

Officers, Gentlemen and Thieves: The Looting of Monasteries during the 1903/4

Younghusband Mission to Tibet

Author(s): Michael Carrington

Source: *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 81-109

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876552>

Accessed: 07/07/2010 06:47

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Modern Asian Studies*.

*Officers, Gentlemen and Thieves: The Looting
of Monasteries during the 1903/4
Younghusband Mission to Tibet*

MICHAEL CARRINGTON

Coventry University

During the early years of British conquest in India [and elsewhere] indiscriminate and frenzied looting often followed military action. Certainly, the acquisition of plunder had always been used as an incentive for the troops, though its distribution was often disproportionate and the source of much discontent.¹ Officially appointed prize agents ought to have lessened any animosity, though like the Admiralty Prize Courts which were a ‘public scandal’, the military agents were mostly thought to be ‘sharks’ and men often went collecting for themselves rather than for the ‘official’ pot.² By the latter half of the nineteenth century, collection of plunder had also become the ‘collecting’ of curios³ and artefacts for both personal and institutional reasons. This material had become increasingly important in the process of ‘othering’ Oriental and African societies and was exemplified in the professionalism of exploration and the growth of ethnographic departments in museums, the new ‘temples of Empire’. The gathering of information may have reached new heights but the British attempt at a monopoly on knowledge was not particularly ordered or controlled and events within the Empire offered the world’s press numerous opportunities for criticism.⁴ Nearer home, reports of loot-

¹ After the defeat of Tipu Sultan at Seringapatam, General Harris got £150,000, Colonel Wellesley £4,000 and the Indian surgeons and sepoy £5 each. Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword* (London, 1969), p. 67.

² *Ibid.*

³ Though this term became, by 1904, one which was not particularly appreciated by those who wanted the appropriate classification of ‘mere curios into objects of scientific interest’. Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums Material Culture and Popular Imagination* (London, 1994), p. 133.

⁴ A *New York Herald* journalist who accompanied newly retired president of the United States Ulysses S. Grant on his 1877 world tour thought that the British had ‘plundered Egypt just as Lord Elgin plundered Greece’, simply in order to provide material for museums. Quoted in, Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London, 2001), p. 4.

ing often became ammunition in the hands of liberal critics of Empire who had their cause strengthened after the disastrous events of the South African War with its burning, looting and removal of non-combatants to concentration camps. So looting may have become morally questionable, but it was institutionalized and symptomatic of the British imperial state's desire for artefacts with which to provide information about 'exotic' societies. There was literally a 'scramble' for information out of which, it was hoped, an ordered and systematic scheme of knowledge would realize the dream of an 'imperial archive' in which fantasy became reality and ultimate knowledge became ultimate power.⁵

Importantly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the gathering and dissemination of the formidable amounts of knowledge the colonial state now required, coalesced with the growing popular demand for Oriental artefacts and the opening of Tibet, one of the last great blank spaces on the world map. This particular case study is illustrative of how the British state's scramble for knowledge and an atavistic desire for plunder produced ideal conditions for the looting of monasteries during the 1903/4 Younghusband mission to Tibet. What follows, is a narrative of events which challenged the fundamentals of moral Empire at a time of flux between its mythical late Victorian benevolence and the new realities of military and industrial international rivalry.

I

There had been some concern over looting as the nineteenth century came to its close. What had once been standard practice was now considered something that only less civilized peoples might engage in. Late Victorian imperialism, founded on its exclusively European moralistic and religious superiority, frowned upon the excesses of a conquering rabble or an army of occupation. Here was the paradox, the acquisition of information and the production of knowledge had reached new heights, but the exercise of the power, which was needed on occasion to acquire this knowledge, was now constrained by contemporary codes of moral behaviour. This was in contrast to

⁵ See, Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993). Richards sees the imperial archive as 'neither a library or museum . . . [but as a] fantasy of knowledge collected and united in the service of state and Empire'. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the period of East India Company rule where the looting of Bengal by British nabobs and the later revolt of 1857 offer examples of the systematic looting which often followed a British victory. In the eighteenth century, British merchants in India were often accused of obtaining their immense wealth through morally dubious means, though they protested that 'the evil was the work of a few bad apples', or it was their Indian trading partners who 'squeezed the natives'.⁶ Traders originally championed as romantic heroes, gained power and wealth but lost respect and public sympathy.⁷ Association with the Company's trading practices tainted the reputation of the military who were described as a collection of 'political renegades, runaway debtors, ne'er-do-wells, illiterates and ancients';⁸ this reputation was further tarnished by events during the disturbances of 1857.

Both officers and men spent the days following the relief of the Residency in Lucknow loading carts with plunder collected from the surrounding palaces.⁹ After sacking the city the troops roamed the countryside looting and burning villages.¹⁰ Similar practices were reported in Delhi though contemporary observers attempted to shift the blame away from Europeans. It was thought 'the Punjabi races, whose aid had been so material' to the suppression of the revolt had largely offered their support 'by the prospect, glorious to them, of the loot of rich Delhi'.¹¹ British officers reluctantly admitted that the 'European soldiery had been little backward in initiating the example' though they were not thought to possess the 'high art and cunning in tracing out its [the loot] whereabouts which marked the efforts of the Sikhs and Punjabis'.¹² It is in no doubt that an inordin-

⁶ Amal Chatterjee, *Representations of India 1740-1840* (London, 1998), pp. 34 and 40.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸ Gerald Bryant, 'Officers of the East India Company's Army in the Days of Clive and Hastings' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 6, no. 3, May 1978, pp. 203-27, p. 205.

⁹ Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny: India 1857* (London, 1980), p. 327. European civilians were also engaged in looting at Lucknow. See, 'A personal Narrative of the Siege of Lucknow During the Indian Mutiny of 1857'. Parsons Papers, box 1, Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge, hereafter CSAS.

¹⁰ This article is concerned, ultimately, with the looting of artefacts from Tibet; as such it touches lightly on the looting and burning of property as revenge or empowerment; it does not deal at all with the related though important issues surrounding the defilement of women.

¹¹ Charles Bruce, *John Lawrence: Saviour of India* (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 205.

¹² *Ibid.*

ate amount of loot was procured in Delhi and that British 'officers were quite as avaricious as the men'.¹³ Much infighting took place over acquisition and distribution though relative order was eventually restored as hunting for treasure became regulated by having to obtain an official prize ticket. It later became evident that huge amounts of money and valuables must have been discovered and not disclosed, as an 'unusual number of non-commissioned officers and men bought their discharge' on return to England.¹⁴

Looting and burning had certainly been ubiquitous in many international conflicts and in the late nineteenth century it still 'featured prominently [between different groups of] Indians in the most "peaceful" of peasant struggles'.¹⁵ But the latter half of the century was supposedly an age of 'moral' Empire and relations between Indians and the British were supposedly improving and regulated (in theory) by laws governing the rights of British subjects of any 'race'. If the British were constrained to a certain extent within India, the areas which constituted the frontier and beyond presented less of a problem for excesses of behaviour (even though many expeditions still proved extremely embarrassing for the Government). It was rumoured that during the 1877–1878 punitive campaign against the Jowaki Afridis, irregular troops had looted and fired houses (during which a number of women were burned alive¹⁶) and in 1881 the sacking and destruction of property in the border areas of Nagaland continued the lively debate about the relative merits of village-burning.¹⁷ As the 1903/4 Younghusband mission entered Tibet the events surrounding the looting of the Summer Palace in Peking by

¹³ Hibbert, p. 320.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Even though the prize money amassed at Lucknow totalled perhaps as much as a million and a quarter sterling its eventual destination remained something of a mystery, as each private soldier who had served throughout the relief and capture of the Residency received less than 18 rupees. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1992), p. 148.

¹⁶ Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London, 1997), p. 410.

¹⁷ See, Peter Robb, 'The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian Identity: An Example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s,' *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 2, 1997, pp. 245–83. The burning of villages during punitive expeditions was sometimes thought to have assumed 'dimensions disproportionate to the exigencies of the situation'. Nevertheless, the Government of India recognized the relevance of secondary objectives, such as the mapping of regions untraversed by Europeans and the display of imperial might as a deterrent to any future 'unlawful' behaviour. See also, R. Bezbaruah, 'Mitaigaon Outrage and the Bebejiya Mishmi Expedition 1899–1900', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 54 Session, vol. 54, 1994, pp. 416–22.

a multi-national force less than four years earlier were still deeply impressed in the public's memory.¹⁸ Events in China had been difficult to justify though the English explorer and correspondent Henry Savage-Landor attempted to defend what went on by claiming that looting 'was the only way by which the natives could be punished for their outrages on [British] men women and children'.¹⁹ The troops were allowed to bring their loot home from China and messes were full of these items for many years after.²⁰ However, the perpetration of thefts (and worse) upon subject populations was becoming increasingly in contradiction of the supposed moral progress of Empire, especially in light of the arrival in India (in 1899) of that most moral and superior person, George Nathaniel Curzon.

Fundamental to the moral development of the British Empire in India were the actions of far-sighted individuals willing to challenge orthodox perceptions of colonial rule. In this sense, the Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1899–1905) was an important transitional period, administratively, psychologically and philosophically. Administratively, there was a minor revolution in the way the Government in India attempted to reduce the mountains of paperwork and implement Curzon's major reforms.²¹ The Viceroy threw himself into this work with such vigour that many thought him exhausted after his

¹⁸ The Summer Palace had also been looted and burned by Lord Elgin's British troops after the Anglo/French landing of 1860.

¹⁹ Quoted in the *Englishman* (Calcutta) 28 July 1904, cited in 'Allegations Against the Tibet Mission with Regard to Looting' Foreign (External) B, August 1904, proceedings nos 241–4. National Archives of India, hereafter NAI.

²⁰ Two golden bells valued at £100,000 taken from the Temple of Heaven in Peking, allegedly by two officers of the Indian Army, became regimental trophies though they later 'disappeared' from the mess. It was claimed that the bells may have been melted down and deposited as bullion at a bank in Simla. This incident only came to light after the Treaty of Versailles, when a museum in Berlin was ordered to return astronomical instruments looted from Peking. An individual had offered documents relating to the incident to the German Government for £10,000 in order that they might refuse to return items while Britain did not (in July 1921 both the *Daily Express* and the *Manchester Guardian* published this story). L/Mil/7/16819. British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, hereafter OIOC.

²¹ Curzon had to implement measures to deal with one of the most serious famines of the century, then to contend with plague. He addressed the issues of troops for South Africa, relations with the Indian Princes, taxation and the partition of Bengal. He also had to deal with personal differences with Lord Kitchener over army reform. His list of reforms included the suppression of frequent official transfers, reduction of superfluous report writing, preservation of ancient monuments, currency and irrigation measures, police and education reform. Significantly, he engaged in a concerted and relatively successful campaign to curb the frequent collisions between Europeans and Indians.

first two years in office. He would later articulate his own thoughts on his workload when he spoke bitterly of himself as an individual who 'works on until he drops and is replaced by another animal'.²² Psychologically and philosophically, the period was notable because Curzon attempted to implement policies and transmit ideas, which would reinforce his belief in the righteousness of the Raj. He hoped to fulfil the role and ultimate destiny of the British Empire as the arbiter of moral justice in the colonial situation. He addressed a number of issues, some of which met with serious resistance from many in India and Britain (for example his campaign against collisions between natives and Europeans). However, one event was to severely test the Viceroy's moral perception of Empire; this was the looting of the monasteries during the mission to Tibet.

The Younghusband mission opened up a country which for many individuals held an obsessive fascination. It was thought that Tibet might hold vast storehouses of treasure or certainly enough Buddhist paraphernalia to satisfy the contemporary obsession with collection and classification. The mission advanced as far as Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. Reports in the Indian press of the defilement and looting of religious buildings challenged Curzon's conception of moral Empire and called into question one of the most important representations of British moral character, that of the officer and gentleman. The official reporting of the mission always denied improper behaviour and the books, which were subsequently published by members of the mission, all reproduced a sanitized version of events which saw the mission as either a regrettable, though necessary imperial event, or as a 'jolly caper'. Most of the publications, which followed the return of mission, ignored the triumph of technology over medieval tactics and weaponry and there was little or no mention of looting. More recently, there has been an attempt to produce a more realistic version of events, but apart from Chinese attempts to propagandize, no comprehensive survey of the extent of the looting has yet been produced.²³

II

Curzon's conception of Empire was rooted in the belief that the British were born to rule and were imbued with the necessary 'character'

²² Orange Papers, box 2. CSAS.

²³ A number of authors have alluded to the looting of religious artefacts, for example see, P. Mehra, *The Younghusband Expedition* (London, 1968) and most recently Patrick French in *Younghusband* (London, 1994). Laudable though these

needed to fulfil this pre-destined role. It was the defence of the character of the British, which pre-occupied Curzon, and his generation of administrators and politicians, unsure of Britain's future in a rapidly changing world. The Younghusband mission occurred at a time when the South African war had not only undermined British Imperial complacency, but had encouraged liberal critics to continually question the morality of Empire. It was obvious to those concerned, that the mission, which had developed out of the supposed Russian threat to India's northern frontier, would receive scrutiny in India and Britain. The Secretary of State (St John Brodrick) wrote to the Viceroy claiming that there was little public support for an expedition of this kind and that the Cabinet thought likewise.²⁴ The mission would have to be seen to be acting in a responsible and honourable manner and any adverse publicity would need to be adequately managed, particularly in the light of the vast treasure thought to exist in the Tibetan monasteries.

The construction of British character at this time was dualistic in nature; it took account of the reinforcement and perpetuation of historical myths in Britain and the development of symbiotic relationships with notions of the 'other' or 'outsider', as 'barbarian' or 'savage'. This was coupled with contemporary fears of degeneration in Britain's 'racial stock' which gave rise to the idea of war as a way of both testing and improving British character.²⁵ This fear had become evident during and after the South African War as the health of potential military recruits came under scrutiny.²⁶ In a sense, the attempt to reinforce the notion of the superiority of British character and portray the British as a race of 'gentlemen' was the result of an organic crisis of gargantuan proportions. There was an attempt to re-establish the hegemonic boundaries of Britain's elites through the implicit unimpeachability of British power and character. One of the most visible examples of British character, was that of the army officer, locked into his world of

works are they produced no great weight of evidence to substantiate the sheer scale of the looting.

²⁴ Brodrick to Curzon, 29 January 1904, Mss Eur F111/236. OIOC.

²⁵ British newspapers used the mission to Tibet as well as military intervention in Somaliland and Nigeria as evidence of the fact that 'the British were not bereft of martial spirit'. *Daily Mirror*, 5 April 1904, quoted in Glen R. Wilkinson, 'The Blessings of War: The Depiction of Military Force in Edwardian Newspapers', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 33, no. 1, January 1998, pp. 97-115, p. 101.

²⁶ See, for example, Sir F. Maurice Miles, 'National Health. A Soldiers Study', *Contemporary Review*, January 1903, pp. 41-56 and 'Where To Get Men', *Contemporary Review*, January 1902, pp. 78-86.

honour, decency and playing the game. Through his schooling and upbringing, the officer was not thought to be subject to the degenerative traits believed to be concretized within the character of many other groups both within and outside Britain. By the turn of the twentieth century the public schools had developed a unifying ethos which gloried in the gentlemanly pursuits. In an atmosphere that bred 'mental flexibility rather than imaginative foresight,' working hard and playing the game were the principal objectives.²⁷ Sub-rational indoctrination engendered a deference to authority and unquestioning group loyalty that transferred neatly from the school to the military.²⁸ It was in the military that the public schools spirit, with its 'gang mentality' its love of honour and its loyalty to the Empire, reached its zenith. The British officer exemplified the spirit of Empire and had to maintain his prestige in a world that was 'terribly masculine', even if they 'were not all gentlemen [they] all had to behave, sober or drunk, as if [they] were'.²⁹ The drive to maintain and reinforce the myth of British character through the concept of the 'officer and gentleman' was a necessary adjunct in the development of the systematic body of knowledge needed to reinforce and develop the notion of colonial superiority.

In India, the incremental developments of nationalism and public awareness were thrown into the pot of earlier Utilitarian and Evangelical philosophy and had produced relatively sophisticated responses to European outrages by the turn of the twentieth century. There was regular outcry in the Indian press and the British Parliament concerning not only the serious assaults on Indians but also the thefts which Indian shopkeepers suffered at the hands of European civilians and soldiers. The editor of the *Howrah Hitaishi* personally saw 'two Europeans dressed in khaki followed by a hackney carriage full of sundry items which were being forcibly taken from the shops' and noted with surprise that the act was 'robbery committed in broad daylight'. He also reported the case of a 'hundred disorderly and intoxicated marines [who] began to snatch away from vendors at every station, cigars, nuts and other things . . . without any protest

²⁷ Rupert Wilkinson, 'Political Leadership and the Late Victorian Public School', *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 13, 1962, pp. 320-30, p. 324.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 328. There is now a quite considerable and varied literature on public school, sport and Empire; John MacKenzie and J. A. Mangan have produced some of the most interesting work.

²⁹ Ronald Hyam, *Britains Imperial Century* (London, 1976), p. 157.

from their commander'.³⁰ The behaviour of military personnel was of some concern to the administration in India and it was thought that the Tibet mission should consist of men of the highest calibre, 'no third class shots and no man who had been tried by court marshal were to be taken'.³¹ But the British claimed to have had a number of problems as the mission began to assemble. From the very beginning officers claimed to have doubt over the honesty and efficiency of the native labour. The road through Sikkim was constructed with the aid of a 'coolie' corps who had little idea where they were being sent and found the life under canvas in continuous rain less than bearable. One officer described the transport drivers as 'common coolies' who were 'too awful for words'.³² Captain Gillespie of the Royal Engineers had trouble with groups of men who were travelling up the line without the 'benefit' of a British officer; Peshawar coolies found their tents too heavy and left them half way between the railhead and Gantok. The Pathans brought their tents but engaged in fights with Sonthali coolies along the way, during which a village was burnt down. Bengali 'babus', of which the British were extremely suspicious, bore the full weight of their stereotypical associations and had to have their 'eccentricities' checked by the British sergeants during supply and transport duties.³³

Once news of a proposed mission to Tibet was announced, individuals and a number of establishments began requesting that they

³⁰ *Howrah Hitaishi* (Calcutta) 10 January 1904. L/R/5/30, Report of Native Papers in Bengal, no. 9, p. 193. OIOC. The British Government found the tone of the Indian nationalist newspapers rancorous, sarcastic, and anti-European. The *Tribune* (Lahore) was said to 'exaggerate every case of assault on a native by a European' whilst the *Bengalee* [Calcutta] continually criticized the Viceroy and individual Government officials. 'Statements of English, Foreign, Anglo-Vernacular and Vernacular Newspapers—Published in India and Burma During the Year 1904' Home (Public) August 1906, proceeding no. 35. NAI. Curzon had become acutely aware of public opinion in India though many in London often underestimated its importance. J. A. Godley (Permanent Under Secretary, India Office) believed that public opinion in India carried no more weight in 1904 than it had 10 or 15 years earlier. As the man on the spot, Curzon thought otherwise, he claimed that public opinion was 'growing all the while [was] articulate [and was] daily becoming more powerful.' Curzon thought that to 'contend that it does not exist, that it has not advanced in the last 15 years, or that it may be treated with general indifference [was in his view] to ignore the great change that [was] passing over [the] country'. Godley to Curzon, 1 January 1904 and Curzon to Godley, 27 January 1904, Mss Eur. F111/167, nos. 1 and 4. OIOC.

³¹ Diary of Private H. A. Sampson, Royal Fusiliers. National Army Museum (London), hereafter NAM.

³² 'Letter from Rawlings', *Light Bob Gazette*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1904, pp. 8–10.

³³ Capt. R. Gillespie, 'The Construction of the Nathu La Road, Tibet Mission, 1904', *Royal Engineers Journal*, vol. 2, 1905, pp. 289–95.

be allowed to nominate persons to collect books and manuscripts whilst the mission was in progress. The hunt for manuscripts in Tibet had its antecedents in the nineteenth-century attempts to 'rescue' treasures thought to lie scattered along the Silk Road and the 'international race for the ancient Buddhist treasures of the Taklamakan and Gobi deserts', which had only recently begun.³⁴ Early exploration had been informed by an objective scientific ethos with its roots in the enlightenment though this evolved and was superseded by the mysterious and poetic imagery of romanticism, which rejected 'cold philosophy'.³⁵ The expeditions of the late nineteenth century however, were symptomatic of a new breed of 'heroic' professional explorer, whose myths developed an instrumental power which 'justified and promoted the expansion of the state in geographical and economic terms'.³⁶

In Central Asia, men like Sven Hedin³⁷ and Aurel Stein³⁸ personified the new age and were glorified in the press and the literature of the period as their adventures gave form and offered guidance for a new generation's 'personal and national ascendancy'.³⁹ Hedin saw the desire for romance and the desire for knowledge as one and the same and rejected pejorative notions of the scientist as a destroyer of beauty or (in Wordsworth's words) 'one that would peep and botonize upon his mothers grave'.⁴⁰ Stein became interested in Buddhist art whilst working for the Education Department of the Government of India in the Punjab and his personally conducted tour of the Lahore Museum for Lord Curzon in 1899 guaranteed Viceregal support for his expeditions.⁴¹ These expeditions into Cent-

³⁴ Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* (Oxford, 1980), p. 111.

³⁵ The Romantic name for science.

³⁶ Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer* (London, 1993), p. 6.

³⁷ Swedish geographer Sven Anders Hedin (1865–1952) studied at Stockholm, Berlin and Halle Universities. Although an amateur archaeologist his excavations in 1899 at Lou-lan, an ancient Chinese garrison town, revealed a number of manuscripts which proved vital for the history of the Silk Road. In 1900–01, disguised as a Mongolian monk, he travelled through northern Tibet but was thwarted in his attempt to reach Lhasa. He later explored and mapped regions of the Himalaya, the Gobi Desert and Tibet providing important material for a number of institutions.

³⁸ Hungarian by birth, Mark Aurel Stein (1862–1943) studied Oriental languages at Vienna, Leipzig, Tubingen and Oxford Universities.

³⁹ And as Riffenburgh points out, they sold a considerable amount of newspapers. Riffenburgh, pp. 6–7.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Sven Hedin, *To the Forbidden Land: Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet* (New Delhi, 1988) first published 1934, introduction pp. vii–viii.

⁴¹ In 1900–01 Stein explored in the vicinity of Khotan, returning to Europe across Russia he deposited the material he had collected in the British Museum.

ral Asia unearthed a considerable amount of Buddhist and other artefacts that found a ready place among the collections of European museums. It was in these establishments, representations of civic and national pride, that a developing leisured class could define themselves within the context of 'other' and more 'savage' cultures. The pre-eminent institution in Britain, the British Museum, had since its opening in 1759, presented collections of 'curios' in ways that 'ordered' the natural world and 'reinforced the hierarchical structure of British society'.⁴² This hegemonic project was developed and refined during the course of the nineteenth century imposing an increasing importance on the acquisition of exotic material. As reports of a British sojourn onto the Himalayan plateau reached London, a paucity of Tibetan manuscripts ensured a healthy interest in the events of the Tibet mission.⁴³

The most desirable materials in relation to Tibet were Buddhist books and manuscripts, as prior to 1904 the libraries in Britain were the poorest in Europe in this respect. The India Office Library held the most important collection though this was severely limited, the British Museum had 'little more than a few leaves torn from some of the larger texts' and the 'libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, and the Royal Asiatic Society had still less'.⁴⁴ This was a period of intense interest in the collection and display of Oriental artefacts precisely because of their role in 'othering' Asian societies; in the production of knowledge as power. Benedict Anderson (in regard to Southeast Asia) notes how colonial archaeological services became powerful and prestigious institutions. His inter-linking concepts of the census, the map and the museum and how this 'illuminates the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain' is persuasive. He maintains that a 'totalizing classificatory grid' could be applied to 'anything under the state's real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, reli-

He later visited Chinese Turkistan, Chitral and Afghanistan. In 1907 he discovered valuable paintings and manuscripts in the 'Cave of a Thousand Buddhas' at Tun-huang in Western China; this material has been described as the greatest single find in the history of Central Asian archaeology.

⁴² Patricia Fara, 'The Appliance of Science: The Georgian British Museum', *History Today* August 1997.

⁴³ For a useful discussion on the role of material culture in museums (though in relation to Africa) see, Annie E. Coombes.

⁴⁴ L. A. Waddell, 'Tibetan Manuscripts and Books Etc Collected During the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa', *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 3rd series, vol. 34, 1912, pp. 80–113, p. 82. Waddell thought that the collection of material from Tibet formed 'one of not the least solid results of the mission of Sir Francis Younghusband'. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

gions, languages, products, monuments'. Everything 'was bounded, determinate, and therefore, in principle, countable'. The 'assumption [here was] that the world was made up of replicable plurals' and of course this was ultimate control, of knowledge as power.⁴⁵ So the acquisition of Tibetan manuscripts was important and as such they would be incredibly valuable. It would be crucial to have knowledgeable and trustworthy collectors (officers and gentlemen who would know how to 'play the game'). A number of names were suggested, including the well-known Pundit, Sarat Chandra Das.⁴⁶ Das was well qualified for the task though disliked by certain members of the British administration who thought him 'totally untrustworthy'; Curzon also believed it unwise to send 'a man of the type of S C Das'.⁴⁷

It was suggested that the well-known Tibetologist L. Austin Waddell and *The Times* correspondent Perceval Landon should collect material for the British Museum. Waddell had graduated as a surgeon from the University of Glasgow in July 1878 with the 'highest honours' and entered the Indian medical service in 1880.⁴⁸ From 1884 to 1890 he was Professor of Chemistry and Pathology at Calcutta Medical College. By 1900 he had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, had a number of military campaigns and decorations under his belt and had been Medical Officer to the Darjeeling district and Deputy Sanitary Commissioner in Bihar. It was while he was in Darjeeling that he had learnt the Tibetan language and had pur-

⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991), p. 184.

⁴⁶ Das was a well-educated Bengali and had been a teacher at Darjeeling. He worked for the Survey of India and visited Tibet in the late 1870s and 1880s; his explorations took him to Gyantse and for a short time as far as Lhasa. He was later used as an interpreter by the British, may have been involved with British intelligence services and was believed to be the model for Kipling's character, Huree Chunder Mookerjee, in *Kim*. Ironically, two Tibetans who spent nineteen years in prison for helping Das travel in Tibet were released when the British reached Lhasa.

⁴⁷ Home (Books and Publications) A, July 1904, proceedings nos 90-6. NAI. Considering the sterling work Das had undertaken for the British, Curzon's slight on his character could be considered unwarranted. Curzon's attitude may have had more to do with his irrationally held stereotypical racial beliefs than any deficiency of Das. Also, there was considerable debate over the amount of money to be allocated for the purchase of artefacts, and which department should provide the finance. The Home Department refused to supply the 10,000 rupees, which was eventually allocated to the mission by the Government, it was suggested that 26-Scientific and Minor Departments be debited for the amount. It was also indicated that there would 'perhaps' be an additional grant of 10,000 rupees (though I have no evidence that this money was ever allocated). *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ L/Mil/9/407. OIOC.

chased a Tibetan temple wholesale to study every aspect of Tibetan Buddhism at first hand.⁴⁹ Waddell then, would be the perfect man for the job of Chief Medical Officer to the Tibet mission and after representations to the Government of India was chosen to be the official collector of materials for the British Museum. He was to be assisted by David Macdonald, an employee of the Government of India, Macdonald was the son of a Scott with a Sikkimise mother and he would be extremely useful as he spoke fluent Tibetan. Many of those that accompanied the mission had a personal interest in an advance all the way to Lhasa. Perceval Landon was not only employed to collect for the British Museum but had signed an agreement with *The Times* that would see his £350 correspondents fee reduced to expenses only should the mission fail to reach the Tibetan capital.⁵⁰ Two Major Generals had quite independently admitted that they thought Tibet would be an 'A-1 place for curios' and many officers hoped for a medal.⁵¹ The mission then, from its inception, was predisposed to advance, it was accompanied by a collection of individuals who were driven by disparate desires and needs. Cartographers hoped to map virgin territory, plant and insect hunters expected to discover new specimens, geologists were looking to Tibet's supposed mineral wealth, individuals wanted curios for institutions or for themselves, some men desired fame, some desired fortune and some desired both.

III

Initial attempts at negotiation in Tibet had failed at Khamba Jong (fort) and the mission, with Colonel Francis Younghusband as its head, Brigadier-General J. R. L. Macdonald as the military commander, its associated transport and three press correspondents returned to Tibet via the Jelap La (pass) on 12 December 1903. Strict orders were issued against looting with particular reference made to religious objects. The mission halted for some weeks at the

⁴⁹ Waddell had travelled widely in Sikkim, Nepal and the Indian Himalaya, had excavated the ruins of Pataliputra, Ashoka's capital near Patna, and had written on Tibetology. See, L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism* (New Delhi, 1991).

⁵⁰ Perceval Landon and C. F. Moberly-Bell Correspondence, Archive of Times Newspapers Ltd (News International PLC), London.

⁵¹ S. Normanton, *Tibet: The Lost Civilisation* (London, 1988), p. 19.

village of Phari and it was here that certain members of the mission began to acquire items of interest.⁵² After the halt at Phari the mission advanced towards Lhasa and saw its first action near the village of Guru on 31 March 1904. Six hundred Tibetans were massacred at Guru and after the fight a number of trophies were collected.⁵³

As the mission progressed, it was necessary to forage for stores and as a rule an attempt was made to pay for the items that were taken from the peasantry, though on occasion troops demolished a village for the timber.⁵⁴ On reaching a monastery it would be quite a different story. The Tibetan leadership, which included the monks, was never afforded the luxury of a political personality and the monks were described as primitive, obstinate and stubborn.⁵⁵ The monks had been promoted in Britain as belonging to a malevolent sect who practised a degenerated form of Buddhism; it was reported that they existed purely in order to oppress the peasantry. The deliberate closing of Tibet after 1792 had meant that subsequent exploration into the area lacked the informal exchange that had occurred between educated Tibetans and those such as Bogle and Turner a century before; this created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. Explorers now came predominantly into contact with Tibetans in the outlying areas that were under Government orders to prevent penetration into central Tibet. A climate of mutual hostility developed which fuelled pejorative accounts of the Tibetan Government and its national religion, which were inextricably intertwined. The attitudes to Tibet were indicative of the wider concerns of the late Victorian Christian crusade against 'heathen' practices in India and elsewhere. Deep rooted Christian prejudice surfaced during the Tibet mission and was later exemplified in publications like Waddell's *Lhasa and its Mysteries* and Landon's *Lhasa* in which monks 'live idly on the labour of the laity'⁵⁶ who are seen as existing in a state of perpetual ignorance and filth.⁵⁷ Driven by disgust, one officer, finding grain hidden in a monastery, took the abbot 'by the nape of his

⁵² The Wellcome Institute has an item marked 'found at Phari Fort 1904' written on it.

⁵³ See Lt Haddow's letter to his father of 3 April 1904. Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum, hereafter RNRM.

⁵⁴ Diary of Private A. E. Christer, Royal Fusiliers, entry for 23 June 1904. NAM.

⁵⁵ See for example the *Spectator* (London) 'News of the Week' 19 March 1904.

⁵⁶ L. A. Waddell, *Lhasa and its Mysteries* (London, 1905), p. 216.

⁵⁷ P. Landon, *Lhasa*, 2 Volumes (London, 1905).

lubberly neck, drove him down on his knees and rubbed his nose in it'. He claimed that the British officers' 'very souls would have revolted at the idea of paying the monks one penny'.⁵⁸

So British military personnel were reflecting contemporary ideas in which 'barbaric' practices like Buddhism featured low in the hierarchy of religious acceptability. However, there would have been tension as officers attempted to operate within the confines of their own socially enforced codes of gentlemanly behaviour, which was in itself in a state of flux. The traditional 'gentleman', his code of conduct and the whole psychological base of gentlemanly standards had changed by the turn of the twentieth century. Peterson, in a discussion on the low status of medicine at this time, has pointed to the characteristic of 'power'. The 'idea of the gentleman was rooted in landed society' and the cornerstone of this belief was that a man held 'possession of sufficient land to free him from economic [and presumably, therefore political] subjection to others'.⁵⁹ Concomitant is the gentleman's right to rule, his fitness to govern 'because' of his independence, his freedom from 'narrow self interest'.⁶⁰ This concept of independence survived the transition from landed gentleman to the officer and the gentleman who was born to rule and to rule well, not because of his position in landed society but because of an inborn 'character'. Character had to be defended at all costs, though now it was not so much that an officer should not flout the rules of the gentleman, but that he must not get caught. The elaborate mechanisms for protecting him, for example the law and the 'rules of the game' could not be employed indefinitely. After too many misdemeanours the officer and gentleman was on his own, shunned by the unforgiving society in which he lived. The idea of character was constantly being tested during the mission and came under severe threat as events unfolded and schism appeared within the officer ranks over the behaviour of some of its members.

The mission reached Gyantse, Tibet's fourth largest, though relatively small city, on 11 April. The Tibetans began evacuating Gyantse Jong (fort) during the night and by the next morning it was completely deserted. The British then ransacked the Jong for

⁵⁸ L. A. Bethel, 'A Footnote by Pousse Cailloux', *Blackwood's Magazine* 225, 1904, pp. 147-76.

⁵⁹ M. J. Peterson, 'Gentlemen and Medical Men: The Problem of Professional Recruitment', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 58, 1984, pp. 457-73, p. 470.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

'food-stores and ammunition'.⁶¹ By this time the 'Orientalist' interest in Buddhist paraphernalia ensured that the Government of India was receiving requests for Tibetan objects. The Victoria Institute at Worcester and the Cambridge University Ethnological Institute, amongst others, asked that they be included in the list of establishments that might receive materials acquired by the mission. The India Office replied that it had not yet received instructions as to the distribution of artefacts.⁶² On 21 April, almost by accident, the debate over looting was sparked by Landon's article that appeared in *The Times*. He claimed that 'valuables or curios, found in the fort [at Gyantse] as were not immediately connected with religious worship will be handed over to the Government of India for distribution among British and Indian museums'.⁶³

The India Office wrote to Louis Dane (Secretary to the Government of India) informing him that Brodrick had asked them to bring *The Times* article to the notice of the Viceroy.⁶⁴ They thought that the wording was 'rather ambiguous' and that it might 'possibly be used as the foundation for accusations of looting'; further to this, Brodrick wished to avoid anything which might 'expose the mission to misrepresentation'.⁶⁵ Younghusband wrote to the Government of India informing them that after the Tibetans had surrendered the Jong he had entrusted Waddell, Landon and the mission interpreter Captain O'Connor, to select 'from among the mass of manuscripts and articles "lying about" [my emphasis] such as were likely to be of value specifically'. He claimed that 'no articles were removed from the chapel in the Jong'.⁶⁶ Two days later a controversial committee was formed for the distribution of brass images found in the Jong and though Younghusband thought the pieces 'all very ugly' he was

⁶¹ Waddell (London, 1905), p. 199. Waddell mentions how he inspected various artefacts in the chapel but makes no mention of taking any. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶² Foreign (External) B, August 1904, proceedings nos 241-4. NAI.

⁶³ *The Times* (London) 21 April 1904. It was also reported that 'nearly all the portable valuables have been removed [from the Palkor Choede Lamastery] by the lamas, in spite of the repeated proclamation by Brigadier-General Macdonald that there would be no looting . . .' *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ R. T. Ritchie, Secretary in the Political Department India Office to Louis Dane, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department. 29 April 1904. Foreign (External) B, August 1904, proceedings nos 254-254A. NAI.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Younghusband to Russell, ICS, Under Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department. Gyantse, 12 July 1904. *Ibid.*

allocated and accepted a dozen items.⁶⁷ News of the finds filtered out and many in Britain and India desired a piece of the 'mystical' land. Mrs Younghusband was not immune from the fascination with Tibet and she began haranguing Captain O'Connor with pleas for curios for her and her friends. O'Connor attempted to delegate to Mr Mitter, the mission's Parsi clerk, who seemed rather put out by the request. Mitter wrote back to Mrs Younghusband and suggested that O'Connor might be better equipped to supply curios as he thought himself rather 'incompetent', and further to this the Captain had a better knowledge of the country and had already acquired a good number of items.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the Tibetans had brought up reinforcements from Shigatse and re-occupied Gyantse Jong during the early morning of 5 May after which a two-month siege ensued. While the Jong was under siege a number of actions took place in the surrounding district including the storming of Naini and Tsechen monasteries. It was during the capture of hostile monasteries that Waddell 'rescued' a number of books and manuscripts from burning buildings that had 'been set on fire by retreating Tibetans'. On more than one occasion he 'ran the gauntlet of exploding boxes of gunpowder' in his attempt to collect material.⁶⁹ Other officers were acquiring artefacts during this time and Younghusband wrote to his wife how he was accumulating 'quite a collection'. He told her how he had 'not taken a single thing' himself as he did 'not think it fair when [he had done] none of the fighting', though both British and native officers kept bringing him objects.⁷⁰ Three weeks later he sent a number of the smaller items down to his wife and informed her that he still had a lot of the larger curios at Gyantse.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Younghusband to his wife, Gyantse 14 April 1904 (Also cited in French, *Younghusband* p. 229). Mss Eur. F197/176. OIOC. Henry Newman, the Reuters correspondent, had a share of these images and recalls there was a 'row about this distribution afterwards, and [that] some people called it scandalous looting'. H. Newman, *A Roving Commission* (London, 1937), p. 219.

⁶⁸ Mitter to Mrs Younghusband, 6 May 1904. Mss Eur. F197/100. OIOC. However, Mitter later relented and sent Mrs Younghusband a number of small items (he was unable to send the painted scrolls and 'other large things' he had acquired as he could not find a suitable box). Mitter to Mrs Younghusband, 29 June 1904. *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Waddell, 1912, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Younghusband to his wife, Gyantse, 28 May 1904. Mss Eur F197/176. OIOC.

⁷¹ Younghusband to his wife, Kangma, 24 June 1904. *Ibid.*

On 8 July, after a spectacular action, Gyantse Jong was captured for the second time and members of the mission began to collect the spoils of war. Officers and men collected numerous weapons, swords, bayonets, spears, bullet moulds, matchlocks and cannon. But with the monastery and its chapels containing so much of apparent value, the contents proved irresistible for both the troops and the 'official' collectors. Major Wimberly, who was attached to the field hospital, wrote to his wife how he had been left to collect all the details of casualties as Waddell had asked him to do it whilst he 'went off on the loot'.⁷² That morning Lt Haddow and Younghusband, who shared the same mess, climbed to the top of the Jong and looked down on the monastery, which was situated directly to the side, it was believed at first that Tibetans might still occupy these buildings though they appeared now to be deserted. They decided to go and 'do a bit of looting on [their] own before anyone else arrived' though they were in 'blissful ignorance' of the fact that General Macdonald with the main force had decided to attack and capture the mass of buildings which were the monastery complex.⁷³ Meanwhile Haddow and a private Smith had entered the monastery and found it deserted save for the presence of two British officers of the Indian Army who were engaged in collecting valuables. Haddow and Smith 'had a great time'; they broke into three buildings and 'loaded themselves with loot'. Thinking it might be useful to capture a Tibetan to help carry away the spoils they went outside but were met by the troops sent to capture the monastery, whereby they were reprimanded by an angry officer who confiscated their loot. But although they were searched, Smith managed to steal three brass images, which he had slipped down his vest. Haddow was not particularly upset at being caught as he had met with 'a certain amount of success on previous occasions'.⁷⁴

With the mission under the spotlight there was an attempt by senior officers to curtail the worst excesses of the looting and staff officers were on the prowl. But attempts to stop the 'unofficial' thefts were not particularly successful and the chapels were systematically pillaged. Two British soldiers of the 64th Pioneers were caught loot-

⁷² Colin Narbeth, 'The Storming of the Gyantse Fort: An Unpublished Letter from the 1904 Younghusband Expedition in Tibet', *Tibetan Review*, June 1996, pp. 16–18.

⁷³ A. L. Haddow (LT.-Col), 'Tibet, 1903–1904. With the Machine Gun Section 1st Battalion the Norfolk Regiment', *The Britannia*, 1933, p. 67.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

ing though they still managed to get their sack-full away easily.⁷⁵ Golden, gilt and brass Buddha and other images, models of chortens, painted scrolls, books with their carved covers, thankas, thigh bone trumpets and aprons, decorative brass bowls, butter lamps and stands, dorje's (thunderbolts), bells, prayer wheels, lamas robes, brass trays, copper tea pots and valuable Ming porcelain were all taken.⁷⁶ If an image was too large to carry away parts of it were broken off.⁷⁷ Houses in the vicinity were robbed, though nothing of great value was found in the majority of them. Wimberly wrote to his wife how he had collected two china vases, a china teapot, a pen-case and a brass cup-stand and cover which he intended to pack up and send down when he had the time.⁷⁸ As news of the looting reached India there was considerable interest in acquiring curios. Younghusband's wife again wrote to Captain O'Connor asking if he would be able to obtain some artefacts for her acquaintances. O'Connor relented and wrote back saying that he would most certainly fit some extra items into a box he was packing up and told her to 'look upon them as a little present'.⁷⁹

IV

Along with the looting a number of other regrettable incidents occurred in and around Gyantse including the death of the son of the representative of the Chinese Amban at Gyantse who was killed by a stray bullet. Also, two or three Chinese subjects and ten or twelve Tibetan women lost their lives in the confusion and two women were shot and wounded as they wandered about in the dark.⁸⁰ Tragically, a British soldier found two youngsters who had been watching the action from a nearby hill had been killed. The boys

⁷⁵ Diary of H. Harvey Kelley, 64th Pioneers. NAM.

⁷⁶ Typescript of items brought back from Tibet by Lt Haddow of the M. G. Section 1st Bn Royal Norfolk Regiment. RNRM.

⁷⁷ Haddow's list contains 61 items, which include, two daggers taken from some large idols at Gyantse, the head of an image broken off as image was too large to carry away, heads on a string taken off an idol. *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Narbeth, p. 18.

⁷⁹ O'Connor to Mrs Younghusband, Gyantse, 21 July 1904. Mss Eur. F197/101. OIOC.

⁸⁰ There were considerable numbers of Tibetan civilians in the area and orders had been issued which prohibited firing at night 'unless certain of hitting the enemy'. Haddow diaries, 21 May 1904. Devon Records Office, hereafter DRO.

were 'cuddling each other in death, both had been shot by a shell . . . [the soldier thought] it was a fearful sight'.⁸¹ Tibetan civilians had the added misfortune of having their property taken and being ill-treated by their own troops. The Tibetan levies were said to have killed three or four women who had 'mixed up with the British troops' at Gyantse.⁸² The Nepalese representative in Lhasa, who reported to the British, had heard that Tibetans were 'plundering villages on their way to Lhasa' and noted that the inhabitants of the city 'were hiding their respective wealth and property wherever they could'.⁸³ For the British, the days following the capture of Gyantse Jong were used to bring up stores and reinforcements and to reconnoitre the vicinity. A force rode to Penam Jong near Shigatse, which was found to be unoccupied, and troops travelled the 14 miles to the village of Dongtse to forage and loot.⁸⁴

On 14 July the march on Lhasa began, the route did not provide much in the way of treasure though the force caused the local population some problems with foraging and the pulling down of some villages for firewood.⁸⁵ There was sporadic looting; at Nagartse, Waddell and David Macdonald found some sepoy stealing from the famous monastery of Samding, they ordered the men to return the goods 'at once'.⁸⁶ By late July the mission had crossed the Tsangpo and was within sight of Lhasa. The excesses of the mission and particularly the looting of religious artefacts outraged the Indian nationalist press. The *Hitavadi* accused the mission of 'enriching the British Museum with at least a portion of the valuable documents, [and] manuscripts' it had looted and that even if the Government had made provision for the purchase of 'some' of these articles the news-

⁸¹ Sampson diary, entry for 12 July 1904. NAM.

⁸² 'Letters from the Nepalese Representative at Lhasa Regarding Tibetan Affairs' Foreign (Secret) E, October 1904, proceedings nos 646-66. NAI.

⁸³ *Ibid.* The reports the Nepalese representative sent on to the British were mostly second or third hand and must be treated with some suspicion, for example one report claimed that the British had advanced on Gyantse and 'shot down every man women and child they had come across'. 'Letter from the Honourable the Four Kasis of Tibet to His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal'. *Ibid.* Enclosure no. 3, p. 59. The British were certainly involved in looting but there is no evidence that they 'intentionally' shot women and children.

⁸⁴ Christer diary, entry for 8 July 1904. NAM.

⁸⁵ Sampson diary, entries for 14 and 22 July 1904. NAM.

⁸⁶ David Macdonald, *Twenty Years in Tibet*, first published 1932 (New Delhi, 1991), p. 25. Macdonald claimed that these sepoy were later tried by court-marshal. Waddell 'noticed' a number of interesting items on the altar at Samding, including images adorned with precious stones and a large Ming jar. Waddell, 1905, p. 296.

paper 'deeply regretted' the 'plunder' of the monasteries.⁸⁷ The *Statesman* maintained that 'piles of loot, which it was not possible to transport, had been accumulated at Gyantse' and said, 'the drawing rooms of Darjeeling begin to tell a tale, which it should be far from pleasant for English eyes to read'.⁸⁸ The *Englishman* agreed, and thought, 'there was little glory to be had out of the campaign in Tibet' though that was 'no reason why the overwhelming weight of loot should be thrown into the scale . . .'.⁸⁹ It was widely reported that the expense of the mission would fall upon the shoulders of the Indian people and the *Hitavadi* believed that this, combined with the looting of the monasteries, had brought disgrace on the army. Further to this it would be the acting Viceroy, Lord Ampthill,⁹⁰ who would be 'guilty of neglecting his duty in the eye of justice and equality' if he failed to prevent further looting and did not return the items already taken.⁹¹

The British Government and the Viceroy now realized that the reporting of the scale of the looting was threatening to cause further and more serious discontent in India. A despatch from Louis Dane claimed that 'the Viceroy [was] anxious to prevent accusations of looting and [had] reason to believe that Tibetan articles [were] reaching Darjeeling in considerable numbers'. He also thought 'special orders' ought to be issued 'which would preclude the possibility of anything being sent down . . . without the sanction of some superior officer on the spot'.⁹² The Military Department wrote to Lord Kitchener, who as Commander-in-Chief in India, was asked if he would agree to the issuing of orders to prevent further looting and whether General Macdonald should

⁸⁷ *Hitavadi* (Calcutta) 29 July 1904. L/R/5/30, no. 32, p. 717. OIOC. The British, always keen to keep an eye on the more vociferous vernacular and Anglo-Indian press, realized that the *Hitavadi* was published from the same building as the *Bengalee* (which was edited by Congress official Surendranath Banerjea). The police thought that Banerjea had 'a strong voice in controlling the policy and doing of the more audacious and unscrupulous vernacular paper *Hitavadi*'. Prem Narain, *Press and Politics in India 1885-1905* (Delhi, 1970), pp. 288-9, fn. 27.

⁸⁸ *Statesman* (Calcutta) 21 July 1904, cited in Foreign (External) B, August 1904, proceedings nos 254-254 A., NAI.

⁸⁹ *Englishman* (Calcutta) 28 July 1904, cited in *ibid.* General Macdonald thought that the articles in the *Statesman* and the *Englishman* were 'uncalled for and greatly exaggerated'. Macdonald to Adjutant General, 14 August 1904. L/PS/7/170. OIOC.

⁹⁰ Curzon had left India for England at the end of April 1904 and was replaced by Lord Ampthill. He returned to office on 13 December of that year.

⁹¹ *Hitavadi* 12 August 1904. L/R/5/30, no. 34, pp. 761-2. OIOC.

⁹² Foreign (External) B, August 1904, proceedings nos 254-254 A., NAI.

do the same. Kitchener agreed that they should issue orders though he maintained that 'General Macdonald was very strict on the subject and from what [he had heard] from officers returning, no looting is allowed amongst the military'.⁹³ By late July it was obvious that the looting of religious and other artefacts had taken place on a relatively large scale. The Foreign Department agreed that there 'was' looting but attempted to shift the blame away from the military. They claimed that,

in China it was pretty bad in some instances, but [they had heard] the military were not the worst offenders [and that it was] difficult to stop looting when valuable things are lying about un-owned. If it is not taken by the victors the loot is appropriated by the people of the country who have no right to it. [They thought that] It would be easy enough to prevent parcels being sent to India by transport.⁹⁴

Amphill, sceptical about the allegations, thought it unnecessary to issue any special instructions unless he 'had heard from private sources that looting had actually been going on and [was] beginning to be talked about.' He did not want to 'assume that the officers of the mission [had] been sending plundered goods to India without positive proof'.⁹⁵ Younghusband was informed that,

notices [were] appearing in newspapers that loot from Tibet was reaching India in considerable quantities [and that] to meet the possibility of this being correct, suitable action should be taken . . . to prevent the loot being sent down, [though] bona fide purchases of curios [were] of course not prohibited.⁹⁶

Amphill was concerned for the good name of the mission and asked Dane to substitute the words 'to meet the possibility . . .' for; 'the Government of India believes that these insinuations are unfounded'. He also thought that Younghusband ought to know of the accusations in order that the mission might be careful not to be 'exposed to misrepresentation'.⁹⁷ There was little debate over the looting in Britain, though Brodrick was asked in the Commons if he realized that 'bales of loot [which included] objects ostensibly pillaged from the monasteries of Tibet [had] arrived at Darjeeling'. He replied

⁹³ Kitchener to Military Department, 29 July 1904. *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ E. R. Elles, Foreign Department, 1 August 1904. *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Amphill to Dane, 28 July 1904. *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Dane to Amphill, 11 August 1904. *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Amphill to Dane, 12 August 1904. *Ibid.*

that he had received no such information and that his 'Government [was] fully aware of the necessity of preventing pillage and [were] taking all the necessary steps'.⁹⁸

The tirade against the mission continued in the Indian nationalist press as the mission entered Lhasa and negotiated a treaty with the Tibetan authorities. The Secretary of State contacted Amptill in order to forbid the looting of the libraries and monasteries of Lhasa though the *Morning Leader* thought there was a 'sinister significance' in the fact that such a prohibition was necessary.⁹⁹ Chief Staff Officer, Major Iggulden, admitted that the 'visible riches and treasures of Lhasa fairly made [their] mouths water'; unfortunately the Tibetans were not inclined to sell the more important items.¹⁰⁰ But the looting was over and though no religious objects were on sale at Lhasa¹⁰¹ some souvenirs were purchased from merchants in solid silver Rupees, which made the mission quite popular with the lay population. There was still tension between the monks and the members of the mission, which required the odd show of force. A disgruntled Lama attacked two British soldiers with a sword wounding one slightly and the other severely. The offender was hanged and his monastery fined 5000 Rupees.¹⁰² The mission left Lhasa on 23 October 1904 and thus ended one of the most controversial expeditions in the history of British India; Henry Newman believed this was the last time British troops were ever 'allowed' to loot.¹⁰³ The controversy over the mission continued in India during the Bombay Congress of December of that year though the key issue became the contravention of the Act of 1858 that forbade the spending of revenue outside the statutory limits of India, except to repel foreign aggression.¹⁰⁴ For the Congress, the mission had been a perfect example of the military policy which had been 'harming the county'

⁹⁸ Mr Philip Stanhope MP (Market Harborough) to Secretary of State, Commons 10 August 1904. V/3/1607. OIOC.

⁹⁹ *Morning Leader* (London) 10 August 1904.

¹⁰⁰ 'An Account of Lhasa . . . ' Mss Eur C270. OIOC.

¹⁰¹ See Candler, p. 273.

¹⁰² L/Mil/7/16831. OIOC. Younghusband returned 4000 Rupees of the fine and gave 1000 to the families of two mission servants killed at Gyantse. See, Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 17 September 1904. L/PS/7/170. OIOC.

¹⁰³ Newman, p. 129.

¹⁰⁴ See, Indian National Congress, Twentieth Session, Bombay, 26–28 December 1904, in A. M. Zaidi and S. Zaidi (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, vol. 4, (New Delhi, 1978), p. 635.

for some time; it was an important element in the wider 'drain of wealth' from India to Britain.¹⁰⁵

While in Tibet, Waddell had amassed over two thousand volumes of books and manuscripts. These formed the bulk of the material he collected 'officially' and were sent down safely to India.¹⁰⁶ Twenty-nine volumes of Waddell's private collection were sent on to the India Office Library and arrived intact though he maintained only half a dozen other volumes of his own collection made it back to India, the rest being lost on the journey home. In January 1905 Waddell's assistant, David Macdonald, was detailed for special duty in Calcutta. He sorted over 400 mule loads of objects, 'many rare and valuable manuscripts, armour, weapons, paintings and porcelain'¹⁰⁷ and an exhibition of the collection was held in the Indian Museum Calcutta prior to its dispersal to museums in Britain and India.¹⁰⁸ Curzon expressed an interest in several items from the exhibition and requested that he might be allowed to purchase them¹⁰⁹ and a large collection of porcelain was despatched to Kitchenner, who was an avid collector (though much of this was damaged beyond repair while in transit).¹¹⁰

V

Around 18,000 persons had been involved with the mission throughout its time in Tibet. It was inevitable that general stores and munitions would fall into the hands of the British troops though it was claimed that the peasants were usually paid for any goods they sup-

¹⁰⁵ Indian National Congress Reports 1901–1904, 1904 Congress, Twelfth Resolution, p. 214. Nehru Memorial Museum Library, (microfilm).

¹⁰⁶ Waddell, 1912, p. 86. Waddell claimed that 'every single volume of this huge Tibetan collection was selected with [his] own hands'. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁷ Macdonald, p. 42.

¹⁰⁸ 'Tibetan Curios for Public Museums' *The Times* 5 April 1905. After the exhibition in Calcutta the official collection was divided up and sent to the British Museum, the India Office Library and Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

¹⁰⁹ The articles in question were: a silver incense burner with cover and chains, two painted scrolls, brazen bar for trumpets, standing goddess and a seated Buddha. A number of Calcutta antique dealers were instructed to place a value on the artefacts. Estimates of their worth averaged 500–600 rupees and it was decided that the value should be 382 rupees, this would be charged to 26 Scientific and Minor Departments. 'Purchase of Certain Tibetan Curios by His Excellency Lord Curzon' Foreign [External] B, May 1905, proceedings no. 330. NAI.

¹¹⁰ Macdonald, p. 42.

plied; the Mounted Infantry alone took over seven thousand animals though they maintained that five thousand were paid for.¹¹¹ The British excused the taking of stores from monasteries by referring to the oppressive nature of the monks, though this was a specious argument given that stores were held in the monasteries for times of famine. Generally, the monks 'were' the peasants, many would have had families in the vicinity and they had little reason to oppress the local population. But there is no doubt that looting was rife and that Tibetans were murdered in the process of acquiring items.¹¹² Also, the sheer scale of the looting of religious objects and the fact that it was institutionalized was unacceptable given the assurances that the monasteries were not to be pillaged. The major question for those involved with the mission was not if, but how, they were going to transport items from Tibet to India, be it for their own collections or for the British Museum and other establishments. How the mission might limit adverse press reaction was a secondary issue as 'special' relationships and the old school tie played their part in guaranteeing the co-operation of the accompanying press correspondents.¹¹³ The reporting of events in the Indian nationalist press was simply dismissed as false accusations by those with an axe to grind. Major Iggulden, was adamant that 'all' supplies had been 'scrupulously' paid for and that 'monasteries and villages had been most religiously respected'.¹¹⁴ On the odd occasion that an officer had attempted to enforce the no looting order those who were caught simply claimed that the items were 'lying' around and were just picked up. General Macdonald reluctantly admitted that a 'certain amount of spoil [had fallen] into the hands of [the] troops' during assaults on hostile monasteries though he claimed that the amount of looting was 'trivial'.

¹¹¹ Which means that two thousand were not. Major W. J. Ottley, *With Mounted Infantry in Tibet* (London, 1906), p. 252.

¹¹² The area surrounding Gyantse was reconnoitred by the British, eager to discover any curios that had been hidden by the monks; a nearby monastery was broken into, the two Tibetans inside were killed and articles looted. Diary of Lance Sergeant Alfred Stanley Dunning. Royal Regiment of Fusiliers Museum, London.

¹¹³ Many of Younghusband's letters to his wife mention the special relationship that had developed between Landon and Younghusband, who shared the same mess at Gyantse. Also, Amphhill informed Brodrick that he was expecting a visit from Landon after the mission and that they were old Oxford friends. Amphhill wanted to talk to Landon about the mission and would also 'endeavour to persuade him' to curtail his advocacy of a forward policy in *The Times*. Amphhill to Brodrick, 5 August 1904, Mss Eur. E233/37. OIOC.

¹¹⁴ H. A. Iggulden, 'To Lhasa with the Tibet Expedition 1903-4', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* 49, 1905, pp. 659-79, p. 675.

He also claimed that he 'had to punish, severely, [the] few isolated cases' with which he dealt.¹¹⁵

Those who claimed to have purchased religious artefacts did not seem to realize or care that the items were not the monks' to sell.¹¹⁶ The treasures of Tibet belonged to the people as a whole and were of national importance (many looted treasures were irreplaceable; statues were sometimes filled with the remains of important lamas). It is doubtful that important religious artefacts would have been willingly sold to the British. Many who were critical of the mission thought that the monks were only selling items because of the aggressive nature of the British. The *Statesman* thought that when it was understood that the British did not intend to threaten the independence of Tibet the monks would be 'something less or more than human if they were to refuse to part with the treasures which they are known to have inherited.'¹¹⁷ But Tibet held vast stores of treasure and many officers were determined to appropriate items for themselves and/or their respective institutions.¹¹⁸ The British officer, and hence the British national character, had to be seen to be above reproach and the correspondence between the various departments reflects an attempt to sanitize the removal of a considerable amount of material from the monasteries. Opinion became polarized between certain sections of the mission as disagreement arose over the legitimacy of the thefts. But the obsession with information and knowledge meant that looting was institutionalized throughout the whole military and civil hierarchy and this guaranteed compliance from any of those present that might have prevented it.

¹¹⁵ Macdonald to Adjutant General in India, 14 August 1904, L/PS/7/170. OIOC. I have found no evidence of punishment for looting though there was a number of corporal punishments (usually 50 lashes) dealt out to recalcitrant sepoys who flouted military regulations. See, list of offences and punishments in the field diaries of Lt Haddow. DRO.

¹¹⁶ The Government had given Waddell 10,000 rupees to spend on books and manuscripts and he amassed over two thousand items, this would only allow for an average of five rupees per item.

¹¹⁷ *Statesman* 21 July 1904, cited in, Foreign (External) B, August 1904, proceedings nos 254-254 A., NAI.

¹¹⁸ After the mission returned there was quite an interest in Tibetan artefacts and institutions wrote to members of the mission in order to borrow items for exhibitions. The Wellcome Institute wanted to borrow items for a medical exhibition and wrote to Youngusband, the press correspondents Landon and Candler and Claude White the Political Officer in Sikkim as they thought they 'would have many interesting articles ...' Curry to Youngusband, Candler, Landon and White, 19 May 1905. WA/HMM/CO/EAR/192, Wellcome Institute, London.

A number of issues are pertinent to the 1903/4 mission to Tibet. There are debates concerning the Great Game, the man on the spot, of surplus energy, the official mind, of periphery, frontier, frontiersman, the role of buffer states, of exploration, of international rivalry and trade. There are issues surrounding the very 'act' of looting, further debates about the collection of materials for display in the 'temples of Empire' and their relationship to the reinforcement of elite hegemony in Britain and the Empire. But what I am suggesting here, is that the desire for books, manuscripts and curios, became an important element, even a central plank, of the philosophy of the Tibet mission and that this event may be illustrative of wider concerns within the British Empire in the early twentieth century. This is not to attempt a monocausal approach to an analysis of the mission, but to expose issues surrounding the dualistic official/unofficial obsession with the collection of Tibetan Buddhist artefacts. This obsession with collecting has a relationship with the maintenance of British 'character' and the control of information as an integral element in the production of knowledge as power. Tibet was one of the last blank spaces on the map, but more importantly it was blank during a time of profound change in Victorian psychological thought.¹¹⁹ The period of the supposed 'new' imperialism, from the 1870s onward, saw an international scramble for imperial possessions and an increasingly perceived threat to the establishment from within Britain. By the turn of the twentieth century Victoria was dead and British hegemony seemed to be in a state of transition; it was crucial that any attack on British character should be parried successfully. But the threat to the British character needed to be tempered with the desire to acquire articles with which to define and determine the position of the British in opposition to the world of the 'exotic' and the 'other'. Confident in the assertion that a cover up could be occasioned the British administration were party to the most blatant looting of religious objects from monasteries defended by demoralized monks and troops who were convinced that victory against the technologically superior Europeans was impossible.

On one level the Tibet mission was just one more threat to Curzon's conception of moral Empire; though placed within a

¹¹⁹ For an excellent discussion on the 'crisis of time and space' and the wider implications of Tibet during this period see, Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La* (London, 1989).

global imperial context it reflects the British state's concerns with knowledge and the strategic impulse to open up a territory contiguous with its 'jewel in the crown'.¹²⁰ Tibet 'was' unique to a certain extent; it existed on and beyond the Himalayan frontier of India in an imperial and indigenous mythical space.¹²¹ Thomas Richards claims that Tibet was the 'prevalent model for the archival confinement of total knowledge under the purview of the state';¹²² as such, it was literally a magnet to an information gathering state in transitional flux. Once an expedition entered the country, it was inevitable that narrow individual profit motive would combine with institutional Orientalist motives and produce a willingness to plunder the monasteries in the search for curios and rare texts. Even if Curzon, or Amthill as acting Viceroy, had wanted to stop the looting they would have been powerless against institutions and senior British officials who were reflecting contemporary obsessions with information and knowledge as part of the surveillance of 'other' societies. On the surface the British seemed willing to gamble with one of the most important representations of the British character itself (the reputation of the officer and the gentleman), in the almost obsessive desire to obtain the knowledge of Tibet, the 'irrational' and 'depraved' Orient. However, the reputation of the officer and gentleman was never really under threat. The myth of the officer and the gentleman was part of the hegemonic project of the British Empire, the knowledge of Tibet was 'acquired' and the myth continued.

The looting of 'curios' during the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century produced a considerable amount of material. An immense proportion of the loot must have been sold off privately for a handsome profit, the rest going to various institutions who used it in their museums to re-enforce notions of colonial superiority, or as so often happened, had it buried in the vaults of the metropole (where much of it still resides). But ulti-

¹²⁰ Strategic concerns were certainly important though imperial expansion for any reason was inextricably connected with knowledge collection/surveillance of one kind or another as had been evident in other campaigns over the frontier during the nineteenth century (Burma or Afghanistan, for example).

¹²¹ As Alex McKay has noted that 'myth and legend generally require a placement outside normal constraints of time and space, so it was no coincidence that the frontier, the zone with the weakest area of definition and administration, was the strongest realm of Indian indigenous and imperial myth.' Alex Mackay, *Tibet and the British Raj* (Richmond, 1997), p. 190.

¹²² Richards, p. 11.

mately, this type of material was being gathered in Asia and Africa at this time because, in the midst of an organic crisis, knowledge was thought to be the most important profit of Empire.¹²³

¹²³ In May of 1905 Lieutenant-Colonel H. A. Iggulden, (formerly Major) Chief Staff Officer to the Tibet mission sold 169 Tibetan artefacts to the British Museum. Colonel F. W. O'Connor (formerly Captain) interpreter with the Tibet mission sold thirteen items to the British Museum in July of 1906. In December 1906 L. A. Waddell gave 26 items to the British Museum (See British Museum register of acquisitions for 1905 and 1906). For the next three decades the auction houses of London regularly sold items appropriated during the mission. Many items offered for sale were 'rare' or 'of the finest specimens' and were referenced as 'secured from a monastery by an officer in the Younghusband expedition' or 'collected during the Younghusband expedition'. Many lot descriptions mentioned that items had been appropriated from Gyantse or the Palkor Choede at Gyantse (for example, see catalogues for Knight, Frank and Rutley for 14 December 1915 and 2 December 1932 and Stevens, for 18-19 July 1922). Waddell auctioned over 50 Tibetan artefacts through Sothebys in 1920, some of these items originated from monasteries in Tibet and were acquired during the Tibet mission (see Sotheby's catalogue for 29-30 November 1920 which also includes items from another mission officer Captain, later Colonel Walton). Many of the above artefacts offered for sale were particularly rare and important specimens of a religious nature.