". This no doubt is the origin of the word *Ab lag* on the Tibetan Plateau. The practice of giving the stranger's share was widespread in premodern Mongolia, and like the killer's share appears to have been a more widespread ancient custom. Carole Pegg reported,

In Old Mongolia, the meat was divided among families according to age and status. If hunters met people on the road, they had to share a piece of meat - a *shorlog* - the

nature of which varied also according to their age and status. If an old man was encountered, he was given the posterior part of the animal's back; if younger, then a part of the leg, such as the hip, thigh, or rump was given, and occasionally, the bones between the spine and rump. Meat was never given from the side that had been shot. The hunter had to leave for himself one of the legs or the fourth rib up from the shot side<sup>22</sup>.

23 Magdalena Tatar also commented on this Mongolian tradition,

Ein Ausdruck dieser Gemeinschaft ist die Sitte, daß Männer, die einem erfolgreichen Jäger, der seine Beute nach Hause trägt, begegnen und ihm dabei das Wort *siroly-a* zurufen, einen Teil der Beute erhalten, und zwar nicht gerade den schlechtesten. Im Gegenteil: wir hören z.B. von einem Vorfahren des Cinggis Khan, daß dieser den größten Teil des Fleisches erhielt und der Jäger selbst nur den sakralen Teil des Tieres bekam (*jülde*, die Lungen, einen Teil der inneren Organe der Brust, die Haut usw.), der traditionell ihm oder bei einem Tieropfer den Göttern zufällt<sup>23</sup>.

24 Concerning the terms in these accounts, in modern Mongolian *shorlog* means a *shashlyk* (*shor* = “skewer”), while *siroly-a* appears to be the classical form of *shorlog*<sup>24</sup>. There is no doubt that the ideas in these records also relate to a wider cultural pattern concerning the killer’s share and notions about the replacement of harvested game animals found also in southern Siberia<sup>25</sup>. In that context, both the killer’s share and stranger’s share on the Tibetan Plateau should be viewed as supra-regional phenomena rather than reflecting so-called “indigenous Tibetan” traditions.

## Randomized sharing

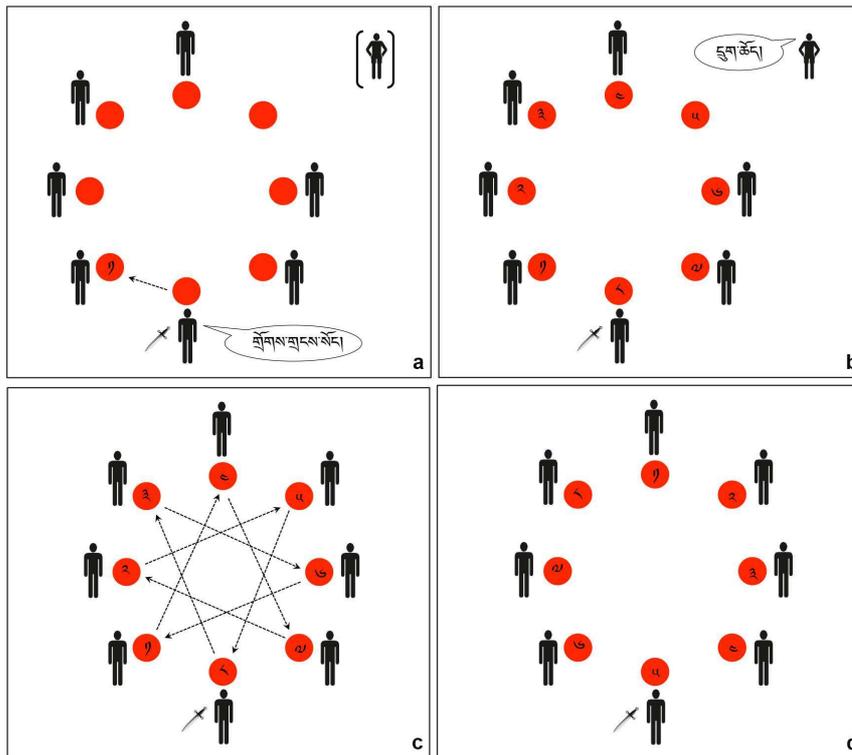
25 The third, rule-bound mode of game meat sharing, one I call randomized sharing, is only known from my own ethnographic records of hunting practice across the northwestern Tibetan Plateau. It relates to the near universal practice of allotting equal shares of game carcasses to every member of a formal hunting group, with the noted exceptions of the killer’s share and any possible stranger’s share. The practice I observed was that of hunting pastoralists in Tshochen County and Gerze County, and it was noted by elderly informants as having also been widely used during the past in those areas<sup>26</sup>. Prior to a formal government ban upon all hunting in Changthang areas becoming more strictly enforced around the early 2000s, local group hunts were primarily organized by pastoralists to harvest wild yak, although other smaller game were also taken during them. Randomized sharing during such group hunts was only related to the carcasses of wild yak.

26 Hunting groups are socially based upon current family or household members, and the friendship and cooperation networks of hunters. Some of them can have old core memberships defined by descent and affinity over many generations, while others are products of recent or current circumstances in a hunter’s social environment. The local term for these hunting groups is *dmar khongs*. The word *dmar* lit. “blood” or “red” refers to fresh or raw “meat” (normally *sha*), meaning the butchered game animal, whereas *khongs* lit. “within, in the midst [of something]” implies group membership when referring to persons, and is locally explained as those in “the same eating group” (*bza’ khongs gcigs pa*<sup>27</sup>). *dMar khong* membership was actually limited only to those who take to the hunting field. Members of one hunting group might refer to each other as being ‘ones of the same *dmar khong*’ (*dmar khongs gcig pa*), in the same way that persons with a common natal place often call each other *pha yul gcig pa*. The expression *dmar khongs gcig*

*pa* was also used to refer to a specific group hunt itself. While a *dmar khongs*, as a hunting group, refers to all those members who actively hunt together on an expedition, it can also cover a group of trusted fellows whom a single hunter that brings down large game, such as wild yak bulls, can then call together to help process and transport his kill. Any large game will be shared between *dmar khongs* members, but allotment of portions of wild yak carcasses will always be randomized during the sharing process.

- 27 The main randomizing method I recorded is associated with the term *grog khol*. The word *grog* lit. “companion” refers to all members of a *dmar khongs*, while *khol* (cf. *khol bu*) means a “share” or “portion”. A *grog khol* or “companions” share’ reckoning involves a particular performance with a series of steps. These are now described in order, as well as graphically illustrated in Fig. 4, for the example of a *dmar khongs* with eight eligible members:

Figure 4. Example of randomized *grog khol* game meat sharing for a hunting group of eight members



a. Following dismemberment, the meat and body parts of a wild yak will first be divided into as many approximately equal piles as there are members of the *dmar khongs* present. The portions are placed in a rough circle and each person stands near to one of the piles. One person will then spontaneously separate themselves from the group, walk some distance away and turn in the opposite direction so as not to look upon the scene. Another person will spontaneously state he will act as the initiator, often marked by planting his knife in the ground. The person to the initiator's left then becomes number 1 in a clockwise enumeration which ends with the initiator himself having the highest number, for example the number 8 in Fig. 4a. The numbers actually apply as much to the portions of animal carcass that sit in front of each of the standing group members as to the men themselves. The initiator will then call out, "The companions are numbered" (*grog grangs song*).

b. The person standing at some remove might hear but does not see what has just transpired. He then calls back to the group any number he wants not higher than the total of members in the group, and not including number 1 for the initiator. In the example with 8 members in Fig. 4b, he says "It is settled at 6" (*drug chod*). He may now turn around and re-join the group back at his original meat pile.

c. A clockwise renumbering of each position and meat portion then occurs, starting from the position of the chosen number. In the example in Fig. 4c, the designated 6 first reassigns his number and thus portion to number 1, then number 7 is reassigned to number 2, number 8 to number 3, and so on around the circle.

d. The overall result is a randomized re-allocation of meat portions that all group members must accept as fair and valid. In the example, the person in the position to the left of the initiator who began with portion number 1 (Fig. 4a) ends up with portion number 6 (Fig. 4d), while his original portion number 1 has gone to the person who began with portion 4, and so forth.

© Toni Huber

- 28 Following the Chinese state's introduction of so-called People's Communes into north-western parts of the Tibetan Plateau from the 1960s on, another method of randomizing also became newly available and was combined with the older practice of *grog khol* reckoning. This was called "drawing of concealed lots" (*yib rgyan dbyug*), and had the same initial steps as *grog khol* of dividing up the meat piles for each person, with one man going into hiding. However, while he was hiding the remaining group members each chose for themselves different tokens that were at hand - a straw, stone, piece of yak

dung, bootstrap, and so forth – and secretly assigned a token to the one in hiding as well. All the tokens were gathered together. When the person in hiding returned, he collected all tokens and randomly placed them atop the meat piles, after which each pile belonged to the respective token holder. The method of *yib rgyan dbyug* was actually based upon a very common practice called “drawing of paper lots” (*shog rgyan dbyug*). This was used for decision-making within a group, such as meetings held by the leaders of work units within a commune or during Communist Party political meetings. However, that method employed paper and written text, neither of which the pastoralists were accustomed to using.

## Symbolic differentiation

- 29 The final sharing mode for game meat I call symbolic differentiation, because it is always associated with defining identity or rank in relation to an animal’s body. To my present knowledge, it is only evident in mythological and hagiographical narratives written in Tibetan language. Its logic entails that specific parts of a wild animal’s carcass are allotted to persons with a distinct social identity – and who are sometimes even identified after the portion they receive – or the nature and order of the body parts is indexed to some form of social ranking.
- 30 The first evidence of symbolic differentiation related to hunting and game meat appears as an episode within the narrative of *Sad mar kar* in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. A hunting party including various social groups who were components of the imperial Tibetan society undertakes the drive hunt of a wild yak. Some of these groups are first mentioned performing different technical operations in the hunt, and following the kill they are mentioned again as receiving certain parts of the carcass. The relevant lines from the most recent translation by Joanna Bialek are as follows:

Oh! Above, on the northern pastures,  
 A lone immature wild yak;  
 When a wild yak is killed on the northern pastures,  
 [Those] who give shouts from the upper part of a valley,  
 The beneficent (?) Ldong and Mthong-khyab found [it].  
 [Those] who provoke [the animal] from the lower part of the valley  
 [Are] Sha and Spug of Skyi.  
 [Those] who shoot at the belly [of the game] from the middle part [of the valley]  
 [Are] Lho and Rngegs of Yar.  
 After (*nas*) [one] gave shouts from the upper part of the valley and  
 [The other] provoked [the animal] from the lower part of the valley,  
 In the middle between them,  
 While having killed the immature wild yak,  
 The fringes [were] the quintessence [of the game] for Pying-ba.  
 [The *btsan po*] gave horns and sinews to Ldong and Mthong-khyab;  
 [He] gave the flesh and the hide to Lho and Rngegs;  
 [He] gave the gullet and the extremities to Sha and Spug<sup>28</sup>.

- 31 Much about the passage remains unclear, and it would be easy to over-interpret it without good evidence to support that. For example, we have no way of knowing why the Ldong and the Tong (i.e. Bialek’s Mthong-khyab) indexed to the upper part of the valley are allotted the horns and sinews. However, taking account of the known realities of hunting practice both past and present, it is clear that the majority of the body parts mentioned – fringes of belly hair, horns, sinews, hide and an internal organ – are those

included in the killer's share rather than anything else. Above, we saw some such killer's shares were already attested for real hunts governed by customary law in the Old Tibetan manuscripts PT 1071 and PT 1072. The *Chronicle* passage is thus vexing within this wider context. Only the lHo (also lHe in the original) and rNgegs are mentioned as shooters and thus killers, yet it is only they who receive the flesh not normally included in the killer's share, while typical killer's share parts go to those involved in the scouting and driving aspects of the hunt. It is hard to know what this deviation from well-attested cultural patterns means. Perhaps the writer of the passage possessed only a vague knowledge of real hunting practice when composing the song, or they resorted to poetic license to achieve a particular symmetry or set of allusions (see below)?

- 32 The same type of references, also related to the hunt and division of a wild yak carcass, appear in later myths detailing clan origins - including those of the lDong cited in the *Chronicle* - in Tibetan language texts found among the Tamang and the Sherpa of highland Nepal. The myths in question concern eighteen primordial, bone-sharing clans (*rus*), and the hunting and division of the wild yak's body parts determine the naming of social groups. Those who take hold of any part of the yak's carcass receive its name, for instance, those seizing the horns (*rwa*) become known as the Rwa pha "Horn Fathers", and so forth. A mythical figure of authority is usually orchestrating the proceedings. Alexander Macdonald collectively referred to these narrative episodes as "creative dismemberment"<sup>29</sup>. It is significant that the Sherpa, who maintain such narratives, claim that their clans originated in the far eastern Tibetan Plateau area named Mi nyag, and that area and its clans are mentioned in some of the stories. Curiously, the other known examples of the same type of "creative dismemberment" narratives involving game meat division, the number eighteen, the origins or ranking of social groups, and so forth, also originate in far eastern Tibetan Plateau areas not far to the north of Mi nyag<sup>30</sup>.
- 33 Entertaining the idea of some continuity between all these types of Old Tibetan and Classical Tibetan narratives, and between what is written in them and actual hunting practices, may be appealing, but it would have to ignore a whole range of very fundamental differences. For example, the allotment in the *Chronicle* song above is determined by the verb *stsald* (i.e. *stsal*) "to grant, bestow", presumably - since there is no direct evidence - because it was the emperor himself indicated as the one deciding the allotment. The emperor appears to be alluded to by the place name Phying ba, and because that identity gains the most ritually important share, a killer's trophy, without the verb *stsald* applied. It must not be forgotten this is an allegorical narrative with eulogistic overtones, and its exact relationship with reality is not fully known. In real hunting practice, as reflected in both imperial Tibetan hunting laws and ethnographic data, we know there is never an actual agent who allots because the agreed customary rules are fixed and followed precisely to eliminate individual determinations. In most of the "creative dismemberment" narratives we know of, representation of allotment is very different from real life practice. The participants are given the choice of which body parts to hold on to or take away by some authority figure. The introduction of this choice - regardless of who permits it - defies all other known precedents, including rules of sacrifice, and reveals what is most likely the contrived nature of such stories. Indeed, their very artifice in story telling about hunting is the best basis for any continuity one might seek between the older and more recent narrative examples.

## Discussion

- 34 In order to aid our understanding of both the killer's share and stranger's share practised by Tibetan Plateau societies, we can view them in terms of the complex cosmological perspectives that have developed in that region. Local ideas about the natural environment exist together with, or have become combined with, doctrines spread by the region's oldest, organized, salvation religions. Most of the pastoralist communities I gathered data among, and those reported on by other scholars I have cited, consider that game animals belong to local place and territorial and deities (*gzhi bdag, yul lha*, etc.<sup>31</sup>). Taking game by hunting generates some degree of imbalance between man and deity owners, as well as a debt that must be repaid by the former to the latter. Concerning Tibetan Buddhism and gYung drung Bon, they universally condemn intentional taking of life, and most hunters accept there is a moral burden accrued by killing game, with negative proximate and future existential consequences attributed to this. Thus, hunting is doubly problematic within this particular cultural environment.
- 35 We have seen the killer's share can in part act as social acknowledgement of some heroic status when large and dangerous animals like wild yak bulls are killed, and we know such recognition is very old. However, in recent records the killer's share is more often referred to as the *sdig gla* or "wages of sin". Such expressions are directly attributable to the moral discourse and terminology of the region's organized religions, and may not even be particularly old<sup>32</sup>. Explicitly, *sdig gla* in this context means the hunter who makes the kill is "paid" extra by his fellows due to social recognition of the additional moral burden he has taken on. The fact that the killer's share mostly consists of parts with a high ritual value may still have to do with a longer cultural history of repaying the debt to those deities who are considered owners of the game, and perhaps also to notions about game replacement. Hunters offer some of this share back to local deities to balance their removal of game from the natural environment, as well as to ensure success in future hunts. Examples of this observed in Tibetan Plateau regions during recent times include the placement of wild animal skulls and antlers or horns upon shrines dedicated to these deities, in addition to small offerings to them of animal blood or organ meats, such as livers.
- 36 The stranger's share may also be understood as an ancient obligation to the spirits of the natural world that has accrued later Buddhist significance on the Tibetan Plateau. The Magar of neighbouring highland Nepal studied by Michael Oppitz have identical ideas about spirits of the natural world owning game animals. Oppitz considered their practice of generously sharing the better/best parts of the carcass with any passing strangers as attempts to diminish or distribute the blame of having taken wild animals that are not the hunter's property<sup>33</sup>. What is found among the neighbouring Magar most likely reflects the older cultural background from out of which the stranger's share practice on the Tibetan Plateau developed during the past, probably under influence of northern populations from Mongolia and southern Siberia. Unlike the Magar, Tibetan Plateau hunters live in societies that have been strongly influenced by the region's salvation religions. Thus, in the minds of the hunters the stranger's share may also represent a chance to distribute or pass on some of the negative moral burden of the Buddhist transgression of intentional killing. This could offer us an additional way of understanding randomized sharing mechanisms. Knowing the type of contemporary

pastoralist communities who use that practice, and whose smooth cooperation within small and trusted circles of kin, cohabitants and neighbours is often necessary or essential, it is a fair assumption that randomized sharing likely contributes to diffusion of potential disputes, helps ensure egalitarian feelings, and the like. But randomized sharing may have come to take on the same underlying logic of equally distributing negative aspects of the twin burdens of theft from game owning deities and Buddhist moral breach that every Tibetan Plateau hunter faces. All the above speculations about the impact of a Buddhist moral cosmology require a non-individualistic reading of doctrine. These have long been in circulation across the Tibetan Plateau. One need only recall the influential teachings of the famous rDza dPal sprul, O rgyan 'Jigs med chos kyi dbang po (1808-1887), who used to popularly preach that consumers of any animal meat which is killed with the intention of giving them a share are equally liable to carry a share of the karmic burden along with the killer<sup>34</sup>. I have chosen this example explicitly because I heard precisely this teaching of rDza dPal sprul being preached in public to pastoralists by a lama at one of my field research sites in Golok during 1999.

- 37 Concerning symbolic differentiation in textual narratives, interpreters of these myths - such as Macdonald and Dotson whose work was cited - have already realized these narrative episodes of creative dismemberment reflect information and ideas about ritual as much - if not more so - as they do experience of actual hunting practice. For instance, elements and patterns in them are well-known from animal sacrifice rites and divination. This also seems to be the case with the ideal eighteen-portion scheme for dismemberment of large animals on the Tibetan Plateau. The cosmologically perfect number nine, which doubled is eighteen, is pervasive in the region's myths and rite procedures. The resulting ideal "carving chart" (Fig. 2) also immediately recalls others used for animal sacrifice in neighbouring highland regions where Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken<sup>35</sup>.
- 38 Finally, when viewed within a regional comparative perspective, it is clear that a great deal of the data presented here on game dismemberment and modes of meat sharing are not unique to Tibetan Plateau hunting cultures. Like most phenomena that have all too easily been labelled as "Tibetan", they actually attest to the remarkably complex origins and composition of peoples living upon the high Plateau. Historical assimilation of elements from Mongol hunting cultures over recent centuries provides an example of how that complexity continues to develop. The single exception in the data that appears to be regionally unique is the randomized sharing of meat from large game recorded only from the north-western Plateau. Notably, it occurs together with use of *dzaekha* game drives of the type attested from various prehistoric alpine and tundra hunting sites across the northern hemisphere, as well as where surface finds of lithic assemblages, including blades and microblades, occur on the northern Tibetan Plateau<sup>36</sup>. Perhaps randomized meat sharing, *dzaekha* drives and stone tools together are an echo of much earlier hunting populations who once settled upon the high Plateau?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benedict, J. B. 2005 Tundra game drives. An Arctic-Alpine comparison, *Arctic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research* 37(4), pp. 425-434.

BGT = *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo (Zang-Han Dacidian)* [Large Tibetan-Chinese dictionary] 1985 (Beijing, Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang).

Bhattacharjee, T. K. 1975 *The Tangams* (Shillong, Research Department Arunachal Pradesh).

Bialek, J. 2018 *Compounds and Compounding in Old Tibetan. A Corpus Based Approach* (Marburg, Indica et Tibetica Verlag).

bKra-ba & bKra-shis sTobs-rgyal 1992 'Brog pa'i 'tsho ba'i skor [Concerning the livelihood of pastoralists], in *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas / deb dang po* [History and culture of Tibet's Nag-chu prefecture, book one] (N.p., Nag-chu sa-gnas Srid-grol lo-rgyus rig-gnas dpyad-gzhi'i rgyu-cha rTsom-sgrig-khang), pp. 53-71.

Brantingham, P. J., J. W. Olsen & G. B. Schaller 2001 Lithic assemblages from the Chang Tang Region, Northern Tibet, *Antiquity* 75, pp. 319-327.

Bielmeier, R., F. Haller, K. Häsler, B. Huber & M. Volkart (comps and eds) 2008 *Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects* (Bern) (the consulted .pdf files for the verb volume in 924 pages and noun volume in 2288 pages represent a 2012 version received from one of the editors, and cited with permission).

Das, S. C. 1902 *Tibetan-English Dictionary* (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot).

Dotson, B. 2013 The princess and the yak. The hunt as narrative trope and historical reality in early Tibet, in B. Dotson, Kazushi Iwao & Tsuguhito Takeuchi (eds), *Scribes, Texts, and Rituals in Early Tibet and Dunhuang. Proceedings of the Third Old Tibetan Studies Panel Held at the Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Vancouver 2010* (Wiesbaden, Reichert), pp. 61-85.

Ekvall, R. B. 1941 Tales from the Tibetan Border III - A Tibetan Hunt, *Asia* 41, pp. 43-46.  
1952 *Tibetan Sky Lines* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Young).  
1968 *Fields on the Hoof. Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

Goldstein, M. C., T. N. Shelling & J. T. Surkhang 2001 *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan* (Berkeley, University of California Press).

Hamayon, R. 1990 *La Chasse à l'âme. Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme sibérien* (Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie).

Huber T. 2005 Antelope hunting in northern Tibet, cultural adaptation to wildlife ecology, in A. Boesi & F. Cardi (eds), *Wildlife and Plants in Traditional and Modern Tibet: Conceptions, Exploitation, and conservation*, thematic issue of *Memorie della Società Italiana di Scienze Naturali e del Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Milano* 33(1), pp. 5-17.

2012 The changing role of hunting and wildlife in pastoral communities of northern Tibet, in H. Kreutzmann (ed.), *Pastoral Practices in High Asia. Agency of "Development" Effected by Modernisation, Resettlement and Transformation* (Dordrecht, Springer), pp. 195-215.

in press, *Dzaekha* game drives for antelope hunting on the north-western Tibetan Plateau, in A. Betts & P. van Pelt, *The Gazelle's Dream. Game Drives of the Old and New Worlds* (Sydney, Sydney University Press).

Humphrey, C. & U. Onon. 1996 *Shamans and Elders. Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Duar Mongols* (Oxford, Clarendon Press).

'jigs-med Theg-mchog 1988 *Rong po dgon chen gyi gdan rabs* [Abbatial sucession of the Great Rong po monastery] (Xining, mTsho-sngon Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang).

Kumar, K. 1979a *The Pailibs* (Shillong, Research Department Arunachal Pradesh).

1979b *The Bori* (Shillong, Research Department Arunachal Pradesh).

Lessing, F. (ed.) 1960 *Mongolian-English Dictionary* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press).

Lobsang Shastri, V. Cayley (transl.) 1998 The Lifestyle of Nomads, *The Tibet Journal* 23(3), pp. 34-49.

Macdonald, A. W. 1980 Creative dismemberment among the Tamang and Sherpas of Nepal, in M. Aris & Aung San Suu Kyi (eds), *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson* (Warminster, Aris & Phillips), pp. 199-208.

Mathieu, C. 1998 The Moso Ddaba religious specialists, in M. Oppitz & E. Hsu (eds), *Naxi and Moso Ethnography. Kin, Rites, Pictographs* (Zürich, Völkerkundemuseum Zürich), pp. 209-234.

Morris, E. A., 1990 Prehistoric game drive systems in the Rocky Mountains and High Plains areas of Colorado, in L. B. Davis & B. O. K. Reeves (eds), *Hunters of the Recent Past* (London, Unwin Hyman), pp. 195-207.

Nor-bsam. 1999 *Am stod sogs a mdo rdzong khongs kyi de sngon shog kha shas kyi lo rgyus thor bu dang byung myong ba'i don rkyen 'ga' zhig skor* [Concerning some historical fragments and unprecedented problems of several previous groups such as the Am-stod belonging to A-mdo county] (Lhasa, Bod-ljongs Mi-dmangs dPe-skrun-khang).

Oppitz, M. 1997 The bull, the ox, the cow and the yak. Meat division in the Himalaya, in S. Karmay & Ph. Sagant (eds), *Les habitants du toit du monde* (Paris, Société d'ethnologie), pp. 515-542.

Patrul Rinpoche 1994 *Kunzang Lama'i Shelung. The Words of My Precious Teacher*, transl. Padmakara Translation Group (San Francisco, HarperCollins Publishers).

Pegg, C. 2001 *Mongolian Music, Dance and oral Narrative. Performing Diverse Identities* (Seattle, University of Washington Press).

Rachewiltz, Igor de 2004. *The Secret History of the Mongols. A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, translated with a historical and philological commentary, vols 1-2 (Leiden, Brill).

rDza dPal-sprul 1989 *Snying thig sngon 'gro'i khrid yig kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung* [Words of my perfect teacher. Instructions on preliminaries for the heart essence practice] (Chengdu, Si-khron Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang).

Ricard, M. 1994. *The Life of Shabkar. The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin* (Albany, State University of New York Press).

Richardson, H. E. 1998 Hunting accidents in early Tibet, in M. Aris (ed.), *High Peaks, Pure Earth. Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture* (London, Serindia), pp. 149-166.

Schaller G. B. 1997 *Tibet's Hidden Wilderness. Wildlife and Nomads of the Chang Tang Reserve* (New York, Harry N. Abrams).

Shukla, B. K. 1959 *The Daflas of the Subansiri Region* (Shillong, North-East Frontier Agency).

Stevenson, H. N. C. 1937 Feasting and Meat Division among the Zahu Chins of Burma. A preliminary analysis, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 67, pp. 15-32.

1968 *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes* (Bombay, The Times of India Press).

Tai Nyori 1993 *History & Culture of the Adis* (New Delhi, Omsons Publications).

Tatar, M. 1989 Die Jagd bei den Mongolen, in W. Heissig & C. Müller (eds), *Die Mongolen* (Innsbruck, Pinguin-Verlag), pp. 150-153.

Zhabs-dkar-ba Tshogs-drug Rang-grol 1985 *sNyigs dus 'gro ba yongs kyi skyabs mgon zhabs dkar rdo rje 'chang chen po'i rnam par thar pa rgyas par bshad pa skal bzang gdul bya thar 'dod rnam kyi re ba skong ba'i yid bzhin gyi nor bu bsam 'phel dbang gi rgyal po, stod-cha* [Extensive biography of Zhabs-dkar, first part] (Xining, mTsho-sngon Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang).

## NOTES

1. Four field research trips totalling 10 months were conducted in Golok Prefecture of Qinghai Province (Matö and Machen Counties, 1999), Ngari Prefecture of the Tibet Autonomous Region (Tshochen, Gerze and Gegye Counties, 2002; Tshochen and Gerze Counties, 2003; Gerze and Gegye Counties, 2010), and Nagchu Prefecture of the TAR (Nagchu and Amdo Counties, 2003). Funding was provided by Victoria University (Wellington), the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Bonn) and the Humboldt University (Berlin), with technical support from the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library project (University of Virginia, Charlottesville) and the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (Lhasa). I am grateful to the late Tsering Gyalbo, to Tsering Namgyal, Huadan Zhaxi, Tsehua, Tsebo and Sonyi for their collaboration during fieldwork. The photograph in Fig. 3 was taken by, and is used courtesy of, the late Tsering Gyalbo (Lhasa). I also wish to thank Huadan Zhaxi (Berlin) and Joanna Bialek (Berlin) for discussions of several obscure Tibetan terms in the sources, as well as Agata Bareja (Warsaw), Uta Schöne and Markus Pesch (Berlin) for insights into Classical and contemporary Mongolian hunting vocabulary and practice.

2. Not only did I observe it at all my field research sites (Fig. 1), but also in Central Tibetan regions south of the Tsangpo River; cf. also Ekvall 1952, pp. 153, 167 on south-eastern Gansu, and the examples given herein for the Changthang from bKra ba and bKra shis sTobs rgyal 1992 and Nor bsam 1999.

3. See Huber 2012, p. 204.

4. See, for example, a historical case among pastoralists in south-western Gansu Province near the border with Qinghai Province noted by Ekvall 1968, p. 54, “The one who does the actual shooting receives, in addition, the skin and the head, but if he used a borrowed weapon, the owner of the gun gets the head”.

5. Sources used in Table 2: for Gerze County, Nagchu County and Golok Prefecture see my own field research data; for Amdo County see Nor bsam 1999, pp. 103-104; for Southwest Gansu see Ekvall 1941, p. 46, 1952, pp. 153, 167 and 1968, p. 54; on Magar see Oppitz 1997, pp. 526-528; on Nishi see Shukla 1959, p. 32; on Adi/Galo see Tai Nyori 1993, pp. 182-183; on Pailibo see Kumar 1979a, p. 90; on Bori see Kumar 1979b, pp. 93-94; on Tangam see Bhattacharjee 1975, p. 52; on Moso see Mathieu 1998, p. 231.

6. For example, Richardson 1998, p. 159 and Dotson 2013, p. 73.

7. Bialek 2018, v. 2: lemmata 287 *blo sóg* pp. 363-365, n. 5, (cf. p. 367 n. 1 on *thur thur* in PT 1287, p. 415) gives an elaborate proof for *thur thur* meaning “fringes” and “understood as denoting longer yak hair hanging down from its belly” (p. 365). This type of body part as a hunting trophy

is cognate with the ethnographically recorded use of a yak's tail as the customary right of a killer.

8. See the edition and annotated translation of PT 1071, pp. r436-441 in Bialek 2018, v. 2: lemmata 287 *blo sóg* pp. 363-364.

9. Richardson 1998, p. 149, Dotson 2013, pp. 74-76.

10. See Dotson 2013, p. 73, the second statute (PT 1071, pp. 449-451) is the “law [covering a case] where a man grasps an arrow stuck in a game animal and says that he killed the animal, but his claim is not upheld” (*ri dags la / mda' tshang na / ri dag khums zhes mchir myi gnang ba'i khrims*). It essentially states that unless witnessed or vouched for, such claims will not be believed (*ri dags la / myI cig gi / lag na mda' chang ba nI / myi phano // myI dus 'phangs pa brtsI 'i / ma mthong ma 'tshal ces / mchI / mchIs myI brtsa'o // [...]*); cf. Richardson 1998, p. 160.

11. See Oppitz 1990, p. 526 on the Magar.

12. See Macdonald 1980, p. 201 on a Sherpa narrative of lDong chen po hunting wild yak and sharing some of the meat with hostile strangers - the Ma sang dpun dgu - who come along just as the carcasses are to be processed.

13. Uncertain: cf. Jäschke 1881, p. 391 'bag 'bog “a slight elevation, hillock”, and BGT, p. 1987 *dbar = bar dang mtshams*.

14. Hypothetical: *dran sha* is unattested, except for an unsourced entry in Das 1902, p. 651, “the meat of an animal that was slaughtered three days ago; the flesh of an animal after the third day of its death (consciousness is said to linger in the body until life has been extinct for three days; it is therefore that the human body is not disposed of until after the third day of death in Tibet)”. My colleague Joanna Bialek (pers. comm., Berlin, 23 November 2017) suggested the following plausible solution: “reconstruct *dran sha* as \**dran pa'i sha*, lit. “meat (more correctly here: muscle) that recollects/is conscious”, that is meat of the part of the body in which consciousness is assumed to abide. I would opt for the heart. According to Das, *snying* has the following synonyms (among others): *sha yi mchog*, *sems kyi khang pa*, and *rnam shes rten*. All point to the heart as the seat of some mental capacities. Thus, *dran sha* = “heart” [...] in the passage *dran sha* always occurs either together with *mkhal ma* and *mchin pa* or when upper parts of the body are mentioned (*brang, ske*)”.

15. Nor bsam 1999, pp. 149-150 with parentheses in the original: *yang na ru khyim du bsad mur rta gzhon pa'am / rkang thang gis skor bskyod bcas kyi thabs lam la brten nas rngon rgyag byed skabs 'dres re 'am Ab lag yang yang zer ba'i ri sha gzhon la skal ba sprod dgos pa'i gom [read: goms] gshis zhig yod pa ste dper na / rngon rgyag byes 'brang gcig dang / byes 'brang gzhon zhig 'brang mal 'bab tshugs mnyam du 'khal na / nyin der phyogs su thad kyi bsad pa'i rkyang 'brong gi sha pags phyed bgos byed dgos la / rngon rgyag mkhan gnyis mnyam du 'phrad skabs ri dwags rkyang 'brong bsad pa yin na de yang phyed bgos byed dgos / rna / rgo / gnyan / gtsod / tshud med / ru khyim nas rta gzhon pa'am yang na rkang thang gis skor rkyod rngon rgyag byed skabs gzhon zhig la 'dres re Ab lag rkyang 'brong tsam ma tshad rna ba dang / rgo ba / gnyan gtsod tshud pa'i sha phyed bgos byed dgos ri dwags bsod mkhan la / Ab lag gam mgo rung zhes pa'i sdiq gla'am / dpa' dar lta bu'i [p.150] thob skal zhig yod pa de ni / 'brong g.yag yin na 'brong rnga dang / sgal gzhung gi ko ba / 'bag dbar gyi ko ba / (gla dbar la zer) de bzhin dran sha dang / mkhal ma g.yas g.yon / mchin pa bcas red / der shod srol zhig yod pa ste rnga 'bag gzhung gsum pags pa'i don cha yin / smug po spun gsum sha yi don cha yin de yan chad zas na rngon pa rang skal chod ces zer srol 'dug 'brong 'bri ma gcig bsad pa yin na mgo dang rnga ma / ko ba / de bzhin dran sha dang / mkhal ma g.yas g.yon mchin pa bcas bsod mkhan de'i don cha yin / rna rgo gtsod gnyan bcas bzhi / mgo dang pags pa / brang sha / dran sha / mchin pa bcas thob / Ab lag sprod rgyu de gang 'dra byas na sprod dgos pa dang / ga 'dra byas na sprod mi dgos zhe na mi zhig gis ri nas ri dwags 'brong zhig bsad de 'brong rnga bcas tshar ba dang 'brong grod phyr bton te 'brong ro nas kha 'phral thub tshe mi gzhon der slebs kyang Ab lag mi shor / rkyang dang / rna ba / rgo ba / gtsod / gnyan bcas ni nang cho phyr bton pa dang / sug bzhi bcad zin na Ab lag mi shor / rkyang ni / mgo dang / brang dran ske sha 'byar ma las gzhon med //.*

16. The editorial emendation of *tseb* to *slebs* here and below is not mine but occurs in the published text.
17. The expression *gom bdun* in this context is frequently invoked in Tibetan Buddhist narrative and ritual contexts related to death and aspirations for rebirth; see Huber 1999, pp. 120 n. 35, 123 n. 49, 251-252.
18. *rTsa la bco* here uncertain. I am inclined to read *bco* as *bcos* [*pa*], Jäschke 1881, pp. 147-148 “to do (a thing) for the sake of appearance, for term’s sake, to affect...artificial, feigned, fictitious”, meaning in context here that the wounded animal should have fallen but gives the appearance of enduring on its feet for some time as if it would live, thus *rtsa la bco* “feigning a pulse”, or perhaps “feigning on the grass (*rtswa*)”?
19. *bKra ba* and *bKra shis sTobs rgyal* 1992, pp. 69-71 with parentheses in the original: *skabs der glo bur du 'brong sgar nang khongs min pa'i mi zhiq 'brong rnga ma 'breg* [p. 70] *gong du slebs pa yin na 'brong gi rnga tseb (slebs) zer ba 'brong sha'i phyed cha sprod dgos / [...]* *gzhan yang rkyang dang ri dwags chung rigs rgyag pa'i skabs su'ang gsod mkhan la sdig gla 'am / che bskal* [read: *skal*] *'jog dgos pa dang / rkyang rtsa la bco tseb (slebs) zer ba rkyang gi long ril len te gom bdun gyi sar dbyug ma thub gong mi zhiq glo bur du slebs tshe rkyang sha phyed bgos byed dgos pa dang / ri dwags chung rigs rnam la'ang sug* [p.71] *bzhi tshigs slog ste bkog ma tshar gong mi zhiq slebs pa yin na / 'dre red zer ba sha phyed sprod dgos kyi yod pa red /*. The published translation or paraphrase of the text by Lobsang Shastri and Vivian Cayley 1998, p. 43 omits many details and I have ignored it.
20. *rKyen gzhan dang 'dres nas ma rung bar 'gyur*, *BGT*, p. 2720.
21. See Lessing 1960, p. 6.
22. Pegg 2001, p. 247.
23. Tatar 1989, p. 151, cf. also the meat sharing episode in the Dobun Mergen narrative in the *Secret History*; de Rachewiltz 2004, p. 3, paragraphs 11-16.
24. According to my former student, Markus Pesch (pers. comm., 17 February 2009) who studied hunting in north-western Mongolia.
25. See Humphrey and Onon 1996, p. 92 on the Daur, “Among many Siberian peoples there were rituals, not involving the forest master, to ensure that the killed animal would be replaced in the forest. For the Daurians there is no detailed information on this. I know only that for large animals rituals involved respectful treatment of the *zulde*, the head, windpipe, heart, and lungs, in other words the organs of breath and life (*ami*). The hunter, Urgunge said, should always share meat if he met a stranger in the forest, but he should never on any account give away the *zulde*, which was the hunter’s ‘luck’ (the assurance that the soul of the killed beast would return in animal form)”. Cf. Hamayon 1990, pp. 380-381.
26. On these communities and their hunting culture, see Huber 2005, 2012, in press.
27. Note the phrasing *'brong sgar nang khongs* for members of a wild yak hunting encampment in the above account by *bKra ba* and *bKra shis sTobs rgyal* 1992, p. 69.
28. See the edition and annotated translation of PT 1287, pp. 412-416 in Bialek 2018, v. 2: *lemmata 210 ldoñ thoñ* pp. 212-213, noting that I have capitalised first words in every new line for consistency of style; cf. also the translation in Dotson 2013, p. 61 n. 2 and citation of other translations therein.
29. Macdonald 1980.
30. See, for example, 'Jigs med Theg mchog 1988 for several versions of a narrative related to the origin and founders of Rong bo dGon chen in Reb kong, sections of which are relevant here. The ancestor, *mDo sde 'bum*, has several trios of sons resembling gods, humans and demons. He takes the three “middle sons” resembling humans on a stag hunt with division of the carcass, related to which local social units come into being (p. 84, *skabs shig mdo sde 'bum gyis bu'bring bo gsum khrid nas ri dwags bshor bar song ste bon khog nas sha ba zhiq bsad par bu gsum la khyod tshos sha ba'i ro bdag po rgyob dang zhes bshad par che ba gu rus rwa la 'jus 'dug par khyod kyi rgyud la khri dpon dang stong dpon mi 'chad pa yong / sha rwa la yal ga bco brgyad yod pas thog mar khyim tshang bco brgyad du*

*gyes yong zhes bshad pa ltar rjes sor rong po yar nang gi gzhi bzung ba rim bzhin 'phel ba'i rgyud pa rong bo tshang gi rong 'brog gnyis yin /*). See also the first volume (written 1837) of the autobiography of the A rig lama Zhabs dkar ba Tshogs drug Rang grol (1781-1851) 1985, pp. 389-392 for similar use of a dismemberment analogy related to ranking at a feast and religious symbolism. Zhabs dkar ba hailed from the Reb kong region, and the song text concerned was apparently composed at a site on the northern side of A myes rMa chen mountain; for a serviceable translation, see Ricard 1984, pp. 197-199.

31. These attitudes often coexist with another old notion of “ownerless wild animals” (*sems can bdaq med*); see Huber 2012, p. 209. This latter idea appears to have come strongly to the fore very recently in the context of pastoralists’ exposure to the values of the market economy and modern education provided by the Chinese state.

32. *sDig gla* is unattested in the Old Tibetan corpus, and in comprehensive Classical Tibetan lexicons, yet Goldstein 2001, p. 592 records its modern use for “money paid to a butcher for slaughtering animals” and “money paid to a murderer”.

33. Oppitz 1997, pp. 526-528.

34. See especially p. 161 of rDza dPal sprul 1989, pp. 156-161 and Patrul Rinpoche 1994, pp. 102-104, cf. also a similar sentiment in a song by Zhabs dkar ba; Ricard 1984, pp. 193-195.

35. See, for example, Stevenson 1937: 19, fig. 1 and Stevenson 1968: 130-134 on mithun sacrifice meat shares for mortuary feasts among the Chin.

36. On *dzaekha* game drives, see Huber, in press; on similar drives in alpine and tundra environments like the northern Tibetan Plateau, see Benedict 2005, Morris 1990; for lithic assemblages on the Changthang, see Brantingham *et al.* 2001, Schaller 1997.

## ABSTRACTS

This contribution examines how a range of pastoralist communities upon the Tibetan Plateau dismember wild game animals after hunting, then distribute the meat using modes of sharing. Drawing upon both ethnographic data and Tibetan language documents, the study found dismemberment and sharing of game meat to be bound by well-defined and fairly inflexible rules, some of which are historically attested as being very old. Four distinct modes of sharing are identified: the killer’s share, the stranger’s share, randomized sharing and symbolic differentiation. While the first three are ethnographically attested, the fourth only occurs in idealized mythical narratives. It is proposed that features of these modes might be explained in terms of values and expectations derived from different cosmologies that have intersected.

Cette contribution examine comment des communautés pastorales vivant sur le plateau tibétain démembrer les animaux sauvages après la chasse, puis distribuent la viande selon certains principes de partage. S'appuyant sur des données ethnographiques et des documents en langue tibétaine, cette étude montre que le démembrement et le partage de la viande de gibier étaient soumis à des règles bien définies et assez rigides, dont certaines sont très anciennes. Quatre modes de partage distincts sont identifiés : le premier met en avant la part du tueur, le second la part de l'étranger, le troisième consiste en un partage aléatoire et le quatrième en une différenciation symbolique. Alors que les trois premiers modes sont ethnographiquement attestés, le quatrième ne se retrouve que dans des récits mythiques idéalisés. L'argument de cet

article est que les caractéristiques de ces modes puissent être expliquées en termes de valeurs et d'attentes relevant de différentes cosmologies qui se recourent.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Tibet, pastoralism, nomadism, hunting, wild animals, animals, sharing

**Mots-clés:** Tibet, pastoralisme, nomadisme, chasse, animaux sauvages, animaux, partage

## AUTHOR

### TONI HUBER

Toni Huber has been Professor of Tibetan Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin since 2003. His research and publications include studies of Himalayan shamans, popular ritual, origins and migrations, ethnography of highland societies in the eastern Himalayas, hunting and wild animals, environment and society, pilgrimage and place-making, and Tibetan religions.

huberton@hu-berlin.de