

Through the Eye of Time

PHOTOGRAPHS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH, 1859-2006



MICHAEL ARAM TARR
AND
STUART BLACKBURN

Through the Eye of Time

Photographs of Arunachal Pradesh
1859–2006

Tribal Cultures in the Eastern Himalayas



By
Michael Aram Tarr
and
Stuart Blackburn



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Cover illustration: Apatanis welcoming the Fürer-Haimendorfs to the Apatani valley.
Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, March 1944, SOAS 155 (5) 1

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About the authors

The contemporary photographs in this book were taken by Michael Aram Tarr, and the great majority were taken between 2002 and 2006 as part of the 'Tribal Transitions' project. Mr. Tarr, who lives in Berkeley, California, has been photographing in India since his childhood and in Arunachal Pradesh since 1996. He also selected the historical photographs to be included in this book from a total of approximately 8,000 photographs of Arunachal Pradesh now located in several collections in the U.K. and in the Elwin collection in Shillong.

The Introduction was written by Stuart Blackburn, director of the 'Tribals Transitions' project. He is a Senior Research Associate at SOAS and the author of several books on folklore in India.

Introduction

People and Place

Arunachal Pradesh is a little-known corner of the world tucked away between Assam, Tibet, Bhutan and Burma. Few people, even today, have heard of the Adi, the Monpa, the Nyishi, the Khampti or any of the other thirty or more groups who live in this part of the eastern Himalayas. So it is all the more fortuitous that photography, within twenty years of its invention, had made its way up the Brahmaputra River and that over the course of the next century several thousand photographs were taken in these mountains on the northeastern frontier of India. This unlikely photographic documentation of tribal life was created by many different, unrelated hands and motivated by a variety of aims, which is why the photographs are scattered in several archives.¹ Taken as a whole, however, the photographs have a depth and quality due in no small part to individuals, especially to a civil surgeon with unusual technical talent, to officers with a sympathetic eye and to anthropologists convinced of the value of the camera.

In addition, the almost yearly expeditions by the British authorities into the hills provided countless opportunities for photography.

Historically, the region that is now Arunachal Pradesh lay on the periphery of two great civilisations, the Tibetan across the tall peaks to the north and the Hindu/Ahom in the Assam valley to the south. Both Tibetan and Ahom written sources record the presence of hill tribes on their borders, but only when the British empire pushed into the Assam valley in the early nineteenth century do we find any detailed descriptions.² From the 1820s onward, the people of Arunachal Pradesh appear in essays, books, diaries and official reports; their villages are sketched and their portraits drawn. The first photograph of a person from the region was taken in 1859, but it is published here for the first time. In the roughly one hundred years that followed, thousands more photographs were taken of these hill tribes, mostly by colonial officials and anthropologists. The majority of these images, too, have never been displayed or printed.

For this book, we have selected a little more than 100 of these historical images, from the 1860s to the 1960s, and added about 100 more mostly taken between 2002 and 2006. Brought together, they show change—in housing, clothing and landscape—but also continuity—especially in rituals and ceremonies. The photographs have been cho-

sen mainly but not exclusively on aesthetic criteria. A degree of geographical and ethnic diversity also influenced selection of the historical images; and most of the contemporary photographs were selected in order to complement or comment upon the historical ones. Whenever possible a narrative structure guided the sequencing of the images. A focus on rituals emerged from our research interests in these events, which display culture in an especially visual manner.

In the end, of course, the photographs in this book do not tell anything like a complete story; the archival images are reflected through a colonial lens, and the contemporary ones are also selective. But placed side by side, they present, for the first time, Arunachal Pradesh through the eye of time.

The state, with a population of just over one million, has approximately 35 tribes and 25 languages (numbers vary according to how one classifies groups and sub-groups). For convenience, the state may be broadly divided into three cultural zones: tibetanised Buddhist groups in the west and along the northern border; a central zone of primarily animists, with a growing Christian presence; and the southeast with groups from Burma, some of whom are Theravada Buddhist, and Naga-related tribes, who practice both animism and Christianity. These regions or culture zones are also defined by major river systems: the Kameng in the west;

Fig. A

Dadaso Manyu's family and friends who came to participate in a Du festival.

Michael Aram Tarr, Hayuliang, 2004

Dadaso Manyu is the man in the centre wearing the baseball hat backward. The first of his four wives, in whose house the ritual took place, is to his left, wearing a traditional Mishmi shawl. Dadaso is a Digaru Mishmi, but his family includes Miju Mishmis as well. Other guests are behind the family on the porch. See also photographs # 61-63.

the Subansiri, Siang (Tsangpo/Brahmaputra) and Dibang in the centre; the Lohit and Tirap in the southeast.

According to the Indian census of 2001, 35% of the state's population are Hindu; 31% are tribal animist ('Other'); 19% are Christian; 13% are Buddhist; and a fraction are Sikh, Muslim or Jain.³ The high figure for Hindus is partially explained by the large number of Indians who are concentrated in the state capital and district headquarters, where they work as government employees, small businessmen and shopkeepers. Another reason is that some tribals, especially Idu Mishmis and Noctes, consider themselves 'Hindu.' All tribes, with one exception (the Tai-speaking Khamptis in the east), speak Tibeto-Burman languages. Only the Khamptis and some of the tibetanised groups have historically used a script.

In the course of the 150 years shown through the photographs in this book, the people of Arunachal Pradesh have seen fundamental changes in their lives. During the first 100 years, they slowly absorbed the impact of British colonial rule; administrative control in the interior was limited even at Indian Independence, but the market economy, tea estates and schools in Assam gradually pulled hill populations southward. The emergence of new economic relations in the hills was signalled as early as the 1830s when annual payments to one tribe were changed from salt and cloth to rupees;⁴ and in the 1940s, the first air-drop in the hills symbolised a new political order. During the past fifty years, these new forces advanced further and further into the hills: a cash economy replaced barter, and political authority was displaced from local councils to elected elites based in the state capital and funded from New Delhi. These changes have resulted in a virtual end to feuding

and slavery, the coming of good roads, telephones, hospitals and literacy, but also to a considerable military presence, a growing influence of Hinduism and a startling rise of Christianity.

When the British assumed control of the Assam valley from the Ahom kingdom in the early nineteenth century, they inherited, almost unwittingly, the hill areas encircling it. Initially, the government in Calcutta wished to leave the hill tribes alone, or at least bypass them, as they sought new trade routes to China. Soon, however, the fledgling colonial administration in Assam was dragged into long-standing economic relations in the region. The British happily took over land revenues in Assam but soon found that they also had to manage trade between the valley and hills. In order to regulate this trade, the colonial government revived two institutions begun by the Ahoms, a Tai-speaking Shan people who had entered the valley in the twelfth century and become thoroughly hinduised by the time the British arrived. First, the colonial government encouraged a series of annual fairs held at *duars* (or 'doors') near the foot of the mountains. Second, they revived an annual tax called *posa*, which obligated some villages in the plains to give a specified amount of goods and money to hill tribes; even the post-Independence Indian government continued to make some of these payments into the 1950s.

The only lithic evidence of what must have been extensive contact between the hill tribes north of the Brahmaputra and the Ahoms records another type of arrangement (see fig. B). An inscription on a stone pillar, erected probably in the early sixteenth century, pledges the local Ahom ruler to protect the settlements of Idu Mishmis if they provide him with baskets of a valuable medicinal plant:

I, the Dihinga Bar Gohain, do engrave on the stone pillar and the copper plate these writings (on the strength of which) the Misimis [sic] are to dwell on the hills near the Dibong River with their females, children, attendants and followers. They will occupy all the hills. They will give four basketfuls of poison and other things as tribute and keep watch over the body of the fat Gohari (Sadiya Khowa Gohain).

If anybody happens to be in possession of and wishes to encroach on both sites [sides?] (of the hills), he is prohibited from encroachment. If anybody should dwell by the side of the hills, he will surely become a slave (of the Misimis). I do proclaim wide that if anybody sits exalted (i.e., comes in power, i.e., becomes a ruler) he should break the agreement and break the stone.⁵

Such promises, even in stone, and even when changed to written 'treaties' by the British in the nineteenth century, were easily broken. Disagreements led to raids on villages in the plains, which in turn prompted the colonial government to send military expeditions into the hills. Throughout the colonial period, in fact, relations between the British and the hill tribes in the northeast were characterised by a low-level but more or less continuous warfare.⁶

Pacification required penetration into the hills. Following the conquest of Assam, army regiments were stationed at various points along the Brahmaputra River; otherwise, however, colonialism was thin on the ground. From the beginning of British control in the 1820s, the northeast region was absorbed into the Presidency of Bengal and ruled from Calcutta. The Commissioner of Assam had his office at Gauhati, in lower Assam, but the vast stretch of upper Assam, where most contact with hill tribes occurred, had few personnel. In



Fig. B Stone pillar with Ahom inscription, probably early 16th c. Maan Barua, Assam State Museum, Guwahati, 2003

the 1830s, responsibility for the hill tribes was the remit of the Political Agency at Sadiya, the farthest outpost of colonialism located where three rivers converge to form the Brahmaputra. Here a British officer and his assistant, plus a few Assamese and tribal interpreters and peons, backed by a regiment of Assam Rifles, negotiated *posa* payments and treaties with several hill tribes. Sadiya was abandoned after an attack by tribesmen in 1839, but troops were soon stationed at the small towns of Tezpur, on the north bank, and Dibrugarh, on the south, because these river locations enabled easy transportation. Gun-boats were used in military

campaigns against hill tribes, and railways reached upper Assam at the end of the nineteenth century. By mid-century, other colonial outposts, consisting of a District Commissioner and his small staff, were set up on the north bank, at Darrang and Lakhimpur.⁷ Although the D.C. headed frequent punitive expeditions into the hills, his principal task was to collect revenues in the plains.

In the 1870s an 'Inner Line' was drawn along the base of the hills to divide British-administered territory from the area controlled by the tribes.⁸ Colonial administration pushed right up to this line of control when a British officer (Assistant Political Officer) was stationed at Sadiya in the 1880s and another at Pasighat by 1912. However, these posts were still in the plains, on the British side of the Inner Line; it was not until the 1940s that even a semi-permanent government presence was established anywhere in the hills.⁹ After Independence in 1947, the Indian government set up the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), with a full administrative apparatus of schools, courts and police at several locations in the hills. In 1972, NEFA became the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh, which then became a state in 1987, with its capital at Itanagar.¹⁰

Colonial Contacts

Portraits in the Plains: 1860s

We know that photography went hand in hand with ethnography in colonial India. As Christopher Pinney and John Falconer have shown, soon after the new technology arrived in British India, photographers were enlisted in the project of classifying the tribes and castes of the subcontinent.¹¹

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the camera proved admirably suited to take over from the draughtsman and the painter in the 'passion for documentation' (to use Falconer's phrase) that energised the colonial enterprise.¹² It is also true that the camera followed the gun: in 1855, for example, photography was added to the curriculum at the East India Company's military academy in Surrey.¹³ Cameras, as Samuel Bourne suggested in 1863, were part of the colonial arsenal, which 'though as suspicious perhaps in appearance, attained their object with less noise and smoke.'¹⁴ It is also more than coincidence that the collodion necessary for the wet-plate processing of photographs in the mid-nineteenth century was essential for making gunpowder.¹⁵

Seen from one angle, the historical photographs of people from Arunachal Pradesh provide another illustration of these observations. Yet it would be a mistake to conflate the camera with the pen or the gun, or to push the collusion between photography and colonialism too far. Although some of the earliest photographs assembled in this book were commissioned in order to construct racial categories, in fact they often reveal the idiosyncracies of their subjects. Similarly, while many of these historical photographs were taken during military campaigns, they usually show us the complexities of colonial contact.

Although photography had to wait until mid-century, drawings, etchings and watercolours had established the popularity of representing Indian subjects, especially 'types', since the second half of the eighteenth century. Colonialism came late to the northeast, but visual representations of people in this isolated corner of empire followed almost immediately on the conquest of Assam in the

1820s. A drawing from about 1825 (in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London) shows a man from the Subansiri area of Arunachal Pradesh wearing a bear pelt head-dress and bead necklaces that are still symbols of tribal identity today.¹⁶ Lithographs of river scenes illustrate the 1837 *Topography of Assam* by John M'Cosh, who was himself a pioneer photographer in India. The first published representations of people from Arunachal Pradesh, however, were lithographic portraits of Hill Miris and Nyishis by Colesworthy Grant that appeared in his *Sketches of Oriental Heads* in the 1840s (see fig. C).¹⁷ Another set of colour lithographs of four Arunachal tribes appeared in John Butler's *A Sketch of Assam and Hill Tribes* in 1847.¹⁸ The clothing, machetes and ornamentation are more convincing in Grant (indeed, the figures in Butler resemble Nagas), but neither could make sense of the braided hair knot with brass skewer that distinguishes these tribes of the Subansiri area. Photographs would reproduce these details more accurately, but precision did not always solve the problem of identification and many photographs are mislabelled. Even today, the lack of ethnographic information and inconsistent labelling in the original documentation often make it difficult and sometimes impossible to identify the tribe of people in colonial photographs.

The earliest known photograph of a person from an Arunachal tribe has an interesting history (see photograph #1). This portrait of a young woman belonged to Sergeant-Major George Carter, who pasted it into his scrapbook, along with diary entries and other memorabilia during his service in India. Many of his diary entries describe the military expedition launched in 1859 to punish Adis who had attacked a village near Dibrugarh, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra River.

The previous year, a lightly armed expedition had been beaten back by bows and arrows, leaving two sepoy dead. Intended to restore lost prestige, the 1859 expedition consisted of 400 sepoy, 60 tribesmen (mostly Singphos and Khamptis) armed with bows, arrows and machetes, and two howitzers. This large force, including Carter mounted on an elephant, attacked villages above Pasighat, burned two of them and succeeded in driving the Adis back but suffered several casualties and wounded British officers. The British force then pulled back to Dibrugarh, where the photograph was taken, not by Carter but (almost certainly)

by Rev. Edward H. Higgs of St. Paul's Church, Dibrugarh.¹⁹ Rather than follow the gun, in this case the camera met it in retreat.

This photograph was unlikely to have helped anyone classify the castes and tribes of India. The young woman in it is identified by Carter as a 'Chief's daughter, Bor Abor Tribe: inhabit the mountains immediately north of Debroogurh, Upper Assam.'²⁰ 'Bor' or 'Bori' was used in the nineteenth century to refer to tribes who lived near or in the plains and were 'dependent', that is, not hostile to the British; they were distinguished from the 'Abor' tribes, who were 'independent' and typically lived in the high hills.²¹ 'Bor Abor', a curious combination, was often used to denote Padam Adis, who lived at various elevations.²² Although the face of the young woman in this historic photograph looks more Assamese than Adi, her dress is similar to that seen in nineteenth-century photographs of Adis; and in this border area Adis and Assamese often intermixed and married, and still do.²³ She is 'dressed up' for this portrait, wearing a full set of necklaces, earrings and arm bracelets. Despite her bemused face, the photograph has a light-hearted feel and was probably given to Carter as a souvenir, to take home when he left India a few years later.



Tema, Huzana, and his Wife
H. M. 1845

Fig. C 'Tema, Huzana, and his Wife, Hill Miris [Hill Miris],
by Colesworthy Grant, *Sketches of Oriental Heads*
(Calcutta, Thacker and Spink, 1840s), BL

Carter's obscure photograph has never before been published, but other early images of Arunachal tribes have acquired a modest place in the history of photography in India. That achievement is largely due to one man. Sir Benjamin Simpson was born in Dublin, joined the East India Company as an Assistant Surgeon in 1853 and served with a series of regiments in north India. In 1860, he returned to India (possibly with his camera) after a three-year leave, and was promoted to Civil

Surgeon in the 24 Paraganas in Bengal and later held that same post in Darjeeling, where he served until his retirement in 1869.²⁴ By that time, he had taken a series of 'travelling studio' portraits of tribal people in northeast India, Bhutan and other parts of the Himalayas. We have included several of his portraits of Arunachal tribes (taken in Assam) not only because of their technical sophistication but also because they display the dignity of their subjects.

The exact dates of Simpson's photographs of Arunachal tribes are unclear, although some were taken in 1861 or 1862 and displayed in the annual exhibition of the Bengal Photographic Society in Calcutta in December 1862.²⁵ The remainder were taken between December 1867 and April 1868 when Simpson was sent to Assam to collect more photographs for an exhibition to be held in Calcutta in 1869. Precisely where in Assam these wonderful photographs were taken is also uncertain—perhaps in Lakhimpur or Dibrugarh—but most were probably taken in Sadiya, the colonial outpost in upper Assam where the tribes in the images (Khampti, Singpho, Adi, Galo, Idu Mishmi, Miju Mishmi and Digaru Mishmi) either lived or came to trade at that time.²⁶ Throughout the 1860s, Simpson's portraits were admired at the annual exhibition held by the Bengal Photographic Society in Calcutta, of which Simpson served as Vice-President. It is difficult to improve on a contemporary assessment that his 'large portraits are excellent, full of artistic merit; they are not to be surpassed.'²⁷

Simpson's work was commissioned as part of an ambitious project, supported by the Governor-General of India, to document the 'people of India.' Eighty of his photographs were shown as

part of the Indian displays at the International Exhibition held in London in 1862; most of his 'likenesses of natives' were portraits of people from Bhutan, Sikkim, Kabul and Chota Nagpur, plus two from northeast India (a Garo and a Kachari) but none from Arunachal Pradesh. Simpson's portraits of Arunachal tribes finally reached an audience outside Calcutta when four of them appeared in the first volume of *The People of India* published in 1868.²⁸ The large and heavy eight volumes of *The People of India*, containing over 500 photographs, stand as an impressive monument to the early use of photography in India.²⁹ Although never influential in its day, this book is now thought to epitomise the colonial preoccupation 'to accumulate, organise and use ethnological information in ways which both justified and reinforced notions of dominance.'³⁰ Whatever the intentions of the men who planned this project, however, the camera sometimes produced photographs at odds with both military conquest and racial typing.

The 'Assam' section of the first volume, illustrated with Simpson's four portraits of Arunachal tribes and five of Assamese tribes, is a case in point. This section was introduced with an essay that underlined both the commercial and the ethnographic potential of Assam.³¹ The author pointed out that although this area was still a relatively unknown corner of the Raj, it would provide the long-desired northeast passage to facilitate trade between India and China. It was also a fertile region, he claimed, so rich that 'it might one day be converted into one continued garden of silk, cotton, coffee, sugar, and tea, over an extent of many thousand miles.'³² Of its potential contribution to science, the author enthused that '[t]here is perhaps no country of the world, of the same extent, where so

many different races of men are collected together as in the valley and hills of Assam.'³³

The attempt to classify these 'many different races,' however, ran into difficulties, which the photographs and their confusing captions did little to resolve. For one thing, tribal populations in the northeast never fitted easily into the narrative of India's racial history put together during colonial times. Neither 'military' nor 'criminal' caste, neither Aryan nor Dravidian, they (along with the Assamese) were a pale streak of yellow 'Mongoloid' at the edge of Risley's famous racial map of 1915.³⁴ A fundamental problem was that a lack of knowledge about these people and their languages produced inconsistent labels and imprecise descriptions. As already mentioned, 'Bor' and 'Abor' were used inconsistently and with political undertones. Another label applied with little discrimination was 'Miri' (in various spellings), which was used for populations living both in the Subansiri region (later called 'Hill Miri') and in the Assam plains (later known as 'Mishing'), and for certain Adi groups, as well.³⁵ Certainly the essay in the Assam section of *The People of India* volume made no headway by classifying the hill people in Arunachal as the 'Indo-Chinese tribes... easily distinguished... by high cheek bones... also fairer and of a more yellowish colour than the other sections of the people.' Similarly, in the captions, Arunachal tribes are variously labelled a 'wild frontier tribe', 'hill tribe', 'frontier tribe' and 'warlike frontier tribe (Laos).'³⁶

Although Simpson's subjects were often shown in anthropometric profile, frequently holding weapons and sometimes with little clothing, their proud bearing and sensitive eyes create an impression different than that implied by these captions and

descriptions. A 'Dhoba Abor' Galo man is apparently about to draw his machete (see photograph #3), but the look of anxiety on his face is more pensive than threatening; at what was probably his first contact with photography and Europeans, he is surprisingly relaxed. Other men also have a hand on their machete, but few viewers would know that the *dao* was an everyday tool and not primarily a weapon of war. Even the long spears, held by some 'warriors' in the group shots, point to the ground and appear to have been placed in their hands just before the shutter opened.

Curiously, given its scope, official patronage and high quality of images, *The People of India* did not attract much attention at the time.³⁷ Far more influential was a publication in 1872 that carried 24 of Simpson's portraits of Arunachal tribes. As with the Watson and Kaye volumes, the catalyst for E. T. Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* was an exhibition. In 1866, the Asiatic Society of Bengal decided to sponsor a 'great Ethnological Congress...to bring together in one exhibition typical examples of the races of the Old World to be made the subject of scientific study.'³⁸ This Congress, in which '[e]very physical character will be carefully noted and registered by means of photographs,' was intended to be an auxiliary to a general industrial exhibition scheduled for Calcutta in 1869-70.³⁹ But this ambitious exhibition never took place. A major reason was official concern about transporting tribesmen and women from Arunachal Pradesh and elsewhere in the northeast. According to Dalton, the Commissioner of Assam feared that bringing the 'strange shy creatures' to the big city would result in 'casualties that the greatest enthusiast for anthropological research would shrink from encountering.'⁴⁰ In the Commissioner's words, if any of the 'specimens'

were to die, 'it might lead to inconvenient political complications.'⁴¹

Before these scruples scuppered the Congress, however, Simpson was sent back to Assam, 'that most prolific of ethnological fields,' to take photographs for the planned Calcutta exhibition.⁴² The job of collecting and collating the ethnographic information was given to Dalton, who had held posts in Assam in the 1840s and 1850s, during which time he visited hill tribes in both the Subansiri and Lohit river valleys. Crucially, he succeeded in obtaining 10,000 rupees from the Government of India to support the publication of his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. In contrast to *The People of India*, Dalton's book put ethnography ahead of photography: a mere 37 plates (lithographs based on photographs) are scattered over nearly 400 pages of scholarly description, vocabularies and a detailed index. Fifteen of those plates, containing 24 separate images, are Simpson's portraits of people from Arunachal Pradesh; in addition to the Khamptis, Singphos, Digaru Mishmis and 'Miris' in the earlier book, we now see Idu Mishmis, Miju Mishmis and various Adis, including highly composed groups shots with an unconvincing generic hut as background. Here, for the first time, photographs of people from Arunachal Pradesh reached a sizable audience, and Dalton's book soon became the standard reference in a field with few reliable markers.⁴³

Expeditions into the Hills, 1870s-1930s

No photographer after Simpson produced portraits of the people of Arunachal Pradesh with a similar technical sophistication; in the controlled conditions of his travelling studio, he brought

the aesthetic of European nineteenth-century portraiture to upper Assam. However, when later photographers were freed from official commissions to classify 'race, caste and tribe,' they did occasionally produce revealing images, close to tribal life and sometimes with ethnographic value. Good examples are two fine portraits of Khampti men (see photographs # 68 & 69) from the early twentieth century, pasted into a scrap book about transporting elephants from Assam to Burma.⁴⁴ Still, most of the photographs during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were taken by British officials, usually during the many military campaigns that penetrated higher and higher into the hills north of Assam. The first photographs actually taken in the hills, and not somewhere in the plains of Assam, are from the late 1870s; although posed in front of a hastily hung blanket or backdrop of banana leaves, these people, unlike those posed by Simpson a decade earlier in the plains, look at home.

Photographs of Arunachal people in everyday situations, however, did not appear until the following decade. If not the first, then certainly a fine example is a group portrait of Akas standing on the porch of their longhouse in 1883-84 (see photograph # 164). This peaceful image, nonetheless, belies the story behind it. Since the 1870s, Akas had been in conflict with the government over their rights to rubber trees and elephant hunting in the forests close to Assam. Then, in late 1883, an Assamese man working for the British government was sent into the hills to collect objects and a 'model Raja and Rani with their ornaments' for the Calcutta International Exhibition to be held that same winter. Incensed, the Akas held the Assamese officer and his party prisoner, while they attacked a village and a forestry office in Assam

and carried two officials back to the hills as hostages. It was to recover these captives that R. G. Woodthorpe led an expedition into the Aka hills; after burning villages and granaries, he returned with both captives and a number of photographs, including #164 in this book.⁴⁵

Photographs of other tribes who lived far from governmental offices in Assam were taken by F. M. Bailey, adventurer, spy and gifted writer, as well as an officer in the Military Police. In particular, on two expeditions between 1911 and 1913, he used his camera and his diary to record his travels to Idu Mishmi and Khamba villages in the northeast corner of Arunachal Pradesh, where Idus had been at war with the recently-arrived Khambas. At the beginning of his trek, Bailey was visited in camp by an Idu Mishmi headman, 'who made a rather lengthy speech in which he said he was glad to be under British control and asked us to stop in his village...he killed a mithan for us.'⁴⁶ Two days and two marches later, Bailey met Andron, another Idu headman, this time of Lemo village, whom he photographed with his three sons and their wives (see fig. D). 'The people of Lemo,' wrote Bailey in his diary, 'were the most friendly that we have yet seen, in fact the further we penetrate into the country, the better class of people we meet. We spent some time in the house of the headman... The old father of the headman said there was always some fighting here but no longer since under one gov't.'⁴⁷ Bailey met Khambas, the Idus' rivals, on an expedition in 1913, when he went further up toward the Tibetan border. In the village of Mipi, he photographed a group of these tibetanised Khambas, including their headman (see photograph #31 and fig. E), 'with tousley hair and a yak's hair overcoat. He is going to take us over the pass to Chimdo [Chamdo].'⁴⁸ Bailey also noted that the headman 'erected a mark above

which Mishmis are not to come.'⁴⁹

Another set of photographs of Arunachal tribes beyond colonial rule was taken further west along the northern border with Tibet (see photograph # 151). These images of people (mostly Sulungs and Nyishis) who traded with Tibetans in the upper reaches of the Subansiri River, near the international border, were taken in the 1930s by G. Sherriff during expeditions led by the botanist and explorer Frank Ludlow. Ludlow's description of these 'Lobas,' as they were known to Tibetans, includes details of material culture not found in earlier accounts (including the braided hair knot so confusingly depicted in the lithographs a hundred years earlier); and, what is even more unusual, he comments on one subject's reaction:

The majority wore skins of animals such as takin [similar to a large mountain goat], barking deer, and monkeys. A few had black shoulder capes which at first sight look like bear skins, but eventually proved to be made of palm fibres. Many wore close-fitting bamboo [sic. cane] skull-caps furnished with a spout. This was kept in place by a brass or wooden skewer which pierced a knot of hair hanging over the forehead. Some had lammergeyer's [a vulture] feathers stuck into their head-gear. All carried bamboo bows about 4 1/2 feet long, iron-shod at one head, which they used as a khud [walking] stick whilst on the march. Their arrows were smeared to the barb with the deadly aconite. Many bore long lances and clumsy swords. They smoked tobacco



Fig. D 'Up Sisseri River. Headman of Lemo. His three sons and their wives.' Frederick Marshman Bailey 1911. BL



Fig. E Detail of photograph #31.

Frederick Marshman Bailey
March-April 1913. BL

continuously out of metal pipes. The head-man had a two-pronged musket, and wore a chuba reaching to his knees. His gay young wife looked like a Tibetan and dressed like one. Aware of her good looks, she enjoyed being photographed.⁵⁰

Other photographs give us a glimpse of the dynamics of the colonial encounter during this period. Static yet revealing are the group shots taken during official expeditions, which present British,

Arunachal and Indian figures in close proximity. Their calm, orderly arrangement is an ironic contrast to the animated chaos of these expeditions: hundreds of men, officers, sepoy, interpreters and guides, an equal number of porters, plus horses and elephants, carrying equipment, ammunition, rations and tents, attempting to move several miles each day in steep mountainous country. Motionless for the moment, the British officers, Indian sepoy, tribal interpreters, guides and porters pose for the camera. Two early group shots were taken by W. Robert, an assistant surveyor during topographical surveys in 1877-78, first to the lower Subansiri and then to the Idu Mishmi hills (see photographs # 35 and 93).⁵¹ The two photographs have a similar composition: British officials sit stiffly, Indian soldiers stand proudly erect, while Idus and Hill Miris sit on the ground in the first row smoking their pipes, with a few small boys who have come along to see the show. All, however, are alike in their concentrated stare at the camera.

A more historic moment is captured in the picture of a meeting between a British and a Tibetan official in 1910 (see photograph #7). Noel Williamson, Assistant Political Officer at Sadiya, is seen taking tea with the so-called 'Governor of Rima' in a woodland setting far up the Lohit River valley near the present-day border between India and China; seated with them are a Tibetan interpreter and a Khampti leader, with Miju Mishmi porters and Tibetans in the background.⁵² Only a few years after Younghusband's advance to Lhasa but before the Simla Agreement drew a line along the high Himalayas, the British government grew anxious about Tibetan influence in this part of the unadministered northeast frontier. They sent the energetic Williamson to investigate and if possible to secure this region for trade to China and

Burma. Williamson reported that the government had nothing to worry about and that 'presents were exchanged in a cordial atmosphere.'⁵³ The image, with its key figures named on the print, is a good example of how photography provided documentation for political intelligence.

A more ambiguous photograph of an equally strategic meeting was taken during an expedition to the Aka hills, on the other side of Arunachal (see photograph #165). The photographer was a young medical officer, Robert Siggins Kennedy, attached to an expedition of more than a thousand officers, soldiers and porters that advanced up from Assam in late 1913 and reached the village of Jamirigoan by New Years Day 1914. One of the expedition's aims, once again, was to monitor Tibetan and/or Chinese influence, as is clear from Kennedy's description of meeting the Tagi Raja, a local leader of Akas, a few days later:

Today about 1pm the Raja arrived, surrounded by a motley crew of courtiers and followers. He was preceded by two standard bearers carrying white flags on long poles, and two wretchedly small and miserable ponies, bedecked with saddle and saddle cloths of Tibetan pattern were led behind. This whole show reminded me forcibly of the procession of a Bhutanese chieftain. This raja is a big man, standing almost six feet high, which makes him very conspicuous amongst his rather low set subjects. He has an evil cast of countenance, with thick lips, and strikes one as being a shifty character. His age is about 30 years. His dress was that of a Tibetan official, of some importance and was pretty correct in detail, though he denied ever having been to Tibet. His 'chuba' [coat] was of blue Chinese silk, and he wore a gilt mandarin hat, with a red coral button on top, which according to Chinese usage denotes high rank, though I fancy his wearing it was purely accidental.⁵⁴

Fellow officer G. A. Nevill wrote that the Raja 'was very nervous and evidently much afraid. He said that his heart was as clear as the Tenga river, but that the last sahib came 30 years ago and the visit was not friendly.'⁵⁵ Nevill then added that the 'Tagi is gifted with a good deal of intelligence... he has been much spoiled when visiting Assam and is now somewhat puffed up with the sense of his own importance.'⁵⁶

This is the figure we see sitting (with his wife) on a raised bench, in a relaxed moment during what looks like an official reception. The large black object on the bench to the far left is a gramophone, which the Raja is said to have enjoyed hearing almost as much as the sound of British military bugles. In another photograph, he is shown standing with a group of his followers (see photograph # 166). But is this man the Tagi Raja? Despite the details in contemporary descriptions, local people have expressed doubts that the man in the photographs is an Aka: to some he appears to be a Monpa, to others a Bugun or a Tibetan, while still others confirm that he is an Aka. Whoever he was, this unusually tall figure, who loved listening to the gramophone, did not oppose the expedition, which later met armed resistance from Mijis and Nyishis. During one of those skirmishes, Kennedy helped to build a makeshift bridge over which the British party fled; at other times, he was busy treating local people for goitre. At the end of the Aka expedition, he went to the Monpa country, where he took a number of memorable photographs, including one of a young boy (see photograph # 175).⁵⁷

Another dynamic colonial encounter is captured in a group photograph taken in 1897, during the first official British visit to the Apatani valley (see

photograph # 105). The photograph shows us the familiar groups—British officers, Indian officers and soldiers, interpreters and local tribesmen—but in a different kind of arrangement: not in rows posed for the camera but in a tight circle of Apatani and Nyishi negotiators, surrounded by British officers and others. The photograph was labelled ‘The Palaver’ by the British officer who took it, and looking closely (with a magnifying glass) at the faces in the inner circle, one can almost hear the speeches that went on for many hours during two cold days in February.

The story behind the photograph is complex.⁵⁸ When a Nyishi man living near the Apatani valley murdered a fellow tribesman, he fled and took refuge with an Apatani friend in the valley; that Apatani friend spirited him away and hid him in a village near the plains. When the hiding place was divulged to the family of the murder victim, they hunted down the murderer, took him back and killed him. Assuming that the Nyishi murderer would wrongly believe that he had betrayed him, the Apatani friend now feared that the murderer’s soul would wreak revenge on him; so the Apatani man decided to attack those who had betrayed the hiding place and had thus placed him in danger. Going down to the plains, the Apatani man killed a man (a Hill Miri) on a tea estate, and this is what brought the British to the Apatani valley. Because this second murder was committed on British soil, on the Assam side of the Inner Line, the authorities sent an expedition to the Apatani valley to investigate.

The negotiations, shown in the photograph, lasted for two full days. When the commanding officer, Capt. R. B. McCabe (seated to the left, wearing a beret in the photograph) opened the parley with

an accusation of murder on British territory, the Apatanis claimed they knew nothing of this ‘Inner Line.’ On the second day, an Apatani named Murchi, admitted to having led the raid but first subjected McCabe to more than two hours of oratory in which he enumerated every Apatani grievance against Nyishis and Hill Miris; he laid out small pieces of bamboo: one piece for each mithun stolen, each woman taken hostage, every man wounded or killed.⁵⁹ After listing these past wrongs, Murchi then argued that the murdered man was a labour contractor for the tea estates who had cheated many Apatanis. Listening to this speech through his interpreters, McCabe heard the words ‘finally’ and ‘in conclusion’ innumerable times before what he called this ‘long Scottish sermon’ finally came to a stop. By the end of the day, the Apatanis turned over three captives, as well as a gun belonging to the owner of the tea estate. Impressed, McCabe fined the Apatanis a single mithun, which he then handed back to them because he did not know what else to do with the large animal.

A more violent colonial confrontation is shown, at least partially, in photographs taken a few years later in the Adi area. Like the Apatani incident, this conflict also began with a murder; but this time the victim was a British officer, the same Noel Williamson whom we see taking tea with a Tibetan official in photograph #7. Only one year later, in 1911, Williamson was killed along with Dr. Gregorson, a British medical officer, and 44 of their porters. After his posting to Sadiya in 1905 as an Assistant Political Officer, Williamson made several trips into the high hills beyond the Inner Line. Guided by the goals of his political masters, to counter Tibetan interests and establish friendly relations with tribes in the interior, this

enthusiastic young man travelled up the Siang, Subansiri and Lohit rivers, and into the Mishmi and Naga hills; more than once, in the course of his duties, he ordered villages burned and livestock destroyed. According to a contemporary, however, ‘Mr. Williamson had been very popular among these people [in the Lohit valley], largely cupboard love I am afraid, for he used to give them large presents of opium and other things.’⁶⁰

On his final journey in 1911, he returned to the upper Siang, once again to monitor the extent of Tibetan influence and extend British control toward the northern border. Williamson knew well that he might encounter resistance: as mentioned above, Adis from this area had fought Sergeant-Major Carter back in the 1850s, and peace had never been fully established since. On his trip to the same villages only two years before, in 1909, Williamson himself had gained firsthand knowledge of the continuing resistance to any kind of British authority in the hills. He reached Kebang village, something no other official had managed to do since Carter’s time, but despite his speaking some Adi and entertaining village leaders with a lantern show, he could not persuade them to give him permission to push further up country.⁶¹ While halting at Kebang, a leader from Riu village, described as the ‘war minister’, arrived and addressed the local audience for about an hour: ‘He and his attendants wore tall round hats of sambhur [a large deer] skin and long coats also of Tibetan texture. He had a short beard and moustache, held a spear in his left hand, gesticulating throughout with his right’⁶² (see fig. F). After this rousing speech, Williamson was told that war between Adi villages was imminent and that the area was too dangerous for him to proceed further.